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THE MAJOR MEDIEVAL
COMMENTARIES ON
GENESIS 37

by

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Thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of the require-
ments for the Degree of
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DIGEST

The essential problem of understanding the medieval Jewish Bible commentaries is twofold: the language is terse and frequently gives only the answer to an unspoken question; and, the comment usually implies more than is mentioned explicitly. Therefore, the reader must first discern the question being asked by the commentator and then relate this question and answer to the total religious outlook of the commentator. In order to perform this latter task it is necessary to have a rather extensive knowledge of the other writings of the commentator, for frequently he will rely upon a comment made in connection with another verse. Moreover, a commentator may either directly or indirectly criticize the approach or solution of another commentator and so a knowledge of earlier commentators is also required.

This thesis attempts to analyze Chapter 37 of the Book of Genesis as seen by Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides. The primary emphasis has been placed on understanding the reason for the comment. In other words, what problem did the commentator see in the biblical text? As a secondary matter the implications of the comment are examined in terms of the religious philosophy of the commentator. This can be illustrated by reference to Nachmanides' comment to verse 1. Here he indirectly indicates his belief in the importance of Jews of his own time returning to settle in Palestine. Further illucidation is afforded by relating this interpretation to the fact that at the time of his exile from Spain, Nachmanides himself chose to go and settle in Palestine.

At the same time certain comments of Nachmanides can only be understood in the light of his involvement in the developing Spanish

mysticism. Similarly, Ibn Ezra's belief in Astrology as a valuable and valid source of knowledge leads to a greater appreciation of some of his comments. Rashi's devotion to the Midrash is well known but his insights into the complexities of the problem of Scriptural consistency never ceases to amaze the student of his writings.

The writer claims none of the great erudition outlined in the first paragraph. He is aware that a much more profound knowledge of this literature than he possesses is required to produce any astounding "chidushin." Yet the discovery of this world of knowledge and concern has been a delight to the writer. It is hoped that the pleasure of having the biblical text come to life in the perspective of medieval Jewish thought together with the joy of a wealth of new insights into the text itself has been conveyed in this thesis.

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

While modern schools of Biblical criticism have captured the attention of the liberal, English speaking Jew, they cannot claim to have replaced the great Bible commentaries of medieval Jewry. Yet these medieval commentaries are being lost by default due to their neglect by all but Orthodox scholars. One of the reasons for this default is to be found in the approach of the commentators to their subject. The fact that they looked upon Scripture as the revealed word of God and not to be questioned basis of Jewish law, antiquates their validity in the eyes of many modern students. Another reason for the diminution of the popularity of these commentaries is the rapid disappearance of Hebrew as a language of scholarship which is available to the English speaking student. Finally, there is the difficulty inherent in the commentaries themselves. To the casual reader they are obtuse, elliptical and all but totally unintelligible. That the scholar too, has no easy task probing the depths of the commentaries and discerning the nature of the textual problem is attested to by the proliferation of super-commentaries through the centuries and even to this day.

The loss of the knowledge of medieval Jewish commentaries is to be regretted, for these commentaries continue to offer literary, textual and religious insights of the highest contemporary value. It is toward the goal of aiding the modern English speaking student in understanding these medieval commentaries that this paper is conceived. The paper attempts to outline briefly the methodology of the commentators and to delineate the nature of the problem that the commentators encountered in

the Biblical text. Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides have been selected as the subjects of this paper because they are undoubtedly the most popular of medieval commentators on the Pentateuch, and because they represent three significantly different approaches to their task.

Rashi (1040-1105)¹ lived in France at a time when Jews devoted themselves to study, trade and agriculture. In contrast to the situation in many other countries, the Jews of France at this time were permitted to own real estate and engage in agricultural pursuits. The Jews spoke French and "either had French names or gave their Hebrew names a French form."² Northern France was relatively unaffected by the wars which occurred in Spain between Christians and Moslems. Hence there was lacking the great stimulus of conflicting cultures. For Rashi and the scholars of his time and locale "religion and learning were one and the same thing. There was no such thing as secular science; religion placed its stamp on everything and turned the currents of thought into its own channels. For Jewish scholars intellectual activity was concentrated in the study of the Bible and the Talmud."³ Rashi himself in addition to his commentaries on the Bible wrote a famous commentary to the Talmud. He also wrote "responsa" and religious poetry.

Rashi is a true product of eleventh century French soil and this background is clearly reflected in his approach to Bible commentaries. As Rashi lived in relative peace and tranquility, so does his commentary demonstrate a quiet, serene searching for simple meaning. His choice of expressions and use of words is conditioned in part by his contact with agriculture and with his society. He engages in no profound

philosophical debates nor in vitriolic apologetics. His reliance upon the Midrashic and Talmudic literature is true to his scholarly milieu. He combines the human concern of a pious Jew with the insight of a meticulous scholar.

In sharp contrast to Rashi is the life and cultural background of Abraham Ibn Ezra (1092-1167).⁴ While only half a century separate the two scholars in time, the cultural difference between northern France and Spain was so great that the difference in years seems greatly exaggerated. In Moslem Spain literature and science flourished. Ibn Ezra had knowledge of grammar and made "use of astronomy, (astrology) mathematics, history, geography, philosophy, and whatever else he could employ for the clarification and elucidation of a vague or puzzling passage. His wide and versatile range of knowledge thus enabled him to utilize it to a fuller extent than could many other commentators."⁵

Moreover, Ibn Ezra having spent a large portion of his life traveling throughout western Europe and England brought to his Biblical Commentaries those same qualities of restlessness and dissatisfaction with the status quo which characterized his life.⁶ As a result of all these factors Ibn Ezra relied upon the traditional literature far less than Rashi and he was able to make forays into uncharted territory in quest of truth.

Combining some of the qualities of Rashi and Ibn Ezra yet totally distinct from each is Moses ben Nachman (1194-1270. Born in Gerona, he shared the cultures of both Spain and France. At an early age he became an outstanding Talmudic authority. In addition to being a physician he also acquired an extensive knowledge of philosophy.⁹

The year 1232 found Nachmanides involved in the fierce dispute raging over the works of Maimonides.¹⁰ He attempted to serve as conciliator between the two opposing sides. In 1263 he engaged Pablo Christiani in a public disputation.¹¹ Shortly thereafter, (1264) Nachmanides was expelled from Spain and eventually ended up in Palestine where he spent his final years.¹² We can account for Nachmanides' conservative approach to Scripture through his strong Talmudic background. In his devotion to mysticism he was probably reflecting a school of growing importance in Spain. Surely the fact that Nachmanides chose Palestine as the place of his exile would be closely related to the "Zionistic" flavor introduced into those Biblical passages dealing with the land of Israel.

Yet no man is only a product of his time and neither Rashi, Ibn Ezra nor Nachmanides can be understood merely by examining their respective cultures. Each, in his commentary to the Bible, gave expression to his particular genius and it is in part the particular and concrete expression of that genius that is sought in these pages.

Chapter 37 of Genesis has been chosen as the text for the examination of this work, partly because of the variety of problems presented in the chapter and partly because of the writer's personal interest in the Joseph cycle of stories.

Notes to Introduction

1. M. Liber, Rashi, p. 19-20.
2. Ibid., p. 22.
3. Ibid., p. 25.
4. B. Casper, An Introduction to Jewish Bible Commentary, p. 66.
5. M. Golumb, An Annotated Translation of Abraham Ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Pentateuch, p. 13.
6. "Abraham Ibn Ezra" Jewish Encyclopedia, VI, p. 521-22.
7. "Moses ben Nachman," Jewish Encyclopedia, IX, p. 87.
8. Ibid., p. 87.
9. Ibid., p. 87.
10. J. Newman, The Commentary of Nachmanides, p. 2.
11. Ibid., p. 2.
12. Ibid., p. 2.

Chapter I - Rashi's Method

Unlike Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides, Rashi did not write an introduction to his commentary on the Pentateuch explaining what were to be his methods and purposes. His methodology, therefore, must be gleaned from chance remarks within the commentary itself, and from an analysis of his entire Biblical commentary.

In his commentary to Exodus 6:9, Rashi makes a statement which could serve as an introductory comment: "Let Scripture be explained in its literal sense so that each statement fits into its proper setting, but the Midrashic statement may also be given, as it is said (Jer. 23:29), 'Is not my word like as fire, saith the Lord, and as a hammer which breaketh the rock in pieces.'" The meaning of the quotation from Jeremiah is that many interpretations of Scripture are possible. Essentially Rashi strives to find the literal meaning of the text. However, "he did not refrain from adding such haggadic or halakic interpretations as seemed to him to comply with his requirements of simple (Peshat) exegesis."¹ The extent to which he found the Midrashic interpretation congenial to his needs prompted one authority to say that apart from his use of parallels from the Masoretic text, the Midrash is the chief source of his exegesis.² While "he emphasizes that many of the Midrashic interpretations actually offer an exact understanding of the Biblical word, ... he fully realizes the fundamental difference between literal and homiletical exegesis, and not rarely rejects interpretations which do violence to the text."³

Rashi's tools are the Masorah, from which he rarely deviates, the Targum, "which he treats with the greatest respect, constantly refers

to them and considers them as of the highest importance for exegesis,"⁴ the later Rabbinic literature, which he uses both for its teachings and in order to understand Biblical words, and not infrequently he has recourse to an Old French word or phrase to enlighten his reader. Like most Jewish medieval commentators he brings to his work the supposition that Scripture is the foundation of Jewish doctrine and law.

"The commentaries of Rashi, which do not bear special titles, are not an uninterrupted exposition of the entire work under consideration, and could not be read from cover to cover without recourse to the text explained; they are rather detached glosses, ... upon terms or phrases presenting some difficulties...They are always preceded by the word or words to be explained."⁵

To what degree did Rashi carry out this methodology in the section discussed in this paper? It will be noted that his reliance upon the material found in Midrash Rabbah, Midrash Tanchuma and the Talmud is considerable, his use of Targum is generally deferential, and his references to Scriptural parallels insightful, and extensive. The only failure seems to be in bringing the literal interpretation. Nevertheless, "where Rashi offers an explanation and we do not at first sight realize the reason thereof, it behooves us to meditate and to seek until we find it."⁶

Notes to Chapter I

1. I. Elbogen, "What Does Rashi Mean to Us Today?" (Rashi Anniversary Volume), p. 36.
2. J. Pereira-Mendoza, Rashi as Philologist, p. 62.
3. A. Marx, "The Life and Work of Rashi" (Rashi Anniversary Volume) p. 17.
4. Ibid., p. 19.
5. M. Liber, Rashi, p. 91.
6. I. Elbogen, op. cit., p. 33.

