

ALLUSIONS TO THE JOSEPH NARRATIVE IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS AND ACTS: FOUNDATIONS OF A BIBLICAL TYPE

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the exegetical tradition of the church, the typological character of the Joseph narrative is historically firmly established. During the patristic period, expositors of Scripture drew out the more obvious parallels, and sometimes less obvious ones, between the life of Joseph and that of Jesus. John Chrysostom, for example, in his homilies on Genesis described Joseph's sufferings at the hands of his brothers as "a type of things to come, the outlines of truth being sketched out ahead of time in shadow."¹ Chrysostom, it should be noted, was schooled at Antioch, the centre of the more literal approach to biblical exegesis in comparison with Alexandria.² While this former school was noted for its attention to matters of grammar and history, its exponents nonetheless practised a moderate form of typology.³

It was the Alexandrian school, associated especially with the figure of Origen, that frequently tended to take typology too far. With respect to Joseph, not just the major events of his life, but even some of the minor details were treated typologically. Thus for Caesarius of Arles, the multi-colored coat given Joseph by his father represented the church composed of those from diverse nations.⁴ In Joseph's first dream, Ambrose of Milan interpreted the sheaf that stood upright, to which the other sheaves bowed down, as indicative of the resurrection of Christ.⁵ This more extreme form of typology often passed over into allegory. Typology and allegory, though seemingly similar to many in the modern age, were in fact

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¹ St. John Chrysostom (translated by Robert C. Hill), *Homilies on Genesis*, 46–67 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992) 191.

² Cf. Robert C. Hill, *Reading the Old Testament in Antioch* (Leiden: Brill, 2005) 139–50. The founder of the Antiochene school, Diodore of Tarsus, wrote concerning the Alexandrians that "[w]e demand them to know that we prefer much more the historical comprehension of the text than the allegorical" (see D. Z. Zaharopoulos, *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible: A Study of his Old Testament Exegesis* [New York: Paulist, 1989] 12).

³ Both the school of Antioch and that of Alexandria used allegory and both employed typology. The distinction in this area was perhaps one of degree. For a recent assessment of the distinction between these schools, see Donald Fairbairn, "Patristic Exegesis and Theology: The Cart and the Horse," *WTJ* 69 (2007) 1–19.

⁴ Mark Sheridan, ed., *Genesis 11–50* (ACCS; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002) 231.

⁵ *Ibid.* 233.

quite distinct exegetical categories.⁶ Allegory viewed the words of the text to be like shells containing hidden meanings, which once perceived, the literal meaning could to all intents and purposes be discarded. In the strict practice of typology, however, the literal sense was still meaningful and primary. Yet as the patristic age progressed, the allegorical method became more prevalent and came to dominate the church's exegesis for over a thousand years.

It was the sixteenth-century Reformation which brought about a reversion to grammatico-historical exegesis⁷ and with it a more measured use of typology. A good representative of this movement is John Calvin, whose biblical commentaries are exemplary in their literal approach to exegesis, which is at the same time accompanied by restrained typology.⁸ With respect to the OT character of Joseph, Calvin wrote in his commentary on Gen 37:6, "in the person of Joseph, a lively image of Christ is presented." On 37:18, he reiterated the same basic idea, "in Joseph was adumbrated, what was afterwards more fully exhibited in Christ."⁹ Similar typological interpretations may be found throughout the works of the early Reformers.

Yet, as in the patristic period, so in the century following the Reformation, biblical typology again began to be carried to extremes. Two notable names in this regard are firstly that of the Dutch theologian Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), of whom it was said that, with respect to the OT, he found Christ everywhere.¹⁰ The other is Benjamin Keach (1640–1704), an early English Baptist minister and scholar, who published a work entitled *Preaching from the Types and Metaphors of the Bible*. Concerning this latter volume Charles Spurgeon commented: "It is a capital book, though too often the figures not only run on all-fours but on as many legs

⁶ Cf. the discussion in Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995) 101–5.

⁷ See Robert M. Grant and David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 91–92, where it states that "the reformers insisted on an historical, literal, grammatical understanding of the Bible."

⁸ There has been a tendency among many of Calvin's admirers to hail him as the father of modern grammatico-historical exegesis (cf. Raymond A. Blacketer, "The School of God: Pedagogy and Rhetoric in Calvin's Interpretation of Deuteronomy," *Studies in Early Modern Religious Reforms* 3 [2006] 3–4). This discerned stress upon the historical method, however, did not at all negate his use of typology. See the detailed study by David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) 113–24. Puckett tells us that Calvin made a firm distinction between allegory and typology, and though he had strong reservations concerning the former, Calvin in fact "made extensive use of typological interpretation" (pp. 113–14).

⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis, vol. 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 261, 266.

¹⁰ Milton S. Terry wrote of Cocceius: "He maintained that Christ is the great subject of divine revelation in the Old Testament as well as in the New, and hence arose the saying that Cocceius found Christ everywhere" (*Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003] 692).

as a centipede.”¹¹ The extreme form of typologizing found in the works of Cocceius and Keach was very popular throughout the following century and beyond.

It was in response to such excess that Bishop Herbert Marsh (1757–1839), Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, issued his famous dictum on typology:

There is no other rule by which we can distinguish a real from a pretended type, than that of Scripture itself. There are no other possible means by which we can know that a previous design and a pre-ordained connection existed. Whatever persons or things, therefore, recorded in the Old Testament, were expressly declared by Christ or by His apostles to have been designed as prefigurations of persons or things relating to the New Testament, such persons or things so recorded in the former, are types of the persons or things with which they are compared in the latter. But if we assert that a person or thing was designed to prefigure another person or things, where no such prefiguration has been declared by divine authority, we make an assertion for which we neither have, nor can have, the slightest foundation.¹²

According to this strict definition, the legitimacy of typological interpretation of the Joseph narrative was questioned. With respect to this OT character, there did not seem to be the scriptural warrant that the Bishop had claimed was necessary to establish the presence of a type.¹³

A measure of doubt about the justification for interpreting the Joseph narrative in a typological manner has remained, it would appear, until the present time. Looking at recent commentaries on Genesis and on Stephen’s speech in Acts, where Joseph is prominent, there is little in the way of typological reflection. Some do venture to note the general analogy between certain experiences of Joseph and Jesus, but this is done briefly and the line of thought is not developed in any detail. Bruce Waltke, for example, proposes that “the movement from exaltation to humiliation to exaltation foreshadows the career of the Son of God.”¹⁴ The matter is not expounded in any depth. Some note the traditional view without

¹¹ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890) 61.

¹² Herbert Marsh, *Lectures on the Criticism and the Interpretation of the Bible* (London: Rivington, 1828) 373; cf. Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 219.

¹³ Cf. Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture, vol. 1* (Philadelphia: Smith & English, 1854) 42.

¹⁴ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001) 523; cf. Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (WBC; Nashville: Nelson, 1994) 360. One of the few modern scholarly exponents of Joseph typology is Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 344, 385, 400. Greidanus is quite emphatic in stating “The life of Joseph foreshadows the life of Jesus Christ” (p. 385), and “Joseph ... is a type of Jesus Christ” (p. 400).

comment.¹⁵ For the most part, there is either silence or ambivalence on this particular issue. I. Howard Marshall, in commenting on Joseph in Acts 7, expresses the view that “Whether this is a typological allusion to the way in which God delivered Jesus from his afflictions ... is not clear.”¹⁶

It is the primary purpose of this paper to present biblical grounds for the typological interpretation of the experiences of Joseph. While Joseph is not expressly termed a type or a prefigurement by any NT writer, nor is any part of the text of Genesis concerning Joseph explicitly expounded in a typological fashion in the NT, evidence can nonetheless be adduced which points to the fact that both Jesus and certain of the NT authors viewed the Joseph story typologically, foreshadowing the experiences of Jesus himself. This evidence lies primarily in the concentrated use of verbal allusion. For the remainder of this paper, we will consider verbal correspondences between the Joseph narratives and the writings of Luke-Acts, and also one particular parable, that of the tenants, which is found in all three Synoptic Gospels.¹⁷ These allusions will chiefly be cited with reference to the Greek text of the OT.

The argument built upon such allusions, it should be stressed at the outset, is cumulative. If just one or two such allusions were to be found, they could readily be dismissed as coincidental. Yet the argument rests upon several strands of evidence: first, there is the number of allusions, not merely a handful but a whole series; second, there is the close verbal affinity between many of these texts and those from the OT; third, many of the contextual, thematic, and verbal details discussed are unique to the passages in question; and finally, the texts adduced as allusions all appear within a narrow and definable range of material, particularly in Luke-Acts, the work of a single author. These factors, taken together, point not to random and coincidental usage, but rather to purposeful design.

¹⁵ E.g. K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005) 670.

¹⁶ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1983) 137. By way of comparison, F. F. Bruce (*The Book of Acts* [NICNT; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988]) passes over the possibility of typology in Stephen’s speech with no comment at all. David Peterson, on the other hand, understands Acts 7 to present both Joseph and Moses as “types of Christ” (*The Acts of the Apostles* [PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009] 246). A wide variety of opinion can therefore be seen on this issue in the modern exegetical tradition.

