

Joseph's Long Shadow

- ¹² Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem.
- ¹³ And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, **I will send you** to them." And he said to him, "**Here I am.**"
- ¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and **bring me word.**" So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.
- ¹⁵ And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, "What are you seeking?"
- ¹⁶ "I am seeking my brothers," he said. "Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock."
- ¹⁷ And the man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.
- ¹⁸ They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him.
- ¹⁹ They said to one another, "**Here comes this dreamer.**
- ²⁰ Come now, let us **kill him** and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams."
- ²¹ But when **Reuben** heard it, he **rescued** him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life."
- ²² And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him"-- that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father.
- ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they **stripped him of his robe**, the robe of many colors that he wore.
- ²⁴ And they took him and **threw him into a pit**. The pit was empty;

- there was no water in it.
- ²⁵ Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of **Ishmaelites** coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt.
- ²⁶ Then **Judah** said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?"
- ²⁷ Come, let us **sell him** to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him.
- ²⁸ Then **Midianite** traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for **twenty shekels of silver**. They took Joseph to Egypt.
- ²⁹ When **Reuben returned to the pit** and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes
- ³⁰ and returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?"
- ³¹ Then they took Joseph's robe and **slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood**.
- ³² And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, "This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not."
- ³³ And he identified it and said, "It is my son's robe. **A fierce animal has devoured him**. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces."
- ³⁴ Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days.
- ³⁵ All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him.
- ³⁶ Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

Genesis 37:12-36

An Ancient Reading...

I was talking with a fellow ARBCA pastor this week about Christ in the OT. He said something very interesting. “I believe, in part, that the OT is written not only about Jesus, but also *to* Jesus. If what I believe about Covenant Theology is true, Christ’s ‘marching orders’ are laid out in the OT Scriptures. So what was he learning and growing into his understanding of as a boy? What he was to fulfill as the Messiah.” You may remember the short story where Jesus leaves Mary and Joseph and is later found in the temple “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers” (Luke 2:46-47). My friend’s idea is that from a very early age, Christ was seeing Himself *in the Scripture*, reading his Father’s words to him, and coming to see what his Father had in store for him.

★★★ ★★★ ★★★

In preparing for this sermon, I continued reading the *Ancient Church Commentary Series* on Genesis 37. This brilliant series digs deep into the Church Fathers to find

quotes from sermons, lectures, commentaries, and other writings of the Fathers on every chapter of the Bible. Last week a few of their quotes dealt with Christ, but many of them did not. As we continue on in the story this week, a high percentage of them now do. **Why?**

As I do maybe once or twice in a sermon series, I decided to look up a few contemporary sermons on Logos Bible Software's uploadable internet site to see what pastor's today had to say about our text. As there are four main Fathers cited in the Ancient Commentary (Ambrose, Chrysostom, Ephrem, Caesarius of Arles), so I took the first four sermons that came up on sermoncentral.com. The titles were: "But God," "Awaiting the Dream Come True," "When You're Down to Nothing, God is Up to Something," and "Ugly Praise."

These sermons had good things in them such as **God's providence** in making good come out of evil, helping people see **their need to be patient** with God like Joseph had to learn, or **praising God** in the midst of going through suffering and tribulation. But none of them talked directly about Christ. Not one. Some of them mentioned that we are Christians and that we live after Christ came, but in

terms of seeing the text actually being about Christ in one way or another, not a word was mentioned. Again, **why**?

It is obvious that two very different ways of reading the Bible are at play here. On the one hand, with contemporary sermons you have what is basically a **normal way of reading** any piece of writing, be it a newspaper, a constitution, a poem, or epic, or the Bible. Scholars call it the **Historical-Grammatical** method of interpreting something, and it is taught at almost every seminary or Bible school in America. The basic idea is to take the words written on the paper, understand them in their literary, cultural, and historical context, and then apply what is written to your life. Here this well, this method is absolutely vital for any proper understanding of any document, as the whole idea of a “living-Constitution” has so destructively shown us in America, as Supreme Court Judges no longer care what the Framers of the Constitution meant by anything they said. If you will not care about the original context, you will make any text mean whatever you want it to mean. This, of course, destroys the very idea of meaning in the first place.