Chapter II - Ibn Ezra's Method

While the difference in time between Rashi and Ibn Ezra is only a half a century and the difference in locale is between France and Spain, the approaches of these two men to Scripture are so different that one would expect to find centuries and continents separating them. Rashi's main source of knowledge for his Biblical commentaries was the Bible itself and the Midrashim. Ibn Ezra utilized grammar, astronomy, mathematics, history, geography and philosophy, subjects which were almost unknown to Rashi.¹

Ibn Ezra offers in his Introduction to the Pentateuch a comprehensive plan of the work he is undertaking together with a criticism of the methods of others and a detailed outline of his own method. His own words will give the clearest expression of his intentions. He first describes the four methods of those with whom he disagrees.

"Method I, the Geonim. Those who interpret the Law travel along five roads. The first road is long and wide, and, for the souls of our generation, far too exalted! Now, if truth be like the dot in the center of the circle, then, this method is as the line of latitude, its circumference. Great scholars have tread on this road, and many of these are sages of the academies of the Ishmaelites (North Africa). For the Geonim have adduced facts lacking proof, and some of them knew neither the method of the ancient scholars nor their sources."²

"Method II, the Karaites. The second road have the perverse ones chosen, and being 'Israelites,' and (having) thought that they had reached the dot itself -- they still do not know its place."³

"Method III, the Allegorists. The third road is one of darkness and gloom and is outside of the circle. For (the followers of this method) fabricate mysteries for everything in their belief that the Biblical laws and statutes are but riddles. I shall not dwell at length to refute them since they are foolish people. For they know not to differentiate between correct and incorrect meanings. They are, however, justified in one respect, and that is, that every commandment, minor or major, must be carefully weighed within one's heart. For, the human heart does possess knowledge, implanted within it from the wisdom of Him who is enthroned from of old. However, if a text be inconsistent with reason, or, if it violates man's sensibilities, (only) then should one seek a hidden meaning, reason being the foundation (of knowledge). Because, the Torah was not given to anyone bereft of reasoning power. Reason (then) is the mediating angel between man and his God."⁴

"Method IV, the Aggadists. The fourth road is close to the dot. Many have pursued it (for) this is the method of the scholars in the 'Greek' and 'Edomite' lands. They fail to analyze grammatical structure, but merely rely upon homiletical methods, such as (those of) Lekah Tob and Or Enayim. Now, since these interpretations are found in ancient works, what need is there for these modern (scholars) to tire us by repeating these homilies?"⁵

"Method V, (Ibn Ezra's Recommended Method). The fifth road is the method upon which I will base my commentary. In my opinion this method is the most correct one, ... I shall seek, with all my power, the (correct) grammatical form of every word, and then interpret it as well as I can. You may find the meaning of any word you need as it first

appears. For example, the interpretation of 'heaven' would be found in the first verse. This (then) is the principle applicable to every (subsequent) term. I shall not mention the interpretation of the Masorites -- why a word is sometimes plenum and another time brevum. ...The translator of the Targum (Onkelos) on the Torah has rendered correctly and explained to us many difficult passages, even though in places he did follow Midrashic interpretation. We know that he knew literal meaning (roots of words) better than we do, but he wanted to give additional explanations, for the plain meaning is understood even by the uneducated. ... But the derash does not displace the peshat. Where a passage can have two possible interpretations, one of which follows the rabbinic interpreters, all of whom were upright, will we firmly rely upon their truth without any doubt. Far be it from me to associate (myself) with the Sadducees (Karaites) who claim that the rabbinic tradition contradicts grammar, and Scripture. For (the method of) our ancestors is truth and all their words are truth and the Lord our God is truth -- may He lead his servant in the path of truth."⁶

These are the points Ibn Ezra would include in his commentary:

1. The text must be consistent with reason
2. The Peshat is the correct interpretation
3. The correct grammatical form is the basis of correct interpretation
4. Where two interpretations are equally valid the traditional (Rabbinic) interpretation is to be followed
5. The problems of Masoretic interpretation are not to be discussed. "the Hebrews do not concern themselves about

the words, but they only care for the sense."

To these may be added:

6. He operates, as does Rashi, by giving first the word or words to be explained and then his explanation.
7. Like Rashi his commentary must be read with reference to the text.
8. Again like Rashi, his scope is usually limited to the immediate problem.

Within our text (Genesis 37), Ibn Ezra has largely fulfilled these requirements. He has admitted that several interpretations may be valid for the same word, he has certainly inquired into the grammatical forms of words, and he has rendered clear and precise meanings by avoiding the Derash.

Notes to Chapter II

1. M. Golumb, An Annotated Translation of Abraham Ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Pentateuch, p. 13.
2. Ibid., p. 33-34.
3. Ibid., p. 36.
4. Ibid., p. 44.
5. Ibid., p. 46.
6. Ibid., p. 54-56.

Chapter III - Nachmanides' Method

Nachmanides distinguished in the Pentateuch three distinct parts or elements:

- (1) The text-book of the Jewish religion; prescribing both its laws and its faith. With this element he expounds on the lines of what he called the Peshat.
- (2) A secret lore dealing mainly with the nature of God and God's relation to the universe. In this Kabbalistic element he expounds only by means of hints and veiled remarks, stressing that these are meant to be understood by students instructed in the traditions of the Kabbalah.
- (3) Information on natural phenomena, or what is today called scientific knowledge. He deals with this element somewhat discursively as the text gives occasion.¹

In the second element, the Kabbalistic element, Nachmanides runs directly counter to Ibn Ezra. In the third part too, he disagrees implicitly with Ibn Ezra. Whereas Ibn Ezra applied his knowledge of science to his Biblical studies, Nachmanides drew his knowledge of science from the Bible. "And it is said there (the Wisdom of Solomon) that: 'God alone gives knowledge that has no falsehood, to know how the world has arisen and the structure of the constellations, the beginning, ending and middle of the times, ...and how the seasons are produced; the courses of the heavens and the location of the stars, the gentleness of cattle and the fierceness of the beasts; the strength of the wind and the thoughts of the sons of man, the diversities of plants and the virtues

of roots; everything concealed and everything revealed I knew.' All these he knew from the Torah and everything he found in her -- in her plain meaning, in her niceties of expression, in her letters and in her tittles, as I have mentioned."²

Indeed, Nachmanides did disagree with Ibn Ezra even in the significance of the shape of the letters. Ibn Ezra avoided and disdained comment on these Masoretic peculiarities, but Nachmanides said: "Everything that was transmitted to Moses our teacher about the gates of wisdom is written in the Torah explicitly or in hints, in words, or in gematriyaot or in the forms of letters whether written in their usual shape, or in some exceptional shape, e.g., the clinging and the crooked and other deviations, or in the tittles of the letters and in their coronets."³

Nachmanides lavished praise on Rashi while he was more guarded concerning Ibn Ezra. "I set as an illumination before me the lights of the pure candlestick, the commentary of R. Solomon, the crown of glory and the diadem of beauty. Distinguished in character in knowledge of Scripture, Mishna and Gemara. To him belongs the rights of the first-born. In his words I will meditate, in their love I shall be ravished, and with them we will have dealings, examinings and cross-examinings, in his literal explanations and Midrashic interpretations and every inaccessible Agada which is mentioned in his commentary. And with R. Abraham ben Ezra we shall have 'open rebuke and hidden love.'"⁴ While Nachmanides does speak favorably of Rashi's commentary in our section, he has both open rebuke and not so hidden love for Ibn Ezra.

"In expounding the Peshat of the text Nahmanides follows

closely in the footsteps of Rashi and Ibn Ezra, especially the former. In fact his whole object in this, which is by far the greater part of his work, is simply either to correct or to amplify them. Like Rashi, but to a greater extent, he seeks to find the exact meaning of each word and like Ibn Ezra, but also to a greater extent, he tries to explain the sequence and connection of the Biblical passages. ...Nachmanides frequently makes use of the Midrashim, as indeed Rashi did before him but in somewhat different form. It is Rashi's method to select a Midrashic explanation which fits most closely to the Peshat, and to reproduce it in the way of explanation if no simpler interpretation of the text can be found. Nachmanides' method is first to clarify the meaning of the Peshat independently, and then to quote a Midrash in confirmation of his view."⁵

In our section Nachmanides makes almost no use of the Remez (hint). His interpretations are generally lucid and comprehensive. He deals not merely with a word or a phrase, but with the Bible as a whole. His comments unite and make consistent this section with the rest of the Bible. While his explanations are almost always longer than either Rashi or Ibn Ezra, the deepened and extended insights well compensate for the additional prolixity.

Notes to Chapter III

1. J. Newman, The Commentary of Nahmanides on Genesis Chapters 1-6:8,
p. 4.
2. Ibid., p. 26.
3. Ibid., p. 24
4. Ibid., p. 11.
5. Ibid., p. 4-5

PART TWO

TEXT AND COMMENTARY

Genesis 37

וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אִמְלֵךְ בְּגֶשֶׁן
אֵלֶּה חַמְלָצוֹת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף בֶּן שֶׁבַע עָשָׂר שָׁנָה הָיָה רָעָה אֶת אֲחָיו
בְּצֶלְפָן (וְהוּא גֵר אֶת בְּנֵי בִלְהָה וְאֶת בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה וְיִשָּׂא וְיִמֵּן אֲחֵי רָעָה

1. AND JACOB DWELT IN THE LAND OF HIS FATHER'S SOJOURNINGS, IN THE LAND OF CANAAN.
2. THESE ARE THE DESCENDANTS OF JACOB, JOSEPH BEING SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD, WAS FEEDING THE FLOCK WITH HIS BRETHREN, BEING STILL A LAD, WITH THE SONS OF BILHAH AND THE SONS OF ZILPAH, HIS FATHER'S WIVES; AND JOSEPH BROUGHT AN EVIL REPORT OF THEM UNTO THEIR FATHER.

Chapter 37 is the beginning of the "Joseph" cycle of stories. In this chapter the events culminating in the sale of Joseph to Potiphar, the Egyptian, are described. While the main point of this group of stories is that Jacob and all his family eventually came to Egypt and slavery, still the details of Joseph's dreams, the brothers' hatred and jealousy and the sale of Joseph are related at length, for as Nachmanides explained: "I give you with regard to the history of the patriarchs, an important rule which has been expressed by our sages in the following words: 'all that has befallen the patriarchs is an indication of the lot assigned unto their descendants.' The text, therefore, dwells at some length on the description of their journeys, the digging of the well, and similar facts, which the reader possibly may consider as useless and

superfluous, but which in truth are an indication of future (important) events," etc.¹ Here in chapter 37 also, these seemingly insignificant events are interpreted to portend important future events.

