

Joseph(5) May 19, 2022

The Account of Joseph Retold by Stephen

Much later, after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, the twelve disciples (apostles) chose seven men from among the congregation of the disciples (followers) of Jesus Christ to help them with the logistics of their ministry. One in particular, Stephen, performed miracles among the people and spoke with wisdom through the working of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:1-10). He was falsely accused by some fellow Jews, possibly false brethren (nonbelievers who professed to be disciples), of speaking against the Law of Moses and against God.

Through false witnesses, he was brought before the Jewish Council¹ in Jerusalem. Instead of responding to the false charges against him, Stephen, as guided by the Holy Spirit, provided a concise history of Israel beginning with Abraham (Acts 6:13 – 7:50). This history would have been well known by his audience, so they knew he was speaking the truth. Stephen's discourse included the history of Joseph covered in Genesis 37 – 50, and is recorded in Acts 7:9-16. I believe that this signifies the importance of Joseph in God's eternal plan regarding Israel.

Stephen closed his historical discourse by correctly and rightfully accusing the spiritual leaders of Israel of murdering the Righteous One (Just One)—Jesus, the Messiah of Israel—just as the spiritual leaders before them killed the prophets of God (Acts 7:51-53). This statement incensed the Council. Stephen then proclaimed that he could actually see the glorified Jesus standing at the right hand of God in heaven. The Council's response was to stone Stephen to death for they believed he was blaspheming God when, in reality, he was speaking the truth under the influence of the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:54-60).²

Joseph as a Type of Christ

We have seen that Christ's birth, infancy, ministry, death, resurrection, and future roles as King and Judge were prophesied in the Old and New Testaments, often in veiled language. Additionally, certain individuals in the Old Testament are considered to be types of Christ. That is, aspects of their lives foreshadowed or represented characteristics or actions of Christ. I believe that Joseph was a type of Christ. Please consider the following comparisons that come to mind:

- Joseph's brothers planned to kill him, but ended up selling Joseph so that he became a slave in Egypt; therefore, his relocation to Egypt saved his life. This was in accordance with God's plan, as Joseph realized and later explained to his brothers. Remember that the infant Jesus would have been killed on the orders of Herod, King of Judea, had an angel of the Lord not told Joseph to take Him to Egypt where He would be safe until Herod died (Matthew 2:13-15).

¹ The Jewish Council was the religious court of Israel. It was led by the High Priest (or high priests) and appointed elders that apparently included Scribes and perhaps Pharisees during the time of the ministry of Christ and His disciples (Numbers 11:16-17; Matthew 2:4; 23:13; 26:57-68; Mark 8:31). They were the spiritual leaders of Israel.

² A Pharisee named Saul, who may have been a member of the Council or at least an observer of Stephen's trial, was in full agreement with the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1-3). Not long afterward, Christ revealed Himself to Saul, saving him and appointing him as the apostle of the Gentiles (Acts 9:1-16; Romans 11:13; Galatians 1:1, 11-17). Saul would become known as the Apostle Paul (Acts 13:9).

- Joseph was hated by his own brothers. They were jealous because their father favored him; they hated Joseph enough that they schemed to kill him. It was prophesied that Jesus would be estranged from His brothers—His brothers in the flesh as well as some of His followers and the people of Israel in general (Psalm 69:8; John 6:59-67; 7:1-5). Indeed, Jesus was hated by His own people. So much so that they demanded his crucifixion and gladly accepted responsibility for His death, preferring the release of a known criminal (Matthew 27:11-26; Acts 3:13-15).
- Joseph's brothers did not recognize him when they saw and spoke with him. Joseph had to reveal his identity to them. Jesus came to His own—the people of Israel (God's chosen nation)—but they did not recognize Him for who He was (John 1:1-5, 9-11). They could not believe that He was their promised Messiah and the Son of God. Whereas Joseph's brothers believed him when he revealed himself to them, the people of Israel, as a whole, did not realize who Jesus was despite what He said and the miracles that He performed among them (Acts 2:22-23). As with Joseph, however, the disciples and others who followed Him did believe Jesus for who He was (Matthew 16:13-17; John 6:66-69).
- Joseph resisted temptation, proclaiming it would be a sin against God if he were to commit adultery with Potiphar's wife. Christ was tempted by Satan with incentives to worship him, and responded by quoting Scripture regarding our command to worship and serve only God (Matthew 4:1-11).
- Joseph forgave his brothers despite the evil they committed against him. Joseph understood that everything that had happened was according to the will of God. Just before He died, Christ asked His Father to forgive the people of Israel despite their rejection of Him and their evil action against Him (Luke 23:33-34). The crucifixion of Christ by His own people through the Roman (Gentile) government was according to God's will (Acts 2:22-23; 4:24-28). God's eternal plan associated with Christ's death and resurrection would soon be revealed through the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 1:18-23; 3:1-12).
- Joseph's family was blessed through his work. They prospered and multiplied greatly in Egypt during Joseph's lifetime. Israel, although temporarily set aside (blinded) during this dispensation of grace, will be blessed through the work that Christ accomplished on the cross (Romans 11:25-29). Sometime after the rapture the people of Israel will repent for killing their Messiah and God will forgive them. They will be saved and will be blessed when their promised kingdom with Christ as King is established for them (Ezekiel 36:22-38; 37:24-28; Acts 3:19-26).

By the grace of God, Joseph realized that being sold as a slave and becoming a ruler of Egypt was according to God's will. He could not have known, however, that many aspects of his own life would be representative of Christ—the Messiah of Israel—in the distant future. God works in amazing ways!

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! (Romans 11:33)