¹⁷ Not all the NT allusions to Joseph listed in the following pages are being noted for the first time. Several are observed by James M. Hamilton, in “Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah? Tracing the Typological Identification between Joseph, David, and Jesus,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12/4 (2008) 52–77.

II. ALLUSIONS IN LUKE-ACTS

This first cluster of correspondences from Luke-Acts are those in which Luke¹⁸ actually alludes to the relevant passage(s) from Genesis with respect to the person of Joseph, while elsewhere alludes to the self-same passage(s) with regard to the person of Jesus.

The LORD was with Joseph (ἦν κύριος μετὰ Ἰωσηφ) (Gen 39:2)

His master saw that the LORD was with him [κύριος μετ' αὐτοῦ] (Gen 39:3)

But the LORD was with Joseph [ἦν κύριος μετὰ Ἰωσηφ] (Gen 39:21)

because the LORD was with him [τὸν κύριον μετ' αὐτοῦ εἶναι] (Gen 39:23)

But God was with him [ἦν ὁ θεὸς μετ' αὐτοῦ] (Acts 7:9)

For God was with him [ὁ θεὸς ἦν μετ' αὐτοῦ] (Acts 10:38)

It is stated repeatedly that the Lord was with Joseph in his various experiences. Luke, representing the divine appellation as ὁ θεὸς (“God”), notes this fact in his record of Stephen’s speech, then later speaks of the same divine presence with respect to Jesus. This increases in significance when the infrequency is noted with which the idea that “God/the Lord was with” an individual occurs in the NT. These are the only such references in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts.¹⁹

Joseph found favor [χάριτι] before [ἐναντίον] him (Gen 39:4)

he gave him favor [ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ χάριτι] before [ἐναντίον] the chief jailer (Gen 39:21)

a man who is discerning and wise [כַּחֵן] (Gen 41:33)

there is no one so discerning and wise [כַּחֵן] as you (Gen 41:39)

He gave him favor [ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ χάριτι] and wisdom [σοφίαν] before [ἐναντίον] Pharaoh (Acts 7:10)

The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom [σοφία]; and the favor [χάρις] of God was upon him (Luke 2:40)

And Jesus increased in wisdom [σοφία] and stature, and in favor [χάριτι] with God and men (Luke 2:52)

Here Luke takes up two of the chief elements attributed to Joseph, that of the favor that he was granted before others and his wisdom. While these two appear in separate texts in the narrative of Genesis, Luke brings them both together in Acts 7:10. The same author also uniquely applies this pair to Jesus in Luke 2, not just once but twice.

¹⁸ In this article, the Lukan authorship of the third Gospel and Acts is assumed. When statements from these books are here attributed to Luke, this is not to deny that he may have been reliably recording the utterances of others.

¹⁹ Elsewhere in these books, we do find distinct divine attributes present with men, such as “the hand of the Lord was with ...” (Luke 1:66; Acts 11:21). The only other clear expression of God being with someone, apart from the platitude of John 3:2, is John 8:29, “the one who sent me is with me.”

He appointed him [κατέστησεν αὐτὸν] over all the land of Egypt (Gen 41:43)

He has made [ἐποίησέν] me a father to Pharaoh and lord [κύριον] of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt (Gen 45:8)

God has made [ἐποίησέν] me lord [κύριον] of all Egypt (Gen 45:9)

He appointed him [κατέστησεν αὐτὸν] ruler over Egypt and all his household (Acts 7:10)

God has made [ἐποίησέν] him both Lord [κύριον] and Christ (Acts 2:36)

A significant event in the Joseph narrative is his exaltation from prison to become “lord” of all the land of Egypt. This is another detail concerning Joseph referred to in Stephen’s speech. The same verbal phrase ἐποίησέν ... κύριον (“made ... Lord”) is also used by Luke with reference to the exaltation of Christ (Acts 2:36). These are the only texts in both Testaments where precisely this phrase is found.²⁰

Since the foregoing instances are phrases recorded in Luke-Acts solely with respect to Jesus and the OT character of Joseph, this is sufficient to establish that the author did indeed draw parallels between the two. Throughout his writings, Luke includes several more direct allusions, where no application to Joseph is made, between the Genesis narrative and Jesus:

but his father kept [διετήρησεν] the matter [ῥῆμα] in mind (Gen 37:11)

but his mother kept [διετήρει] all these matters [ῥήματα] in her heart (Luke 2:51)

Contextually, these two are related in that both concern a parent’s response to unusual manifestations of divine interest in the life of a young son. Verbally, this particular collocation is only stated with reference to the father of Joseph and the mother of Jesus in the whole of biblical literature.