Chapter 36 has described at length the geneology and settlements of Esau after he departed from Jacob and from the land of Canaan. This is seen by our commentators as a deviation from the main stream of the Scriptural narrative. Now, in chapter 37, Scripture reverts back to its primary narrative, the families of the forefathers and those descendants who are chosen to fulfill the destiny of Israel. As Isaac was chosen from the sons of Abraham, as Jacob was chosen from the sons of Isaac, so is Joseph chosen from the sons of Jacob to lead the events which will carry the family to Egypt, to Sinai, through the desert and eventually to a permanent settlement in Canaan.

The basic problem confronting the commentators in the beginning of this chapter is to relate these opening verses to the chapters which have preceded, in order to maintain the continuity of Scripture, and to lay the ground for the descent to Egypt and the subsequent return to Canaan. First the commentators look back to the preceding chapter. To understand the relation of Jacob to Esau they examine the similarities and the differences in words and in ideas. Rashi first notes that the geneology of Esau is short while the geneology of Jacob is long. For Rashi this comparison proves the merit and importance of Jacob. However, at first glance, it would appear that the geneology of Esau is long inasmuch as it takes a whole chapter (36) while the geneology of Jacob appears to be summarized in one verse (37:2). A similar contrast can be made in the case of Abraham's sons Ishmael and Isaac. It is written

(Gen. 25:12) "and these are the descendants of Ishmael." There follows several verses listing the names of his children. Then follows (Gen. 25:19) "And these are the descendants of Isaac." In this case there is no listing of names. Instead there follows the description of the birth of Esau and Jacob and the story of Jacob's life. Similarly it is written (Gen. 36:9) "And these are the descendants of Esau." Then Scripture lists the names of Esau's sons and progeny. In the case of Jacob it is written (Gen. 37:2) "These are the descendants of Jacob, Joseph being seventeen years old..." The point that Rashi makes is that the geneology of Jacob is not restricted to a few sentences or a chapter but, in fact, the remainder of the Torah is a description of the geneology of Jacob and their settlements.

A second significant difference between Esau and Jacob is that Esau's geneology is given before Jacob's. Similarly it is to be noted that Ishmael's geneology is given prior to Isaac's. While it might be thought that they are listed in order of importance, Rashi proves in the Midrash he brings² that Esau and Ishmael, like the generations before Noah are like the sand which is sifted and discarded to find the pearl. The pearls, of course, are those personalities upon whom Scripture dwells at length, e.g., Noah, Abraham, Isaac and in this case, Jacob.

A third difference between Esau and Jacob is noted in their choice of dwelling places. "And Esau dwelt on Mt. Seir." (Gen. 36:8), while "Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan." (Gen. 37:1). Both Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides comment on this difference. Ibn Ezra merely mentions the contrast with the comment that "Jacob dwelt in the chosen land". Nachmanides, on the other hand, in

characteristic manner looks deeper into the comparison. He praises Jacob both for choosing to live in the land of Canaan (an act which has in itself great religious merit) and for helping to fulfill the promise made to Abraham in the covenant mentioned in Gen. 15:13. In addition he sees that Esau chooses an easier life, the comfort of living as master of his own land, "the land of their possession" (Gen. 36:43), while Jacob continued to live as his father lived, as a stranger in a land he did not possess. It is clear that Nachmanides' personal concern for Israel and the צדק of living in Israel is brought into play in this interpretation. Jacob, (like Nachmanides himself) is fulfilling the commandment of dwelling in Israel.

Rashi finds a fourth difference in the fact that of the descendants of Jacob only Joseph is mentioned by name while chapter 36 lists the names of all of Esau's children and progeny. From the word בית, dwelling places, the association is made with the word פחד meaning fear. Jacob seeing all of Esau's chiefs surrounding him was afraid. However, he was assured by the verse: "and the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble" (Obad. 1:18). A spark will go forth from Joseph that will consume and burn all of them.³

There are several significant similarities found in chapters 36 and 37. Rashi finds the similarity in the main themes to be the point uniting the chapters. This theme is a description of the dwelling places of Esau and of his descendants and of Jacob and his descendants. In order to magnify this similarity Rashi adds the word and to the word

these in 37:2 and interprets these to refer to dwelling places and to descendents.

Chapter 36

A. The dwelling place of Esau 36:8

"And Esau dwelt on Mt. Seir"

B. The dwelling place of the

descendants of Esau

36:20 "These are the sons of
Seir the Horite, who inhabited
the land" to 36:43 "these are the
chiefs of Edom according to their
habitation in the land of their
possession."

Chapter 37

A. The dwelling place of Jacob

37:1 "And Jacob dwelt in the
land of his father's sojourn-
ings."

B. The dwelling place of the

descendants of Jacob.

37:2 "These are the
descendants of Jacob,
Joseph being seventeen years
old..." etc.

According to Rashi's interpretation JOSEPH BEING SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD is the first point in describing the dwelling places of the descendants of Jacob.

A second similarity is based on interpreting the word שָׁלוֹם to refer to שָׁלוֹם (to dwell in peace). Esau conquered his land, and lived in his possession in peace. Jacob having struggled all of his life (with Laban, Esau, the angel and Shechem) sought to live in peace and tranquility. However, this was not to be. It is sufficient for Esau, the evil one, to seek peace in this world, but Jacob, the righteous one, will only find peace in the world to come. Therefore, the trouble with Joseph came upon him.

It has already been noted that Rashi solves the problem of the meaning of THESE ARE THE DESCENDANTS OF JACOB, JOSEPH BEING...etc., by having these refer to dwelling places and JOSEPH BEING SEVENTEEN being the first event in the description of the dwelling places of Egypt and later, Canaan. The problem, of course, is that a list of descendants does not follow the statement THESE ARE THE DESCENDANTS OF JACOB. Instead, there is only the statement JOSEPH BEING SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD. The difficulty with this interpretation that Rashi brings is that it adds something to the text which is not in the text itself. Therefore, Rashi brings another interpretation from the Midrash (Gen. Rab. 84:6). This interpretation explains that the reason Joseph alone is mentioned of all the brothers is that the entire being of Jacob worked only for Joseph, that is, the main goal of Jacob's life was to marry Rachael and beget Joseph. This is the implication of Rashi's statement that "the entire being of Jacob worked for Laban only for Rachael" the mother of Joseph. In addition, Joseph resembled Jacob in many ways, both physically and in terms of similar events in their lives. Clearly, this second explanation too, is not without defects. The main defect is that it relegates the eleven brothers to a position of unimportance when they certainly play a significant role in the history of Israel.

Ibn Ezra attempts to solve the problem by interpreting the word נִצְחָדָן, descendants, as events. The sentence would then read, "These are the events (which occurred to) Jacob. Joseph being seventeen years old..." As evidence for his revision, Ibn Ezra brings a verse from Proverbs (27:1) which he interprets as showing that the word נִצְחָדָן

can have a meaning other than descendants.

Incisively Nachmanides points out the defects in both of the above interpretations. Rashi's first argument fails, he says, because the word בני 3/10 simply does not refer to settlements. Ibn Ezra's solution fails because man cannot give birth to events (as his interpretation would have us believe) but time alone can perform this function. In place of these, Nachmanides offers two other explanations of the difficulty in the text. The phrase THESE ARE THE DESCENDANTS OF JACOB is meant literally. The reason that of all the sons Joseph alone is mentioned is because the list of sons has already been given (Gen. 35:23-26) and because Joseph is the main character in the events which are to follow. Secondly, the word THESE carries the hint of the seventy souls who will descend with Jacob to Egypt (Gen. 46:8ff). Therefore, just as chapter 36 has listed all of the progeny of Esau, so will the progeny of Jacob be enumerated.

The words JOSEPH BEING SEVENTEEN, etc., presents a number of problems for our commentators. The first problem is the apparent contradiction between the statement that Joseph was seventeen years old and that he was a נער, a youth, a term which is usually applied to boys no older than fifteen years. With the Midras' (Gen. Rab. 84:7) Rashi interprets this to mean that although he was seventeen years old, he still conducted himself as a youth. Ibn Ezra says that he performed the duties of a נער. (This comment is found in Ibn Ezra's commentary to verse 21, but it belongs with verse 2). Nachmanides, in contrast to both Rashi and Ibn Ezra, does not attempt to show that the two phrases mean two different things while being mutually compatible. Instead, he

finds the statement HE WAS A YOUTH to be a further explanation of the statement that he was seventeen. The only problem is that the position of the phrase HE WAS A YOUTH is unusual in that it does not follow the phrase it explains. However, there are other examples in Scripture of such an occurrence (Gen. 40:5).

The statement that Joseph was with the sons of Bilbah, etc., together with the ambiguity of EVIL REPORT OF THEM is treated by all of the commentators. Rashi says that Joseph was with the sons of Bilbah because they were being scorned and taunted by the sons of Leah since the former were only the children of maid-servants. Joseph befriended them because they were being persecuted. The evil report Rashi believes is directed against the sons of Leah. Since Joseph was friendly with the sons of the maid-servants, he would not bring home stories about them. Therefore, the stories must be about the sons of Leah. Also Joseph's act of reporting the evil deeds of the sons of Leah would be a kind of retribution for their own scorning of Bilhah's sons. Moreover, Rashi takes from the Midrash (Gen. Rab. 84:7) a description of the evil things the sons of Leah were doing. Rashi then defines the word נִסְבֵּי as having the meaning of talkative. He illustrates this with a reference to the equivalent old French word and Song of Songs (7:10) where the word נִסְבֵּי means causing to speak. The difficulty involved in Rashi's attributing the evil report to the sons of Leah is that they are not part of the sentence nor have they been mentioned so far in this chapter.

Ibn Ezra, recognizing this difficulty, claims that Joseph was with the sons of Bilbah because he was younger than they and they made him serve them. Joseph, being the son of a legitimate wife, found it

degrading to serve the sons of his mother's maid. Therefore, he brought this EVIL REPORT to their father. In addition Ibn Ezra notes that the Midrash which Rashi brings describing the evil deeds of the sons of Leah, cannot be the true meaning of Scripture since no mention is made of the sons of Leah in the text.

