Joseph, Son of Israel, in Egypt

Introduction
The purpose of this reading assignment is to discuss Joseph, son of Jacob. It is to show that Joseph was both a type or shadow of Jesus Christ as well as his posterity in the last days. To understand this we will need to study about the life of Joseph and how he helped save his own family but also many gentiles.

Great Nation Needs a People of Size

As the book of Genesis, where the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are found, comes to an end, we find that the direct line descendants of the Patriarchal Fathers, “the chosen seed,” numbered only seventy souls” (Ex. 1:5), not more than the size of a small village. But Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been promised that the Lord would make of them “a great nation,” a nation that would bear [the gospel] and Priesthood unto all nations” (Abr. 2:9). And “seventy souls” does not a nation make! That would be a small village at best. A great nation needs a people of size, of great size!

The last part of Genesis relates the remarkable story of how Israel became a people of great size. The center of this is Joseph, son of Jacob, who was sold into Egypt by his brothers. The story is told in Genesis 37-50. That’s thirteen chapters of the book of Genesis! Of this, Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has observed:

“The importance of Joseph in the book of Genesis is signified by the fact that he figures prominently in sixteen of its fifty chapters (see Gen. 30; 33; 35; 37; 39-50). Joseph’s life span from cradle to grave represents only 4 percent of the twenty-seven hundred years covered by the book of Genesis. Yet his life is reported in nearly one-third of its chapters. (“Remnants Gathered, Covenants Fulfilled,” in Voices of Old Testament: The 26th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium [1997], p. 4)

Robert J. Matthews, a highly respected scholar in the Department of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University, has also noted:

The book of Genesis covers seventy-eight pages in my copy of the Bible. If we deduct four pages for the account of the Creation, that leaves seventy-four pages to cover the time from the fall of Adam to the death of Joseph, a period of about twenty-three hundred years. The ninety-three years of Joseph’s life from age seventeen to one hundred ten are covered in twenty-four pages; in other words, 30 percent of Genesis covers only 5 percent of the time period. That proportion ought to give us an idea of how Moses, the inspired author of Genesis, felt about the importance of Joseph’s story. (“Our Heritage of Joseph of Israel,” in Thy People Shall Be My People and Thy God My God: The 22d Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, [1984], p.2)

Though Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob, he was the first born of Rachel, Jacob’s second wife by trickery but first by bargain (Gen. 29). When Jacob’s firstborn, Reuben, lost the birthright through transgression (see Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4), Joseph became the birthright son (1 Chron. 5:1-2).

Joseph greatly loved Joseph, which caused his brother’s to despise him (Gen. 37:3-4). Adding to their spite were the dreams Joseph had that they and Jacob would bow down to him (Gen. 37:5-11). This was more than the brother’s could handle. Finding opportunity, they sold him to a band of Ishmaelites who in turn sold him as a slave to Potiphar, an Egyptian official (Gen. 37:12-28). Jacob was told that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal (Gen. 37:29-36).

Joseph as a Type and Shadow of Jesus Christ

Joseph

- Joseph was the beloved son of his father (see Gen. 37:3).
- Joseph was rejected by his brothers (see Gen. 37:4).
- Joseph was sold at the urging of his brother Judah into the hands of Gentiles (see Gen. 37:25–27).
- Joseph was sold for 20 pieces of silver, the price of a slave his age (see Gen. 37:28).
- The attempt to get rid of Joseph eventually led to the temporal salvation of Joseph’s family (see Gen. 45:4–5).
- Joseph was age 30 when he began his mission (see Gen. 41:46).
- All knees bowed to Joseph when he became a ruler in Egypt (see Gen. 41:43).
- Joseph generically provided food to his family (see Gen. 42:33, 35).