When you apply this method to the Bible, you will be

able to get the kinds of applications given in the sermon titles mentioned above. But one thing you will not be able to get, especially in a story like this one, is anything having to do with the future life of Jesus Christ. The reason? It just isn't in there on that kind of reading. I challenge anyone to find the name Jesus Christ in our text today. Some may not think this is a problem. In fact, some may think that what I will show you today is actually the problem, thinking that it makes up meaning that isn't actually there. But Jesus seemed to differ. He not only **taught his disciples** that all Scripture points to him (**Luke 24**), but chastised both his disciples and the Pharisees for not seeing this before he told them, and often times even after he did.

You see, there is something that makes **the Bible different** from all other books. That something is that it has two authors. Now, some books have two authors, but only one book has both **a human and a divine author** for every text. Peter says, “**No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (**2Pe 1:21**). Or as Hebrews puts it not that David but, “... **as the Holy Spirit says**, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the**

rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness” (Heb 3:7-8). It says this as it quotes Psalm 95:8. So the Holy Spirit wrote Psalm 95:8.

This fact creates a unique problem for us when we interpret the Bible. When we want to know what the author meant, **which author are we talking about?** Are we to think that the human author had the exact same intent and purpose in writing that the divine author did? Peter seems to say that this is not the case, because he says that the prophets writing the Scriptures carefully inquired of earlier Scriptures and had to investigate and think about what they were doing, even though they were inspired by the Holy Spirit (1Pe 1:10-12).¹ Obviously, the Spirit knew more than they did. This isn't to say that the human author and Divine Author are out of sync or that we are allowed to just make up anything we want and say it is what the

¹ Here is how Tremper Longman III puts it, “When we talk about the intention of the author, what are we saying of the relationship between the divine and human authors? Are we asking after the human author’s intention assuming that it is co-extensive with the divine author’s? 1 Pet 1:10–12 and the interpretation of Old Testament passages in the New Testament led me to say no. However, do we then bypass the human author? No. The fact that the divine Author stands behind all of Scripture (written by an unknown number of human authors) in the final analysis gives us confidence to treat the Bible as an organic unity. It allows us to perform canonical exegesis which is based on the principle of the analogy of Scripture (more later). Tremper Longman III, “What I Mean by Historical-Grammatical Exegesis: Why I Am Not a Literalist,” *Grace Theological Journal* 11 (1990): 141 [137-52].

Divine Author meant. Rather, as Peter says here just like Jesus did, we are to discover how the Divine Author is pointing us to Christ.

This is the recognition with which the Church Fathers come to the text. Now, sometimes they could get carried away in their interpretation. But one thing they all did was see Christ in places that few today would even bother to look. What I want to do this morning is take you through our story and show you how they interpreted it, thereby lifting your eyes above your own problems that may in some small way be like Joseph's, to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to whom Joseph points in this very story.

We will do this in a way that differs from previous stories in Genesis, for Joseph marks a difference in our Christocentric interpretation of this book. For the first time, The Angel of the LORD—who is Christ—does not really talk to Joseph at all. Four times in ch. 39 we will read that “the LORD was with” Joseph (2, 3, 21, 23). But God's being with him is more in terms of divinely guided providence as opposed to direct conversations in physical appearances, dreams, or visions. God is leading Joseph's life

in such a way that it will have a profound impact on the lives of future people. This is why people have taken to see Joseph as *a type of Christ*. The way we see our Lord in most of his life is not by actually seeing Jesus talk to this Patriarch or give a command, but in the providential way that Joseph's life both prepares the way for the coming of the Lord and actually typifies in some very remarkable ways, the actual life of Jesus Christ.