Nachmanides questions Rashi's interpretation above on logical grounds. If Joseph was so friendly with the sons of the maid-servants, why didn't they assist Joseph when the brothers sought to sell him? It cannot be argued that they were afraid, for together with Reuben and Joseph himself, they were a majority. The reason Nachmanides thinks Joseph was with the sons of the maid-servants was because he was the youngest and Jacob commanded them to care for Joseph. Joseph brought an EVIL REPORT against them. Therefore, the sons of the maid-servants hated Joseph. The sons of Leah hated Joseph for a different reason. They were jealous because Jacob showed favor to Joseph, their equal in birth, by giving him a special coat.

In contrast to Rashi, Nachmanides defines אָפֶסֶת as evil report. The word אָפֶסֶת appears not as a modifier of אָפֶסֶת, but for emphasis. Furthermore, Nachmanides objects to Rashi's interpretation of אָפֶסֶת as describing Joseph's youthful activities. Rather he feels that the term is relative and indicates that Joseph was younger and weaker than the others. Finally, Nachmanides accounts for the use of the terms WIVES applied to the women who have previously been called concubines. He suggests that possibly Jacob took them for wives after the death of Leah and Rachel. Scripture refers to the maids as concubines only during the lifetime of the mistresses.

ישראל אהב את יוסף מכל בנים כי בן זקן הוא היה
ועל כן נקרא יוסף בן זקן

3. NOW ISRAEL LOVED JOSEPH MORE THAN ALL HIS CHILDREN, BECAUSE HE WAS THE SON OF HIS OLD AGE: AND HE MADE HIM A COAT OF MANY COLORS.

In raising the problem of the meaning of the phrase בן זקן the commentators recognize that they are dealing with more than an ambiguity. At stake is Joseph's claim to distinction, the morality of Jacob and ultimately the whole question of the Torah as a divine and therefore perfect revelation. Rashi and Ibn Ezra agree that the phrase means that Joseph was born when Jacob was old. Ibn Ezra adds that Jacob was ninety-one years old when Joseph was born. The term is also applied to Benjamin, Jacob's youngest son. Nachmanides claims that both of the above commentators are wrong. He points out that Jacob loved Joseph because he was a בן זקן. If the phrase means son of old age then the phrase would have greater applicability to Benjamin than to Joseph. Moreover, the youngest of the other brothers is only a year or two older than Joseph. Therefore, the appellation son of old age confers no special distinction upon Joseph and indicates no reason for Jacob to favor him above the other brothers. Ibn Ezra attempts to justify his position by claiming that after Joseph and Benjamin no more children were born to Jacob. Therefore, the term is justifiably applied to Joseph. The defect in this position is that Joseph is not distinguished from Benjamin. Rashi, too, perhaps recognizing the defect in his definition, brings two additional possibilities. Onkelos, he says, defines בן זקן as a wise son. This definition is based on

the idea that יָדָה is an abbreviation of יָדָה אִשְׁמְרָה, one who has acquired wisdom. A second alternative interpretation is also taken from the Midrash as was the definition of Onkelos (Mid Rab. 84:8). This definition claims that Joseph's appearance was similar to Jacob's and is based on the similarity of the phrase וְיָדָה יָדָה and וְיָדָה יָדָה, facial features. Nachmanides reasons that the phrase וְיָדָה יָדָה refers to the custom of an elder to have a young son attend to him. Joseph performed this function for his father. In commenting on Onkelos' definition (above), Nachmanides points out that Onkelos translated the phrase וְיָדָה יָדָה as וְיָדָה יָדָה when applied to Joseph and וְיָדָה יָדָה when applied to Benjamin. The reason for the difference is that in the case of Joseph, Scripture adds וְיָדָה יָדָה TO HIM, thereby indicating that Joseph was a servant to him. This, Nachmanides feels, adds support to his own interpretation. Moreover, there are certain mystical implications to Nachmanides' interpretation. He emphasizes the fact that Joseph was with Jacob constantly and that during this time the father imparted to the son all of his knowledge which would for Nachmanides include his mystical knowledge. Also this relationship between Jacob and Joseph would indicate that Joseph is the true heir apparent to the tradition of the forefathers. Jacob recognized this and prepared Joseph for his task.

Rashi defines וְיָדָה יָדָה as fine wool. He brings as evidence two quotations from Scripture; in a verse from Esther (1:6) the word וְיָדָה יָדָה (וְיָדָה) is interpreted as fine cotton, and the verse from 2 Samuel (8:18) shows that Tamar and Ammon, the children of the king, wore a similar garment thereby proving that it must have been a garment of high quality.

Rashi displays his inclination for Midrashic interpretations by bringing the following additional interpretation of the word ל'עצ.

"And an Aggadic interpretation: because of his troubles, for he was sold to Potiphar (פ), and to the merchants (ע), and to the Ishmaelites (י) and to the Midianites (מ)." Ibn Ezra offers another interpretation based on Daniel 5:6: ל'עצ the palm of the hand which might indicate an embroidered garment.

וְכֵן כִּי הָיוּ הַיְּהוּדִים מְכֻרָם בְּמִצְרַיִם וּבְעַלְמָא דְּכַדְשָׁא וּבְעַלְמָא דְּיִשְׁמָאֵלִית וּבְעַלְמָא דְּמִדְיָאנִית וּבְעַלְמָא דְּכַדְשָׁא וּבְעַלְמָא דְּיִשְׁמָאֵלִית וּבְעַלְמָא דְּמִדְיָאנִית

4. AND (WHEN) HIS BRETHREN SAW THAT THEIR FATHER LOVED HIM MORE THAN ALL HIS BRETHREN, THEY HATED HIM, AND COULD NOT SPEAK PEACEABLY UNTO HIM.

In his commentary to Exodus 15:9, Rashi explains the meaning of the word ל'עצ. He says, "Do not be puzzled at a word that expresses an idea usually expressed by two, vis., ל'עצ for ל'עצ, for there are many examples of this way of speaking; e.g. Gen 37:4, "And they were not able ל'עצ peaceably," which is the same as ל'עצ ל'עצ "to speak with him." So it is clear that Rashi means to point out that ל'עצ is not an error but that Scripture frequently uses one word to express an idea usually expressed by two words. Ibn Ezra's interpretation is similar, substituting the word ל'עצ for ל'עצ. The implication of Ibn Ezra's change is that the brothers were so enraged that they could not speak to their brother at all, even to pass a simple greeting. Rashi claims that this is to the

Both Rashi and Ibn Ezra agree that the word שֶׁבִּיעַ which appears here in the masculine plural form is the same as the feminine form שֶׁבִּיעַ found in Psalms 126:6, and Baba Metzia 23B, and has the meaning of sheaves. Rashi frequently relies on the Targum for his definitions as he does here.

It might seem that the phrase AROSE AND ALSO STOOD UPRIGHT is redundant, but Rashi points out that AROSE means to arise from a prone position while STOOD UPRIGHT means that it remained in a standing position.

In treating the word שֶׁבִּיעַ Ibn Ezra comments, as he so often does, on the grammatical construction of the word. He notes that it is derived from the root שָׁבַע and that the dagesh in the ש replaces the fallen ש. Nachmanides, defining the same word, points out that it means surrounding in the way that warriors about to go into battle will surround a king. In this instance the contrast between the methodology of Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides is very great. While the former is satisfied with a cold grammatical definition, the latter presents a picture which gives life to the text.

Nachmanides displays this same characteristic in discussing the SHEAVES. Taking in the broad sweep of Scripture he points out that the sheaves are the essence of Joseph's dream. They indicate that the brothers will bow down to Joseph and that they will bow down by means of or because of the sheaves. This is a reference to (or a hint of) the fact that the brothers will come to Egypt seeking grain.

וַיִּתְּנֵם לְעֵשָׂא בְּעֵינָיו וְלֹא בְּלִבָּם וְלֹא בְּדַעְתָּם
וְלֹא בְּחֵסֶד וְלֹא בְּרַחֲמִים וְלֹא בְּחַסְדֵּי מֶלֶךְ

8. AND HIS BROTHERS SAID TO HIM: SHALT THOU INDEED REIGN OVER US?
 OR SHALT THOU INDEED HAVE DOMINION OVER US? AND THEY HATED HIM
 STILL MORE FOR HIS DREAMS, AND FOR HIS WORDS.

The question SHALT THOU INDEED REIGN OVER US? OR SHALT THOU INDEED HAVE DOMINION OVER US? seems to be repetitive. Therefore, the commentators are bound to distinguish between the two questions. Ibn Ezra interprets the word REIGN to mean shall we make you king? while the word DOMINION conveys the inference will you rule over us by force? Nachmanides on the other hand defines REIGN as referring to a king, while DOMINION refers to an officer of lesser authority. Nachmanides considers the difference to lie in rank and Ibn Ezra believes the difference lies in the method power is taken.

The phrase AND FOR HIS WORDS is ambiguous. Rashi suggests that it refers back to the evil report which Joseph brought against the sons of Leah. Nachmanides feels that this cannot be the cause of additional hatred, for the evil report concerned only part of the brothers. Therefore, he argues that HIS WORDS refers to Joseph's bragging statement HEAR I PRAY YOU, THIS DREAM WHICH I HAVE DREAMED (verse 6). This statement was made to all of the brothers and could be a cause inciting the hatred of all of them.

וַיִּתְּנֵם לְעֵשָׂא בְּעֵינָיו וְלֹא בְּלִבָּם וְלֹא בְּדַעְתָּם
וְלֹא בְּחֵסֶד וְלֹא בְּרַחֲמִים וְלֹא בְּחַסְדֵּי מֶלֶךְ
וְלֹא בְּחֵסֶד וְלֹא בְּרַחֲמִים וְלֹא בְּחַסְדֵּי מֶלֶךְ
וְלֹא בְּחֵסֶד וְלֹא בְּרַחֲמִים וְלֹא בְּחַסְדֵּי מֶלֶךְ

9. AND HE DREAMED YET ANOTHER DREAM, AND TOLD IT TO HIS BRETHREN
AND SAID: BEHOLD, I HAVE DREAMED YET A DREAM: AND BEHOLD, THE SUN
AND THE MOON AND ELEVEN STARS BOWED DOWN TO ME.
10. AND HE TOLD IT TO HIS FATHER, AND UNTO HIS BROTHERS: AND HIS
FATHER REBUKED HIM, AND SAID UNTO HIM: WHAT IS THIS DREAM THAT YOU
HAVE DREAMED? SHALL WE INDEED COME, I AND YOUR MOTHER AND YOUR
BROTHERS TO BOW DOWN TO YOU TO THE EARTH?

