

## Signals

The verb, to signal, means to send an alert, a warning, or a notice of some kind in advance of something important that's coming. Trees send chemical signals to each other thru their root systems if there's a parasite in the vicinity, so they can prepare defenses. Cytokines, small protein molecules, are how the cells of the body send signals to other cells. Armies have corps dedicated to sending and receiving signals. Signaling is communication. God also communicates.

The Incarnation of the Son and all that was accomplished at His Advent was an event of such importance in history that God sent humanity scores of signals well in advance. And those signals all are recorded for us in the Scriptures. What I'm referring to here as "signals" are termed by many Bible scholars "foreshadowings," "prefigurements," and "types." But there's nothing wrong with "signals." In this lesson, we'll look at one example of such a signal. It's one of the most important ones in the Old Testament. Yet it's one that most people overlook because of its subtlety. We'll also need to draw meaning from it.

### Joseph, a type of Christ, a signal of what's to come.

There's more text in Genesis for the Joseph narrative than for any of the other patriarchs, 13 chapters, from Genesis 37 to the end, he's that important. Jacob's blessing at the end of Genesis highlights both Judah and Joseph, although we almost always focus on the blessing to Judah and ignore that for Joseph, which is highly significant. Let's look at some of the parallels between Joseph and Jesus:\*

- Joseph was given a vision of the sons of Israel worshipping him, which prompted jealousy and hatred from his own people who conspired to kill him, even as he came to save them
- Ruben unsuccessfully interceded for Joseph (as Pilate did for Jesus)
- he was sold for 30 pieces of silver thru Judah, whose name in Greek form would be Judas
- his robe was dipped in blood and given to his father (N.B. Revelation 19:13)
- he found safety in Egypt
- all he does prospers because God was with him
- he fights temptation and wins
- he's accused of wrong-doing and unjustly sent to prison (a figure of death for Jesus)
- in prison, he's between two criminals; he prophesies salvation for one, but death for the other
- he waits for God to raise him up from prison, and when finally he's vindicated he emerges as a new person
- out of prison, he's exalted to the right hand of the highest authority
- because of his faithfulness, he brought God's blessing to all the nations; blessing comes to a starving world, which is also the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12
- he has emissaries sent before him, crying out to all who hear, "bow the knee" (think Paul and Phil 2:10)
- he sees everything that happened to him as "God meant it for good," for the salvation of many just as Jesus sees the labor of his soul and is satisfied (Isaiah 53:10,11)
- he ends up being a blessing to his father, to his brothers who initially hated him, and to all Gentile nations
- he had great strength despite much suffering; he had morally pure character; and he saved people from death
- his life interrupted the sinful cycles of hatred and retaliation, of moral chaos and dysfunction
- God sent him on a mission to deliver people, to fulfill the Abrahamic promises; and he had great faith in God's covenant promises (thus, "take my bones..."); he prophesied the future, with hope in the future
- God had sovereign oversight of everything that happened to Joseph and thru Joseph

The Joseph cycle highlights how God's providence works in history, involving sinful humans, to bring about salvation, not only for the chosen family but for all the Gentile nations. It dramatically shows how God turns evil acts into good. The breakdowns in family life that began in Genesis chapters 3 and 4 continues all thru the OT, yet the Joseph story shows that God works thru such dysfunctional people and situations to bring blessing to all – but after He works in those families to bring healing and reconciliation. Sin is no obstacle to God's plan to redeem humanity. The Joseph narrative contains in cameo form the theology of the Bible.

The Old Testament Scriptures are saturated with such signals as the Joseph narrative. Daniel 9-11, Isaiah 7, 11, and 53, Psalm 22, and other Messianic prophecies are in this category. So are the Levitical sacrifices, the furnishings of the

Tabernacle/Temple, and the annual festivals. And more. Whether the people who lived in those OT times understood them, we can't know. But it's for sure that we, on *this* side of Christ's coming, can. And what they mean, besides that they prove that Christ is all that He claimed to be, is that the Bible is exactly what it claims to be, the Word of the living God. No rational person can pass off those striking correspondences as just coincidences. There's no other explanation for the Joseph story, for such a detailed story prefiguring Christ, than that it was planned by an omniscient and sovereign God. The signals mean that God is indeed there, that He speaks, and that the Bible is His Word.