His brothers ... hated him [ἐμίσησαν αὐτὸν] ... “Shall you indeed reign over us [βασιλεύσεις ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς]?” (Gen 37:4, 8)

But his people hated him [ἐμίσουν αὐτὸν] ... “We do not want this man to reign over us [βασιλεῦσαι ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς]” (Luke 19:14)

These words in the Gospel appear at the beginning of the parable of the ten minas (Luke 19:11–27). The opening part of this parable in which the relevant words appear is unique to Luke. It speaks of a person who is to be appointed as ruler, whose people hate him and do not wish to have him reign over them. Such was true regarding Joseph when he told his brothers of his dreams that he would one day rule over them. Again, it should be noted, nowhere else in Scripture are these ideas, that is, of hatred and rejected rulership, explicitly brought together in this manner.

²⁰ One other text in Genesis is verbally close, but is speaking of a relationship between two individuals (Gen 27:37: “I have made you his master”).

But remember me [μνήσθητί μου] when [ᾠταν] it is well with you ...
and make mention [μνησθήσῃ] of me to Pharaoh (Gen 40:14)

Jesus, remember me [μνήσθητί μου] when [ᾠταν] you come into your
kingdom (Luke 23:42)

This instance is of particular interest in that though there is a parallel in words, there is a reversal in roles. Contextually, the two passages exhibit an obvious connection. In each, there is an innocent principal actor who is condemned together with two others. These are the only two such scenarios in the entire biblical corpus. Each account includes how the main character foretells the deliverance of one of the other two, the cupbearer and the repentant thief. The corresponding words in both texts form part of an exchange between the one to be delivered and the one who foretells this. Yet at this point the Lukan account reverses the use of the words making the allusion. Whereas in Genesis it is Joseph who requests the cupbearer to remember him, in the Gospel it is the thief who makes the identical request of Jesus. Moreover, while the cupbearer, we are expressly told, “did not remember” (Gen 40:23), Jesus evidently will and promises the man so there and then (Luke 23:43). Contrasting allusion of this kind is not uncommon elsewhere in biblical literature.²¹

The Lukan resurrection narrative, in particular, contains a series of echoes corresponding to the Genesis passages telling Joseph’s reunion with his brothers. Besides the verbal parallels which follow, there is a conceptual correspondence in that Joseph was thought to have been dead (Gen 42:13, 32, 36, 38; 44:20).

but they did not recognize him [οὐκ ἐπέγνωσαν αὐτόν] (Gen 42:8)

but their eyes were kept from recognising him [μὴ ἐπιγνῶναι αὐτόν]
(Luke 24:16)

When he made himself known [ἀνεγνωρίζετο] to his brothers (Gen 45:1)

He was made known [ἐγνώσθη] to them (Luke 24:35)

“Peace be to you [לוםִשׁ לָכֶם], fear not [μὴ φοβεῖσθε]” (Gen 43:23)

He greeted them [ישׂאל להם לוםִשׁ], lit. “asked peace to them” (Gen 43:27)

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and frightened [ἔμφοβοι]. (Luke 24:36–37)

²¹ In his study of literary techniques in biblical narrative, Fokkelman informs us that correspondences between one text and another may be based upon: (a) similarity; (b) contrast; or (c) a mixture of both (J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999] 121). As an illustration, we may take Christ’s temptation in the wilderness. Scholars have noted echoes here of both the Edenic temptation and the testing of Israel in the wilderness. In both instances those tempted fell into sin, whereas Jesus did not. Allusion is made to a similar situation, and a similar event, but with the opposite outcome. Cf. Kenneth Duncan Litvak, *Echoes of Scripture in Luke-Acts: Telling the History of God’s People Intertextually* (London: T & T Clark, 2005) 113.

they were troubled [ἐταράχθησαν] at his presence (Gen 45:3)

He said to them, “Why are you troubled [τεταραγμένοι] ...?” (Luke 24:38)

“I am [ἐγώ εἰμι] Joseph” (Gen 45:3, 4)

“It is I [ἐγώ εἰμι] myself” (Luke 24:39)

Most of the details here are particular to the Lukan resurrection narrative. Besides this sequence, also present in both texts are the reports of those saying that Joseph/Jesus was alive, and the initial response of unbelief.

They told him, saying [λέγοντες], “Joseph is still alive [ζῆ] ...” (Gen 45:26)

they told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive [οἱ λέγουσιν αὐτὸν ζῆν] (Luke 24:23)

he did not believe them [οὐ γὰρ ἐπίστευσεν αὐτοῖς] (Gen 45:26)

they did not believe them [ἠπίσταν αὐταῖς] (Luke 24:11)

But while they still did not believe [ἀπιστούντων αὐτῶν] for joy ... (Luke 24:41)

This reference to not believing, it is observed, is included neither in Matthew’s resurrection account nor in the shorter ending of Mark, and occurs only once in John concerning the later appearance to Thomas (John 20:25).

