

Joseph – A Type of Christ

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The bible contains the story of a man who was a good shepherd, beloved by his father. He brought messages of good tidings which led to mocking and ridicule. He was hated and rejected by his own brethren. Eventually he was betrayed and sold for the price of a slave. This same man would eventually overcome his bitter circumstances by the providence of God to be exalted. He was the bread of life and every knee would bow to him, including those who betrayed him

At first glance, it appears that we are speaking of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But at second glance, we also see a glimpse of the story of Joseph. In fact, the circumstances surrounding these two individuals share such a striking resemblance that it can hardly be coincidental. Truly, Joseph is a “type” of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What is a bible “type”? Simply put, a “type” anticipates or foreshadows someone or something greater in a day to come. It is a shadow cast on the pages of Old Testament history by a truth whose full embodiment or antitype (the anticipated) is found in New Testament revelation. Old Testament types can be people (Rom 5:14), things (Heb 10:19-20), and even events (1 Cor 5:7).

We even sing songs about bible “types”, sometimes without realizing it. Most are not planning to visit literal Canaan’s land, yet it seems a month doesn’t go by without us singing the words, “To Canaan’s land I’m on my way where the soul of man never dies.” Most have never stood on the banks of the Jordan River, but oft we sing, “On Jordan’s stormy banks I stand and cast a wishful eye.”

The bible talks about “types”, we sing about “types”, but rarely do we hear teaching on bible “types”. Part of the reason for this is that much of the religious world has abused bible typology by delving into the realm of the extravagant to the point that everything they read, including that which is incidental, is a “type”. For example, some have tried to dissect every aspect of the tabernacle, down to the cords and pegs, because of an overuse of bible typology.

But on the other extreme, some have discredited bible typology to such a degree that they believe all bible types must be denounced unless specifically identified as such in the New Testament. But if we followed that same line of reasoning, we’d have to assert that there are no prophecies in the Old Testament except those specifically quoted in the New Testament – and we know this is not the case. We want to avoid either extreme when it comes to bible typology.

Understanding that Joseph is a “type” of Jesus Christ can be a very rich and fulfilling study of God’s word and is enormously practical for our spiritual growth. Before delving into the practical implications of such a study, let us first see the parallels from merely looking at Gen 37:

- 1) Both were shepherds (Gen 37:2; John 10:11)
- 2) Both reported their brothers’ evil (Gen 37:2; John 7:7)
- 3) Both were beloved by their father (Gen 37:3; Matt 3:17)
- 4) Both wore a special tunic (Gen 37:3; John 19:23)

- 5) Both were hated by their brethren (Gen 37:4-5, 8; John 5:18)
- 6) Both had their words rejected (Gen 37:8; John 12:48)
- 7) Both would reign over their brethren (Gen 37:8; Luke 1:33)
- 8) Everyone would bow to them both (Gen 37:8; Phil 2:10)
- 9) Both had parents who “kept the saying in mind” (Gen 37:11; Luke 2:19)
- 10) Both were sent to their brethren by their father (Gen 37:13-14; Mark 12:6-7; John 1:11)
- 11) Both sought out their brethren (Gen 37:16; Luke 19:10)
- 12) Both had brethren who conspired to slay them (Gen 37:18; John 7:1)
- 13) Both were mocked for their prophecies (Gen 37:19; Mark 15:29)
- 14) Both were plotted against by their brethren (Gen 37:20; John 11:53)
- 15) Both had someone who tried to stop it (Gen 37:21-22; Acts 3:13)
- 16) Both were stripped of their garment (Gen 37:23; Matt 27:28)
- 17) Both had no water to drink (Gen 37:24; John 19:28)
- 18) Spices were involved (Gen 37:25; Luke 24:1)
- 19) Judah sold Joseph, Judas sold Jesus (Gen 37:26-27; Matt 26:25)
- 20) Both were sold for silver (Gen 37:28; Matt 26:14-15)
- 21) With both, it was as if wild beasts had devoured them (Gen 37:33; Psa 22:12-13, 16)
- 22) With both, it was as if their flesh had been rent (Gen 37:33; Heb 10:19-20)

A few practical implications:

- 1) Bible typology such as this gives us confidence in the uniformity and inspiration of scripture. In a world where so many cast doubt on the bible’s reliability and authenticity, bible typology provides the Christian an avenue by which to better contend for the truth. While some call the record of Jesus Christ foolishness, the real foolishness is to claim that the story of Joseph and Jesus Christ, separated by almost 2000 years between them, could possibly be coincidental. The only plausible explanation is that we serve a God who knew the story from the beginning and how it would play out. This should give us confidence in the power and foreknowledge of God
- 2) Bible typology enhances our appreciation for the bible. Prior to Jesus’ ascension, Jesus opens the minds of the apostles to understand the scriptures and everything written about him (Luke 24:44-47). Only after we see Christ can we properly identify a bible “type” in regard to Him. Before Jesus came to Earth, the story of Joseph was merely the story of a man who through faith overcame immense suffering only to be exalted by God. But having the benefit of hind sight opens a whole new realm of golden nuggets to be found. Bible typology heightens and magnifies the story of our Lord even more so than before.
- 3) Bible typology such as what we see in the life of Joseph should give us confidence that Christ-mindedness is within reach. Sometimes we are so intimidated by the life of our Lord that we resolve within ourselves there is no way we can ever be like Him. It is true that we will never lead a sinless life. It is true that we are not qualified to die for the sins of mankind. But Joseph wasn’t qualified for either of these things and somehow he was a man with the same free moral

agency as us leading a Christ-like life. More impressive is the fact that he did so without the many advantages we have conducive to faith. Joseph did not have the bible; he did not have any brethren of like-minded faith to turn to; he had no church. In other words, if he can do it we can do it! Joseph is living proof that Christ-mindedness is not about genetic makeup, it is about how we respond to our circumstances through faith. May the story of Joseph, a truly inspirational “type” of Jesus, give us the courage to seek for higher ground.