Regarding this second dream we read in verse 9, AND HE TOLD IT TO HIS BROTHERS. In verse 10 we read, AND HE TOLD IT TO HIS FATHER AND TO HIS BROTHERS. There are two problems which the commentators recognize; why did he tell the dream to his brothers a second time and why did he tell the second dream to his father but not the first dream? Rashi comments on the first question that Joseph did not really tell the dream to his brothers a second time but merely repeated it to his father in their presence. Nachmanides accepts this interpretation. The reason for retelling the dream to his father in the presence of the brothers is to be found in the explanations of the rebuke. According to Rashi, Jacob rebukes Joseph for bringing the hatred of his brethren upon himself apparently because of his bragging manner. After the rebuke Jacob attempts to pacify the brothers by pointing out the absurdity of the dream, namely, that Rachel is dead and so she (symbolized by the moon in the dream) cannot ever bow down to Joseph. However, there is a rabbinic principle that every true dream has some false element. Therefore, according to Rashi, the point about Rachel only confirmed in Jacob's mind the validity of the dream. In order to divert the brothers and to

allay their fears, Jacob attempted to point out the absurdity of the dream. The assumption is implicit that the brothers did not know this rabbinic principle. Nachmanides unites the rebuke with the question about the dream. His idea is that the rebuke serves the dual purpose of calming the brothers by displaying scorn for the dream and of rebuking Joseph for his pride in imagining such great things about himself and wasting his time in vain day-dreams. Both of the above interpretations imply that it was necessary for the dream to be told to Jacob in the presence of the brothers so that they would be pacified by Jacob's scorn (which according to Rashi's is only apparent). This raises the problem of the referent of the moon symbol, since Rachel is already dead (Gen. Rab. 84:11). Both Rashi and Ibn Ezra assume, with the Midrash, that Joseph implies Bilhah, his mother's servant, who raised Joseph after the death of Rachel. Nachmanides, however, argues on the basis of the list of those who went down to Egypt (Gen 46:8ff) that Bilhah, too, is already dead and so cannot be the referent of the moon symbol. Furthermore, he argues, it is very unlikely that a concubine should be so singled out with such significant symbolism. The correct interpretation of this dream is that the sun symbolizes Jacob, the moon signifies all of Jacob's household, and the eleven stars represent the eleven brothers who, although they are members of the household, are mentioned separately since they will bow down to Joseph in Egypt before the rest of the household. Once again we can see in Nachmanides' interpretation a broad and comprehensive understanding of Scripture and the working of a mind that can relate and unite various episodes into an

integral story. The reason that Joseph related the second dream to his father and not the first dream, according to Nachmanides, that he understood by himself the interpretation of each dream and only related it to those who were involved. Jacob understood this and this is part of the reason for the rebuke. Ibn Ezra, concerned with the grammatical aspects of the text, shows the two meanings of the word וַיִּרְאֵהוּ. He says that when וַיִּרְאֵהוּ is followed by a ו as in the present instance it means rebuke. When it is not followed by a ו it carries the meaning of destruction.

וַיִּרְאֵהוּ וַיִּשְׁכַּח וַיִּשְׁכַּח וַיִּשְׁכַּח וַיִּשְׁכַּח וַיִּשְׁכַּח

11. AND HIS BROTHERS ENVIED HIM: BUT HIS FATHER KEPT THE MATTER

Both the word וַיִּרְאֵהוּ and the word וַיִּשְׁכַּח are in question. Rashi interprets the word וַיִּרְאֵהוּ to mean he watched and waited and he brings Scriptural evidence for this unusual translation. Ibn Ezra defines the word as remembering. Rashi then explains that the word וַיִּשְׁכַּח refers to Joseph's dream. In line with Rashi's earlier interpretation that Jacob's rebuke was only for the benefit of the brothers his present interpretation indicates that Jacob believed the dream would be fulfilled and he "watched and waited" for this event.

וַיִּשְׁכַּח וַיִּשְׁכַּח וַיִּשְׁכַּח וַיִּשְׁכַּח וַיִּשְׁכַּח

12. AND HIS BRETHREN WENT TO FEED THEIR FATHER'S FLOCK IN SHECHEM.

In the Masoretic text two dots (:) appear over the word וַיִּשְׁכַּח. This same thing occurs in Ezekiel 34:2 with the words וַיִּשְׁכַּח וַיִּשְׁכַּח

— who feed themselves. The significance of the dots is that "the ו/ע, the sign of the accusative, is disregarded, as it is traditionally dotted in the Scrolls, and the verse rendered: And they went to feed themselves on their father's flocks -- i.e., they went to revel and make merry."⁴ This displays Rashi's method of presenting a Midrashic observation where no other is readily available.

וְיֵצְאוּ לְרֹעֵת הַבָּקָר וְיִשְׁכְּבוּ בְּעֵדֵי הַבָּקָר וְיִשְׁכְּבוּ בְּעֵדֵי הַבָּקָר
וְיֵצְאוּ לְרֹעֵת הַבָּקָר וְיִשְׁכְּבוּ בְּעֵדֵי הַבָּקָר וְיִשְׁכְּבוּ בְּעֵדֵי הַבָּקָר

13. AND ISRAEL SAID UNTO JOSEPH: DO NOT THY BRETHREN FEED THE FLOCK IN SHECHEM? COME, AND I WILL SEND THEE UNTO THEM. AND HE SAID TO HIM: HERE AM I.

Rashi and Ibn Ezra both understand the phrase HERE AM I to indicate Joseph's willingness and readiness to carry out Jacob's command. Rashi adds to this the factor of Joseph's humility and willingness to carry out the command even though he was aware of his brothers' hatred of him and the possibility of personal danger.

וְיֵצְאוּ לְרֹעֵת הַבָּקָר וְיִשְׁכְּבוּ בְּעֵדֵי הַבָּקָר וְיִשְׁכְּבוּ בְּעֵדֵי הַבָּקָר
וְיֵצְאוּ לְרֹעֵת הַבָּקָר וְיִשְׁכְּבוּ בְּעֵדֵי הַבָּקָר וְיִשְׁכְּבוּ בְּעֵדֵי הַבָּקָר
וְיֵצְאוּ לְרֹעֵת הַבָּקָר וְיִשְׁכְּבוּ בְּעֵדֵי הַבָּקָר וְיִשְׁכְּבוּ בְּעֵדֵי הַבָּקָר

14. AND HE SAID TO HIM: GO, NOW, SEE THE WELFARE OF THY BRETHREN, AND THE WELFARE OF THE FLOCK: AND BRING ME BACK WORD. SO HE SENT HIM OUT OF THE VALE OF HEBRON, AND HE CAME TO SHECHEM.

Rashi brings a verse (Num: 13:22) to suggest that Hebron may be on a mountain. The verse from Numbers reads, "And they went up into the South, and came unto Hebron." However, since the spies of this verse were outside of Israel the Hebrew verb עלו would appropriately have a spiritual rather than a physical connotation. The question then arises as to the use of the word עלו. Rashi takes his explanation from Midrash Rabbah where the word עלו is given the interpretation of על על and made to refer to Abraham and the covenant between the pieces, (Gen 15:13), "for thy seed will be as sojourner." In this same Midrash על is read as על referring to God's deep designs. Both the covenant and God's designs are here interpreted as indicating the journey of Joseph to Egypt and Israel's ultimate enslavement there. Nachmanides mentions this Midrash but apparently the problem is not of major concern to him. Instead, he dwells on the problem of redundancy. In Gen. 35:27 we read, And Jacob came... to Mamre, to Kiriath-arba that is Hebron." Since we already know that Jacob is in Hebron and that this must be the point of Joseph's departure, why is it necessary for Scripture again to relate that Joseph departed from Hebron? The answer Nachmanides offers is that it emphasizes, to Joseph's credit, the distance between Hebron and Shechem and the fact that he was willing to travel a great distance to obey his father's command even though he was aware of the danger to himself.

Rashi finds this same type of problem with regard to SHECHEM. We know both from verses 12 and 13 that the brothers are in Shechem. Why is it necessary to mention again that Joseph came to Shechem. The reason that Rashi gives is that Scripture wants to indicate that Joseph

was coming to a place known for misfortunes. Rashi, with the Talmud mentions the ravishing of Dinah (Gen 34) which occurred at Shechem in the past and the division of the kingdom which would occur there in the future (I Kings 12:1).

וַיִּזְכַּר אֱלֹהֵי אִשְׁמָעֵאל וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי אִשְׁמָעֵאל אֶל יוֹסֵף וְיָחִזְקֵהוּ
וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אֱלֹהֵי אִשְׁמָעֵאל וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי אִשְׁמָעֵאל אֶל יוֹסֵף
וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אֱלֹהֵי אִשְׁמָעֵאל וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי אִשְׁמָעֵאל אֶל יוֹסֵף
וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אֱלֹהֵי אִשְׁמָעֵאל וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי אִשְׁמָעֵאל אֶל יוֹסֵף

15. AND A MAN FOUND HIM AND, BEHOLD, HE WAS WANDERING IN THE FIELD.
AND THE MAN ASKED HIM, SAYING: WHAT DOST THOU SEEK?
16. AND HE SAID: I SEEK MY BRETHREN. TELL ME, I PRAY THEE, WHERE
THEY ARE FEEDING THE FLOCK.
17. AND THE MAN SAID: THEY ARE DEPARTED FROM THIS (PLACE); FOR I
HEARD THEM SAYING: LET US GO TO DOTHAN. AND JOSEPH WENT AFTER
HIS BRETHREN, AND FOUND THEM IN DOTHAN.

In these three verses we can see at a glance the varying methods of the three commentators. Each one asks the question, "Who is the man who aids Joseph?" Rashi and Nachmanides answer that the man is the angel Gabriel. Ibn Ezra disagrees and claims that the simple meaning of the text indicates that he is merely a man, a passer-by. Rashi's evidence (Midrash Tanchuma פ' ע'ו) is that the word אִישׁ man is used elsewhere in Scripture in connection with the angel Gabriel (Dan. 9:21). Also the Aramaic word for man ܐܢܫܐ is the basis of the name Gabriel ܕܢܝܠܐ. Nachmanides seems to accept this explanation.

In large part the introduction of the angel into these interpretations is an answer to the problem presented by Joseph's presumptuous question, "Tell me...where they are feeding the flock?" How could Joseph assume that the man knew the location of his brothers? Ibn Ezra answers this in straightforward manner by stating that Scripture implies with the question the statement, "If you know." While Rashi feels that the angel is sent to aid Joseph, Nachmanides sees in the cryptic answer of the angel the proof that the man was indeed an angel. No man would give such an answer but would answer directly. The dual character of the answer will be explained below.