Other possible points of contact between Genesis and Luke 24 may be mentioned, though more tentatively. The brothers’ first visit to Egypt is reported back to their father in Canaan with the words “they told him all [ἀπήγγειλαν αὐτῷ πάντα] that had happened to them” (Gen 42:29), resembling the report of the women who had visited the tomb before the explicit resurrection narrative—“they told all these things [ἀπήγγειλαν ταῦτα πάντα] to the eleven and to all the rest” (Luke 24:9). The verb “amazed” (Gen 45:26, ἐξέστη; Luke 24:22, ἐξέστησαν) is employed in response to the report in both accounts, this being its only occurrence in the gospel resurrection narratives. Following the reunion with the brothers, prominence is given by Joseph to “my father” (Gen 45:3, 9, 13). The brothers are to “ascend to my father” (45:9; ἀνάβητε πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου), bearing gifts that Joseph provided (v. 23). Following the resurrection reference is made to “my father” (Luke 24:49), to whom Jesus will ascend and from whom gifts will be sent. In Genesis Joseph tells his brothers to report to his father “my glory” in Egypt (45:13; τὴν δόξαν μου), while in Luke Jesus speaks of entering “his glory” (24:26; τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ), the sole Gospel use of this word in the post-resurrection accounts.

Those more definite verbal allusions to Genesis mentioned above are all distinctively Lukan. Since they originate with one author it is reasonable to suppose that they are deliberate and meaningful. To create so many allusions simply at the level of words without an accompanying relationship of thought would be pointless. It is reasonable to suppose therefore that Luke perceived a connection between the life and

experiences of Joseph and those of Jesus. It surely does not require any strain of thought to identify that connection. Both Joseph and Jesus were favored by God early in life, and given special divine gifts and wisdom, both experienced a period of humiliation and are thought to have died, yet despite this each was exalted by God to become a great lord. What was found in Luke is now confirmed elsewhere.

III. ALLUSIONS IN THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS

We next consider another set of allusions which point to the fact that the Joseph-Jesus interrelation was not a Lukan innovation but was present beforehand in the teaching of Jesus himself. One particular parable manifests a series of intertextual echoes with Genesis 37, the beginning of the Joseph narrative. This is the parable of the tenants, found in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matt 21:33–46; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19):

Come, I will send [ἀποστείλω] you to them [πρὸς αὐτούς] (Gen 37:13)

Finally he sent [ἀπέστειλεν] to them [πρὸς αὐτούς] his son (Matt 21:37; cf. Mark 12:6; Luke 20:13)

Now Israel loved [ἠγάπα] Joseph more than any of his other sons (Gen 37:3)

beloved [ἀγαπητόν] son (Mark 12:6; Luke 20:13)

Seeing [προεἶδον] him from afar ... they said [εἶπαν] each one to his brother (Gen 37:18–19)

The tenants, seeing [ιδόντες] the son, said [εἶπον] among themselves (Matt 21:38; cf. Luke 20:14)

Come, let us kill him [δεῦτε ἀποκτείνωμεν αὐτὸν] (Gen 37:20)

Come, let us kill him [δεῦτε ἀποκτείνωμεν αὐτὸν] (Matt 21:38)

Come, let us kill him [δεῦτε ἀποκτείνωμεν αὐτὸν] (Mark 12:7)

(Come), let us kill him [(δεῦτε) ἀποκτείνωμεν αὐτὸν] (Luke 20:14)²²

And taking him [καὶ λαβόντες αὐτὸν], they threw him into the pit (Gen 37:24)

And taking him [καὶ λαβόντες αὐτὸν], they cast him out of the vineyard ... (Matt 21:39; cf. Mark 12:8)

Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill [ἀποκτείνωμεν] 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.” And his brothers listened to him. (Gen 37:26–27)

... and they killed [ἀπέκτειναν] him (Matt 21:39; cf. Mark 12:9; Luke 20:15)

²² In Luke’s version, the imperative δεῦτε (“Come?”) is a variant reading for which the textual evidence is divided. It is absent from Codices B and A. It is present, however, in Codex S and the majority text tradition.

As with many of the Lukan examples, it is important to appreciate that certain of these word clusters are unique to the two biblical texts in question. Only in these two situations do we read of a father sending a son who is loved to those who will reject him. It should be noted that in both Genesis 37:13 and Matthew 21:37 the grammatical subject is the father, the verb is “send,” the object is the son, and the identical prepositional phrase concerns those hostile ones to whom the son is sent. At this point, the correspondence is extremely close. Also, it is only in these two contexts in all of Scripture that the grouping “Come, let us kill him” occurs. These facts, together with the other verbal echoes, make the purposeful nature of the allusion quite certain.

