

# **A community as a testamentary executor:**

**The journey of Joseph's bones from Egypt to the Promised Land**

**By IN-KOOK KO**



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## **Declaration**

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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## **Abstract**

This research is a synchronic reading of Exodus that investigates the “traces of Joseph’s bones” in the Exodus narratives. The Exodus is depicted in this narrative as Joseph’s funeral procession. Moses carries Joseph’s bones up from the land of Egypt when the Exodus begins (Exod. 13:19) and the sons of Israel bury the bones in the land of Canaan at the end of Exodus (Jos. 24:32). That is, the texts portray the Exodus as the journey of Joseph’s bones from Egypt to the Promised Land. However, the texts offer only a trace of the bones at the beginning and at the end of the narrative. In this study an inter-textual approach to the biblical texts is used to interpret the Ark of the Covenant as the coffin containing Joseph’s bones in the desert. A faithful testator who strongly believed God’s promise intended the narrative of the solemn journey as a way of handing over his faith to his audience as a form of testament. The audience keeps and performs the testament as testamentary executors.

Joseph’s funeral narrative is interpreted in this study by focusing on the text itself. The end of the narrative is reached with the burial of the bones as recorded in the book of Joshua. This construction suggests that the burial is a fulfillment of Joseph’s testament, but not the ultimate fulfillment thereof. The testament also has a bearing on further texts beyond the sixth book of Hebrew Bible.

This narrative construction also has potential for interpretation in contemporary Christianity. The construction of the narrative reveals to the reader that God was the real executor behind the testamentary executors. The study therefore suggests that the church is a community which stands in continuation with the testamentary executors of the Old Testament. Joseph’s funeral narrative finds renewed fulfillment in the Christian church when expecting the real Executor again. This study concludes with some suggestions for the Church of how the fulfillment of Joseph’s testament can be facilitated in contemporary contexts.

## Opsomming

Hierdie navorsing verteenwoordig ‘n sinkrone lees van die Eksodusverhaal waarin die “aanduidings van Josef se beendere” bestudeer word. Die Eksodus word in hierdie verhaal uitgebeeld as Josef se begrafnisproses. Moses dra Josef se beendere op vanuit Egipte waar die Eksodus begin (Eks. 13:19) en die seuns van Israel begrawe die beendere in die land van Kanaän aan die einde van die Eksodusverhaal (Jos. 24:32). Dit wil sê, die tekste beeld die Eksodus uit as die reis van Josef se beendere van Egipte na die Beloofde Land. Die tekste bied egter slegs ‘n spoor van die beendere aan die begin en aan die einde van die verhaal. ’n Inter-tekstuele benadering tot die Bybeltekste word in hierdie studie gebruik om die Verbondsark te interpreteer as die kis met Josef se beendere in die woestyn. ‘n Getroue erflater wat ten sterkste in God se belofte glo het die verhaal van die plegtige reis bedoel as 'n manier waardeur die erflater sy geloof aan sy gehoor in die vorm van 'n testament oorlewer. Die gehoor bewaar en voer die testament uit as testamenêre eksekuteurs.

Josef se begrafnis narratief word in hierdie studie geïnterpreteer deur op die teks self te fokus. Die einde van die narratief word bereik met die begrafnis van die beendere waarvan in die boek Josua vertel word. Hierdie konstruksie suggereer dat die begrafnis die vervulling van Josef se testament is, maar dat dit nog nie die finale vervulling daarvan is nie. Die verhaal oor die erflating beïnvloed ook die verdere tekste na die sesde boek van die Hebreeuse Bybel.

Hierdie narratiewe konstruksie toon ook potensiaal vir interpretasie in die hedendaagse Christendom. Die opbou van die narratief onthul aan die leser dat God die eintlike uitvoerder agter die testamentêre uitvoerders was. Die studie suggereer dus dat die Kerk ’n gemeenskap is wat in kontinuïteit staan met die testamentêre uitvoerders van die Ou Testament. Josef se begrafnis narratief vind hernude vervulling wanneer die Christelike kerk opnuut die Uitvoerder van die testament verwag. Die werk sluit af met enkele voorstelle oor hoe die uitvoering van hierdie testament in kontemporêre kontekste gefasiliteer kan word.

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## List of Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
CB	Coniectanea Biblica
EEC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
ESV	English Standard Version
JPS	The Jewish Publication Society
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
LXX	Septuagint
NAC	The New American Commentary
NCBC	The New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NIB	The New Interpreters Bible
NICNT	New international commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	The New international commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NTS	New Testament Studies
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Problem statement

The last chapter of Genesis closes with a relatively short report on the death of Joseph (50:26) — compared to the report on the death of Jacob (49:29-50:14) — although Joseph is the main character in Genesis 37-50. It may be possible to examine the story from a national or a family perspective. On the one hand (from a national perspective), Joseph held a big funeral for Jacob Israel. It was like a national event with heavy mourning to which the Canaanites, who were bystanders, responded: “The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning” (50:11).<sup>1</sup> At least, in the eyes of foreigners, the members of the funeral procession were Egyptians who were accompanied by a very large company (50:9) consisting of more than just the deceased’s family. In contrast, there is no indication whatsoever that the Egyptians had anything to do with Joseph’s burial, and it seems that it was not a matter of national concern. This is difficult to accept without any other explanations, because Joseph was “in charge of the whole land of Egypt” (41:41). On the other hand (from a family perspective), it seems as if Joseph’s family left the funeral ceremony unfinished. All patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were buried in the same place, namely “the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre in Canaan” (49:30), but the body of Joseph was just “placed in a coffin in Egypt” (50:26) by the sons of Israel instead of being buried, which seems like

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<sup>1</sup> All the English Bible quotations in this thesis is from *ESV*, the Hebrew is from *BHS*.

an uncompleted funeral process.

It is furthermore interesting that the burial of Joseph's bones is described, not in the book of Genesis, but in the book of Joshua, which deals with the return to the Promised Land (Jos. 24:32). This text establishes a close relationship between Joshua and Joseph, a relationship which is corroborated by the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 7:20-27 where it is indicated that Joshua was a descendant of Ephraim who is the second son of Joseph. Joshua also died without mourning at 110 years, the same age as Joseph at his death (Jos. 24:29-30). Is this a coincidence or a key to solving the mysteries regarding Joseph's funeral?

Therefore, the problems that will be investigated in this study can be summarized as follows:

- a. Why is the description of the burial of Joseph so brief (in contrast to the elaborate description of Jacob's death)?
- b. Why is the burial of Joseph described in Joshua 24 and not in Genesis 50?
- c. What theological significance does this construction of the narrative have?

## 1.2 Hypothesis

The description of the death and burial of Joseph should be brought in relation to Joseph's will, which is mentioned in Genesis 50:25. Matters regarding the time when his funeral would be held and the people who would perform it, were determined by Joseph himself. In accordance with Joseph's will, his bones had to be transplanted by the sons of Israel when

God visits them. Thus, there was no room for the Egyptians to participate in the funeral and it became family work within the context of Israel's religion. The sons of Israel had to wait for a visitation (**תְּמִימָה**) from God to carry Joseph's bones up. This could have been the reason why the Israelites could not complete the funeral at that time.

The unfinished funeral of Joseph in Egypt creates an expectation with the reader regarding the completion of the funeral. In the book of Exodus, Moses concluded the next step of the funeral. He took Joseph's bones out of Egypt (Exod. 13:19) and started on a journey to bury them in the Promised Land according to Joseph's will. The journey of the bones is continued by the descendant of Joseph, namely Joshua (as mentioned above). It is alleged that the journey accords with the route of the Exodus. The funeral is finally completed after Joshua's death. Joseph's bones were buried at Shechem by the sons of Israel.

Joseph's bones play an important role in the community of the Exodus. The bones, which symbolize the last words of Joseph, accompanied the Israelites during the entire Exodus. Some biblical texts state that it was the Ark of the Covenant that went with the Israelites, not the bones. Could one perhaps assume that symbolic changes happened in the text regarding the coffin and the Ark of the Covenant? Could one perhaps assume that the texts wanted to portray the Ark of the Covenant as the coffin with Joseph's bones?

The sons of Israel could have remembered the invisible last words of Joseph through the visible bones (or the Ark of the Covenant). The bones enlightened the Israelites' identity,

motivated them to keep doing the Exodus and made them live as testamentary executors.

This research, therefore, hypothesizes as follows:

- a. That the description of Joseph's death and burial must be linked with the reference to his testament or will mentioned in Genesis 50:25. (The will or testament of Joseph is described as his wish that his bones had to be transplanted when God "visits" them);
- b. That the reference in Exodus 13:19 to how Moses took the bones of Joseph and started the journey enables the interpreter to depict the Exodus as a journey to bury the bones of Joseph in the Promised Land;
- c. That the coffin with the bones of Joseph underwent a "symbolic change" and manifested itself as the Ark of the Covenant during the journey of the Exodus;
- d. That the Exodus as journey with the bones of Joseph is continued by Joshua and is concluded at the end of Joshua's life with the burial of the remains of Joseph according to Joshua 24;
- e. That the bones of Joseph acted as a bridge between the generations before, during and after the Exodus and that it led the communities or generations to act as testamentary executors during the entire Exodus and thereafter.

### **1.3 The aims and methodology**

The aim of this research is to interpret the Exodus in connection with Joseph's funeral. The dispersed fragments in the Hebrew Bible support that the Exodus was a journey of Joseph's

bones. This study attempts to combine the different biblical testimonies and to construct the journey. It focuses on the text itself. In other words, the journey of Joseph's bones will be studied without investigating the historical, social and political background of the time from Joseph through Moses to Joshua. The study will trace how the motif of Joseph's burial is manifested throughout the Pentateuch and Early Prophets. The macroplot of the narrative about the journey of Joseph's bones from Egypt to the land of the promise will therefore be analyzed by means of an intertextual interpretation that focuses on the development of specific motifs. Vanhoozer insists, "The attempt to discover the meaning of the biblical stories is thus a work of the intertextual imagination" (1990:201). The French word, "intertextualité", was coined by Julia Kristeva. "It is defined as the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position" (Kristeva 1980:15).

According to Westermann, the Joseph story is "aimed primarily at listeners, not readers; for a long time it existed only in a few manuscripts, and it was known for the most part through recitation and listening" (1987b:334). Thus, the Hebrew key words which are accented in the text (50:22-26) will be scrutinized by means of a close reading that also considers the intertextuality in the bigger textual corpus. For example, the key word, "Joseph's bones", is mentioned in four biblical texts: Genesis 50:25; Exodus 1:8; Joshua 24:32 Hebrews 11:22. Each of the texts is to be analyzed and explained, to explore the meaning of the bones through narrative construction. A narrative methodology not only focuses on the intertextuality created by key words, but also describes how the occurrence of events creates a plot line which links these events in terms of causality.

Furthermore, in order to identify the descendants of Israel, namely, the community of the Exodus, it is necessary to scrutinize aspects such as the meaning of Joseph's age (110), the enumerated names of the ancestors, "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (50:24), and the coffin.

The synchronic study presented here will therefore be a combination of (i) a study on the intertextuality created through the distribution of certain key terms; (ii) a study of the narrative construction reflected in the Exodus story; and (iii) a study of certain key motifs that have a bearing on the narrative understanding.

## **1.4 Preliminary literature study**

The concern of modern biblical scholars has moved from the matter of production of texts, to the text itself, or to the matter of reception of the biblical texts. In the case of the Joseph story, recent Bible scholarship has paid much more attention to the story as a whole than to the processes of production behind the text. For example, Longacre analyzed Genesis 37 and 39-48 using a rhetorical and textlinguistic method (1989). Hettema read the story of Joseph from the view of Ricœur (1996). Westermann dealt with eleven Joseph stories, omitting the story of Joseph's death (1996). He states, "It must be made clear that we are not dealing here with a historical account that was written according to our own modern definition of 'historical'" (1996:x). Löwenthal attempted to interpret the Joseph story as a narrative within the book of Genesis (1973).

However, Hilbert attempted to link some motifs in the Joseph story with several biblical texts, even to the New Testament (2011). He introduced Joseph as “prophetic dreamer (37:5-11), diviner (40:12-36), and clairvoyant (50:24-25)” in order to interpret his dreams within Israel’s kingship story. The first two metaphors seem appropriate to be applied to the interpretation of the dreams, but the last is not, because Joseph’s last words do not relate to any dreams. Joseph’s role of clairvoyant is also not explained enough in the article. The context of the text (50:22-26) rather tells about the journey to the land of promise for Joseph’s burial. Westermann considered the journey as “the solemn funeral procession from Egypt to Canaan” (1987a:210). Unfortunately, his idea has not been developed any further in publications.

At this stage, it seems that it is necessary to develop the view of Westermann further with reference to several other biblical texts. As indicated above in our methodological description this research thus attempts to combine the methodology of Hilbert and the perspective of Westermann.

## 1.5 Outline

This thesis contains five chapters. Its framework is designed with two parts. On the one hand, the first and last chapters are the introduction and conclusion of the whole thesis. The present chapter includes the problem statement, hypothesis, the aims and methodology, preliminary literature study and outline. The last chapter summarizes the middle chapters (chapter two,

three and four), shows their relevance for the contemporary Christian community, and makes some suggestions for the church.

On the other hand, the middle chapters include the exegetical process of the biblical texts related to Joseph's funeral. Chapter two indicates that the Exodus was the journey of Joseph's bones in order to fulfill Joseph's testament. That is supported by the symbols of Joseph's funeral. The meaning and function of the symbols are scrutinized in the chapter. Chapter three analyzes the epilogue of the Joseph story. The analysis tells that the epilogue plays a significant role to bridge the gap between the old and new generations. Chapter four deals with characters related to Joseph's testament as a view of testamentary executors: The testator, the primary and secondary audiences of Joseph's last words, Moses, the sons of Israel at the end of the Exodus and the executor behind the testamentary executors.

## Chapter 2: The symbols of Joseph's funeral

### 2.1. Introduction

Walter Brueggemann notes, “[T]he traditioning process that pursues a *canonical intentionality* (J. Sanders 1976) and that eventuates in a *canonical shape* is a remarkable achievement whereby a complexity of ‘bits and pieces’ of tradition of many kinds is drawn together in a more or less coherent unity (Childs 1979)” (2003:96). Some Old Testament scholars had studied the Hebrew Bible, focusing on the production of the Scripture for “the less coherent unity”. In contrast to those scholars, many Jewish and Christian readers have read the Bible, considering the aspect of “the more coherent unity”, not “the less”. Jewish readings have read Genesis as a part of the Torah and Christians have read the book as the first book of the Pentateuch. They have all supposed that Genesis is not a book separate from the rest of Torah/the Pentateuch. There is a coherence that ties the five books, and even other parts in the Hebrew Bible contain many motives from the Torah. Some motives in Genesis penetrate into several biblical texts, not only in the Pentateuch, but also the rest of the Bible. One of them is the open-ended Joseph story.