We have in America a crisis of faith, of enormous magnitude. People who identify as Christians are content with easy and (still) socially acceptable church attendance to be the full (and only) expression of their religion. It can't be ignorance of the Scriptures, for there's excellent Bible teaching everywhere. Is it indifference to the responsibilities of following Christ? Or, might it be a lack of trust? In other words, there's the possibility that what's in the Bible isn't really true, so why put out the effort and take risks?

Faith is not some vague hope that our beliefs might also be true. Faith is the *certainty* that what God has said, every word, is true truth, and it looks forward with great anticipation for its fulfillment. The O.T. signals and their fulfillment in Christ prove that the Bible is as worthy of our trust as God Himself is. So the Bible we have in our homes is not just a special book. It's the revelation of truth in word form concerning things we otherwise could not know. And we must respond to it in the way that God expects. The Bible therefore has all the authority over us that God Himself does. As Creator and Revealer, He has the right to hold us responsible for what it says. We ignore it (or disobey it) at our peril.

But there's something else about OT signaling. Because those signals are there, in print, in languages that nearly everyone in the world can read, the proof that the Gospel is true truth is plainly evident to all. Perhaps 95% (I made up this number, but it might be correct) of Americans repudiate Christianity in favor of paganism. (I reject the terms "secular" and "secularism" as nothing more than the attempt to make non-theism less pejorative. All people are religious at their core, so if it's not Christianity or Orthodox Judaism, it's got to be paganism.) The turmoil in America today is simply the unrestrained, irrational and/or violent expression of hostility to God. "Social justice" (and its corollary myths) is only the most recent of all the sacred doctrines of modern American paganism, joining Darwinism, humanism, scientism, and a bunch of other -isms that have been around for fourscore and more years. In spite of all the evidence God has provided in the Bible for its trustworthiness, people just don't want the blessings that come from believing it.

We suppose ourselves to be fiercely rational modern people, demanding empirical truths in order to accept anything as true, rejecting anything that isn't "evidence-based." Yet the evidence that the Bible is supernatural in origin is right there in the text. And the stakes for deciding for or against the Bible couldn't be greater! And yet everyone ignores it – if they're not outright contemptuous of it.

The great American experiment of a "Christian nation," or at least a society based on biblical values, has vanished. It's gone. It's over, along with its attendant blessings. So, we're in a situation today just like the early Christians were in: a small minority who believe in the Jewish Messiah, holding to a radically different godly culture, values and worldview, surrounded by a vast multitude of pagans intent on worshipping idols and living as barbarians. It's as if history has come full circle, and we're resuming right where the Book of Acts stopped. Perhaps that's why Acts has such an abrupt ending, because there's more to come, picking up right where Luke left off. Centuries of "civilization" . . . erased.

Dear reader, as God sovereignly superintended the events in Joseph's life, he is sovereign over not only all history but also over the lives of each of us. That should encourage us to joyful submission to His Word. May our love for God and for others serve as a signal that the blessings that God bestows are supremely to be desired. But that repudiation of God, whether thru willful contempt or benign indifference, cannot go unpunished. As this transitional era between Christ's first and second advents comes to an end, let's resolve to live whatever time remains for us as those early Christians did, indeed as Paul did, rejoicing in our Savior and serving Him wholeheartedly and with fervent love. Be assured that everything written in the Scriptures *must* be fulfilled, including the oft-repeated promise of reward for faithfulness to His will.

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\* *The list of parallels between Joseph and Jesus comes from the work of Jo Ann Davidson, Professor of Theology at Andrews University Theological Seminary, presented at the 2018 Annual ETS meeting. Davidson studied under John Sailhamer, whose book, "The Pentateuch As Narrative," is essential for any serious study of the Old Testament.*