It is here in the parable that the significance of the Joseph allusions is clearest. There is no doubt that its interpretation relates to the sending of Jesus to the Jewish people, and their subsequent rejection of him and its consequences.²³ This general theme, as well as several of the precise details, parallels the experiences of Joseph who was sent to his own brothers. In both cases, the one who was sent should have been accepted as a kinsman (cf. John 1:11). But the envy of those to whom he was sent resulted in their mistreating him. Yet there is one crucial difference to be observed in the final two citations above. In the case of Joseph, though his brothers initially expressed their intention of killing him, once he falls within their grasp they relent. Giving consideration to the fact that “he is our brother, our own flesh,” they decide to sell him into slavery rather than take his life. At this point the parable diverges. Having stated, in the same words as Genesis, their intention to kill the son, the tenants of the vineyard, then proceed to do precisely that. Here is another instance of contrastive allusion, in this case with considerable significance. Implicit is the fact that like the brothers of Joseph, the Jews of Jesus’ day should have relented in their desire to kill him. More than this, the fact that they went ahead and brought about his actual death shows that their envy and hatred exceeded that of their predecessors towards Joseph. Once they had him in their clutches, the sons of Jacob could not bring themselves to kill their own brother.²⁴ The later sons of Israel, however, had no qualms about handing over Jesus to be crucified. Their hardheartedness against one of their own went much deeper. The more discerning amongst those hearing this parable would not have missed the point. In fact, upon realising that Jesus had spoken this parable against them, the Jewish leaders are even more resolved to do away with him (Matt 21:46; cf. 26:4). In the light of the Joseph narrative, then, the parable shows the deeds of

²³ Cf. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 813–14; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 704.

²⁴ Mathews (*Genesis 11:27–50:26* 699) comments that “Judah argues that kinship ... prevents them from murdering [their] brother’ (v. 27).”

the current generation of Israel to be more wicked than those of their forefathers.

IV. ALLUSIONS IN THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS (LUKE 15:11–32)

Lastly, we consider the so-called parable of the prodigal son, which in actual fact relates to two sons.²⁵ This parable contains quite a number of identifiable allusions to the Joseph cycle. Yet here the purpose in echoing Genesis differs from the texts discussed above. All previous NT contexts which have referred allusively to the events concerning Joseph have done so with a view to them as in some way adumbrating the experiences of Jesus. But now in the person of the prodigal son, together with his elder brother, we see a different application, not to Jesus but to those who believe in him. The several allusions in the parable have been largely overlooked by commentators. This may be due to that fact that in many instances the allusions operate contrastively.

The parable concerns “two sons” (v. 11). The Joseph narrative opens with two chapters (Genesis 37–38) about two sons of Jacob, Joseph and Judah respectively. In the parable one of the sons, the younger, departs for a distant land (v. 13), where he lives immorally. In Genesis, Joseph, the younger son, is taken to the land of Egypt; however, it is Judah, the son who remains in Canaan, who lives immorally. Genesis 38 describes how Judah initially intermarries with the Canaanites (v. 2), and later, upon the death of his wife, sleeps with a local prostitute (vv. 15–19), who turns out to be his own daughter-in-law (v. 25). Joseph, on the other hand, though frequently tempted to commit sexual sin, refused to do so (Gen 39:7–10). Ironically, Joseph, though innocent, ends up being punished, while Judah, though guilty, is not. Then both narratives include a famine:

because the famine [τοῦ λιμοῦ] that follows will be very severe [ἰσχυρὸς] (Gen 41:31)

There was a famine [ἐγένετο λιμὸς] in all the earth (Gen 41:54)

Now the famine was severe [ὁ δὲ λιμὸς ἐνίσχυσεν] in the land. (Gen 43:1)

The famine was very severe [ἐνίσχυσεν γὰρ ὁ λιμὸς] (Gen 47:13)

there was a severe famine [ἐγένετο λιμὸς ἰσχυρὰ] in that land (Luke 15:14)

Here again, as well as a similarity there is a contrast in that it is the far land to which the younger son has gone which experiences the famine, while back in his father’s house food is abundant. Even the family servants, we are told, “abound in bread” (Luke 15:17, ἄρτων). This is the opposite of

²⁵ Cf. CEV section heading: “Two Sons.”

the Genesis story, where it is in the land of Egypt that “bread” was plentiful (Gen 41:54, ἄρτοι).