Genesis ends with the death of Joseph without a funeral service. The question remains, therefore: “Did Joseph really have no funeral because he, who rose to the highest rank after Pharaoh in Egypt, led the big funeral procession for his father accompanied by a multitude

from Egypt to Canaan?” When we consider the final form of the Bible where the motif of Joseph’s bones connects different parts, it becomes problematic. In the books of Exodus and Joshua, the bones of Joseph appear. Mysteriously, a long time later, Moses departed out of the land of Egypt carrying the bones of Joseph and in the land of promise the bones were buried by the sons of Israel. The bones were traveling together with the Israelites until they came to the land of Canaan. In other words, the Exodus seems to be the journey of the bones in order to be buried in the Promised Land. Meyers asserts: “The momentous journey out of Egypt is also a funeral procession of sorts, for Joseph’s embalmed skeletal remains are transported for burial in the land of promise” (2005:112).

The itinerary of the journey is known only by the indications of departure and arrival. There is no trace of the bones’ middle itinerary; it seems that the coffin of Joseph was symbolically changed into something similar. The same Hebrew word for coffin (**גְּרָנָה**), reappears in the desert with another meaning and form, namely as the Ark. It seems that the coffin was symbolically changed into the Ark. The evidence of this symbolic change will be scrutinized in this chapter. Thus, this chapter of the thesis studies the symbols of Joseph’s funeral procession: the bones of Joseph and the coffin.

This research goes beyond an investigation of the burial of Joseph’s bones. We know for certain that the bones and the coffin were taken to the Promised Land according to Joseph’s last words and that they were buried in the land of Canaan. If the entombment of the bones in Shechem was Joseph’s last wish according to Genesis, we may expect that the Hexateuch

construction would be supporting this motif. Schmid therefore also asserts: “The burial of the bones of Joseph in Shechem reported in Josh 24:32 forms the end-point of a thread begun by Gen 50:25. This thread leads from Genesis, past the notice in Exod 13:19, and then to the end of Joshua in Josh 24:32. Therefore, Gen 50:25 has shown itself to be an important hexateuchal compositional element” (2010:214).

However, the burial of Joseph’s bones is not the final desire of his testament. Dozeman asserts that the entombment reflects “the burial practices of the Diaspora Jews” (2009:309). This makes the reader reread Joseph’s testament more closely. The Genesis narrative reports that Joseph said, “[Y]ou shall carry up my bones from here” (Gen. 50:25). His wish before his death was not the burial of his bones, but rather its carrying from the land of Egypt. Even though the narrator of the book of Joshua closed Joseph’s story line with the burial of the bones, the intention of Joseph’s last words is still open for interpretation. Therefore, the present research does not support the theory that the motif of Joseph’s bones should be interpreted within the Hexateuchal construction, that is, that it stops in the book of Joshua. It rather wants to investigate further traces of evidence in the other biblical texts in order to see whether this motif also continues outside the Hexateuch.

## **2.2. The bones of Joseph**

### **2.2.1 The delayed burial**

Joseph was not buried in Egypt but his embalmed body was just placed “in a coffin in Egypt”

(Gen. 50:26). Joseph wanted his bones to be carried by the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt to the land of Promise, which was not the time immediately after he had died, but rather when God visits (**תְּבִיא**) them (Gen. 50:25). Joseph's burial was therefore postponed. His dying wish assumes that his bones had to remain in Egypt for some time. The Israelites moved from the land of Canaan to the land of Egypt because of a severe famine. They "settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen" (Gen. 47:27), but they did not understand it to be a permanent settlement, because they knew that God had promised Abram to give him the land (of Canaan) and that his descendants will return back to this land (Gen. 15). Therefore, the family of Jacob Israel must have known that the life in Egypt was temporary, but the problem was that they did not know how long they had to stay there.

Joseph mentioned his bones (**עָצָמָתִי**), not his body or remains, on his deathbed. According to Genesis 50:26, his body was embalmed. It means that his corpse was mummified so that it would not decay for a long time. Joseph must have known about this practice because he himself "commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father" (Gen. 50:2). Although Joseph would have known that his body would decay very slowly after being embalmed, he did not mention his remains, but rather his bones. Afterwards, Joseph's mummified remains consisted of "flesh and hair" but were called "bones" by the Israelites (Stuart 2006:325). The utterance "bones" seems to suggest a length of time, given that the change from a mummified body to bones lets the reader think that it would take a very long time. Consequently, the reference to bones might be suggesting a very long stay in Egypt.

The book of Exodus also hints that Joseph's bones stayed in Egypt for a very long time.

Exodus opens with the numerous names of Jacob's family and their descendants. The narrator of Exodus testifies, "But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them" and a new king, "who didn't know Joseph", ruled over Egypt (Exod. 1:7, 8). Longman notes, "There are some questions about the date of Joseph and even more about the date of the exodus ..., but it was long enough that the family of God had grown to nation size" (2009:97). To be specific, the narrator mentioned how long the Israelites stayed in Egypt, namely "430 years" (Exod. 12:40).

The delaying of the burial even continued throughout the desert period. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years (cf., Num. 32:13, Deut. 8:2). Almost the entire first generation of the Exodus died in the wilderness and at the time when Joshua became the second leader of the Israelites, they conquered the land. Joseph's bones were buried at the time when Joshua died, as we have seen above.

### **2.2.2 The visible symbol of the invisible promise of God**

Joseph bequeathed his bones as a legacy to his descendants, in order to remember the promise given to their forefathers. On account of the long delayed fulfillment of God's promise, it seemed likely that the Israelites were forgetting the promise or could not trust it anymore. Although Joseph did not see the fulfillment of the promise in his lifetime, he believed that God would definitely lead the whole family of Jacob Israel to the Promised Land in His appointed time (Heb. 11:20). This belief was the hereditary possession of the Patriarchs, so Joseph left his bones to keep reminding the people of the promise, even when it was still

delayed. In his last words, he indicated that his bones should be carried up by the sons of Israel. It seems that Joseph wished that the bones would become the visible symbol for the invisible promise of God. Sailhamer notes: “Unlike Jacob, who was returned to Canaan immediately after his death, Joseph requested that his bones remain with the children of Jacob in Egypt as a reminder of their future return to the land” (1992:268).

During the long sojourn in Egypt, the bones might have recalled the last words of Joseph that “God will surely visit you” (Gen. 50:25). When Joseph was alive, the Egyptians were favorable to him and his family, but he could not be sure of how long the goodwill of the Egyptians would keep. According to the Midrash, the Egyptians became hostile toward the Israelites as soon as Joseph died:

Then Joseph died and the physicians embalmed him, and his brothers and all the Egyptians wept seventy days for him. Then the counselors of Pharaoh and his wise men presented themselves before Pharaoh and said to him, "We have heard that the brothers of Joseph and all their dependents are unable to go out of our land unless they take his bones with them, for so he bound them by oath before his death. Now, if it pleases the king, let him command that a leaden coffin be made, five hundred kikar in weight, and let Joseph be placed in it and cast into the middle of the Nile, so that none of his brothers will know his burial place. Then the sons of Israel will be compelled to dwell in our land and serve us for ever. Or the king may order that Joseph be buried in the tombs of the kings, and we will set golden dogs in that place and by our magic we shall make them bark with great strength whenever a stranger

approaches them." And Pharaoh replied: "I will have Joseph cast into the middle of the Nile; thereby obtaining for myself two benefits: the waters of the Nile will be blessed for Joseph's sake and will water the whole land and fertilize it, and also his brothers will never find him, and so this wise people will be our slaves for ever." And they made the coffin of lead and the magicians and sorcerers cast it into the midst of the Nile.

(Levner 1946:226)

This Midrashic legend is hard to believe, but it shows the possibility that the Egyptians could change their attitude towards the Israelites at any time. In fact, the author of Exodus records the time when the Egyptians turned against the Israelites (Exod. 1:8-11). The hostile Egyptians persecuted the Israelites and they were not friendly anymore. The sons of Israel became the slaves of the Egyptians. Under these circumstances, when there seemed to be no light of hope, the sons of Israel in the land of Egypt could have the hope that God will definitely visit them and will deliver them from the suppression of the Egyptians as a result of Joseph's hope that was symbolized by his bones. The bones of Joseph symbolized God's promise under their severe suffering.

Like in Egypt, the bones also symbolized "the wide span of God's purpose from promise to fulfillment" during the long journey in the desert (Johnstone 2003:87). The visible symbol had played a significant role in keeping the identity of the Israelites in the wilderness. The Israelites needed to have a reason why they had to keep going in the barren land and not

return to Egypt; it is because God had promised their forefathers that He would give them the land of Canaan. They knew the promise, but the lengthy journey might have made them tired and resulted in them forgetting God's word. The Bible reports that the Israelites grumbled over the food in the wilderness and even regretted having come out of Egypt. Stuart summarizes the complaints of the Israelites in his exegesis of Exodus 16:3: "This was the first time the Israelites made the 'if only we had died in Egypt argument,' but it would not be the last (see Num 11:4, 18; 14:2; cf. 20:3; Josh 7:7)" (2006:371). It seems that during the entire Exodus the Israelites needed to have a visible motivation stimulating them to keep going to the Promised Land. Propp notes, "Joseph has his own remains preserved by the Hebrews as a token of faith in their repatriation" (1999:489). Whenever the motivation for the journey was weak, they could keep going in the desert seeing the symbol that Joseph left them.

However, there was another visible symbol of God's presence that appears in the Exodus narrative. When the leader of the Exodus went up a mountain to see God alone, the rest of the Israelites had to wait for him under the mountain. Moses stayed with God on the mountain for a long time and the long wait had the Israelites suspecting that their leader might have died. They decided to make a visible god to lead them, instead of the disappeared man of God. The Scripture says, "When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, 'Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him'" (Exodus 32:1). Eventually, they made a golden calf that was recognized as "the embodiment of the divinity that had led them in their

exodus" (Stuart 2006:665).

There seemed to be two conflicting visible symbols among the Israelites then. One was the bones of Joseph, a symbol of Joseph's last wish which reminded of God's promise. The other was the golden calf, a symbol of the god of the exodus that they had made themselves. The former encouraged them to keep going to the land of God's promise, but the latter gave them an impulse to stay with idolatry. It seems that these conflicting symbols suggest that the Israelites were in a state of confusion to determine which way they should go, either to God or the gods. The narrative suggests that both could not be tolerated. Exodus 32:20 therefore indicates: "He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it". As a result, the sons of Israel could keep going in the wilderness with Joseph's visible legacy accompanying them.

### **2.3. Symbolic change from the coffin to the Ark of Covenant**

The Ark has been studied by many Biblical scholars as a symbol that has multiple meanings. Woudstra summed up the symbolic interpretations of the Ark from Augustine to Calvin. Augustine allegorically interpreted the Ark, stressing the symbolical significance as "church" and "a prefiguration of the incarnate body of Christ". Gregory the Great attempted to find "many hidden meanings in the ark". One of his findings was that "the heart of a faithful priest is like the ark." This is expanded upon by Luther: "Whereas Gregory sees in the ark the symbol of a priest's heart only, Luther extends this symbolism to the heart of all believers."

The main interest of Luther was to seek “a connection between the ark and the incarnation”. Calvin considered the Ark as “an earnest symbol of God’s presence” (Woudstra 1965:14-20). The study of the Ark as a symbol deserves to be investigated deeper and wider. No research has been done on the Ark’s symbolic aspect as a coffin, even though the Ark is indicated to be a coffin in Exodus and further contexts.

### **2.3.1 The Ark as a coffin in the Exodus context**

The biblical narrative shows only the beginning and end of the journey of Joseph’s bones. The detail of the middle of the journey of the bones is unknown, but it is suggested that the bones were with the Israelites during the entire Exodus, because they only were buried in the land of the promise. As we have seen, the bones were a symbol of God’s promise to not settle permanently in Egypt or in the desert. They were a great motivation to make the Israelites keep going to the Promised Land. If the symbol of the promise were to have disappeared in the middle of the Exodus, it could have been a serious problem and might have caused the Israelites to stop moving forwards to the land of Canaan or to start following other ways. However, they did eventually arrive at the destination that God promised. Thus, the narrative suggestion that the bones of Joseph were still with the Exodus community leads the reader to look for what else was encouraging the people to keep going to the land of promise.

#### **2.3.1.1 The disappeared vehicle of the bones in desert**

Tracking the disappeared bones requires an understanding of what the vehicle of the bones

was and it is necessary to examine how the Israelites carried the bones. After the end of Genesis, Moses was the first person who took the bones of Joseph (Exod. 13:19), but it is doubtful that the remains of the body were taken in his hands, without any container. According to Genesis 50:26, Joseph's body was first embalmed and then placed in a coffin. Consequently, Moses took the coffin referred to in Genesis and not the bones themselves. Fretheim explicitly notes, "Moses took Joseph's coffin along on the exodus journey" (1991:151). Therefore, the vehicle of the bones for the funeral procession was the coffin. In other words, the journey of the bones was the journey of the coffin.

Traces of the middle of the coffin's journey from Egypt to Canaan cannot be found in the desert account. Jewish legend, however, introduces the possibility of two shrines in the desert. "All the time in the desert Israel carried two shrines with them, the one the coffin containing the bones of the dead man Joseph, the other the Ark containing the covenant of the Living God" (Ginzberg 1913:183). This legend seems to be made up on the basis of Jewish imagination and not of any historical or archeological evidence. In addition, the biblical texts do not mention two shrines in the wilderness.

The desert account in Exodus is shrouded in mystery. Water seems to be a literary device used to divide the land of Egypt from the land of Canaan. The coffin disappears after the Israelites crossed over the water (the Red Sea) and reappears after they crossed over the water again (the Jordan River). That is, in the desert that belongs neither to the land of Egypt nor to the land of Canaan, it seems that something happened to the coffin containing Joseph's bones.

One can probably assume that the coffin physically changed to the Ark, but it is impossible, given that the Ark was too small to contain a mummified body and too beautiful to be called a coffin. Kitchen summed up the appearance of the Ark: “The ark was a rectangular box (‘ārôn) made of acacia wood and measured  $2 \frac{1}{2} \times 1 \frac{1}{2} \times 1 \frac{1}{2}$  cubits (I. e. c.  $4 \times 2 \frac{1}{2} \times 2 \frac{1}{2}$  feet or c.  $1.22 \text{ m} \times 76 \text{ cm} \times 76 \text{ cm}$ ). The whole was covered with gold and was carried on poles inserted in rings at the four lower corners. The lid, or ‘mercy-seat’, was a gold plate surrounded by two antithetically-placed cherubs with outspread wing” (1996:80).

Thus, the narrative certainly does not suggest a physical changing of the coffin into the Ark, but it seems that it rather suggests that the vehicle of the bones for the journey transformed symbolically from the coffin to the Ark in the desert. We will therefore turn to some evidence to support this claim.

### 2.3.1.2 Another vehicle for the bones in the desert

The biblical texts offer evidence of the symbolic change. Instead of the box containing the bones, another box containing sacred things of God emerges in the wilderness. The second box is indicated with the same Hebrew word which is used for the first box, namely “אָרוֹן”.