Jesus Christ

- Jesus Christ was Heavenly Father’s well-beloved Son (see Matt. 3:17).
- Jesus was rejected by the leaders of His people, the Jews (see Isa. 53:3; John 1:11).
- Jesus was sold by Judas, a form of the name Judah, and delivered over to Gentiles, the Romans (see Matt. 27:3).
- Jesus was sold for 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave His age (see Matt. 26:15).
- The attempt to destroy Jesus led to the Atonement and salvation for Heavenly Father’s family (see 2 Ne. 9:7–8).
- Jesus was age 30 when He began His mortal ministry (see Luke 3:23).
- All knees will eventually bow to Jesus (see D&C 88:104).
- Jesus, the Bread of Life, freely offers salvation to all mankind (see John 6:34–35; 2 Ne. 9:50).

Figure 1
Through a process of events, Joseph rose from being the slave of Potiphar to the vizier of Egypt (the highest official in Egypt under the king). As vizier Joseph ran the country of Egypt. In that position, Joseph prepared Egypt for seven years of famine, a catastrophe he had prophesied would come upon Egypt and the surrounding lands (Gen. 39 - 41).

When the famine came, Joseph’s preparations saved Egypt. But it also saved his father, Jacob (or Israel) and his brothers who were forced to look to Egypt for food. In a tense and moving conclusion to this story, Joseph was once again reunited with his father and brothers. When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, whom they thought was dead, Joseph also revealed why the Lord allowed the brother’s to betray him and sell him into slavery. Said he, “Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that he sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life” (Gen. 45:5).

When Joseph sent for his father, Jacob, to come to Egypt, Jacob was unsure what to do. Canaan was the land the Lord wanted Jacob and his sons to have and now they were moving to Egypt. Was this in the Lord’s plans? Jacob approached the Lord through sacrifice. The Lord responded, saying, “fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation... and I will surely bring thee up again” (Gen. 45:25 - 46:4; emphasis added).

**Joseph as a Type of Christ**

Throughout the scriptures there are many stories, events, and symbols that are designed to teach of the roles of Jesus Christ. These become “types and shadows” of things to come (see Mosiah 3:19; 16:14). There have been many who have seen the story of Joseph as a “type and shadow” of Christ, prefiguring him in many ways. **Figure 1** gives a list of some of the comparisons between the two. The similarity is striking to say the least.

**Jacob Adopts Ephraim and Manasseh**

When Pharaoh made Joseph the vizier of Egypt, he also gave him a wife, Asenath (Gen. 41:45). Joseph and Asenath had two boys, Manasseh and Ephraim. Before he died, Jacob adopted Joseph’s two sons and conferred the birthright upon Ephraim, the younger of the two (Gen. 48:1-14; JST Gen. 48:). When Israel made their exodus from Egyptian bondage, they became tribes of Israel in the place of Joseph. Therefore, for many years Israel was comprised of thirteen tribes, instead of the twelve that left the promised land to dwell in Egypt.

**Joseph Typifies His Posterity in the Last Days**

Elder Nelson spoke of the great importance of Joseph to Latter-day Saints:

Few men in the Old Testament are of greater importance to Latter-day Saints than is Joseph of Egypt. Many Bible commentators have described him as a type, or shadow, for the Savior. But we also know him as a specific type for the Prophet Joseph Smith and a generic type for all members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Many of the Church’s members claim descent from Joseph through his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. (Remnants Gathered, Covenants Fulfilled,” in Voices of Old Testament Prophets [1997], pp.3-4)

Indeed, as important as Joseph is as a type and shadow of Christ, it is equally important to understand Joseph as a shadow of the saving role his posterity. The twelve sons of Israel, and by extension the lineages which would have come from each son, were saved from physical genocide—the ultimate effects of the famine—had it not been for Joseph. Likewise seed of Joseph through his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, would bring a physical and spiritual salvation of the house of Israel in the last days. In fact, the JST adds verses to the Joseph story where Jacob specifically revealed this type and shadow to Joseph himself. The day Jacob adopted Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, as his own (Gen. 48), Jacob said to Joseph:

Therefore, O my son, [God] hath blessed me in raising thee up to be a servant unto me, in saving my house from death:

In delivering my people, thy brethren, from famine which was sore in the land; wherefore the God of thy fathers shall bless thee, and the fruit of thy loins, that they shall be blessed above thy brethren, and above thy father's house;