Joseph and His Brothers Near Shechem

We pick up our story after Joseph has had his *two dreams* where he tells everyone in his family that one day, they will bow down to him. This comes, of course, right after his father gives him this *royal coat of marvelous colors* that basically tell his sons exactly what God would tell them through Joseph's dreams. And we remember also that all of this made Joseph's brothers extremely angry, hateful, and jealous.

Now we read, "*Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem*" (*Gen 37:12*). This is a rather odd place to go to work, given that it is 50 miles north of Hebron and happens to be the very place where they had massacred an entire village. Let me put it this way. If you

were **Robert O’Neill**, the white American Navy Seal who had just taken out Osama Bin Laden in the heart of Abbottabad, Pakistan, would you then go back there to start a business in the middle of town? At the very least, these sons of Jacob seem very sure of themselves.

Jacob knew where they had gone and so turns to Joseph—who curiously is not out with them this time, “**Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem?**” (13). Why isn’t Joseph with them? Was Jacob holding Joseph back because he was trying to protect the boy from the wrath of his siblings? We don’t get that impression, for the father says, “**Come, I will send you to them**” (13). Jacob is going to send his beloved son on a mission to the heart of darkness—ground zero of angry Canaanites and the even more, his own furious brothers.

Joseph’s response is **curious**. “**Here I am**” (13). This unusual phrase appears only a few times in English Bibles. **Abraham** responded this way to the Angel of the LORD’s command to sacrifice his son (**Gen 22:1, 11**). **Isaac** responded this way to his father as he was about to die (**22:7**). He responded again this way when he was old and his sons came to him for a blessing (**27:1, 18**). **Jacob** (**Gen**

31:11; 46:2) and Moses (Ex 3:4) both responded to the Angel of the LORD with this phrase. Samuel famously says it four times to Eli, because he was too dull to know it was the Angel speaking to him. Jonathan says it to his father Saul after tasting honey and knowing his is about to die (1 Sam 14:43). Finally, the LORD himself says it twice in Isaiah, “Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am” (Isa 52:6). “Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am'” (Isa 58:9). When? In a day coming in the future. This section concludes by saying that Jacob said, “Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word.’ So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem” (Gen 37:14). The phrase is therefore taken to be the response of someone who is willing to obey God (be it directly or through a human agent).

Now let’s stop and look at how a couple of famous Fathers looked at these first couple of verses. Ambrose of Milan was Augustine’s teacher. He writes, “The Son of God was going to come to earth to be loved by just men

and denied by unbelievers. And so Jacob, in sending his son to his brothers to see if it was well with the sheep, foresaw the mysteries of the incarnation that was to come.” How so? By sending his son to the lost sheep of Israel. What sheep was God searching for in the concern manifested even at that time by the patriarch? The very ones of whom the Lord Jesus himself said in the Gospel, “I did not come except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 15:24).²²

He then uses the name “Shechem,” which means “shoulder” or “back” to say that each father sent his son to those who had turned away, just like Cain did or as the Psalmist says, “You will make them turn their back” (Ps 21:12). And here is the application, “Now the just person does not turn away from the Lord but runs to meet him and says, ‘My eyes are ever toward the Lord’ (Ps 25:15). And when the Lord said, ‘Whom shall I send?’ Isaiah offered himself of his own accord and said, “Behold, here I am’” (Isa 6:8; Ambrose, *On Joseph* 3.9).

Chrysostom, who is very much the Calvin of the old

²² Mt 15:24.

² Mark Sheridan, *Genesis 12-50*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture OT 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 235.

world in terms of his solid sense of Scripture and lack of wanting to allegorize still says, “Now all this happened ... as a type of things to come, the outlines of truth being sketched out ahead of time in shadow. As Joseph went off to his brothers to visit them, to those who had no respect for brotherhood or for the reason of his coming and who first intended to do away with him and then sold him to foreigners, so too our Lord in fidelity to his characteristic love came to visit the human race” (Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 61:10). There was fire in the bellies of these preachers of old, because their hearts burned with an unquenchable thirst to spread the savor of Christ to all the world. They saw him everywhere, even in Joseph being sent to his brothers.