The Hebrew noun has three meanings in the Old Testament:

1. *Chest*, for money-offerings, 2 K 12<sup>10, 11</sup> 2 Ch 24<sup>8, 10, 11, 11</sup>.
2. *sarcophagus*, mummy-case of Joseph Gn 50<sup>26</sup> (E).
3. *chest, ark* in tabernacle & temple, containing

table of law, with cherubim above, the esp. seat of ‘‘ among his people, only Hex (71 t.) S (61 t.) K (12t.) & Ch (48t.) + Ju 20<sup>27</sup> Je 3<sup>16</sup> ψ 132<sup>8</sup>; used alone & in various combinations (cf. Seyring <sup>ZAW 1891, 114f.</sup>).

(Brown, Driver & Briggs 2000:75)

The Hebrew word with the meaning of a coffin was used only once, namely in the context of Joseph’s death. Grammatically, the word has the definite article, so the body was put in “the coffin” and not in “a coffin”. If the narrator deliberately used the definite article, it must have had a pointed object that was quite important and was well-known in the Israelite community. Unfortunately, the antecedent of the definite article cannot be found in the book of Genesis that ends without giving extra information about it. This leads the reader to consider where this term appears again. Therefore, the context of the desert where the coffin disappeared and the Ark (indicated with the same Hebrew noun) appeared comes into focus again. It seems that the desert account identifies the coffin with the Ark.

### **2.3.1.3 The function of the vehicle**

The vehicle of Joseph’s bones before and after the desert wandering has the same function of the Ark during the desert wandering. The main function of Joseph’s coffin was to motivate the Israelites to keep going to the Promised Land. Blum interprets Joseph’s bones as “die Einführung der Gestalt des Führungsengels in 14:19a/b parallel zur Wolkensäule” (2006:133). The role of the guiding angel and the pillar of cloud was to encourage the Israelites to

persevere with the Exodus. Likewise, the Ark also had a similar function. On the one hand, the Ark was a symbol of God's presence to guide them in the wilderness. The Israelites could reach the land of Canaan by following the way that the Ark led. On the other hand, the Ark was a symbol of God's presence to protect them from enemies. There were many enemies to stop them from going to the land of Canaan. God defeated the enemies through the Ark. Payne illustrated these two functions of the Ark:

Even without such inquiry, however, God acted through the ark for the guidance and the protection of his people. His lifting up of the cloud became the signal for Israel's wilderness advance (Num. 10:11; ...), and it was the ark that went before the tribes "to find them a place to rest" (v. 33). God's presence became also a means for scattering the nation's enemies (v. 35). Note the ark's functioning as a palladium at Jericho ... and being designated by the name of Yahweh of Hosts (or armies, 2Sam. 6:2; cf. 1 Sa. 17:45).

(Payne 2009:348)

Therefore, the Ark had the same function as the coffin, namely to keep the Israelites going to the Promised Land.

#### **2.3.1.4 The container symbolizing God's covenant**

Joseph's bones symbolize God's promise given to Abraham. Joseph's death wish was to have

his bones carried up by his family or his descendants. He must have remembered his father's testament on his deathbed and wanted his body to be buried in the land of Canaan. Jacob followed the tradition of the previous Patriarchs (Isaac and Abraham). The family burial tradition comes from the covenant of God in Genesis 15. God gave his word to Abraham that Abraham's descendants will return to the land of Canaan and that he will die peacefully there. The promise of God was placed in the context of "the old ritual of covenant-making" (Brueggemann 1982:154). That is, the return to Canaan was part of God's Covenant. Abraham, who believed God's covenant, bought some land in Canaan where he buried his wife, Sarah, and where he himself was later buried. According to the tradition, his lineal descendants were buried in the same place. Joseph who knew the family burial tradition might have wanted to be buried in the land of Canaan. The coffin containing Joseph's bones is therefore like the container symbolizing God's covenant given to Abraham.

Similarly, the Ark is a container that symbolizes God's covenant. The Israelites had the first container, the coffin with Joseph's bones, motivating them to go to the Promised Land when they crossed the first water. The symbolic meaning of Joseph's bones, recalling God's promise to Abraham, flowed into another object in the desert, namely the Ark. The Israelites crossed the second water with the second container, the Ark, having similar meaning as the first container. The Ark has many names in the biblical texts. Among them, the Ark of the Covenant is noticeable because it plays a significant role in recalling God's covenants and promises. Hague states, "The idea of a promise, or pledge of presence, is never far from the essence of the meaning of the ark. Nevertheless, the promise was not a corporeal presence, for God is incorporeal and invisible, and may be understood more in terms of the covenant

promise, ‘I will be with you’ (Gen 26:3; 31:3; Exod 3:12; Josh 1:5; Isa 43:2) and ‘I will be your God, and you will be my people’ (Gen 17:7; 26:24; Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12; Jer 7:23; 11:4)” (1997:506-507). Thus, two containers carried by the Israelites at various stages of their journey to the Promised Land contained the covenant of God.

### **2.3.1.5 Two symbols of God’s covenant**

After the Israelites crossed the second water (the Jordan River), the biblical texts testify to two symbols of God’s covenant: Joseph’s bones and the Ark of the Covenant. Why would the texts have to testify two symbols? As we have seen previously, the function of the coffin containing Joseph’s bones, which has the meaning of God’s covenant given to Abraham, was to keep the Israelites going to the land of Canaan. It seems that the narrative’s suggestion is that, as the bones of Joseph were buried by the sons of Israel in the Promised Land, Joseph’s funeral had been finished, but the meaning of God’s covenant had not been buried with the bones. The second symbol of God’s covenant was still with the Israelites, even though they had already entered and conquered the land of Canaan. The Ark of the Covenant kept the meaning of God’s Covenant that God will be the father (as a guidance and protector) and God of his people (the Israelites).

### **2.3.2 The Ark as a coffin in further contexts**

The book of Joshua records that Joseph’s bones were buried in Shechem. The entombment of the bones in the Promised Land can be seen as a fulfillment of Joseph’s testament. “Genesis

50:25 narrates Joseph's death in Egypt. He is said to have elicited a promise from the Israelites that they would take his bones back to the land promised to his ancestors for burial. Here, that promise is fulfilled (24:32)" (Pressler 2002:123). Literally, however, it is nowhere indicated in the biblical narrative that Joseph had mentioned either the burial of his bones or the place of his burial. The indication of the burial in the land of promise seems to be offered in order to satisfy the reader who already knows what will eventually happen to the bones. However, the text, Genesis 50:25, keeps opens the possibility to interpret the aim of Joseph's last will not only as a burial in the land of promise but also as something else in other biblical texts with a different angle.

A motif in a biblical text is sometimes revived in another biblical text. The first symbol of God's covenant, Joseph's bones, journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land. Likewise, the second symbol of God's covenant, the Ark of the Covenant, also journeyed from some parts of the land of Palestine into the Promised Land. The second journey has some similarities with the first. In particular, it seems that the journey of the Ark in the land of Beth-shemesh shares the motif of the journey of Joseph's bones in terms of a funeral procession.

### **2.3.2.1 The journey of the coffin / the Ark by death motif**

The journey of the coffin containing the bones of Joseph is closely related to the death of other biblical people related to the Exodus. When Joseph died, his body was put into a coffin and remained in Egypt a very long time. Moses carried the coffin from Egypt to transplant the bones of Joseph to the Promised Land according to Joseph's last will after the death of the

Pharaoh's son. The coffin's journey in the desert was begun with the death of some Egyptians in the Red Sea. The coffin crossed over the River Jordan after the death of Moses and came into the land of Canaan. Although the coffin arrived at the Promised Land, the journey wasn't over. Only when the last leader of the Exodus, Joshua, died, the journey of the coffin was finished. Thus, it is possible that the coffin's journey was closely related to the motif of death.

The death motif recurs in the context of the journey of the Ark of the Covenant in 1 Samuel. The Ark started to journey from Silo to Ebenezer because "about four thousand men" of the Israelites died in the first Ebenezer war between the Israelites and the Philistines (4:2). Although the Israelites brought the Ark to the second Ebenezer war, they were defeated by the Philistines and two sons of Eli died. As a result, the Ark moved from Ebenezer to Ashdod (5:1). After the people of Ashdod were killed by the hand of God (5:11), the Ark moved to the land of Beth-shemesh (6:13-15). In the land of Beth-shemesh, many people from Beth-shemesh were killed because they "looked upon the Ark" (6:19). And lastly, death led the Ark to be moved to "the house of Abinadab" (7:1). Therefore, the journey of the Ark was also closely related to the motif of death, like the journey of Joseph's coffin.

### 2.3.2.2 Repetition of words in Genesis 50: **אבָל** **מִן** + **עַלְהָ**, **בָּאָרוֹן**, and **אֲבָל** **מִן** + **עַלְהָ**, **בָּאָרוֹן**

Robinson notes, "Sometimes the text imitates another text but places different people in it" (1996:40). In the narrative of the Ark in the land of Beth-shemesh, some Hebrew words from Genesis 50 are imitated: **אבָל** **מִן** + **עַלְהָ**, **בָּאָרוֹן**, and **אֲבָל** **מִן** + **עַלְהָ**, **בָּאָרוֹן**. These phrases let the reader rethink and interpret the Ark narrative within the context of Joseph's funeral.

**בָּאָרוֹן**. The corpse of Joseph was put “in the coffin”. The exact Hebrew phrase of “in the coffin” is “**בָּאָרוֹן**”, which appears seven times in the Hebrew Bible: 1) Genesis 50:26 (in the coffin), 2) Deuteronomy 10:2 (in the ark), 3) Deuteronomy 10:5 (in the ark), 4) 1 Samuel 6:19 (upon the ark), 5) 1 Samuel 6:19 (in the ark), 6) 2 Kings 12:11 (in the chest), 7) 2 Chronicles 5:10 (in the ark). The assumption that the Ark refers to Joseph’s coffin makes us review the verses related to the Ark of the Covenant. If Genesis 50:26 (coffin for dead) and 2 Kings 12:11 (chest for the money offerings) are excluded, five verses remain, namely:

- Deut. 10:2
- Deut. 10:5
- 1 Sam. 6:19
- 1 Ki. 8:9
- 2 Chr. 5:10

This list shows that **בָּאָרוֹן** in the first book of Samuel is surrounded by reports that Moses put two stone tables that the LORD wrote at Horeb in the Ark. That is, the Ark narrative in the land of Beth-shemesh is placed in the center of those phrases with **בָּאָרוֹן** which are related to the Ark of the Covenant in the Hebrew Bible.

**מִן** + **עַלְהָ**. Joseph wanted his bones to be carried “up from” Egypt (Genesis 50:25). The word, “**עַלְהָ** (**go up**)”, can refer to going up to the land of Canaan that is higher than the land of

Egypt geographically. Stuart elaborates, “Throughout the narrative, going from Egypt to Canaan is described as going up, not because Moses was thinking of north as ‘up’ but because Egypt is largely lowland, near sea level, and Canaan is mostly highland, mountains and hills. Virtually throughout the Bible, people go ‘up’ when they go higher in elevation (thus to Canaan, to Bethel, to Mount Zion and the temple) and ‘down’ when they go lower in elevation (thus to Jericho, to Egypt, to the Dead Sea)” (2006:325). The Hebrew word (**עליה**) used with preposition **מִן** (from) occurs in the Joseph testament:

**וְהַעֲלָתָם אֶת־עַצְמָתִי מִזֶּה**

And you shall carry up my bones from here (Gen 50:25)

The Hebrew phrase can, however, also be understood in the context of one’s death. The term, “go up from”, that was mentioned in Joseph’s death wish, is repeated in the mouth of mourners in Beth-shemesh just after the death of the people of Beth-shemesh who looked into the Ark:

**וְאֵלֶּה מֵי יַעֲלֵה מֵעַלְינוּ**

And to whom shall he go up away from us? (1 Samuel 6:20)

The use of terminology thus corroborates our earlier observation that the death motif connects the coffin and Ark with one another.

**אַבָּל**. During Jacob’s funeral procession, the narrator of Genesis recorded that the family

members of Jacob and the Egyptians mourned (“וַיַּעֲשֵׂה לְאָבִיו אֶבֶל”<sup>10</sup>) for the death of Jacob (Genesis 50:10). Similarly, the narrator of the first book of Samuel narrated that the people of Beth-shemesh mourned (“וַיַּתְהִלֵּל הָעָם”<sup>11</sup>) for the deceased people (1 Samuel 6:19).

It seems therefore that the Hebrew words that were written in the context of the death of Jacob and Joseph were imitated by the Ark narrative in the context of the death of the people of Beth-shemesh. The repeated Hebrew words intensify that the death of the Beth Shemeshites who looked into the Ark had to be interpreted in the light of Joseph’s funeral procession.

### **2.3.2.3 A key of the questionable death of the Beth Shemeshites**

The Ark narrative in 1 Samuel 6 suggests that the people of Beth-shemesh had heard about the magical power of the Ark of the LORD, particularly, that it had mutilated and killed Dagon, the god of Ashdod, in front of the Ark. It might have stimulated foreigners to check what was inside the Ark and some of them looked into it. This behavior stemmed from “their curiosity” (Blaikie 1888:82), but the results were terrible. All of the people who looked into the Ark died. Many Old Testament scholars have attempted to give an answer as for the reason why they had to be killed. Generally, the answers can be divided into two groups. One is that there was no respect for the sacred box. For example, Cartledge explains it with “no respecter of persons, and the danger of trifling with holy things applies to the chosen as well as the heathen” (2001:91), while Bergen notes, “The shameless disregard for the ark’s sanctity and the violation of its sacred space brought swift and direct judgment from Yahweh”

(1996:103). The other reason is that the death came from not sharing the joy over the returning of the Ark. Hertzberg states, “We are told that those who did not share in the joy over the return of the ark incur the punishment which overtakes people who do not show due respect to the high God, be they Philistines or Israelites” (1964:61). Brueggemann harmonizes these two theories. “Some Israelites violate the ark, either by looking in it (v. 19) or by refusing to celebrate (so the Septuagint). The response of Yahweh is to strike out and kill them” (1990:43).

Despite several attempts to explain the questionable death of the Beth Shemesites, the text keeps silent. At this stage, as another attempt to explain this enigma, it seems that the symbolic aspect of Joseph’s coffin applies to the Ark as well. According to the translation of MT, what the people of Beth-shemesh did to the Ark is “(looked into”).<sup>2</sup> The translation implies two actions of the people of Beth-shemesh: Opening the Ark by touching and looking inside of the Ark. This action of looking into the Ark “would imply the opening of the ark” (Tsumura 2007:226). In order to open the Ark they must have touched it, but touching the Ark was strongly prohibited (cf. 2 Samuel 6:6-7). Only the group of Israelites chosen by God could deal with God’s holy things. The Kohathites took care of “the most holy things”, and Aaron and his sons could go into the tent of meeting and covered the Ark with “the veil of the screen” while the camp was moving (Num. 4:4-5), but even they were not allowed to touch and see the Ark. Bergen sets the limits of their right to the Ark and explains their duty: “According to the Torah (Num 4:5–6), no Israelites outside the Aaronic priesthood were permitted to see even the exterior of the ark, much less its interior. Even the Kohathites,

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<sup>2</sup> LXX translates it “(saw)”

whose God-given duty it was to transport the ark, were forbidden either to touch or view the sacred box. Thus, the first duty of the Israelites—especially the Kohathites, whose charge it was to care for the holy things of Israelite worship (cf. Num 4:2)—would have been to hide the ark from view while avoiding any physical or visual contact with it” (1996:103).