Also contrastive is the fact that the younger son of the parable journeys back to the father, while in Genesis the father and his household come to the son. The return of the lost son to his father clearly echoes several texts in the Joseph story. These are the passages concerning his exaltation, his meeting with his brothers, and the reunion with his father. A number of close verbal connections are found here:

Then he fell on the neck [ἐπιπεσὼν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον] of his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck (Gen 45:14)

As soon as he appeared [lit. “was seen”] before him, he fell on his neck [ἐπέπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ] and wept on his neck a long time (Gen 46:29)

his father saw him ... and ran and fell upon his neck [ἐπέπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ] (Luke 15:20)

And he kissed [καὶ καταφιλήσας] all his brothers and wept upon them (Gen 45:15)

and kissed him [καὶ κατεφίλησεν] (Luke 15:20)

Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring [δακτύλιον] from his hand and put it on the hand [ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα] of Joseph, and clothed him [ἐνέδυσεν αὐτὸν] in a robe [στολὴν] of fine linen (Gen 41:42)

And the father said to his servants, “Bring quickly the best robe [στολὴν], and clothe him [ἐνδύσατε αὐτόν], and put a ring [δακτύλιον] on his hand [εἰς τὴν χεῖρα]” (Luke 15:22)

slaughter animals [θύματα] and make ready, for the men are to eat [φάγονται] with me (Gen 43:16)

bring the fattened calf and slaughter [θύσατε] it, and let us eat [φάγοντες] and celebrate (Luke 15:23)

Noteworthy is the fact that the parable joins together two separate elements of the Genesis account. There the clothing of Joseph and the placing of the ring on his finger occur upon his being appointed by the king to the position of ruler, which occurs some time before Joseph is reunited with his family. In the parable these separate events are combined. The honor given the younger son is here bestowed by his own father upon his return to his father’s household.

Together with the above are related statements to the effect that the long-absent relative(s) had now “come,” and about the fact that the younger son, though previously “dead,” was now “alive”:

My brothers ... have come [ἦκασιν] to me (Gen 46:31)

Your father and your brothers have come [ἦκασιν] to you (Gen 47:5)

Your brother has come [ἦκει] (Luke 15:27)

his brother is dead (Gen 42:38; 44:20)

Joseph my son [ὁ υἱός μου] is still alive [ζῆ] (Gen 45:28)

my son [ὁ υἱός μου] was dead, and is alive [ἀνέζησεν] again (Luke 15:24)

this your brother was dead, and is alive [ἔζησεν] (Luke 15:32)

It is only in these two contexts in the whole Bible that we read of a son considered dead who is in fact found to be alive.

Another irony is that in the Genesis account the verb παρακαλέσαι, “comfort/entreat,” appears in connection with the sons comforting their father (ἦλθον παρακαλέσαι αὐτόν, “they came to comfort him,” 37:35) when he learned of the supposed death of Joseph. Yet in the parable it is the father who went out to make entreaty to the elder brother (ἐξελθὼν παρεκάλει αὐτόν, “going out he entreated him”; v. 28) over the latter’s negative response to the return of the son who was metaphorically dead but now lived (v. 32). In the first instance, the comfort is expressly said to have been refused, in the second the entreaty is implicitly rejected.

Allusion to the account of Judah in Genesis 38 is unmistakable in the retort of the elder brother. He claims that the younger son had squandered all his living μετὰ πορνῶν, “with prostitutes” (Luke 15:30). Once again, this detail appears contrastively in the parable. In the OT passage it was Judah the elder son who had consorted with a “prostitute” (πόρνη), a word appearing three times in that chapter (vv. 15, 21, 22), while the younger son was sexually pure. The elder son complains of not even being given a “goat” (ἔριφος) for the pleasure of himself and his friends (Luke 15:29). In the very same chapter of Genesis, “goat” (ἔριφος) also occurs three times (vv. 17, 20, 23), referring to the price agreed upon by Judah, the older son, for sleeping with the prostitute. Interestingly in both situations the “goat” is connected with the friends of the son concerned. In Genesis 38 Judah sends a friend²⁶ with the goat as payment for the prostitute (v. 20); in the parable the elder son wishes a goat that he might have a celebration with his friends (v. 29). The congruence of “prostitute,” “goat,” and “friend” in the space of such a narrow span of text in Genesis and in the elder brother’s response in the parable surely puts the presence of an allusive relationship beyond serious question.

Further minor points of detail may be mentioned. Joseph in Genesis, when tempted and refusing sin expostulates, “How could I ... sin against God [ἀμαρτήσομαι ἐναντίον τοῦ θεοῦ]?” (39:9). The younger son of the parable, having sinned, confesses, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you [ἤμαρτον εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ἐνώπιόν σου]” (v. 18; cf. v. 21).