Let's Kill that Dreamer

Our story continues, “And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, ‘What are you seeking?’ ‘I am seeking my brothers,’ he said. ‘Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.’ And the man said, ‘They have gone away, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’ So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan” (Gen 37:15-17). Joseph was wandering,

like a lost sheep himself (Isa 53:6), and perhaps his own iniquity where he was so unkind to his brothers was being laid on his heart as he searched.

He is found by a man. His identity is a mystery; we do not need to know who he is. He tells them that they have gone yet a few more miles north to a little area called Dothan. This is where he will find them. How did he know? Is this common knowledge or perhaps supernatural knowledge that this man possesses (could it even be The Angel)?

In thinking about this section of the story, the Father's again turn our eyes to Christ. Caesarius of Arles writes, "When Joseph was looking for his brothers he wandered in the desert. Christ also sought the human race, which was wandering in the world; he too as it were, wandered in the world because he was seeking the erring" (Sermon 89.1). And Ambrose says, "And it was right that he wandered about, for he was seeking those that were going astray. Yes, 'the Lord knows who are his'" (2 Tim 2:19). And Dothan, he says, means desertion. "No wonder if they deserted who did not hear him saying, 'Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest'"

(**Matt 11:28**).

It is into this desertion idea that he looks at the next section and says, “... and they saw him coming from afar, before he drew near to them, and they raged that they might kill him. It is right that they were far off who were in desertion, and so they were raging, because Christ had not drawn near to them. For if the model of Christ had drawn near to them, they would surely have loved their brother. But they could not be near, for they were plotting fratricide.” The same, of course, became true of the people of Israel, beginning at that moment he said that he was Isaiah’s Servant. They sought to throw him off a cliff (**Luke 4:29**). His life was in constant danger from such men from that moment onward, but he always sovereignly escaped until his time had come.

Our story reads exactly like that. “They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, ‘Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams’” (**18-20**). Do not these last words

remind you, “He cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him” (Matt 27:42). In the plot to kill him, we move very quickly from the early ministry of the Lord to the time of his death. The Pharisees, his own brothers and sons of Israel just as Joseph’s brothers were, plotted to kill him, for they could not take his words of authority over them.

Two Brother’s Intervene

Let’s return to the more **immediate context**. In the next verse we learn that **Reuben** heard about this plot. Let’s stop and think for a moment. It says that Joseph came to his brothers, yet clearly, not all of his brothers were there. This reminds us of how it was only his four half-brothers via the concubines whom he had made so angry in the previous section.

Now **Reuben is the oldest** of all the brothers. He committed a misdeed against his father in trying to steal Bilhah, and thus Jacob’s authority. But now, Reuben has had a change of heart. “He rescued [Joseph] out of their hands” (Gen 37:21). How? By saying, “Let us not take his life.” Of course, it is at this point that the type has to break

down, because **Christ actually dies**. But if **Joseph were to die**, then he would not be raised from the dead, for though he foreshadows Jesus, he is not Jesus. Nevertheless, it is through his singular act of Reuben that the dreams of Joseph end up coming true.

Reuben's act is one of many providential events that God is using to orchestrate the fulfillment of the dreams, ironically, the very thing the brothers were trying to stop from coming true. Think about how they had **connected killing Joseph to keeping his dreams from coming true**. They knew the dreams were from God, but if Joseph was dead, they figured, then God couldn't fulfill those dreams. Of course, they were right. But they were not right in thinking that they could thwart God's plan. And this story is all about God's plan working in the midst of great sin.