The attempt to interpret the death of the Beth Shemesites with “cultic taboos (cf. Num 4:15, 20; 20 Hertzberg)” (McCarter 1980:131) is in our estimation not enough explanation. During the journey of the Ark in the land of Canaan, the Ark was not protected by the proper ways as set out in Numbers 4. It was exposed, not only to the Israelites, but also to the Philistines. Anyone could see the sacred wooden box. If the law of Numbers 4 applies to the Ark narrative in 1 Samuel, all people who had seen the uncovered wooden box would have been killed. But only the people who looked inside the Ark were killed. It means that the law of Numbers 4 cannot be applicable to the journey of the ark in the land of the Philistines. Thus, “cultic taboos” cannot explain adequately why the people of Beth-shemesh were not allowed to look into the Ark.

Instead of the interpretation of “cultic taboos”, the explanation of the Ark as a coffin is more convincing in understanding the reason behind the questionable death. Even though the Ark was exposed to anyone in the land of the Philistines, it was not allowed to look inside the Ark, because the Ark symbolizes the coffin containing the corpse of Joseph. That is, opening the wooden box was like opening a coffin, and looking at the corpse in a coffin was shameless behavior. It seems that God punished the people who did not respect the Ark as a

coffin that symbolized Joseph's funeral, as well as the coffin containing Joseph's bones that symbolized God's covenant.

## 2.4. Conclusion

Chapter 2 scrutinized the meanings and functions of the two symbols of Joseph's funeral during the Exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land. The first symbol was Joseph's bones. The bones symbolized the lengthy stay in Egypt and the invisible promise of God. The symbol played a significant role for the Israelites to keep waiting for God's visitation and keep going to the Land of Promise. The second symbol was Joseph's coffin. The coffin containing the symbol of Joseph's bones symbolically changed to the Ark symbolizing God's covenant in the desert after the Israelites crossed the first water (Red Sea). The Ark of the Covenant encouraged the Israelites to keep going to the Promised Land although the way in the wilderness was tough, and although there were many enemies who wanted to stop them from going to the land of Canaan.

The question why there was no funeral service for Joseph who was the high officer in Egypt and the main character in Genesis 37-50 is solved by the answer that the two symbols (Joseph's bones and coffin) suggest that the Exodus was Joseph's funeral procession. That is, these two symbols let the Israelites regard the Exodus as Joseph's funeral. The unfinished funeral of Joseph in Genesis was performed during the entire Exodus and finished with the burial of his bones in the Promised Land. Although Joseph's funeral was finished at the end of the Exodus as his bones and coffin were buried in the land of the Canaan, the meaning of

Joseph's testament, "you shall carry up my bones from here" (Gen. 50:25), was still alive through the Ark of the Covenant.

## Chapter 3: Bridging the old and new generations

### 3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 suggested that the Exodus can be likened to Joseph's funeral procession. At the burial of Joseph's bones in the Promised Land, it seems that God's promise given to Abraham was fulfilled. There seemed to no longer be any reason for the generation that conquered the land of Canaan to remember the promise God made to Abraham because it was already accomplished at the time. They entered the Promised Land after the Exodus generation died. Joshua was the last symbolic person of the Exodus. The death of the last Exodus leader could have separated the generation in the land of Canaan from the previous generations who were not able to enter Canaan and could have led them to live according to the customs of the Canaanites. If this was the case, they could have become like the Canaanites, losing their identity and their God. How then would the children of Israel, who were born in the land of Canaan know who they were and who their God was, with their background that seemed disconnected from the previous generation?

The last scene of the Joseph narrative can be seen as a bridge between the generations from the Patriarchs to Joshua. In this chapter of the thesis, the generations are divided into three groups. The old generation consists of the people who lived at the time of the Patriarchs, the Exodus generation of the people who lived from Moses to Joshua, and the new generation of

the people who lived after Joshua in the land of promise. The first bridge appears in the names of the three Patriarchs. The story of the Exodus generation opens with the names of the three Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which were mentioned together for the first time in Genesis 50:24. These names were to remind the Exodus generation of Joseph's testament. The generation after Joseph needed to remember the promise given to their forefathers during the Exodus to motivate them to keep going to the Promised Land. After all, the names should serve as a voiced legacy for the Exodus generation, the inheritors in the middle generation. The exact Hebrew phrase **לְאַבָּרָהָם לִיְצָחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב**, which was used in the last words of Joseph, recurs only in the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy.

The next bridge is found in certain common denominators between the death of Joseph and the death of Joshua, that is, in the connection between Joseph and his descendant; the lifespan of 110 years, as well as in the fact that the burial site belonged to Ephraim. It seems that the common denominators serve the function of being a link between firstly, the old and new generation, and secondly, the first and second book of the Pentateuch or the Former Prophets that is “the ‘early prophets’ Joshua (book of Joshua), Samuel (Judges, 1-2 Samuel), and Jeremiah (1-2 Kings). In later (particularly Christian) tradition they are regarded as historical books” (Trites 1987:391). This chapter focuses on the former (the denominators appearing in the death notices of Joseph and Joshua in order to create as a bridge between the old and new generation). However, before taking up the main subject, the connection between the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets will be examined briefly.

### **3.1.1 The last for the beginning**

The books of Genesis and Exodus both belong to the Pentateuch. The book of Genesis is the first book of the Pentateuch, and it introduces the beginning of the second book of the Pentateuch; the last part of Genesis alludes to the beginning of Exodus. The last word in Genesis, “in Egypt”, hints at the first part of the next book. Exodus deals with the story of the Israelites from their time in Egypt to their exodus out of Egypt. Furthermore, the twice mentioned invitation of God in Genesis 50:24, 25 generates curiosity as to when God will visit the sons of Israel, but because there was no visit in Genesis, the reader will want to open the next page of the Pentateuch. Brueggemann indicates, “So the narrative ends in Egypt, awaiting the visit” (1982:379).

In addition, the second book of the Pentateuch gives an answer to the hidden question in the last part of Genesis. In the first part of the book, the children of Israel were oppressed by the Egyptians. The first phrase in Exodus, “and these are the names”, not only explains the reason for the suffering, but also provides a clue as to the hidden question in the last verse of Genesis. The Egyptians oppressed the children of Israel who had multiplied (that is, compared to the 70 names listed under Jacob’s family), in order to prevent them from overthrowing the Egyptian government. However, Genesis does not identify those who embalmed Joseph. According to the Midrash, the people who embalmed Joseph were identified at the beginning of Exodus:

Who embalmed him? R. Phinehas and F. Judah disagree in R. Nehemiah’s name. R.

Judah said: The physicians embalmed him; while F. Phinehas maintained: The tribal ancestors embalmed him. Thus it says, AND THEY EMBALMED HIM, AND HE WAS PUT IN A COFFIN IN EGYPT; and who were they? – [Those enumerated in the next verse]: *Now these are the names of the sons of Israel, who came into Egypt* (Ex. I, I).

(Freedman & Simon 1939:1001).

Jacob's descendants who embalmed the body of Joseph proliferated in Egypt and lived off the land. The story was no longer about the family of Jacob but about the people of Israel. Noth notes:

The expression *benē yisrā'el*, which in v. I still means the 'sons of Israel', i.e. 'sons of Jacob' (on this cf. Gen. 35.10 P), from v. 7 onwards consistently describes the 'Israelites' who now form the object of the divine action in history. This transition is achieved by the simple statement that after the generation of the sons of Jacob had died (v. 6) an unspecified period of time had elapsed during which the descendants of Jacob had increased so greatly that they had now become a 'people' (v. 9) living in the midst of Egypt.

(Noth 1962:20)

They became a nation that sprang from the root of God's chosen family. Fretheim illuminates the function of Joseph's last words, stating that "Joseph's words create the bridge to the next

stage in Israel's story, just as it has been his actions in this story that have enabled the brothers to go into Exodus as a unified family" (1994:674). Therefore, there would have been a huge gap without the last words of Joseph in the last chapter of Genesis, which introduces the beginning of Exodus.

### **3.1.2 Connection between the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets**

Within the narrative structure of the Hebrew Bible, the account of Joseph's burial is located at the end of the book of Joshua, which can be compared to the location of Joseph's death at the end of Genesis. As the death of Joseph introduces the second book of the Pentateuch, so the death of Joseph's descendant (Joshua) introduces the second book of the Former Prophets.

We have seen previously that, from a literary perspective, Joseph's last words play a key role in linking the story of the Patriarchs in Genesis to the story of Moses and the Exodus out of Egypt. Ska indicates, furthermore, that Joseph's last words also connect Genesis with the rest of the Pentateuch: "Furthermore, before dying, Joseph announces the return of his descendants to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen 50:24). So the conclusion of Genesis prepares for the future and ties Genesis to Exodus—Deuteronomy" (2006:17).

Similarly, Joseph's burial connects the patriarchal history to the conquest of the Promised Land. If Joseph is the bridge between the first book and the rest of the Pentateuch, it is

possible that he came to symbolize the Pentateuch. Joseph, as a symbol of the Pentateuch, reappears in the Former Prophets, connecting him to another descendant of Ephraim with the name of Joshua, who was the leader of the conquest. In this context, Joshua connects the Patriarchs with the first community of the conquest of the land. Mann indicates that the bridging between the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets is the intention of the editors:

Now, at Joshua's death, the narrator finally grants him the exalted status formerly reserved for Moses: he is "the servant of the Lord" (v. 29; cf. 1:1). Tying the book to the end of Genesis, the Israelites bury the bones of Joseph at Shechem in the plot that Jacob had bought (Gen 35:18-20, 50:25). Jacob (= "Israel") has now come home to the land of the promise. Thus the editors have stitched together the Former Prophets and the Pentateuch. As the book of the Torah of Moses ends with Moses' death outside the land, the first book of the Former Prophets ends with Joshua's death inside the land. "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the Lord did for Israel" (v. 31). Yet the book ends with an implied question: will they still serve the Lord in the days to come?

(Mann 2011:48-49)

### **3.2 The voiced legacy - לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב**

Joseph, who practically ruled over all of Egypt, left nothing of his property to his family

when he died. Even though inheritance was a crucial factor in a testament, Scripture never mentions anything about Joseph's property or inheritance. Joseph probably left a fortune after his death, given that he was next in line to the King of Egypt. However, the story does not indicate that he left instructions regarding the distribution of his property.

When Joseph mentioned the Promised Land in his last words, he added the phrase "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" which often recurs in the Bible. The names of the Patriarchs are mentioned in this sequence for the first time in the canon. The exact Hebrew phrase "לְאַבָּרָהָם לְיַצְחָק וְלִיעָקָב" (preposition ל + the name of each of the Patriarchs) appears eleven times in the Hebrew Bible, and it is sometimes accompanied by specific words such as "the land" or "to swear" as shown below:

Land      Swear

הארץ      נשבע      Genesis 50:24      (1)      וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֲלֵיכֶם אֱנֹכִי מַתָּה וְאֱלֹהִים פְּקָד יִפְקָד אֶתְכֶם

וְהַעֲלָה אֶתְכֶם מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲלֵהֶהָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבָּרָהָם לְיַצְחָק

וְלִיעָקָב

And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will visit **you** and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

הארץ      נשאתִי      Exodus 6:8      (2)      וְהַבָּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֲלֵהֶהָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאָתִי אֶת־יְדִי לְתַת אֶתְהָ

לְאַבָּרָהָם לְיַצְחָק וְלִיעָקָב וְנִתְּתִי אֶתְהָ לְכֶם מִזְרָחָה אֲנִי יְהוָה

I will bring **you** into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to **you** for a possession. I am the LORD."

(3) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֲלֵיכָם לְךָ עַלְّה֙ מִזֶּה אַתָּה וְהַעַם אֲשֶׁר Exodus 33:1 נשבתי הארץ

הַעֲלִית מִאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם אֲלֵהֶתֶּן אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעֲתִי לְאַבְרָהָם לְיַצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב  
לֹאמֶר לֵזְרָעָךְ אַתָּנִיחָה

The LORD said to Moses, "Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To **your offspring** I will give it.'

(4) אָסִירָאָו הָאָנָשִׁים הַעֲלִים מִמִּצְרָיִם מִבֵּן עִשְׂרִים שָׁנָה Numbers 32:11 נשבתי האדמה

וּמְעַלָּה אֶת הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעֲתִי לְאַבְרָהָם לְיַצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב בַּי לְאַמְלָאו  
אתְחִרֵי

'Surely none of the men who came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, because they have not wholly followed me,

(5) רָאָה גַּתְתִּי לְפָנֵיכֶם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ בָּאוּ וְרָשֹׁו אֶת-הָאָרֶץ Deuteronomy 1:8 נשבע הארץ

אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאַבְתֵיכֶם לְאַבְרָהָם לְיַצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב לְתַת לָהֶם וּלְזָרְעָם  
אתְחִרֵיהם

See, I have set the land before **you**. Go in and take possession of the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to **them** and to **their offspring** after them.'

הארץ נשבע Deuteronomy 6:10 (6) וְהִי בַּיּוֹם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע

לְאַבְתָּיךְ לְאָבָרָהּם לְיַצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב לְתַת לְךָ עָרִים גְּדוֹלָת וְטוֹבָת אֲשֶׁר לְאָבָנִית

"And when the LORD your God brings **you** into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you-- with great and good cities that you did not build,

ארצם נשבע Deuteronomy 9:5 (7) לֹא בִּצְדָּקָתְךָ וּבִיְשָׁר לְבָבְךָ אַתָּה בָּא לְרֹשֶׁת אֹתָה

אֶרֶץ כִּי בְּרִשְׁתַּת הַגּוֹיִם הָאֱלֹהֵיהֶן מִזְרִיחֶם מִפְנִימָה וְלִמְעֵן הַקִּים

אֹתְהָדָבָר אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאַבְתָּיךְ לְאָבָרָהּם לְיַצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב

Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before **you**, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

△ X Deuteronomy 9:27 (8) זִכְר לְעַבְדִּיךְ לְאָבָרָהּם לְיַצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב אֶל-תִּפְנוּ אֶל-

קָשֵׁי הַעַם הַזֶּה וְאֶל-דְּרַשְׁעָיו וְאֶל-חַטָּאתָיו

Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Do not regard the stubbornness of this people, or their wickedness or their

sin,



נשבע

**Deuteronomy 29:12** (9) **לְמַעַן הַקִּים-אָתָךְ הַיּוֹם לוֹ לְעַם וְהוּא יְהִי-לְךָ**

**לְאֱלֹהִים כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר-לְךָ וְכַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאָבָתֶיךָ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיַצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב**

that he may establish **you** today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised **you**, and as he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

האדמה

נשבע

**Deuteronomy 30:20** (10) **לְאַהֲבָה אֶת־יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לְשָׁמֹעַ בְּכָל־זֶה וְלִדְבָּקָה־בָּזֶה**

**כִּי הוּא חַיָּיךְ וְאֶרְךְ יָמֶיךְ לְשִׁבְתָּה עַל־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהֹוָה לְאָבָתֶיךָ**

**לְאַבְרָהָם לְיַצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב לְתָת לְהֶם**

loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that **you** may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."

