

In addition to their attack on the story of Jacob, the critics have made similar efforts to discredit the story of Joseph. S.R. Driver in Westminster Commentaries - The Book of Genesis, p. 321 accepted the idea that this story was a mixing of two imaginary sources, one called J - Yahwist, and the other E - Elohist. That these "documents" are strictly the product of the imagination is based on the fact that nobody has ever seen them or even heard of them. By identifying variations in how the same events and circumstances are expressed, they invented two stories of Joseph which are claimed to contradict each other in various ways.

In the incident of Joseph being sold into Egypt, they make "J" source say that Joseph was rescued by Judah (Genesis 37:26) from murder by his brothers, while "E" source says that it was Reuben (v.21). Joseph was sold to the Ishmaelites (v.28) (J), to an unnamed Egyptian (v.28) (J), stolen by the Midianites (v.28) (E), sold to Potiphar (v.36) (E) to supervise prisoners held in Potiphar's house (40:3) (E), yet Joseph was thrown into prison by Potiphar (39:20) (J). After Joseph was promoted to high office, he heard from his brothers about Benjamin in response to his inquiry (43:7) (J), but the brothers volunteered information about Benjamin (42:15) (E). Simeon was left in Egypt as hostage (42:24) (E), yet Simeon not mentioned (v.19) (J). The brothers' sacks were opened at the inn ((v.27) (J), but the sacks were opened at journey's end (v.35) (E). Was it Reuben (v.37) (E), or Judah (43:9) (J) who offered himself as surety for Benjamin's safety? Goshen was mentioned as the land for Jacob to settle (45:10) (J), but the name of the land not mentioned (v.18) (E).

The doctors of the "higher textual criticism" have attempted to make these differences into a series of contradictions. But a simple, unbiased reading of the Scripture narrative reveals a consistent and orderly account of what happened in the life of Joseph.

Joseph was sent by his father to ensure that all was well with his brothers. They, seeing him approaching, decided that this was the opportunity to rid themselves of him by killing him and throwing him into a pit (Genesis 37:20). But Reuben intervened and persuaded the brothers not to shed his blood, but let him die in the pit (v.22). His plan was to rescue Joseph later and take him back to his father, likely with the hope of getting himself out his father's bad books (35:22).

Later, while the brothers were eating, they noticed an Ishmaelite trading caravan coming. The flock of animals still needed to be watched, so it was evidently Reuben that performed that task because he was not aware of Judah's suggestion. He persuaded the brothers to sell Joseph to the traders (27:26-27) instead of letting him die in the pit.

The other brothers would be hesitant about telling Reuben about the change in plans, since they may well have suspected that Reuben was looking for a way to get back into favor with his father, hence Reuben's surprise when he found the pit empty (37:29). It is clear from the narrative that the "Midianite traders" were the same as the "Ishmaelites" -

- "Then Midianite traders passed by; so the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt" - Genesis 37:28. It is only at the end of the chapter that we hear of the sale of Joseph -
- "Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard" - v.36 .