Reuben's plan saved Joseph. He appeals to **the law to win the argument**. He said, "**Shed no blood**" (**Gen 37:22**). This is rather ironic, given that this takes place so near to Shechem. But they know it is wrong to murder. But how can he convince them? Their blood-lust must be satiated. "**Throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him.**" (He had said this "**that he might rescue**

him out of their hand to restore him to his father.)” Reuben’s heart seems right, but like Pilate, he hands weren’t pure. He didn’t stand up for Joseph, but rather was going to throw him in the well. Don’t get me wrong, I can understand why. It is many against one. But then again, the same was true with Joseph.

This word “pit” (*bor*) is interesting in light of our Christ-line. It obviously means something like a well here. But in other places, it can stand for Sheol, the place where the dead go. Of Helel ben-Shachar (Lucifer, Nachash) it says, “But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit” (Isa 14:15). The very word used is a symbol of the realm of the dead.

At this point, the brothers commit the deed. They do three things. First, “When Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore” (Gen 37:23). Second, “They took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it” (24). Third, “Then they sat down to eat” (25). What a remarkable statement this third point is. After stripping their brother of his clothes, leaving him physically naked and without any authority, then leaving their brother for

dead at the bottom of a dry well, cold and in the dark, they get hungry, so they go have a sandwich. **Of course they get hungry!** It is hard work torturing your brother and throwing him down a hole in the ground. What else would you do after such a senseless, brutal, faithless, vengeful, rage-filled act than take out your lunch box and drink some Gatorade from your Wonder Woman thermos (I assume these boys didn't have the Incredible Hulk lunch box)? This third point serves to show just how **spiritually dull** the brothers had become. **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34)**. And let us not forget that this happened to them because of their hatred, anger, and jealousy.

Perhaps in eating, they were trying to think of what to do with him next. Should they just leave him there? Wouldn't that be as bad as killing him? Remember, Reuben hadn't told them of his plan to save Joseph himself. Now, he has gone back to work leaving them to themselves. Suddenly, **“looking up [always a sign that something significant is about to happen] they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to**

carry it down to Egypt” (Gen 37:25). Obviously, the family of Ishmael had grown large in the past hundred years. Why would they be going to Egypt? Ishmael himself had ties to Egypt, as Hagar his mother was an Egyptian (Gen 16:3) and she also managed to find him an Egyptian wife (21:21).

They are carrying with them an expensive cargo of imports: gum, balm, and myrrh. Three items, one of which is identical to the three gifts carried by the wise men when they came to visit the Christ-child (“gold and frankincense and myrrh,” Matt 2:11). Upon seeing them, Judah, who was also conscience stricken, who will himself have his own moral failings in the very next chapter, who will nevertheless become the one through whom Christ himself would come, this Judah came up with a plan.

Like Reuben, God will use Judah’s plan to outwit the murderous brothers. He said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh” (27). Judah now sounds a lot like Pilate, “I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves” (Matt 27:24). Little did Judah know,

but God would use to insure that Joseph would become a powerful ruler. This convinced the other brothers (**Gen 37:27**), but why? Mostly, they were outwitted, but not by Judah's cleverness. Rather, it was by their own dullness and by God's wisdom. Remember, they were so angry they tried to kill him. What do you suppose would be the instrument to assuage their wrath? Why, money, of course!

“**Then Midianite traders passed by**” (**28**). It is unclear if these are a sub-group of the Ishmaelites, or simply another name for them. Midian was a son of Keturah and Abraham (**Gen 25:1**), so that would have made him the half-brother of Ishmael. Possibly, like Isaac and Rebekah, these families mixed so that they could be called either name. But the point is, they did pass by, and this was in God's providence, using Judah's plan to save Joseph.

The brothers “**drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt**” (**Gen 37:28**). There are three things here that parallel the life of Christ at different stages, but a couple of other things happen in a moment that I want to have in our minds, before returning to that theme again. So let's continue.