הארץ

ונשבעתיה

**Deuteronomy 34:4** (11) **וַיֹּאמֶר יְהֹוָה אֲלֵינוּ זֹאת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי**

**לְאַבְרָהָם לְיַצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב לְאָמֵר לְזָרְעָךְ אֶתְנָגָה הַרְאִיתִיךְ בְּעִינֶיךְ וְשָׁמָה לְאָ**

**תַּעֲבֹר**

And the LORD said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to **your offspring**.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there."

There are important points in the references above. To begin with, it seems that the Hebrew phrase **לְאַבְרָהָם לִיצָחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב** is related to “the (Promised) Land (**הָאָדָמָה/הָאָרֶץ**)”. In the case of Deuteronomy 9:27, the word land does not appear in the verse itself, but rather in the following verse (v. 28). Deuteronomy 29:12 connotes the land indirectly. The names of the three Patriarchs that are coined by Joseph are used seven times and the similar form of the names appears more frequently in the book of Deuteronomy. Driver (1902:323) observes, “The oath to the forefathers is often alluded to in Dt. (on 18); but usually with reference to the promise of the land of Canaan: with reference to the covenant concluded with them, 4<sup>31</sup> 7<sup>12</sup> 8<sup>18</sup>; cf. also 4<sup>37</sup>”. In addition, the Hebrew word, “to swear (**נִשְׁבַּע/נִשְׁבַּע**)” follows after **לְאַבְרָהָם לִיצָחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב** (except in Deuteronomy 9:2). The three key words in the references above, (“the land”, “to swear”, “to Abraham to Isaac to Jacob”) make us recall the covenant between God and Abraham, particularly, the land of Canaan given to Abraham and his descendants as “an everlasting possession”. (Genesis 17:8) The covenant was fulfilled partly by the three Patriarchs. Abraham bought some area in the land of Canaan for the burial of Sarah and himself. Ska (2006:25) introduces Isaac as an inheritor of the land of Canaan: “Isaac inherits the land of Canaan, while Lot's descendants settle in Moab and Ammon (Genesis 19) and Ishmael's descendants in the wilderness, to the south of Beer-sheba, not far from Egypt (Genesis 25:18; cf. 16:14; 21:14, 21)”. Jacob is buried in the land of Canaan by his family and the Egyptians even though he died in Egypt. Lastly, these references are related to living people and not to the dead in the narratives. All living descendants of Abraham were heirs to the land of Canaan according to God's promise given to him; they had to act in order to receive the legacy.

Logically, the land that Joseph mentioned when he was dying was supposed to be Israel's inheritance, the legacy handed over by Abraham through his son, Isaac to his grandson, Jacob. The sons of Abraham were to keep it and turn it over to their descendants. This could be the reason why the high-ranking officer in Egypt, who probably had a great fortune, left nothing to his descendants. He had to make them see that they needed to take over the land that God promised his forefathers to give to their descendants instead of his property. Thus, the descendants of Joseph inherited the real legacy from him. At the time of Joseph, it had become a voiced legacy that was spelt out in the names of each of the three Patriarchs and had to be handed over to coming generations. Even though Joseph died in Egypt, his testament was relived wherever the voiced legacy was recited. One of his descendants, Moses, who was chosen by God, journeyed out of Egypt to fulfill the testament recalling the names coined by Joseph.

In addition, the allusion to the voiced legacy of Joseph seems to strengthen the narrative unity of the Pentateuch. It may be helpful to consider the frequency of occurrence of the phrase in the Hebrew Bible. The phrase **לְאַבְרָהָם לִيְצָחַק וּלְיַעֲקֹב** occurs only eleven times in the Pentateuch. The number eleven refers to Joseph's position in the order of birth of the sons of Israel (Jacob) in Genesis 29-30. In other words, the occurrence of the phrase eleven times calls to mind the position of Joseph as the eleventh son, and the recurrence of the Genesis phrase in Exodus-Deuteronomy further shows that Joseph's voiced legacy functions as a link between Genesis and the Pentateuch as a whole. The book of Exodus to the book of Deuteronomy is closely related to the Exodus generation.

Thus, the voiced legacy that appears only in the Pentateuch belongs to the Exodus generation and it sheds light on their identity. Even in the wilderness, where people could easily forget their identity, they remembered who they were and why they had to go to the land of Canaan by recalling the names of their forefathers and the promise given to Abraham. Moreover, God also asked Moses, who was the first leader of the Exodus, to reveal His identity to the descendants of Israel through the names of the three Patriarchs (Exod. 3:16). Mathews notes that, “The naming of the three patriarchs bridges Genesis and the episode when the Lord reveals himself to Moses, commissioning him to realize what Joseph here has predicted (Exod 3:6, 15, 16; 33:1)” (2005:930). The “middle” heirs of Joseph had kept their legacy during the Exodus.

### **3.3 Joseph and his descendant (Joshua)**

Joseph’s bones were buried at the time of or after the death of Joshua. There seems to be a certain connection between the two incidents. If we consider the report of Joseph’s death in Genesis 50, we will find at least two common themes in the deaths of both Joseph and Joshua – the lifespan of 110 years and the burial place that belonged to Ephraim. In addition, genealogical linkage between the two is found in the book of Chronicles. If they are strongly related based on those elements, it seems that the reports of the burial of Joseph’s bones and of Joshua’s death support the idea that the mention of the burial in the last chapter of the book of Joshua is to serve as a bridge between the old and the new generation.

In the next subsections the link between Joseph and Joshua will be investigated more closely.

### **3.3.1 Joshua – a descendant of Ephraim**

The account of the burial of Joseph's bones is placed after the burial of Joshua in the last chapter of Joshua. The author seems to forge a connection between Joseph and Joshua. This connection is confirmed by the genealogy of Ephraim in the book of Chronicles, where the Chronicler uncovered their relationship indirectly. According to 1 Chronicles 7:20-27, Joshua was a descendant of Ephraim:

The sons of Ephraim: Shuthelah, and Bered his son, Tahath his son, Eleadah his son, Tahath his son, Zabad his son, Shuthelah his son... Rephah was his son, Resheph his son, Telah his son, Tahan his son, Ladan his son, Ammihud his son, Elishama his son, Nun his son, Joshua his son.

The passage states that Joshua was a descendant of Ephraim, who was a descendant of Joseph. This corresponds with Genesis 41:50-52, which says that, Joseph's wife, "Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On", gave birth to two sons in Egypt. The name of the first son was Manasseh and the second Ephraim.

The burial of Joseph's bones is arranged after the burial of Joshua in the book of Joshua. If the narrator of the Pentateuch wanted Joseph's will to be fulfilled by the end of the Exodus,

he would have placed the burial at the time of the death of the last Exodus generation. However, the narrator places the burials of Joseph and Joshua side by side – the burial of Joshua is first while the burial of his lineal ancestor is second. It seems that the narrator wanted to depict the burials as simultaneous, as if Joseph's burial became realized through the burial of Joshua. The simultaneous burials of Joseph and his direct descendant show a powerful fulfillment of Joseph's will, and it fulfills his testamentary will of bringing his descendants to the Promised Land.

Therefore, we may conclude that besides the last words of Joseph accomplished at the time of Joshua's death, the burial of Joseph that took place at the same time as the burial of his direct descendant also connects the Exodus generation to the new generation. The simultaneous burials probably served as a lesson to the new generation that God would surely keep his word at his appointed time. On the question of the time of the burial of Joshua and of Joseph, their consecutive burials can be considered from a theological perspective just as the age of Joshua in the books of the Former Prophets is both historical and theological at the same time. Thus, I would argue that the two were buried simultaneously to show the perfect fulfillment of Joseph's will by God.

### **3.3.2 The number 110 identifying Joseph**

#### **3.3.2.1 Double meaning of 110**

The number 110 shows the identity of Joseph, not only as an Egyptian but also as an Israelite. Some biblical data support him as an Egyptian. He lived in the land of Canaan for only

seventeen years and lived in Egypt for the rest of his life (ninety three years) as a slave, a prisoner and a practical ruler over all of Egypt. Moreover, he got the Egyptian name “Zaphenath-paneah” from Pharaoh and had an Egyptian wife, “Asenath” (Gen. 41:45). This suggests that 110 be interpreted in the light of an Egyptian background. The number was considered an ideal lifespan by ancient Egyptians. Vergote notes:

Ce dernier a rassemblé 27 témoignages où il est dit qu'un personnage a atteint l'âge de cent dix ans ou dans lesquels le vœu est exprimé de vivre cent dix ans sur terre. On est donc en droit de conclure que les cent dix ans étaient considérés comme l'âge idéal par les Égyptiens.

(Vergote 1959:200-201)

As noted previously, it seems clear that the 110 years is regarded as the ideal lifespan in several Egyptian texts. In contrast to this, the Israelites follow the life span of Moses as an ideal lifespan. Gaster claims that the ideal lifespan of the Hebrew is one hundred and twenty years (1969:222). Thus, the death in Egypt at the age of the Egyptian ideal lifespan tells us that Joseph died as an Egyptian rather than an Israelite.

However, certain questions may arise regarding the interpretation of the number in the biblical text. If the 110 years is considered the ideal lifespan by Egyptians, why did the number 110 recur as the age of Joshua at the end of the book of Joshua (24:19) and at the beginning of the book of Judges (2:8)? Joshua was a Kenizzite (Num. 32:12) and the scope of

his activities excluded the land of Egypt, that is, he had nothing to do with Egyptians. Is there any other meaning to the number 110 in the passage? Farbridge comments on the frequent occurrence of certain numbers in ancient Oriental texts:

But whether we accept one theory or another, a study of ancient Oriental Literatures is bound to lead us to the conclusion that there are some numbers at least which occur very frequently and were never intended to be taken in their literal sense by those who made use of them. This use of many numbers in a round sense can partly be explained by the fact the notion of representative numbering is extremely common amongst Eastern nations who have a prejudice against counting their possessions accurately, and it thus also enters largely into many ancient systems of chronology.

(Farbridge 1970:88)

The number 110 that appears four times in the Bible deserves to be studied from a different angle. Some biblical scholars have studied the number 110 with a symbolic dimension. Wenham synthesizes their works and explains the age of Joshua and Joseph symbolically:

Joshua also reached this age (Josh 24:29). Labuschagne (*OTS* 25 [1989] 126) regards Joseph's age as symbolic. The age of the patriarchs follows a sequence, Abraham 175 =  $7 \times 5^2$ ; Isaac 187 =  $5 \times 6^2$ ; Jacob  $3 \times 7^2$ ; Joseph  $1 \times (5^2 + 6^2 + 7^2)$ . "Joseph is the successor in the pattern (7, 5, 3, 1) and the sum of his predecessors ( $5^2 + 6^2 + 7^2$ )."

(Wenham 1998:491)

These kinds of number analyses appear to be a number game manipulated by some ancient mathematicians. Hamilton highlights the intentional use of the symbolic number thus:

To the contrary, the writers apparently used symbolic numbers as a composition technique. Thus the roots of the Jewish Kabbalah (the esoteric teachings of Judaism and Jewish mysticism that flourished in the Middle Ages), and in particular gematria (one form of which involves explaining a word or group of words according to the numerical value of the letters) are found in the biblical text. A proper and restrained use of number symbolism functions as a deterrent against an overly literal treatment of symbolic numbers in the Bible.

(Hamilton 1995:710)

The explanation that 110 refers to the descendant of the three Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) as a symbolic number offers the reason why Joshua who had nothing to do with the Egyptians, died at the age of one hundred and ten years old. The symbolic number claims that Joseph and Joshua were the descendants of the Patriarchs, the ancestors of the Israelites. Thus, Joseph died as an Israelite rather than an Egyptian.

From the preceding argumentation, we reach the conclusion that the age of Joseph at his death (110) has a double meaning: the ideal life span of the Egyptian and a descendant of the Patriarch. The incompatible meanings, Egyptian and Hebrew, were fused into the twice mentioned number in Genesis 50:22, 26. Therefore, the number shows the identities of

Joseph, who was an Egyptian and an Israelite at the same time.

### 3.3.2.2 The structural function of 110 in the Joseph's epilogue

To be specific, it seems that Joseph was an Israelite more than an Egyptian. Brueggemann introduces Joseph as “fully Israelite, yet partly Egyptian” (1982:378), which is agreeable according to the structure of Genesis 50:22-26:

**וַיֵּשֶׁב יוֹסֵף בָּמִצְרָיִם** הוּא וְבֵית אָבִיו וַיְחִי יוֹסֵף<sup>22</sup>

מאה ועשר שווים

וירא יוסף לאפרים בני שלשים גם בני מיכר בז-מנשה לידיו על-ברבי<sup>23</sup>

יוסף

The last words of Joseph (to his brothers and the sons of Israel)	וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֲלֵיכֶם אָנֹכִי מַת וְאֱלֹהִים פָּקַד יִפְקַד אֶתֶּכֶם וְהַעַלְתָּה אֶתֶּכֶם מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲלֵהֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לְיַצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב וַיִּשְׁבַּע יוֹסֵף אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאָמֵר פָּקַד יִפְקַד אֱלֹהִים אֶתֶּכֶם
	וְהַעֲלָתֶם אֶת־עַצְמֹתִי מִזֶּה

מאה ועשר שנים

In Egypt

וַיְחִנֵּנוּ אֹתוֹ וַיִּשֶּׂם בְּאָרוֹן בְּמִצְרָיִם

This structure shows that Joseph is depicted as an Israelite concerning his family and the descendants of his family. Number 110 separates the Israelite from the Egyptian element. There's nothing mentioned about being Egyptian, but only the word “בְּמִצְרָיִם” (in Egypt) in Joseph's epilogue. The sole Egyptian element, “in Egypt”, is written twice in Genesis 50:22, 26 and is located outside of Joseph's last words. In contrast to this, the much lengthier last words spoken to the family and the descendants of (Jacob) Israel are inside the epilogue.

### **3.3.3 The burial place belonging to Ephraim**

The bones of Joseph were buried at Shechem which was a part of the Promised Land. Joseph's last will seems to have been fulfilled, but if the bones were buried at Hebron where the Patriarchs were buried, the author of the book of Joshua would have established a stronger connection with Genesis. Geographically, the two places were located in different directions. Shechem was located in the northern part of Palestine and Hebron in the south. Is this simply a historical report or is there a theological connection with Shechem and the burial place of the Patriarchs? The first step in answering the question begins with the New Testament account. In Stephen's speech, Shechem was the place where the bodies of Jacob and their ancestors were “laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem” (Acts 7:15-16). Perhaps the inconsistency could be explained by assuming that Stephen mixed up the materials from the stories of Abraham and Jacob in Genesis:

Type	Buyer	Seller	Real estate	Price
A (Gen. 23)	Abraham	Ephron	the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area (Hebron)	four hundred shekels of silver
B (Gen. 33)	Jacob	The sons of Hamor	the piece of land on which he had pitched his tent (Shechem)	a hundred pieces of money
C (Acts 7)	Abraham (Type A)	The sons of Hamor (Type B)	Shechem (Type B)	?