The answer that the angel gives to Joseph's question is also significant. Each commentator sees something different according to his individual approach to Scripture. Rashi starts with the phrase THEY ARE DEPARTED FROM THIS (PLACE) וְהָיוּ מֵעַתָּה. Rashi probably understood this to mean that the brothers journeyed from this place, Shechem. But to Joseph this must have been very obvious for they were not there. Therefore, the statement must have another meaning. The meaning Rashi suggests is that the brothers left the place of meeting, thereby symbolically departing from brotherhood. And where did they go? The angel answers, I HEARD SAYING: LET US GO TO DOTHAN. Why should an angel have to rely on what he hears from men for his information? Since an angel knows the answer without depending on men for information, the answer he gives is also symbolic. Dothan דוֹתָן is similar to the word דִּבְרֵי legal craftiness in seeking mean to kill Joseph. In other words, Joseph understood the angel to say that the brothers were plotting against him.

Nachmanides finds this explanation partially unacceptable for while he has praised Joseph's courage and obedience, he cannot imagine that Joseph would proceed to certain death knowingly. Therefore, he interprets the angel's words as being spoken on two levels. On the obvious level Joseph understood that the brothers went to Dothan, the place. On the hidden or secret level, the angel told Joseph that the brothers gave up all notions of brotherhood and were planning to kill him, but Joseph did not understand this hint. Thus he continued on, AND FOUND THEM IN DOTHAN. Rashi, too, recognizes that by Dothan, Scripture intends the name of the place and not only the interpretation legal craftiness. He says, "But according to the plain meaning, it דוֹחַן is a place name, and the Biblical text does not depart from its plain meaning." However, the purpose of this elaboration according to Rashi is to show God's action through Gabriel and not Joseph's problem in finding his brothers. Ibn Ezra enters the controversy only to comment that Dothan דוֹחַן and Dothan דוֹחַן, that is with and without the yod (י), are the same word. This is consistent with his tendency to disregard minor peculiarities in the Masoretic text. Those who dwell on these variations, he feels, distort the plain meaning of Scripture.

In commenting on the phrase FOR I HEARD, SAYING, Nachmanides adds the object them to the verb I HEARD. Them refers to some men or perhaps to some shepards. To the participle SAYING he adds the auxiliary verb they were. He brings a verse from Gen. 27:5 where the auxiliary verb is also omitted. By this he intends to prove that this is the style of Scripture and that Scripture is not defective. He feels that the meaning of the sentence is, "The shepards journeyed from this place, for I heard men saying, let us go to Dothan, perhaps they are your brothers."

וירא את אברהם ויטריף יקרב אליו ויאמר אליו
ויאמר אליו אליו כוונתו בזה פסוק
אמר אליו ויאמר אליו כוונתו בזה פסוק
הוא ראה את אברהם ויטריף יקרב אליו

18. AND THEY SAW HIM AFAR OFF, AND BEFORE HE CAME NEAR UNTO THEM, THEY CONSPIRED (AGAINST) HIM TO SLAY HIM.
19. AND THEY SAID ONE TO ANOTHER: BEHOLD, THIS DREAMER COMETH.
20. AND NOW, COME AND LET US SLAY HIM, AND CAST HIM INTO ONE OF THE PITS, AND WE WILL SAY: AN EVIL BEAST HATH DEVoured HIM: AND WE SHALL SEE WHAT WILL BECOME OF HIS DREAMS.

According to Nachmanides the brothers may have devised two plans to kill Joseph. While he was still a distance away they thought to kill him indirectly, that is, without using physical force themselves by means of inciting the dogs to kill him. And so Scripture says, THEY CONSPIRED (AGAINST) HIM TO SLAY HIM. When Joseph approached nearer the brothers saw that they were no longer able to carry out this plan and so they plotted to kill him directly, saying, BEHOLD THE DREAMER COMETH AND NOW, COME AND LET US SLAY HIM. This distinction is important for later Nachmanides will comment on the consequences of each of the plans.

Rashi and Ibn Ezra apparently feel there is only one plan and they regard verses 19 and 20 as the elaboration of the conspiracy mentioned in verse 18. They both concern themselves with the meaning of וירא. Rashi derives it from the word פ'ל craftiness. Ibn Ezra says, "they had evil thoughts."

A problem is presented in the word נ/ע of verse 18.

וְעַל is the direct object which is not required by syntax of the sentence. Rashi reasons through several steps to arrive at the final meaning:

1. It sometimes happens that וְעַל has in context the meaning וְעִלָּה e.g., Jer 20:2,; Gen 21:2.
2. The meaning of וְעַל is the same as וְעִלָּה.
3. The Targum translates the word וְעַל meaning with or on him. This in Hebrew could be עִלָּה to or towards him. Thus it is connected to Rashi's interpretation of וְעַל - they were filled with craftiness and deceit towards him.

If the statement, AND WE SHALL SEE WHAT WILL BECOME OF HIS DREAMS, is taken literally there is a contradiction between this statement and, COME AND LET US SLAY HIM. For if Joseph is slain surely nothing can become of his dreams. The raising of this type of problem reveals a very straightlaced approach to Scripture which admits no sarcasm. Therefore, bound by this restriction, and confronted with the apparent contradiction, Rashi, together with the Midrash (Gen Rab. 84:14), find two different speakers. The brothers say, LET US SLAY HIM, But the Holy Spirit answers them, AND WE WILL SEE WHAT WILL BECOME OF HIS DREAMS, as if to say, "We shall see whose word will be fulfilled, yours or mine." In contrast to Rashi, Nachmanides is able to recognize this as a sarcastic remark on the part of the brothers. However, Nachmanides also recognizes the fact that the dreams might possibly be fulfilled and then Joseph would surely rule over his brothers as the dreams portended.

himself supplies the bridge between the Midrashic explanation of Reuben's motives and the variation in the two parts of the verse when he says, "The Holy Spirit attests regarding Reuben that he said this only to deliver him, for he would come and lift him out of there." According to Rashi the speaker of the second part of the sentence is the Holy Spirit. The Midrash has raised the question of the sincerity of Reuben's appeal and cast suspicion on his motive. This suspicion about Reuben is furthered by the description of the pit. According to verse 24, "THE PIT WAS EMPTY, THERE WAS NO WATER IN IT. THE PIT WAS EMPTY is an inclusive statement making the words THERE WAS NO WATER IN IT superfluous. Therefore, the Midrash (Gen. Rab. 84:16) teaches that "THERE WAS NO WATER IN IT but there were snakes and scorpions." If Reuben knew of this he would be guilty of murder if Joseph was killed by the snakes and scorpions. Nevertheless, Rashi agrees with the Midrash that Reuben really did intend to save Joseph, and the Holy Spirit testifies to this fact. Nachmanides, too, questions Reuben's intentions and connects this with the problem of the various plans to kill Joseph which was mentioned in connection with verse 18. From Gen. 42:22, Nachmanides takes Reuben's statement "Did I not speak unto you (the brothers) saying: Do not sin against the child; but you would not listen." From this point he reconstructs the stages of Reuben's argument. First he urges the brothers not to bother Joseph at all (Gen. 42:22). Since they would not accept this position, Reuben agreed to work with them to kill Joseph indirectly (Gen. 37:18). However, when they were unable to carry out this plan and they decided to kill Joseph directly, Reuben urged them not to do this.

What was his motive? From the fact that Reuben said, DO NOT SHED BLOOD and not "do not shed his blood," or, "do not shed Joseph's blood," Nachmanides infers that Reuben was teaching a lesson and not overly concerned with Joseph as a brother. The lesson Reuben sought to teach was that there is a difference between the punishment of one who kills directly and one who kills indirectly. The former is more severe and the latter is less severe. In this light, Nachmanides interprets the problem of the pit. The reason Scripture mentions that there was no water in the pit after saying that it was empty is to emphasize that if there was water in the pit, and Joseph drowned when he was thrown in, then the brothers would be guilty of direct murder and subject to the more severe punishment. The explanation offered by Rashi is unacceptable to Nachmanides because of his own comprehensive view of Scripture. He reasons that if there were snakes and scorpions in the pit they would either kill Joseph or leave him alone. If they did not kill him it would be a miracle which the brothers would be bound to acknowledge. If the brothers knew that Joseph was under Divine protection, as evidenced by the miracle, they could not carry out their plan to sell Joseph but would be compelled to release him. We know that this is so from the Book of Daniel. Daniel was cast into a pit of lions at the command of Darius. The next day, when Daniel emerged unharmed from the pit and he told the king that God had protected him, Darius released Daniel and even exalted him (Dan. 6:18-29). If Darius, a gentile, could show this respect for the God of Israel, certainly the brothers of Joseph and the sons of Jacob our forefather could do no less. However, since Joseph emerged from the pit unharmed and still the brothers sold him,

it must mean that no miracle took place and so there were no snakes and scorpions in the pit. The statement that there was no water in the pit merely emphasizes the fact that it was empty.

Commenting on the phrase THEY STRIPPED JOSEPH OF HIS COAT, Ibn Ezra notes that STRIPPED וּסְרָ is in the hifiel conjugation and indicates not that the brothers removed Joseph's coat, but rather that they caused Joseph to remove his own clothing.

The word כְּתוֹנֵת indicates his undergarment, so that, "They stripped him and threw him naked into the pit." Rashi agrees with this interpretation of Ibn Ezra's and adds that the כְּתוֹנֵת צִבְעוֹן is the additional coat Jacob gave to Joseph. The problem that both Rashi and Ibn Ezra confront in the text is that כְּתוֹנֵת צִבְעוֹן may simply be the modifier of כְּתוֹנֵת. The sentence would then read, "they stripped Joseph of his coat, which is the coat of many colors." However, both commentators reject this in favor of the interpretation that the text refers to two separate garments; the undergarment and the special coat Joseph received from his father.