“When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes and returned to his brothers and said, ‘The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?’” (Gen 37:29-30). Why was Reuben gone? Did he just think they would leave Joseph there? Was he a coward and so he just left the scene of the crime? What was going through his mind? We don’t know exactly. We do know by his response that he was terribly upset that the pit was empty and Joseph was no longer there. This, too, has parallels to some degree with Christ, but one more thing happens that we want to consider.

“Then they took Joseph’s robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in blood” (31). What was their plan? They then “sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, ‘This we have found; please identify whether it is your son’s robe or not.’ And he identified it and said, ‘It is my son’s robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to piece’” (32-33). In these things we see great wickedness in the actions of the founding fathers of the nation of Israel. We do not know how many brothers conspired, but we get the feeling that all of them (save probably Benjamin) were part of it.

Some were angry and wanted him dead. They hadn't gone through with killing Joseph, so they deceived their father in order to hide the real reason Joseph would not come home. They had sold their brother for money.

Others wanted to save him, but didn't know how to explain what had happened without getting everyone into trouble (perhaps Reuben was never told that Joseph was even sold). Still others had different reasons for lying to their father. There is a book called the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, a very famous book in the days of the NT, a Jerusalem best-seller if you will. Each of the brothers recounts their own wicked sins, and the stories combine for a serious tale of moral failures and lessons. In one, Gad remembers, “For this reason Judah and I sold him to the Ishmaelites for thirty pieces of gold; we hid ten pieces and showed only the twenty to our brothers. ⁴ Thus it was through greed that our plot to kill him was carried out.” (Test. Gad 2:3-4). For greed they put their father through great horror, horror that would last most of his life. As it says, “Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused

to be comforted and said, ‘No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.’ [In other words, he will never be comforted until the day he dies. His light had been completely extinguished]. Thus his father wept for him” (Gen 37:34-35).

A Greater Joseph

At this point, I want to return to the Greater Story of Jesus Christ. For there is much here that parallels various parts of his life that we have not yet discussed. First and foremost, let us consider that the different levels of wickedness by these brothers—from anger and hate, to plotting to murder, to stripping their brother and leaving him to die in a pit, to selling him to never see him again, to deceiving their father and lying to him in a most heinous way so that without actually saying anything, they made Jacob come to a false conclusion about the death of his son, to never telling him the truth of the matter leaving him to wallow in sorrow and sadness over something that never happened, to the different motives in doing all of this ... all of this is the very reason why the Lord Jesus came to earth in the first place. So even on this most basic level, their sin points to the need for a Savior.

But consider all of the parallels. Though not in the same order of Christ's life, they still remind us of things that will come later in the NT. We have seen the Church Father's making much of Shechem, Dothan, the loved son being sent by his father to the lost sheep of Israel. We have seen the plot to kill, conspiring against him, dreams, and pits all being things that remind us of the coming Christ. We have seen, like Pilate, men try to save the son, but figuratively speaking it was to no avail.

For when they threw the son into the pit, it is as if he had died that day. They also **stripped him of a robe** and then dipped it in blood, turning it **red**. It reminds us in shadowy but powerful ways of what happened to Christ. **"They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him ... (Matt 27:28) when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him"** (Matt 27:31). They sold him for Twenty shekels of silver, reminding us of Judas, who sold his brother and friend for thirty pieces (Matt 27:3). It is curious, how a story written by Jews would actually say thirty, but that ten was hidden away, isn't it? Perhaps a Christian copying that book understood something of the

parallels we are giving here? Or, perhaps, it is as two of the Church father's put it, "Although Joseph appears to have been sold at a higher price than Christ, the One who ransomed us through his passion is in fact invaluable (Chromatius, Caesarius of Arles)."³

This, of course, happened only after Joseph was drawn up out of the pit. This is Joseph's figurative resurrection. It says, rather ironically, since this is what happened to Jesus at the very beginning of his life, they took Joseph to Egypt. Here is how Matthew puts it, "An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt'" (Matt 2:13). A different Joseph and a Greater Joseph go down to the same old same Egypt. All to save Jesus' life, so that later he might save his people, as the first Joseph did.