One could assume that Stephen was probably confused about the buyer, the seller and the real estate. Nevertheless, it does not make sense that he was simply confused about the history of the Patriarchs in Genesis, given that his audience consisted of members of the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:15) and the high priest (Acts 7:1), who were clearly knowledgeable regarding the history of the Patriarchs. Additionally, Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit at that time (Acts 7:55). How then did he mix up the material? There is a possibility that he had read the Samaritan Pentateuch or had been influenced by the Samaritan tradition (Scobie 1979).

However, Bruce (1988:137) rejects this conjecture because, “It is unlikely that the suppression of Hebron in favor of Shechem is a sign of Samaritan influence; the burial of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at Hebron is as clearly recorded in the Samaritan Bible as in MT.” Scobie offers a harmonized explanation:

Mare is forced here into some of his most desperate harmonization, suggesting either that Abraham bought land in Shechem near that later bought by Jacob (though there is not a word of this in Scripture) or that Abraham was “included with Jacob in his later purchase (Jacob and all his posterity being in Abraham’s loins)”!

(Scobie 1979:407-408)

This explanation is reasonable, but the problem of Jacob not being buried at Shechem, but at Hebron, remains. For now, it seems one way is to consider the problem as one of the unsolved mysteries in the Bible. However, it is clear that Stephen connected the burials of Jacob and his ancestors to Shechem where the bones of Joseph were buried. It means that the place served as a link. Butler also maintains that Shechem links the Patriarchs to Joshua with respect to the sanctuary:

The burial ground is connected to the place where Jacob established an altar (Gen 33:19), presumably the same place where Abraham had also built an altar (12:7), the foundation for the sanctuary where Joshua mediated the covenant to Israel (Josh 24:1–28).

(Butler 1998:283)

The next step is to read the biblical text (Jos. 24:32) more closely. Jacob wasn't buried in Schechem according to the Old Testament. Why then did the text of Joshua mention his name? The text is focusing on what Jacob did rather than where he was buried. The analysis of the text is from the structure. Joshua 24:32 can be divided into three parts:

A. **וְאַתָּעֲצָמוֹת יְזֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר-הָעָלָו בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם**

As for the bones of Joseph, which the people of Israel brought up from Egypt

B. **קְבָרוּ בָשָׂכֶם בְּחַלְקַת הַשְׁדָה אֲשֶׁר קָנָה יַעֲקֹב מֵאָתָה**

**בְּנֵי-חָמֹר אֲבִי-שָׁכֶם בְּמֵאָה קְשִׁיטָה**

in the piece of land that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of money.

C. **וַיְהִי לְבָנֵי-יְזֹסֵף לְנַחַת**

It became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph.

A verse is divided by accents. Joüon notes, “A verse ends with silluq, followed by sof påsuq; this constitutes the major break. The verse is divided by atnah into two halves, which can be of unequal length” (1991:66). Atnah “׀” is found in the word, **הַטְּשִׁקָּה**. That is, part A and B are separated from part C, which is the result of the burial. Part A is the repetition of Joseph’s last words in Genesis 50. So, it seems that the narrator wanted to emphasize part B that explains the land of Shechem was bought by their forefather, Jacob. It means that the burial of Jacob’s son in Shechem is legal. Woudstra supports this, “To be sure, Jacob’s purchase had established a lawful claim to the land where Joseph’s bones were put to rest” (1981:361). If the burial in Shechem is lawful, then life in the land of promise would be legal. Therefore, the burial of Joseph’s bones in Shechem, remembering Jacob’s purchasing the land from the landowner, is to justify the future of the new generation in the land of Canaan.

Furthermore, the mentioning of this place was meant to remind members of the audience of their past. Bartholomew and Goheen note that, “Joshua assembles the tribes at Shechem, where he reviews their history and exhorts them to decide whom to serve, the gods of the Amorites or the LORD (24:15)” (2004:84). The people confessed that they would only serve the LORD, even as they remembered their history. Their confession caused Joshua to make a covenant with the new generation in Shechem. On the last page of the book of Joshua, the new generation recollected the history of the old generation at Shechem, just as Stephen (another new generation at the time of the New Testament) used Shechem strategically. Thus, as a burial site and as a site of memory, Shechem acts as a bridge between the old and the new generations.

### 3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that there is a strong connection between the two generations. The sons of Israel witnessed the fulfillment of Joseph's testament in the land of the promise and took part in the burial of Joseph's bones. The action connotes that the new generation was standing on the shoulders of the old generation. In order to clarify this point, some links from the old generation through the Exodus generation to the new generation were presented in the previous discussion. These include the idea of the voiced legacy and the similarities between the death of Joseph and the death of Joshua.

The names of the three Patriarchs that Joseph mentioned for the first time in a sequence acts as a bridge between the old generation and the Exodus generation. Human memory is short lived, that is, without some device to keep it alive. Physical things are easy to change but sound is unchangeable and its impact lasts for a long time. Joseph knew this and created a new auditory message for his descendants, which consisted of the names of his forefathers. Joseph employed the sound of the names as a voiced legacy that would enable the people of Israel to remember the God of their ancestors. It helped the next generation recall God's promise to their ancestors and know who their God was. God promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants believed it. Joseph bequeathed the same faith to his descendants when he died. God revealed himself through the voiced legacy that was coined by Joseph and was used several times by the Exodus generation. It is clear that the voiced legacy was a way for God's chosen people to communicate with God. This way, the Israelites knew who their God was, who they were, and why they had to go to the Promised Land.

The death of Joshua also showed striking similarities with the death of Joseph, which bridged the gap between the old and the new generations. Joshua, who linked the Exodus generation with the next generation, was an Ephraimite, that is, a lineal descendant of Joseph. He died at 110 years of age, the same age that Joseph was when he died, and they were both buried at a place that belonged to Ephraim. The burial of Joseph's bones at the same age and the same place where his direct descendant was buried suggests that the new generation had to live in the Promised Land remembering the God of the old generation who fulfilled the testament of Joseph to the letter. The new generation saw the fulfillment of God's marvelous promise with their own eyes and buried the bones of Joseph with their own hands. Thus, they were not an independent generation without any memory of their previous history, but a generation that acted as a living witness of God and a testamentary executor of the testator.

## Chapter 4: Testamentary executors

### 4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter argued that the epilogue of the Joseph story (Gen. 50:22-26) played an important role to bridge the gap between the old and new generations. The new generation that entered the land of Canaan, was connected to the Exodus generation and the Patriarchs by Joseph's testament and his death. The connection led them to live not as individuals or free human beings, but as the people of God, who had the memory of God's promise given to their forefather in the Promised Land. It means that Joseph's epilogue offered a strong identity to the people that had to live in the land of Canaan. They were the descendants of a faithful forefather who had believed the promise of God and they were the witnesses of the fulfillment of this promise. The fulfillment gave them a reason to live as a people with the memory of God's sincerity in the Promised Land.

This research has argued that the Exodus is presented in terms of Joseph's funeral narrative. This funeral narrative therefore functions as some sort of an extended metaphor which describes the Exodus. When investigating the narrative in this chapter, it is therefore important to take note that the narrative functions in this way, and does not present some historical construction. Characters involved in the narrative plot should therefore also be

interpreted metaphorically. There are different characters that function in the narrative, that is, those actors in a story “who carry out the various activities that comprise the plot” (Powell 1990:51). Their functions in the extended metaphor need to be clarified for a better understanding of the journey.

We have used the image of a last will to explain the dynamic of the Exodus story thus far. This was done on account of the fact that Joseph’s words at the end of the book of Exodus gives his last wish to his children. Although one could probably not assume the custom of a formal last will or testament in ancient times like the modern custom. However, reference to the modern-day practice of formalizing a last will in a testament may serve as explanatory model for the understanding of the extended metaphor in this text.

Thus, the reader meets the characters related to the testamentary execution in this chapter. The first character is Joseph, who gave his wish to the testamentary executors, and therefore acts as the testator. The next character is plural: The primary audience (the brothers, the sons of Israel) and the secondary audience (the Egyptians) of Joseph’s last words, the leader of the Exodus (Moses), and the sons of Israel at the end of the Exodus. The last character is God, who was the executor behind the testamentary executors.

Moreover, God’s visitation (**תְּקִדּוּמָה**) goes into effect on the time of the execution of Joseph’s funeral. The primary and secondary audiences mummified Joseph’s body and put it in a coffin without mourning. They could not finish the funeral for Joseph because the visitation

has not come in their life time. As God visited the sons of Israel at a later stage, Moses could continue with the funeral.

## 4.2 The testator

In the Joseph narrative (Gen. 37-50), the Judah narrative (Gen. 38), that seems somewhat irrelevant to Joseph, is recorded. Childs interprets these two narratives in the light of God's promise:

The point of this last section seems to lie somewhere in the contrast between the stories of these two sons in relation to the promise. Joseph became the means of preserving the family in a foreign country (50:20), but also the means by which a new threat to the promise of the land was realized. Conversely, Judah demonstrated an unfaithfulness which threatened to destroy the promise of a posterity, which was only restored by the faithfulness of a Canaanite wife. In sum, the final section of the book of Genesis turns on the issue of the threat to the promise which leads inevitably to the book of Exodus.

(Childs 1979:157)

Joseph was a son of Jacob, remembering the promise of God given to the Patriarchs. Jacob left his last wish to Joseph on his deathbed: "Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your fathers" (Gen. 48:21). Joseph must have

realized that “the land of your fathers” referred to the land of Canaan, because his great-grandfather (Abraham) and grandfather (Isaac) were already buried “in the cave of Machpelah” (cf. Gen. 25:7-10; 35:27-30). His father (Jacob) also wanted to be buried in the same place (cf. Gen. 47:29-31; 49:29-32). It is likely that Jacob’s last words recalled to Joseph God’s covenant with Abraham. God promised to give the land, “from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gergashites and the Jebusites”, to Abraham’s offspring (Gen. 15:18-21). Jacob, as one of Abraham’s descendants, left his dying wish behind believing God’s promise of land to Joseph. Arnold testifies as follows, “Jacob’s dying wish therefore expresses faith in the ancestral promises, and anticipates a better day when his family will inherit the Promised Land permanently, fulfilling the promises of the covenant (cf. 47:29-31)” (Arnold 2009:383). Joseph kept his father’s last words in mind and executed to bury his father in the land of Canaan. That is, Joseph was Jacob’s testamentary executor.

It seems that Joseph interpreted God’s covenant with Abraham and applied it to himself. Joseph and all his family were in the land of Egypt. Joseph had to reign over Egypt. Jacob’s family couldn’t come back to the land of Canaan at that time because there was a severe famine and they had gotten permission to live in the land of Goshen from the king of Egypt (Gen. 47:1-7). Joseph could have been buried alone after his death like Jacob, but he seemed to have decided to rather be buried with the rest of his family in the Promised Land, even if it was some time later. His decision came from God’s prophecy that Abraham’s descendants “will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be

afflicted for four hundred years”, but that God “will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions” (Gen. 15:13-14).

God’s promise was delivered to the Israelites by Joseph as a type of a testament. Joseph remembered the promise and wanted his descendants to keep it until it was fulfilled. His wish was expressed to the sons of Israel by the time that he was dying. In his testament, there was his strong faith that God’s promise will be definitely accomplished in His time. Arnold insists, “Like his father, Joseph’s dying words express triumphant faith that God will fulfill his promise to the ancestors (vv. 24-25, cf. 48:21; 49:29-33)” (2009:388). Joseph, who was Jacob’s testamentary executor, was a testator who wanted his descendants to keep and perform God’s promise like he did.

## **4.3 Testamentary executors**

### **4.3.1 The primary audience of Joseph’s last words**

Strictly speaking, Joseph left his dying wish only to two groups: one was Joseph’s brothers and the other the sons of Israel. They were the primary audience of Joseph’s testament. It is hard to distinguish Joseph’s brothers from the sons of Israel. They could be the same people with different terms being used; because Joseph’s brothers were also the sons of Jacob, who was named Israel. Nevertheless, this chapter divides them into two groups according to how the Hebrew Bible mentions them.

#### 4.3.1.1 Joseph's brothers

Joseph's brothers were the first audience of Joseph's last words. Joseph's testament is begun by speaking to his brothers: "Joseph said to his brothers" (Gen. 50:24). Their relationship was very special. The brothers had a great influence on Joseph's life. The changing of Joseph's status from a son to a slave was because of their jealousy. They were half-brothers. Jacob had four wives and twelve sons from them. Rachel, who was the most beloved wife, died when she bore his younger brother named Benjamin (Gen. 35:16-20). Jacob showed his favoritism to Joseph, who was the first son of Rachel, and made special clothes, "a robe of many colors", for him (Gen. 37:3). The other half-brothers felt jealous of him. To make matters worse, Joseph had a dream that his parents and brothers will bow down before him and told them of it. Their jealousy became bigger and they "hated him even more" (Gen. 37:5, 8). At last, the half-brothers sold Joseph to foreign traders (the Ishmaelites or the Midianites) (cf. Gen. 37:25-36, 40:1). That is, the beloved son Joseph became a slave by the jealousy of the half-brothers. This was the beginning of his status changing:

Israel's beloved son → an Egyptian slave → a prisoner → the practical ruler of Egypt

The narrative of Joseph's vengeance (Gen. 42-44) and reconciliation (Gen. 45) with his half-brothers was allotted space in Joseph's story line. A crucial key to the conflict between Joseph and his half-brothers was the death of their father. Joseph urged them to leave Benjamin, who was his younger brother (mother's son), in Egypt (Gen. 44:17). At that time, Judah told him that Jacob would pass away if Joseph would take Benjamin. That is, in Judah's speech, Jacob's death played a key role to reconcile Joseph and his half-brothers. During the time that

Jacob was alive, there was no tension between Joseph and his half-brothers, but when his father died, the tension recurred. The half-brothers lived in fear of Joseph's vengeance. They approached Joseph and begged him to save their lives, appealing to him with Jacob's last words. According to their testimony, Jacob wanted Joseph to forgive the half-brothers "before he died" (Gen. 50:15-16). Yet, Joseph's answer was ambiguous. Kass interprets that Joseph's answer did not mean reconciliation:

Joseph, as is often the case, functions on two levels, and in both capacities his response, albeit generous, is also alienating. Speaking as a human being, Joseph is unforgiving. Speaking as the self-appointed spokesman for God, Joseph insists that there is nothing to forgive. However much Joseph's speech succeeds in allaying his brothers' fears, he preserves his distant stance. There is no real reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph, to the last, holds himself apart.

(Kass 2003:657)

Joseph had not revenged himself on his half-brothers since Jacob's death, but the tension was still between them. The tension might have led the ears of the brothers to be more inclined to listen to Joseph's last words. Joseph said, "I am about to die" (Gen. 50:24). Joseph's brothers could die or live, depending on his words. Thus, when Joseph called his brothers and they noticed that he was dying, the tension probably peaked.