וישנו סדר-הם ויפאז'ינים וירא וכו' סדרת ישראליים
 מאז חקירת וחקירתם באים גבולות וצרי' וס' כוללים
 סבובי וצרי' מהו
 ו'אמר ייחזקאל אל'א' מה בצר' לך ומה אלהיך וכו' את צחוק
 שבו ומהלך ישראליים וצרי' ו'אמר מה' את' אלהי
 בעל' הוא וישראל אלהי
 וישראל אלהי וצרי' מה' את' וישראל אלהי וכו' את
 בעל' וישראל אלהי וצרי' מה' את' וישראל אלהי וכו' את
 וישראל אלהי וצרי' מה' את' וישראל אלהי וכו' את

25. AND THEY SAT DOWN TO EAT BREAD: AND THEY LIFTED UP THEIR EYES AND LOOKED, AND, BEHOLD, A CARAVAN OF ISHMAELITES CAME FROM GILEAD, WITH THEIR CAMELS BEARING SPICERY AND BALM AND LADANUM, GOING TO CARRY IT DOWN TO EGYPT.
26. AND JUDAH SAID UNTO HIS BRETHREN: WHAT PROFIT IS IT IF WE SLAY OUR BROTHER, AND CONCEAL HIS BLOOD?
27. COME, AND LET US SELL HIM TO THE ISHMAELITES, BUT LET OUR HAND NOT BE UPON HIM FOR OUR BROTHER, OUR FLESH IS HE. AND HIS BRETHREN HEARKENED UNTO HIM.
29. AND THERE PASSED BY MIDIANITE MEN, MERCHANTMEN: AND THEY DREW AND LIFTED UP JOSEPH OUT OF THE PIT, AND SOLD JOSEPH TO THE ISHMAELITES FOR TWENTY PIECES OF SILVER, AND THEY BROUGHT JOSEPH TO EGYPT.

There is an obvious confusion between verse 25 where the brothers see a caravan of Ishmaelites, and verse 28 which involves both Midianites and Ishmaelites. The problem is further complicated by verse 36 which states that "the Midianites sold him into Egypt", and chapter 39 verse 1, which states that Potiphar bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites. Each commentator works out the solution in his own particular way. In a comment on verse 28, Rashi says that Joseph was sold three times. While he does not agree in every detail, Rashi obviously drew his counsel from the following Midrash (Gen Rab. 84:22): "How many deeds of sale were written on his (Joseph's) account? Rabbi Judan and Rabbi Huna disagree. Rabbi Judan maintained, Four. His brothers sold him to the Ishmaelites, the Ishmaelites sold him to the merchants, the merchants to the Midianites and the Midianites into Egypt. Rabbi Huna said, Five; (he adds) The

Midianites to the Egyptians and the Egyptians to Potiphar."

In response to the question who drew Joseph out of the pit? (for according to the context of verse 28, it was the Midianites who performed this act). Rashi explains his view that "the sons of Jacob drew Joseph from the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites, and the Ishmaelites to the Midianites, and the Midianites to the Egyptians." Rashi differs from the Midrash in not considering the term לְמַדְּמֵי merchantmen as a separate group. Rather he holds that the Midianites were merchantmen. He does not deal with the problem presented in verse 36, that the Midianites sold Joseph into Egypt. He does, however, claim that there are two caravans; the Ishmaelites and the Midianites.

Ibn Ezra interprets the beginning of verse 28, "When the Ishmaelite merchants were passing by, for the Midianites are called Ishmaelites." In this interpretation he does two things: he translates the כִּשְׁמֵי of לְמַדְּמֵי to mean when so that it refers back to the first caravan mentioned in verse 25; and he identifies the Midianites with the Ishmaelites. The basis of this identification is the passage in Judges (8:12 and 24) where the Midianites are called the Ishmaelites. Therefore, as far as Ibn Ezra is concerned, the brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites who sold him to Potiphar.

Nachmanides disagrees with Ibn Ezra explicitly and he agrees with Rashi in the possibility of his Midrashic interpretation. He says that Ibn Ezra misinterpreted the passage in Judges and the Midianites are not to be identified with the Ishmaelites. Nachmanides' own interpretation is that the caravan was owned by the Ishmaelites for they commonly used camels. Thus the brothers, upon seeing the caravan at a distance

immediately recognized it as an Ishmaelite caravan. When the caravan drew close they saw that there were merchants in the caravan and they understood that the Midianite merchants hired the Israelite caravan to carry their goods. The brothers then sold Joseph to the Midianites. From this point on Scripture sometimes mentions the Ishmaelites and at other times mentions the Midianites as the possessor of Joseph. Nachmanides is able to justify this ambiguity on the grounds that Scripture frequently gives two different views of the same action; the view of the one who commands the action, and the view of the one who performs the action. He brings several passages from Scripture to show that this is not uncommon. So in this case, while the Midianites were the legal owners of Joseph, the Ishmaelites by virtue of operating the caravan may have had temporary possession of Joseph thus enabling Scripture to speak of the Ishmaelites selling Joseph (39:1).

Commenting on the phrase AND THEY SAT DOWN TO EAT BREAD, Ibn Ezra notes that nine of the brothers ate together which implies that Reuben was not among them. This explains verse 29 which says AND REUBEN RETURNED. Ibn Ezra does not speculate as to where Reuben went. Rashi will ask this question at the appropriate time.

Both Rashi and Ibn Ezra inquire into the origin of the word סוּרְסָר caravan. They agree with the Targum and decide it is so called because it travels along the דָּרָס path.

In a rare instance Rashi states the problem of the text along with his answer. "WITH THEIR CAMELS BEARING, etc. Why does the text set forth what they carried? To make known the reward of the righteous. For it is the custom of Arabs to carry naptha and resin which have a bad

odor, but for this one (Joseph) there chanced (to be) spices so that he (Joseph) would not be afflicted by the bad odor." The point Rashi would teach is that God prepares the way for His righteous ones.

In defining and describing the merchandise carried by the caravan, Rashi seems anxious to classify all the goods as spices. By so doing he can identify the word סוּסָנָה spicery with the same word in II Kings 20:13, where בֵּית סוּסָנָה can be translated treasure house or spice house. This means that spices are considered to be a treasure. Balm is considered to be a spice and so is ladanum. Ibn Ezra is far more concerned with the grammatical implications of the words. He points out that סוּסָנָה in our verse (25) differs from the סוּסָנָה of the Kings passage. The difference can be explained by the fact that ס is a quiescent letter and can be dropped without affecting the meaning of the word. He comments on the fact that the word סוּסָנָה balm appears in various forms and that commentators differ widely in their definitions and one suggestion is that it was brought from Jericho, but Ibn Ezra rejects this. Similarly to define סוּסָנָה he quotes Saadia, adding his own comment that "perhaps this is so". When the correct interpretation is not clear, Ibn Ezra will present the views of several commentators.

Rashi defines the phrase WHAT PROFIT IS IT most literally; he says it refers to money. Ibn Ezra is a little bit more subtle indicating that the implication is, "what is the benefit". He is not so certain of the exact meaning and mentions "that it is close in meaning to desire."

Two views are expressed about the meaning of the phrase AND CONCEAL HIS BLOOD. Rashi together with Onkelos claims it means "and conceal his death". Nachmanides, however, realizes that the death of a person cannot

really be concealed and that if he remains alive it must eventually be revealed. Therefore, he interprets the phrase literally. He points out that murderers commonly attempt to conceal their deed. The intention is not to conceal the fact that someone is dead but rather to hide the evidence that might disclose the murderers. Nachmanides continues to draw out the implications of the brothers' acts. Reuben had taught that if they throw Joseph in the pit and he dies, the punishment is far less than if they spill his blood with their own hands. Judah now argues that even by throwing Joseph in the pit and leaving him to die (from hunger, thirst and/or wild beast) they will still be considered murderers and the punishment will be the same as if they themselves had shed his blood. In terms of law, Nachmanides says that the opinions of both Reuben and Judah are correct.

Ibn Ezra comments that the phrase HE IS OUR FLESH (verse 27) is not literally true. Therefore, he explains, "like our flesh, for we came out of one flesh."

The word וְיָנִי has two basic meanings: to hear and to obey. Rashi demonstrates that whenever וְיָנִי has the meaning of obey, Targum translates it by the word דִּקְרָא; and whenever it has the meaning to hear, Targum translates it וְיָנִי. In this case the brothers obeyed Judah.

וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי
וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי
וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי וְיָנִי

29. AND REUBEN RETURNED TO THE PIT: AND, BEHOLD, JOSEPH WAS NOT IN THE PIT: AND HE RENT HIS CLOTHES.

30. AND HE RETURNED TO HIS BRETHREN, AND SAID: THE CHILD IS NOT
THERE: AND AS FOR ME, WHITHER SHALL I GO?

Rashi offers two interpretations of the phrase AND REUBEN RETURNED.
"When he was sold he (Reuben) was not there, for his day had come to go
and minister to his father." This interpretation has the advantage of
being consistent with the context of the sentence, but there is no corrob-
orating evidence. Therefore, Rashi brings a second interpretation which
gives the sense of repentance to אָפ'ן. "Another interpretation:
he was occupied with his sackcloth and his fasting because he had dis-
arranged the couch of his father." In chapter 35:22, the text specifies
this deed of Reuben's. Both of these interpretations are taken from the
Midrash (Gen. Rab. 84:19).

In the phrase AND AS FOR ME, WHITHER SHALL I GO, Rashi is con-
cerned with the apparent meaninglessness of the words. He points out
that it is a rhetorical question having the meaning, "Where shall I flee
from the sorrow of my father, for it is everywhere and there is no place
I can go to avoid it." Ibn Ezra is concerned with the appearance of
אָפ'ן twice in the phrase. Scripture "Uses the word I twice
though once would have been sufficient, but that is the way of the lan-
guage."

אָפ'ן איז גענוג פאר אַלע אַרבעטן
אָפ'ן איז גענוג פאר אַלע אַרבעטן

31. AND THEY TOOK JOSEPH'S COAT, AND KILLED A HE-GOAT, AND DIPPED
THE COAT IN THE BLOOD.

Rashi asks the question, why did the brothers use the blood of a he-goat? The answer he gives from the Midrash (Gen. Rab. 84:19) is that, "its blood is similar to that of man".

He also comments on the word כִּדְמוּתוֹ. This he says is the absolute form of the noun of which the construct form is כִּדְמוּת. However, the correct absolute form of the noun would be כִּדְמוּתָא.

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אָמַר כִּדְמוּתוֹ כִּדְמוּת בְּנֵי אָדָם וְיִשְׂרָאֵל
אָמַר כִּדְמוּתוֹ כִּדְמוּת בְּנֵי אָדָם וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אָמַר כִּדְמוּתוֹ

32. AND THEY SENT THE COAT OF MANY COLORS, AND THEY BROUGHT IT TO THEIR FATHER; AND SAID: THIS WE HAVE FOUND. RECOGNIZE NOW WHETHER IT IS THY SON'S COAT OR NOT.

The problem that Nachmanides encounters in this sentence is that the subjects of each of the verbs are ambiguous; they can refer either to the brothers or to the messengers. There are various possibilities:

1. "They" in each case refers to the brothers even though the physical action of the verb "brought" is performed by the messengers. This is what Nachmanides referred to earlier (Gen. 37:25) when he said that Scripture sometimes speaks from the viewpoint of the one who commands the action and sometimes from the one who performs the action. In this case the verb "sent" refers to the action the brothers commanded and the messengers (the ones who are commanded) performed.