The last verse of the story leaves us with the same thought. "Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard" (Gen 37:36). The hope of the story is that Joseph is alive. The hope of the Greater Story is that Jesus Christ is

³ Mark Sheridan, *Genesis 12-50*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture OT 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 238.

alive as well. One figuratively died. The other literally died. One was figuratively raised from the dead. The other literally rose from the dead. When he died, some were worried that his body was no longer in the grave. Had someone stolen it? Why was it gone? Others, however, believed that it was as he had said, he would rise from the dead. This is the Gospel and this is our hope. All of it was foreshadowed 1,800 years or so earlier in the life of this boy named Joseph.

What amazing me about this story is that there are at 20 or so parallels to the Lord Jesus in this ancient type of Joseph (see chart below). There are certain stories in the Bible that find similar levels of parallels to things in the NT, stories such as Daniel in the Lion's Den and Jesus' death and resurrection, or the Tower of Babel and Acts 2, but this one has parallels that go from the very earliest moments of Jesus' life as a man, to after his resurrection 33 years later. Truly, Joseph is a great type of Christ. His life points casts a long shadow much longer than itself, beyond any applications you might want to make in parallels between your life and his, to someone greater than you or I or Joseph.

Surely, there are too many parallels for this to be coincidence. And what Christian believes in those anyway? No, God is the Author behind the human authors. He wrote this story to Jesus, who must have taken it personally to heart. What might he have thought when he first came to that conscious recognition that all of Scripture was about him, and then heard this story for the first time? But God has also written it to us, so that we might see the Savior in spite of our own sins—like those of Joseph’s brothers, for you and I are more like the twelve brothers in their sin (including Joseph), than we are like Christ. That is why the Lord came.

Be convicted of your sins today. Know that they are, like those in the story here, a great offense to God. And if you are convicted of them, repent of them, and be encouraged that you have a God who is greater than your sins and has shown you how great he is even back in Genesis, through type and prophecy that is Joseph’s life as it became fulfilled in Jesus Christ who can bring you safely into the presence of God. Praise him in his church today.

Parallels of Joseph and Jesus (Gen 37:12-36)

Joseph	Jesus
Sent to his brothers (the sons of Israel)	Sent to the people of Israel (Matt 15:24)
Here I am	(Isaiah's servant): Here I am (Isa 52:6)
Shechem (turn back)	Sent to turn the people back to God (Ps 21:12; 25:15).
Joseph wandering	Jesus: No place to lay his head (Matt 8:20)
Dothan ("desertion")	"Come to me ... I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28).
Brothers rage to kill Joseph	Pharisees rage to kill Christ (Starting in Luke 4:29)
Angry at his authority: We will see what becomes of his dreams	(mocking the king): Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him (Matt 27:42).
Reuben and Judah, their hands are clean?	Pilate: My hands are clean? (Matt 27:24)
Strip him of his robe	Jesus stripped of his robe (Matt 27:31)
Threw him into the pit (a word for Sheol, the realm of the dead)	Jesus died.
Sat down to eat = spiritually dull	"forgive them, they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34)
Caravan bearing three items: gum, balm, and myrrh	Wise men bearing three gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matt 2:11)
Reuben and Judah outwit the brothers	God outwits the world in the death of Christ (1 Cor 2:8).
Joseph sold for money	Jesus sold for money (Matt 27:3)
The boy is gone, and where shall I go?	Vexed that the body of Jesus is gone (Luke 24:3, 11; John 20:9).
Dipped the robe in red blood	Scarlet robe (Matt 27:28)
The great evil of the brothers	Jesus came to save sinners (Matt 9:11-12)
Drawn up out of the pit	Raised from the dead (John 21:14)
Joseph Goes down to Egypt	Joseph takes Jesus down to Egypt (Matt 2:14)