The highly tensioned half-brothers had to live in a different tension because of Joseph's last words. Instead of vengeance, he reminded them of God's promise to their forefathers. He strongly believed the promise that God will bring them to the land of Canaan and hoped them to return home by the time that God would visit them. He told them, "God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." (Gen. 50:24). However, there was still the problem that nobody knew when God would visit them and the book of Genesis ends without mentioning the visitation, so the brothers had to live with the new tension during their entire lives. All that they could do was to wait for God's visitation, which they did.

#### **4.3.1.2 The sons of Israel**

The second primary audience was the sons of Israel. This group could be all of Jacob's family or another expression referring to Joseph's brothers. On the one hand, it is possible that the audience was all of Jacob's family members. They include Joseph's brothers, as well as the rest of Jacob's family in Egypt. Jacob's seventy family members moved to Egypt and lived in the land (Gen. 46:27). Joseph was the person who saved them from the severe famine of Canaan and brought them to Egypt, where there was abundant food. He might have felt a responsibility for their life in Egypt after he died and wanted to say something. Jacob's whole family must have wanted to hear his dying wish on his deathbed. According to this assumption Joseph firstly called his nervous brothers, covered by the fear of vengeance, to relieve them and secondly, the whole family surrounded him to speak about the rest of their lives in Egypt. On the other hand, it is also highly likely that the audience was Joseph's brothers. The sons of Israel are identical with the brothers. Jacob Israel was the father of all.

Above all, the literal evidence in the Bible supports this. The expression, “**בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**”, appears four times related to Joseph’s story in Genesis (42:5, 45:21, 46:8, 50:25). They all refer to Joseph’s brothers. Thus, the latter is chosen as the meaning of “the sons of Israel” in Joseph’s last words, that is, that “the sons of Israel” is another expression for Joseph’s brothers.

The changing of the appellation from brothers to the sons of Israel has a function and expands the meaning. The different names given to the brothers each have a distinct function. When he called his anxious brothers, who were living in fear of his vengeance for the first time on his deathbed, Joseph strongly reminded them of God’s promise with a new tension and wanted them to have the same faith that God will fulfill his promise in His time. Secondly, mentioning their name imposed on them what they have to do when God visits them. Their mission was to carry Joseph’s bones up, away from the land of Egypt to the Promised Land. For this, Joseph made them swear. The oath plays a role to bind them to performing Joseph’s testament. It became the obligation of the whole Israel to keep and to perform it, even though all of Joseph’s brothers died. Löwenthal explains why Joseph had to bind his brothers and their offspring as one group namely, “the sons of Israel”: “Joseph knows that his brothers will all die in Egypt. That is why he now binds ‘the Children of Israel,’ those born and to be born, to return his remains for burial, as Jacob’s sons did for his burial, in his homeland, which will become theirs forever” (1973:159). It seemed that the brothers had not only to wait for God’s visitation to transplant Joseph’s bones into the land of Canaan, but also to ask their children to keep the oath and perform it. At last, the oath led one of their offspring to take Joseph’s bones up from the land of Egypt: “...the recollection of this adjuration was handed down among the Israelites in Egypt, generation after generation, until they fulfilled it (Exod. xiii

19)" (Cassuto 1967:41). Therefore, the meaning of "the sons of Israel" in the context of Joseph's last words includes Joseph's brothers and their offspring.

#### **4.3.2 The Egyptians: The secondary audience**

It is notable to observe the response of the Egyptians when Joseph had died. The Hebrew Bible does not mention their movement for the funeral ceremony, although Joseph was a high-ranking officer in Egypt. In contrast to him, his father had a great funeral procession with a number of influential Egyptians in terms of "all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt" (Gen. 50:7). Jacob was neither a public official nor an Egyptian, but he was a Hebrew, a foreigner with whom it was disgusting to eat for the Egyptians (Gen. 43:32). Wenham notes, "The Egyptian aversion to eating with foreigners is well attested in classical sources, such as Herodotus, Diodorus, Strabo listed by Dillmann" (1998:423). Nevertheless, his funeral became a national project because his son stood next in line to the King of Egypt. In other words, Joseph was the powerful leader of Egypt. His leadership led many Egyptians to attend the funeral for Joseph's father. Even for the death of a powerful leader of Egypt's father, the Egyptians held a big funeral.

What the Egyptian funeral participants did was to lament and mourn for the dead (Gen. 50:10). In the eyes of bystanders, the mourning was too big to cry for a deceased family. The Canaanites saw the big wailing and they considered the mourner as "the Egyptians" and called it, "אָבֶל מִצְרַיִם" (literally, heavy mourning)", hence, the place was named "אָבֶל מִצְרַיִם" (literal meaning: the mourning of the Egyptians)" (Gen. 50:11). It is clear that the Egyptians'

mourning was important for the funeral: “The mourners followed directly after the bier; then came the rest of the burial-procession. In the earlier period, hired mourners who waisted funeral dirges accompanied the corpse to the burial-place outside of the city limits; torchbearers (a custom taken over from the Romans by the Jews) and several men playing flutes and beating drums accompanied the bier” (Shinedling 1969:600). Their mourning left a strong impression, not only on the Canaanites, but also on the reader. The reader is naturally supposed to expect quite a bigger funeral for the influential leader of Egypt. Ironically, there was no funeral held for him by his family or the Egyptians. The text does not offer the reason, but it is highly likely that the Egyptians heard Joseph’s last words and followed the will.

#### **4.3.3 Moses: the leader of the Exodus**

In the time of the Patriarchs, a family was the main unity tying the members of a community together. Gerstenberger noted the characteristic of the Israelite family: “As I remarked, the Israelite family was a community which shared life, dwelling place and belief to an extent and with an intensity that we in our atomized little remnant families can no longer imagine” (2002:25). Parents took charge of the members of a family: “Presumably the head of the family did not exercise an absolutist rule, but rather was the representative of the family in the outside world, whereas his wife looked after domestic matters (one has to think only of the way in which both parents are usually mentioned in connection with the upbringing of children in the Wisdom writings)” (Gerstenberger 2002:20). Although the role of the wives of the Patriarchs was important, the role of the father is portrayed as even more prominent in Genesis. In other words, all Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) were the fathers of a

family who led the rest of the family members.

In contrast to the Patriarchal era, a father could no longer be a leader of the Exodus community. Moses was the leader of the community and they went to the land of Canaan together, without spreading out. What made him the leader of the Exodus community and what made the people in the Exodus into one community, having the same purpose to go to the land of Canaan?

Brueggemann introduces the Exodus community as a “New social community”:

...The reality emerging out of the Exodus is not just a new religion or a new religious idea or a vision of freedom but the emergence of a new social community in history, a community that has historical body, that had to devise laws, patterns of governance and order, norms of right and wrong, and sanctions of accountability. The participants in the Exodus found themselves, undoubtedly surprisingly to them, involved in the intentional formation of a new social community to match the vision of God’s freedom. That new social reality, which is utterly discontinuous with Egypt, lasted in its alternative way for 250 years.

(Brueggemann 1978:16-17)

Moses built up the community based on Joseph’s testament. There is no doubt that Moses was the leader of the Exodus, but there was no explanation how he became the leader of the

Exodus community. God chose him as the leader of the Israelites on the mountain of God, Horeb, and sent him to Egypt. Moses fomented the social order of Egypt by showing miraculous signs and tormented the Egyptians with wondrous and severe plagues. In the end, Pharaoh allowed the Israelites to go out of Egypt (Exod. 12:31-32), which means that Moses was the emancipator of his people who were slaves in Egypt. However, an emancipator was no longer necessary to the Israelites, given that they had gotten Pharaoh's permission that released them from the land of Egypt. "Their status has now changed; they leave Egypt 'dressed out,' not as slaves, but as persons who have been raised to a new level of life by their God" (Fretheim 1991:142). The role of Moses as an emancipator from Egyptian bondage was finished, but a second role awaited him. He never forgot God's calling him to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land "flowing with milk and honey" (Exod. 3:17). So, he had to lead the people who already got freedom, to the Promised Land without getting dispersed. There was no obligation on them to go to Canaan under the leadership of Moses. They could settle in the desert or go to another country to live well. Nevertheless, they chose to follow Moses and to go to Canaan under his leadership.

What made Moses the leader of the Exodus community was that he convinced the Israelites to regard the Exodus as the process of the fulfillment of Joseph's dying wish. Under the busy circumstances of the plundering in preparation of getting away from Egypt, the biblical text testifies what Moses had done: "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him" (Exod. 13:19). It is an act of faith: "The Mekhilta notes that while the other Israelites were busy plundering the Egyptians, Moses was preoccupied with disinterring Joseph and keeping faith with him" (Sarna 1991:69). Why did the narrator of the Exodus mention this? It seems redundant in this

context, but it was indispensable: “...the unsettlement is not primarily a problem but is itself an important datum to be taken into account in fresh, venturesome efforts at Old Testament theology” (Brueggemann 1997:xv). The testimony is “an allusion to the oath in Genesis 50:25, and is a verbatim citation of the words of Joseph” (Pixeley 1987:85). Childs regards this as the “writer’s recalling Joseph’s predication of God’s visitation” to show “Yahweh’s plan” (2004:224). The plan seems to combine the Israelites into one community for the coming long journey.

Moses remembered the oath that Joseph made the whole family of Jacob swear, including their offspring, as one community with the same goal, namely the fulfillment of Joseph’s last wish. Albertz mentions that the oath was satisfied by Moses (2012:237). The oath was used again to bind a number of people preparing to escape from Egypt as one community by Moses. Moses, who was the emancipator of the people, became the center of public attention. It is probable that some people witnessed what he did and that the witnesses recognized the Exodus as Joseph’s funeral when Moses took Joseph’s bones up. Hamilton notes, “Canaan represents one’s future, where one is headed. Joseph’s bones represent one’s past, where one has come from. Here the future and past are wedded, without either consuming the other” (2011:207). This news spread to all the people in the middle of preparing for the Exodus. The people who got their freedom became the sons of Israel again who had to keep the oath that their forefather swore before Joseph. It seems that they regarded Moses as the first testamentary executor among them and followed him to bury the bones in the Promised Land. Thus, the community that was established by Moses was a community as a testamentary executor.

#### **4.3.4 The sons of Israel at the end of Exodus**

As we have seen so far, it is clear that some biblical texts describe the Exodus as Joseph's funeral. Generally, the last process of a funeral service is the burial of the dead. In this regard, Joseph's bones had to be buried when the whole funeral procession was finished. At this stage, the issue is who the burier would be and when the time of the burial would come. In order to establish who was supposed to be the burier of the bones, it is necessary to review the funeral of Jacob in Genesis 50. The Egyptians participated in Jacob's funeral procession, but the burial was performed only by the sons of Jacob Israel (Gen. 50:12). This hints that the sons of Israel would also perform this task with the bones of Joseph.

When the Israelites arrived in the land of Canaan, they successfully fought against the Canaanites to conquer the land under the command of Joshua, who was the second leader of the Exodus. The victory of the battle let the Israelites to acquire some parts of the land, which was indicated to have been the Promised Land. The conquest of the land meant that the Exodus was finished. After the conquest, Joshua died at the age of one hundred and ten years. It seems that the sons of Israel interpreted the death of Joshua at the same age as Joseph, who was his lineal forefather, as the time to bury Joseph's bones and they buried the bones in the Promised Land.

## 4.4 The executor behind the testamentary executors

What the Exodus regarded as Joseph's funeral procession was performed according to Joseph's dying wish. The core of the wish was established based on God's promise given to Abraham and his offspring. Austin distinguishes five general classes (Verdictives, Exercitives, Commissives, Behabitives, Expositives) "according to their illocutionary force" (1971:150) and each of the classes is summed up as follow: "the verdictive is an exercise of judgment, the exercitive is an assertion of influence or exercising of power, the commissive is an assuming of an obligation or declaring of an intention, the behabitive is the adopting of an attitude, and the expositive is the clarifying of reasons, arguments, and communications" (1971:162). According to his classification, the words given to Abraham by God in Genesis 15 belong to the class of "commissives".

Commissives require a speaker to act or to perform what he or she had said (Austin 1971:156-158). It means that God had a responsibility for the fulfillment of what He had promised to Abraham and his offspring. The matter of the fulfillment is the matter of God's sincerity. If a promise is sincere, it had to be done by the promisor. Searle suggests how to distinguish sincere promises from insincere promises. "The distinction between sincere and insincere promises is that, in the case of sincere promises, the speaker intends to do the act promised; in the case of insincere promises, he does not intend to do the act" (Searle 1969:60). God gave His words to Abraham. It means that God was the promisor and He had a responsibility to do something for the fulfillment of His promise. Searle noted: "The essential feature of a promise is that it is the undertaking of an obligation to perform a certain act"

(1969:60). That is, the promisor (God) had to prove that his promise is sincere, by acting himself to perform what he had said.

The promisor had done something to fulfill the promise related with the Exodus. On the one hand, he elected a leader for the reburial of Joseph's bones. The promise was handed down to the children of Israel as a form of testament by Joseph. According to the testament, Joseph's bones had to be transplanted from Egypt to the Promised Land. The promise was to be fulfilled with the reburial procession of the bones. The promisor (God) appeared to Moses and called him as an emancipator of the Israelites who had become slaves in Egypt. In the calling, the term used in Joseph's testament was uttered, namely the name of the three consecutive Patriarchs and God's visitation (**תְּפִלָּה**) (Exod. 3:16). It seems that the use of the same terminology alluded that the emancipator was called to be the leader of the bones' reburial as well. God released the Israelites through Moses to keep his words given to the Patriarchs: "God delivers Israel from Egypt not because they somehow deserve it, but because he has a promise to keep to Abraham and the other patriarchs (e.g., Ex. 2:24)" (Enns 2000:270). On the other hand, the conquest of the Promised Land was only possible as a result of the hand of God. The Exodus community was not a trained army, but people who used to be slaves. Nevertheless, they won the battle against the Canaanites because God stood on the side of the Israelites. In other words, God had fulfilled his promise as the executor behind the testamentary executors. Hill and Walton notes, "The book of Joshua, then, has great theological significance, for its narratives demonstrate, more than anything else could, that the Lord was keeping the covenant promises he had made to Abraham. Just as Israel did not come out of Egypt by its own power, so the land was not taken by Israel's military might

or by Joshua's strategies" (1991:170).

## 4.5 The Time of God's visitation

The primary and secondary audiences of Joseph's last words had waited for the time to carry Joseph's bones away from the land of Egypt. There was nothing that they could do but wait because the time had not come in their lifetime. However, the testator had confidence that the time will definitely come. The assurance was expressed by the twice uttered word **תִּקְרֹב** in his last words (Gen. 50:24-25). Gunnel defined **תִּקְרֹב** as used in the testament as follows: "PQD as an act of the favour of YHWH according to an earlier promise" (1980:207-208) and it was used with infinitive absolute plus imperfect (**תִּקְרֹב יְפָקֵד**), which means that the confidence that God will carry out His promise was strongly emphasized.