2. "They" the brothers "sent," and "they" the messengers "brought," for the brothers were still in Dothan. In this case each verb has a different subject.
3. "They" the brothers "said," by means of the messengers, or "they" the messengers themselves "said," or "they" the brothers "said" when they returned to Hebron from Dothan.
4. Some suggest that the verb נָסַח refers to the sword, and means that "they" the brothers "stuck" (נָסַח) the coat with the sword and sent it.

Nachmanides does not say which of the above interpretations is the correct one. He also asks the question, why is it necessary for the brothers to pretend doubt as to whether or not the coat belonged to Joseph as in the words RECOGNIZE NOW WHETHER IT IS THY SON'S COAT OR NOT? If they brought the coat in without question, the father, knowing of the jealousy and hatred which existed, would accuse the brothers of killing Joseph. By making it appear as if they found the coat and were doubtful of its ownership, they diverted suspicion from themselves. They specifically brought the colored coat rather than the undergarment so that Jacob would be certain to recognize the coat of his favorite son.

וַיִּבְרָךְ יַעֲקֹב אֶת-בְּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיוּם הִנֵּה אֲנִי שֹׁכֵן אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְהִנֵּה יוֹם אֲנִי מֵת וְאַתֶּם מֵתִים וְאֵין מֵתִים וְאַתֶּם מֵתִים וְאֵין מֵתִים
For TG BG

33. AND HE RECOGNIZED IT, AND SAID: THE COAT OF MY SON; AN EVIL BEAST HAS DEVoured HIM; JOSEPH IS WITHOUT DOUBT TORN IN PIECES.

The statement THE COAT OF MY SON does not really answer the brothers' question. Therefore, Rashi adds the words to imply, "it is the coat of my son".

In chapter 44:28, Judah, quoting his father, gives the reason for Joseph's absence as, "Surely he is torn in pieces". If this is the reason that Jacob accepts for the death of Joseph then the statement AN EVIL BEAST HAS DEVoured HIM is superfluous. Since this latter reason must have some purpose within Scripture, Rashi probably assumed that it was for the purpose of making a homily. In this vein he says, "There was enkindled within him the spirit of prophecy. The end would be that the wife of Potiphar would incite against him." Perhaps this comment is prompted by the fact that an evil beast takes the feminine form in the Hebrew אֵלָה and the wife of Potiphar could surely be considered an "evil beast." (Gen. Rab. 84:19) Rashi then asks the question, why did not the Holy One Blessed be He reveal (the truth) to him? This question might be prompted either from the fact that the "spirit of prophecy" already revealed something to Jacob, however little it was (regarding the wife of Potiphar). Therefore, it could just as easily have revealed the whole truth to him. Or Rashi might have asked the question because of his assumption that Jacob was a prophet and in the ordinary course of events such things would be revealed to him. Rashi brings the following answer: "Because (the brethren) excommunicated and cursed whosoever would reveal, and they combined the Holy One Blessed be He with them." He continues, "But Isaac knew that he was alive; and he said, 'How shall I reveal (to Jacob) when the Holy One Blessed be He does not desire to reveal it to him?' Later (verse 36) Rashi will

argue that Isaac was still alive at the time of these happenings. Since Isaac was one of the forefathers who is considered a prophet (together with Abraham, Jacob and to some extent, Joseph) it is natural that he would know the truth.

Ibn Ezra comments that in the phrase שָׁרַף TORN IN PIECES the word שָׁרַף is a "pual" perfect tense and normally would be vocalized שָׁרַף. The reason for the variation from the normal pattern is due to the ש which cannot be geminated. Therefore, the "kubutz" is lengthened to a "cholom." A very good example of the normal and the irregular forms is found in Lev. 6:2, שָׁרַף and שָׁרַף, where the former is the regular form and it is followed by the irregular form.

וַיִּשְׂרֹף יַעֲקֹב אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וַיִּשְׂרֹף יַעֲקֹב אֶת־בְּגָדָיו
וַיִּשְׂרֹף יַעֲקֹב אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וַיִּשְׂרֹף יַעֲקֹב אֶת־בְּגָדָיו

34. AND JACOB RENT HIS GARMENTS, AND PUT SACKCLOTH UPON HIS LOINS,
AND MOURNED FOR HIS SON MANY DAYS.

The term MANY DAYS is a general term. Since Rashi can make the time period more specific he will attempt this. Since he can draw a nice moral lesson from the specific time period, he certainly will do so. He states that the exact time Jacob mourned for Joseph was twenty-two years, from the time that Joseph departed from him until Jacob went down to Egypt. Joseph was seventeen years old at the time he went to Egypt (Genesis 37:2). When he came before Pharaoh he was thirty (Genesis 41:46). This is thirteen years. Add to this the seven years of plenty

and two years of famine before Jacob came to Egypt and there are twenty-two years. These twenty-two years correspond to the twenty-two years that Jacob was away from his home and unable to fulfill the commandment of honoring his father and mother. Jacob was twenty years in the house of Laban (Genesis 31:41). He was one and a half years at Succoth (Genesis 32:17) and six months at Beth-el, making twenty-two years. Therefore, Jacob's period of mourning was the punishment for the neglect of his youth as indicated by the phrase לֹא הִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ, וְלֹא הִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ being interpreted as _____. Rashi could hardly have resisted this Midrash (Gen. Rab. 84:20) for the punishment fits the offense so perfectly.

וְלֹא הִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ וְלֹא הִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ
לֹא הִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ וְלֹא הִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ

35. AND ALL HIS SONS AND ALL HIS DAUGHTERS AROSE TO COMFORT HIM; BUT HE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED; AND HE SAID: FOR I WILL GO DOWN TO MY SON MOURNING TO SHEOL. AND HIS FATHER WEPT FOR HIM.

All three of our commentators are puzzled by the phrase ALL HIS DAUGHTERS, for Scriptures records only the birth of one daughter, Dinah (Gen. 30:21). Rashi brings two Midrashic answers (Gen. Rab. 84:20). One answer is that twin sisters were born with each son and also that each son married Canaanite women. These daughters-in-law are called daughters. The merit of the first answer is that it does not have to stretch the meaning of daughters to include daughters-in-law. This interpretation is based on the Midrash on the verse Gen. 35:17 which Rashi quotes. The

second answer is logical and likely. However, it does require that the word daughter include daughters-in-law. Ibn Ezra argues that daughters refers to his one daughter and to his granddaughter, the daughter of Asher. Nachmanides mentions the explanation of Ibn Ezra with the comment that it is a possibility. He continues on to discuss the second interpretation of Rashi's, that the daughters-in-law are called daughters. This he says is a common event in Scripture. The outstanding example is Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 2:2). It is a sign of love and affection.

The problem of why Jacob refused to be comforted troubles Rashi. If Jacob thought Joseph was dead, he would and should accept consolation. The Midrash (Gen. Rab. 84:21) states that you can be comforted for the dead but not for the living. Rashi adds to this that a dead person should be forgotten from the heart. He probably means to suggest that Jacob, because he could not forget his son, could not accept the fact that he was dead. Therefore, he could not accept consolation for a son he thought might still be alive.

The phrase FOR I WILL GO DOWN TO MY SON MOURNING TO SHEOL carries the implication that Joseph is in Sheol. Therefore, Rashi interprets of as meaning for or on account of. This makes it clear that it is Jacob who will go to Sheol on account of Joseph and not that Joseph is in Sheol.

According to the Biblical concept, Sheol is a place without joy or mourning. This is true of the grave also. Rashi translates Sheol as "the grave." He adds that Jacob will die and be buried while he is still mourning. This is to contradict the idea that he might mourn even into the grave. In dealing with the interpretation of Sheol, Rashi

gives an additional answer from the Midrash. Sheol is Gehenna. According to Rabbinic tradition a man is in judgment for twelve months in Gehenna. However, if all of Jacob's twelve sons would be living then Gehenna would have no power to judge him. Therefore, Rashi says: "This sign was given over to my hand from the Almighty, if not one of my sons will die during my life, I am assured that I shall not see Gehenna. Ibn Ezra agrees with Rashi that Sheol indicates the Grave. He chastises the Christian translator Jerome who translated Sheol as Hell. Ibn Ezra brings many verses from Scripture to prove that Scripture has no such intention.

The phrase HIS FATHER WEPT FOR HIM is ambiguous. FATHER can refer either to Isaac or to Jacob and HIM can refer either to Jacob or Joseph. According to the context of the sentence, HIS FATHER would have to refer to Jacob's father Isaac. Also, if the phrase would refer to Jacob rather than to Isaac it would seem that it should have come together with the statement describing Jacob's mourning (verse 34). The question may be asked, as Rashi does, why does Isaac WEEP and not mourn. The logical answer is that he knew that Joseph was alive and, therefore, he wept for his own son's sorrow. Ibn Ezra agrees that FATHER refers to Isaac and he proves that Isaac did not die before these events took place. However, he does not distinguish, as Rashi does, between weeping and mourning. He assumes that Isaac does not know that Joseph is alive. Why doesn't Isaac know? The spirit of prophecy left both Isaac and Jacob because of their grief. The spirit of prophecy does not come upon one who mourns.

וְהַמִּדְיָאֲנִיתִים מָכְרוּ אֹתוֹ לְפֹתִיפָר מֵאֲמָלָה שָׂרֵן הַמִּצְרִי
וְהָיָה בְּבֵיתוֹ

36. AND THE MIDIANITES SOLD HIM INTO EGYPT TO POTIPHAR AN OFFICER OF PHAROAH'S, THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD.

The Targum translates מֵאֲמָלָה to mean, one who kills men. Rashi disagrees with this and gives Potiphar's position as chief of "those that slaughter the cattle of the king." The basis of this definition is that the root מִכ means to slaughter animals. Ibn Ezra, while pointing out that the word מִכ refers both to killing and to cooking, agrees with the translation of the Targum as opposed to that of Rashi. Nachmanides also agrees with the Targum and Ibn Ezra, and he argues that since the prison was in Potiphar's house (Gen. 40:3) it is more likely that Potiphar was the executioner.

Notes to Text and Commentary

1. M. Friedlander, Essays on the Writings of Abraham Ibn Ezra, p. 64.
2. Midrash Tanchuma (k) 201.
3. Soncino, Midrash Rabbah, p. 772.
4. Ibid., p. 779, Dot 2.

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