In both contexts, we find the idea of servitude. In the Genesis account, it is the younger brother who is reduced to a slave (Gen 39:17, 19, עבד).²⁷ In contrast to this, it is the elder son, who remains at home, that is depicted in the parable as being in a state of slavery. The son complains to his father, “Look! For so many years I have been slaving

²⁶ This, we note, is the only occurrence of the term “friend” in the whole of Genesis.

²⁷ Cf. Ps 105:17–18, “He sent a man before them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave [MT: עבד; LXX: δοῦλον].”

[δουλεύω] for you” (v. 29). Once more, in the light of the Joseph/Judah contrast, we detect the presence of deep irony, in that it is now not the son forcibly removed to the distant land that is enslaved, but the one who stays at home.

Lastly, when Joseph’s brothers came to Egypt, the record states that even Pharaoh rejoiced (ἔχάρη) together with his servants (Gen 45:16). But when his own brother returns, the elder son refuses to share in the rejoicing (χαρῆσαι ἔδει, “it was fitting to rejoice”; Luke 15:32). The irony is unmistakable. The elder brother refuses to celebrate the return of his own flesh and blood, while the pagan king rejoiced in the reunion of Joseph with his family!

Since this parable was addressed to the Pharisees and teachers of the law (Luke 15:2–3), considering their intimate acquaintance with the Scriptures, they could not have failed to detect the various allusions. The question is: What point was Jesus making by means of such allusive references, especially in view of the fact that most form a contrast with the OT characters and events being signalled? The notion of reversal is clearly a prominent component of the discourse. The basic intention, it is suggested, probably lies in the fact that although in Genesis it is the elder brother Judah who falls into sin, he emerges from the narrative not just equally blessed but more so than Joseph the younger brother, who was a model of integrity. In the latter chapters of Genesis, the role of these two sons of Jacob is clearly in focus.²⁸ Following the lapse of the first three sons, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi (cf. Gen 49:3–6), the question arises as to which son would receive the right of the firstborn.²⁹ Would it be the next son of Leah (Jacob’s first wife), Judah, or the first son of Rachel (Jacob’s intended wife), Joseph? At first, everything seems to point to Joseph, and he would indeed be greatly blessed (cf. Gen 49:21–26). Yet although the divine promise through Joseph’s dream was that his brothers would bow down to him (Gen 37:6, 9), literally fulfilled when the brothers came before him in Egypt (Gen 42:6; 43:26),³⁰ it was ultimately Judah who would have this preeminent status (Gen 49:8; “your father’s sons will bow down to you”). It was to Judah that the rulership would belong (Gen 49:10).³¹ Although in Genesis 38 Judah conducts himself poorly in every respect, his later change of heart is evident in his intercession and self-substitution for Benjamin in Gen 44:18–34.³² His former sorry spiritual

²⁸ As Waltke states (*Genesis* 495), “Central in this story are the sons of Jacob, and of them Joseph and Judah.”

²⁹ *Ibid.* 492.

³⁰ Cf. John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009) 327.

³¹ See the discussion in *ibid.* 328–29.

³² Judah’s willingness to substitute himself for his half-brother Benjamin (vv. 33–34) is described by Mathews as “the moral high point in Judah’s career” (*Genesis* 11:27–50:2 806).

and moral degradation did not bar him from the greatest privileges from God. We can discern how this OT story might be applicable to the situation in Luke's Gospel. There, the younger son strays and falls into sin, much like Judah had done, yet he is now restored to his father's favor. Amazingly, though previously having erred, he receives all the honors bestowed upon Joseph at the time of his exaltation. The older son currently also shares in the father's blessings, yet is reproachful of the son who is seemingly honored above himself. Seeing that the younger son represents the "sinners" responding to Jesus, and the older son the critical Pharisees, the contrastive allusions to the turnaround in the Joseph-Judah narratives are entirely apposite.

V. CONCLUSION

Although Joseph is not "expressly declared" to be a type anywhere in the NT according to the strict criterion required by Marsh, which in fact would limit genuine types to a mere handful, the presence of typology may be established by other means. The allusions examined in this paper cannot easily be dismissed as coincidental. Their number, their verbal similarity to the OT text, and frequently their uniqueness, all point to deliberate design. We conclude with reasonable confidence, therefore, that it was Luke's intention to present to his readers parallels between the life of Joseph and the Lord Jesus Christ and, in the particular case of the parable of the two sons, correspondences between the Joseph-Judah narrative and the Pharisee-sinner conflict. Such a typological approach to Joseph, also found in the parable of the tenants, was most probably derived from Jesus himself.

The earlier more conservative exponents of typology, such as Chrysostom and Calvin, though not detecting all the allusions, would seem to have been justified in their basic approach.

This is the longest individual speech in the whole book of Genesis, in which Judah's true qualities are manifest (Waltke, *Genesis* 496, 561).