The moment to fulfill Joseph's wish had not come for a long time. No one could know the exact time, because it depended on God. How could they estimate when God would visit them? It seems that the hint is hiding in the last verse of Genesis. In a brief report of Joseph's funeral, the reader easily found that there was no mourning, even though mourning is an indispensable factor of one's funeral procession. Is it possible that the mourning of the Israelites related to God's visitation? Before the study of the relationship, it is necessary to understand what kinds of mourning there are. Johnstone introduced the various mourning customs in the Bible: "No further details are given here, but ancient mourning customs included weeping (Gen 35:8; 37:35; 50:1, 10-11, mentioned regularly), tearing of clothes, wearing sackcloth, disheveling hair, covering with dust and fasting (Gen 37:34-35; cf. 2 Sam

1:11-12, etc.). Some burial accounts do not mention mourning (e.g., those of Abraham and Isaac), while other texts indicate long-lasting grief (Gen 24:67; 37:35)” (2003:105). This shows that any kind of crying or groaning can belong to mourning for the death.

God visited the sons of Israel when they cried out to Him. The king of Egypt worried about the multiplied Israelites in the land of Egypt. He used the Israelites as slaves and gave them heavy work to do. The heavy work made them to cry out (**בֹּקֶשׁ**) to God. Their groaning (**מַחְקָרָה**) caused God to remember the covenant with the Patriarchs (Exod. 2:23-24). It seems that this context has nothing to do with Joseph’s funeral, but that God considered their crying as mourning for Joseph’s funeral. The ear of God was inclined to the mourning and God decided to visit them to fulfill Joseph’s last words: “The terms for ‘groaning’ and ‘crying out’ are repeated four times, signifying the agony of the Israelites. But, more important, this addendum finally brings God into the picture. Although the divine presence may have been hovering in the background of the fortuitous saving of the infant Moses, the narrator does not tell us anything about God’s response to the suffering of the people until this passage” (Meyers 2005:46).

The fact that there was no mourning for Joseph’s burial can be interpreted as a signal that God will take care of their offspring when they cry out in need. In this regard, it seems also to be the explanation why there was no mourning for the burial of Joshua, who was one of Joseph’s direct offspring. After the death of Joshua, the sons of Israel cried out a lot in the book of Judges. It was an indispensable factor of the cycle of Judges:

1. The children of Israel do evil in the eyes of the Lord (2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1)
2. Although the nature of this evil is rarely spelled out, their sin prompts the anger of God and results in oppression at the hands of some foreign nation (2:14; 3:8; 4:2; 10:9). The nature of the evil Israel commits is summarized in 2:10-3:5 as idolatry and intermarriage. Because of their sin the Israelites not only are unable to expel the Canaanites, but they themselves fall before foreign powers.
3. During their oppression, the Israelites cry out to the Lord (3:9, 15; 6:6-7; 10:10).
4. The Lord hears their cry and raises up a deliverer, one of the judges (2:16; 3:9, 15; 10:1, 12). The deliverer is chosen and empowered by the Spirit of the Lord (3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19).
5. It is often reported that this deliverance was followed by the submission of the enemy and a period of peace during which the deliverer judged Israel, followed in turn by the death and burial of the judge (3:10-11; 8:28-32; 10:2-5; 12:9-15).

(Dillard & Longman 1994:124-125)

The crying of the Israelites brought the hand of God to help them. Boling introduces “crying out” as “pivotal to the rise of a judge” (Boling 1975:81). To sum up, God’s visitation was linked with the mourning custom for death of “crying out”.

## 4.6 Conclusion

Each character of the testamentary executors was introduced above. Joseph was the person who had strong faith that God will definitely fulfill His promise in His time and wanted to hand down his faith to the sons of Israel. His wish was accomplished when he left his last word to them on his death bed. He became a testator to keep the promise of God. The faith, believing the promise, came into a form of testament. Joseph made all the Israelites into one group by the oath that he made them swear. Like this, Moses who was one of the Israelites made the people who had freedom from the king of Egypt into one community with one common goal. As he carried Joseph's bone up from the land of Egypt, he was looked upon as a leader of Joseph's funeral. That is, the Israelites who were the multitude of the Exodus regarded the Exodus as the funeral procession of Joseph. When Joshua, who was a direct descendant of Joseph, died at the same age as that of Joseph, the sons of Israel buried the bones in the Promise Land as testamentary executors. Behind the testamentary executors, there was the executor of the fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham and his offspring. He was the promisor of the promise and had made the sons of Israel return home (the land of Canaan where their forefather, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, had settled and were buried) by electing a leader for the reburial of Joseph's bones as an invincible warrior who conquered the land of Canaan.

There were two questionable aspects of Joseph's funeral in Egypt. On the one hand, the primary and secondary audience of Joseph's last words did not finish Joseph's funeral, that is,

they did not execute Joseph's testament. According to the testament, the funeral could have been completed when God visits them, but there was no visitation in their lifetime. On the other hand, the audience did not mourn for the death of Joseph, in contrast to their mourning for the death of Jacob. This chapter has argued that there is a connection between the lack of the visitation by God and the mourning of the people. God visited the Israelites when they cried out to God for help from the oppression of the Egyptians. The crying out has an effect to recall the mourning that the audience of Joseph's last words did not do. That is, the mourning was a signal to call God for the visitation to complete Joseph's funeral.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

### 5.1 Reprise: the construction of Joseph's funeral

Joseph's funeral has been constructed by inner and inter-textual exegesis. Biblical texts describe the funeral as the journey of Joseph's bones. The trace of the bones in the Hebrew Bible shows that the journey of the bones accords with the route of the Exodus. It begins with taking the bones up out of the land of Egypt by Moses (Exod. 13:19) and ends with burying the bones in the Promised Land by the sons of Israel (Josh. 24:32). Even though the bones were with the Israelites during the entire Exodus, the coffin containing the bones disappears without a trace in the desert which is located between two waters (Red Sea and Jordan River). In this mysterious place another box type container appears depicted with the same Hebrew word (**קְרֵבָה**). The meaning of the first box containing the bones therefore was conflated into the second box, namely the Ark of the Covenant. The second box played the same role as Joseph's coffin that motivated the Israelites to keep doing the Exodus and going to the land of Canaan. The Exodus is finished when the bones were buried in the Promised Land. That is, the Exodus was Joseph's burial procession.

This construction shows how the Pentateuch is to be connected with the Former Prophets in the light of Joseph's epilogue (Gen. 50:22-26). In chapter 2 it had been argued that Joseph's last words not only support the Hexateuch theory. The record of the burial in the book of

Joshua makes the readers consider that Joseph's story line stops at the sixth book of the Hebrew Bible, namely at the end of the Hexateuch. The burial of Joseph's bones in the Promised Land is a fulfillment of Joseph's wish. However, the text (Gen. 50:25) is open to another interpretation. The symbolically changed box (the Ark of the Covenant) also recurs in the book of 1 Samuel. Chapter 3 of the present study therefore supported the theory of a Pentateuch, instead of a Hexateuch. The voiced legacy (**לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב**) appears only in the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. It illustrates that the epilogue of the Joseph story plays a significant role to connect the Pentateuch and the Former prophets. In chapter 4 the reason why there was no mourning for the death of Joseph and his lineal descendant (Joshua) was studied within the context of the second book of the Pentateuch (Exodus) and the second book of the Former Prophets (Judges). The mourning has the function of calling to God in the crisis of the Israelites.

In the last chapter of Genesis two contrasting funeral processions for the death of a father and his son is recorded. For the father's death, the family held a big burial procession accompanied by lots of mourners, but for the son no one held a funeral. The contrasting family funerals on the same page hint at the future burial procession for the son, namely the Exodus that was a much bigger and longer funeral procession with many mourners that cried out.

The question now arises whether the Exodus understood from the perspective of Joseph's funeral also has implications for the Christian reader. Can contemporary Christians be

understood - in continuation of the Joseph funeral narrative - as testamentary executors? One should, of course, remember that the Joseph and Exodus narrative was not in the first place constructed to serve and inspire a Christian community. Such a view would be anachronistic. However, Christian communities over the ages have looked back onto the Old Testament narratives and found continuity with these authoritative traditions which help them to give expression to their own beliefs in terms of the Christ event. This surely applies to my own context, namely the Christian church in South-Korea. It remains my task, therefore, to look back onto these Old Testament narratives from a South-Korean Christian perspective in order to interpret these narratives for that context. In doing so, I remain aware of the metaphorical nature of the narrative about Joseph's bones, as well as of the image of the last will or testament used as explanatory model in this study. However, the question remains what theological implications the above understanding of the Joseph narrative has for the Christian context which I try to serve with this study.

In order to answer this question we will firstly have to understand what the testament was and is. Thereafter we will have to survey what the testamentary executors did. Only then will it be possible to apply this narrative to the present-day Christianity.

## **5.2 Reconstruction for contemporary Christian understanding**

### **5.2.1 Understanding of the testament**

The understanding of what the testament was helps the reader to understand what it would

mean for today. People leave their last wishes in order to indicate what they really want to happen after their death. Joseph's wish was that the sons of Israel were to be a community, having the same faith as he and believing the promise of God. As a testator, he left his death wish to his audiences, binding them with an oath for the fulfillment. The Exodus narrative suggests that it had been done according to Joseph's last words (Gen. 50:24, 25) that related to God's covenant given to Abraham and his offspring in Genesis 15. The covenant can be summarized as a promise in the context of Joseph's last words: the descendants of Abraham will return at a much later stage to the land of Canaan where Abraham sojourned and was buried. In other words, the death wish was made in the strong faith that God will surely fulfill His promise in His time.

The obligation for the fulfillment of Joseph's last words rested on the shoulders of the sons of Israel. One will not be able to say that Christians - as the New Testament continuation of the people of Israel - have the same obligation however, because the last words were already fulfilled. That is, Christians no longer contribute to the historical fulfillment of Joseph's death wish. The question therefore remains what the implications of the Exodus narrative understood as Joseph's funeral procession would be for contemporary Christianity. Should Christians then rather attend to God's unfulfilled promises?

### **5.2.2 The performances of the testamentary executors**

The understanding of what the testamentary executors did relates to our study of Joseph in the previous chapters. In chapter 3 Joseph's identity was studied. From the itinerary of

Joseph's whole life, it can be argued that he was both an Israelite and an Egyptian at the same time. However, the fact that his age (110) is mentioned twice in the epilogue of the Joseph narrative highlights that he was an Israelite more than an Egyptian. In chapter 4 the true Israelite was indicated as a testamentary executor of his father's will. Jacob knew his family burial tradition and left his wish to Joseph for the burial of his body in the family tomb. Joseph did what Jacob wanted on his deathbed.

As a testamentary executor, Joseph interpreted Jacob-Israel's testament very well. According to the testament given to Joseph (Gen. 48:21-22), the burial place for Jacob would be in the land of Shechem. Interestingly, the object that God would bring to the Promised Land according to this text, was not singular but plural. It meant that Jacob's burial was not understood as a personal matter, but one for the whole people of the Israel. Joseph knew this and understood that Jacob's testament was based on God's promise. For him, the time when the entire family of Israel would move to the land of promise would come if they would wait for God to return them according to the promise.

Furthermore, Joseph's testamentary executors were excellent interpreters of Joseph's testament as well. The primary and secondary audiences of Joseph's last words knew that nothing would happen if God's visitation would not come in their lifetime Moses, as the first Exodus leader, believed, however, that God had visited the sons of Israel. The Exodus community understood that the Exodus was Joseph's funeral procession when Moses took the bones up from Egypt. The sons of Israel understood that they had to bury the bones when

Joshua, who was a direct descendant of Joseph, died at the same age that Joseph had been at his death.

Joseph postponed his funeral by means of his testament until the time when God would visit them. For the coming national-sized funeral, he bound the sons of Israel as one community with an oath. Joseph's brothers and the Egyptians did not finish the funeral for Joseph. They had waited for the time to transplant Joseph's bones from Egypt to Canaan. This expectation was handed down from one generation to another, until one of them - Moses - took the bones up from the land of Egypt. That act bound the rest of the Israelites as a community again and they held a funeral procession for the reburial of the bones in the Promised Land. The sons of Israel buried the bones in Shechem (the legalized land that was bought by Joseph's forefather and which belonged to the Ephraimites).

Joseph handed down two significant legacies for the fulfillment of the testament. One was his bones. They symbolized the delaying of the burial in the Promised Land and the invisible promise of God. The other was the voiced legacy coined by Joseph. The legacy especially recalled who the God of their ancestors was. These two legacies played an important role to remind the Israelites of their identity and to keep them going forward to the Promised Land.

We have seen above, however, that the fulfillment of God's promise continued even after the burial of Joseph's bones. The Ark of the Covenant, which was closely associated with Joseph's coffin by the Exodus narrative, remained with the people of Israel to remind them

everyday of God's will for them. This symbol which had enduring value, creates an open-endedness to the Exodus narrative which has to be fulfilled by God's enduring presence among His people in the Land of Promise.

### **5.2.3 The Church fulfilling God's testament?**

If one would assume that the New Testament church forms the continuation of God's people in the new covenant, what would the implications be of the above interpretation of the Exodus narrative? Does the Church fulfill God's testament today?

It was indicated that Joseph's last will rested in the covenant promise which God already made to the ancestors. The fulfillment of Joseph's death wish is therefore the fulfillment of God's covenant promise. We have therefore indicated above that the real Executor behind the testamentary executors is God. Through his visitation of the Israelites God guided them through the desert by means of Joseph's bones which symbolized God's will and presence.

The New Testament understands Christians - even non-Jewish Christians - to be fellow heirs of this promise: "This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Eph. 3:6). The Christian writers understood Jesus Christ as the incarnate symbol of God's enduring presence. God's visitation finds new fulfillment in Jesus Christ, his death, and his resurrection.

The Christian church therefore forms a community which lives with the expectation that the fulfillment of God's enduring presence as shown in the Exodus narrative, will also happen in their own time. The testament symbolized through Joseph's bones, and which was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, is therefore entrusted to the Christian community. The Christian community realizes, however, that the real Executor behind the human executors of the testament is the God of the Exodus.

### **5.3 A challenge to the church: Handing down the heritage of faith**

The church has to contemplate how to keep the Christian faith for the present and the future like Joseph did. When Jacob's family settled in the land of Egypt, many circumstances changed. It was probable that they had to learn the language and culture of Egypt. Even the Egyptian religion might also have infiltrated into their life. The Israelites had to keep their identity and faith under these conditions. Joseph bequeathed his faith in God's promise in a testament. His family and descendants had inherited the faith by that way. That worked well to keep their identity in a foreign land.

The Christian church exists in a world which is not always conducive for keeping the faith in God's promises. God's presence in this world is not always self-evident. Therefore, the church has to consider not only how to keep the Christian faith, but also how to hand down the heritage of faith for the next generation. The Christian church will do well to reread the Exodus narrative as the execution of Joseph's testament which had to remind the Israelites in Egypt and in the desert of God's covenant promise of his presence.

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