For thou hast prevailed, and thy father's house hath bowed down unto thee, even as it was shown unto thee, before thou wast sold into Egypt by the hands of thy brethren; wherefore thy brethren shall bow down unto thee, from generation to generation, unto the fruit of thy loins forever:

For thou shalt be a light unto my people, to deliver them in the days of their captivity, from bondage; and to bring salvation unto them, when they are altogether bowed down under sin. (JST Gen 48:8-11; emphasis added)

President Brigham Young (1801-77) testified of this role played by Joseph’s descendants in the last days:

Joseph was foreordained to be the temporal saviour of his father’s house, and the seed of Joseph are ordained to be the spiritual and temporal savours of all the house of Israel in the latter days. (Journal of Discourses, 7:290)

**Joseph Prophecies of the Future of Israel, the Twelve Tribes**

Jacob, being close to death, gave patriarchal blessings to each of his sons (see Gen. 49:1-28). Then shortly before dying, he charged his sons to “bury me with my fathers” in the land of Canaan. He then laid down and died (Gen. 49:29-33). It was the land of Canaan that was to be the promised land and Jacob’s last desire was to be buried in that land. Getting permission from Pharaoh, Joseph and his brothers with a large entourage of Egyptians went to Hebron and buried Jacob in the same burial cave as Abraham and Isaac with their wives (Gen. 50:1-13)

Upon returning to Egypt, the brothers were frightened that Joseph would now turn on them to avenge the wrong they had done him. But Joseph forgave them and told them that the Lord allowed their actions for a good thing, “to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.” Joseph promised to help feed them feed their families (Gen. 50:15-21). Many years of peace and comfort followed.

But shortly before he died, Joseph gathered his brothers and prophesied of the future of the tribes of Israel, most of which has been lost. Fortunately, the Joseph Smith Translation has restored the material lost, adding twenty verses!

Joseph prophesied that Israel would be brought into bondage by the Egyptians—which he considered a scattering—but that the Lord would raise up a prophet to deliver them from their captors and bring “out of this land [e.g, Egypt] unto the land which he sware to Abraham, and unto Isaac, and to Jacob” (JST Gen. 50:24, 29, 34-36).

He then prophesied that Israel would be “scattered again.” He said that “branch” of his own posterity would be “broken off, and shall be carried into a far country where they would eventually become a corrupts people in “hidden darkness” and “captivity.” But he said that they would “be remembered in the covenants of the Lord, when the Messiah cometh” and be recovered from their sinful state “unto freedom.” Of course, this has reference to Lehi and his posterity in the new world.

He prophesied of Joseph Smith and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon to be added to the Bible and that the two books...
would "grow together unto the confounding of false doctrines, and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins, and bringing them to a knowledge of their fathers in the latter days; and also to the knowledge of my covenants, saith the Lord." He also said that "for the thing which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand shall bring my people unto salvation."

(JST Gen. 50:24-36)

It would be well to note that Lehi, who had the brass plates, which included the five books of Moses (1 Ne. 5:10-11), quoted from Joseph's prophecies. This adds a second witness to the importance of Joseph's prophecies (see 2 Ne. 3).

Joseph then extracted an oath that the descendants of the Twelve Tribes would take Joseph's "bones" with them when they are freed from bondage and bury him in the land of his inheritance when they are restored to the promised land (JST Gen.50:26). This was carried out as recorded in Joshua 24:32, several hundred years after he died. A fitting ending to the son who's destiny was to save the Twelve Tribes of Israel by first being "scattered," so to say, from the promised land and living amongst Gentiles he was the means of saving Israel and Gentiles. After having completed his work was finally restored back to his land of inheritance in the promised land.

The following is NOT required reading but is an excellent discussion of the various ways Joseph is a type and shadow.

Brother Joseph Fielding McConkie a professor of Ancient Scripture, at Brigham Young University) discusses many of the similarities between Joseph sold into Egypt and Joseph Smith and the seed of Joseph (tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh) in the last days. This is an informative discussion.

Joseph's life as a type or prophecy is not limited to the manner in which it portrays the life of Christ. We have already noticed that Moroni saw it as foreshadowing that of the New Jerusalem of the last days. In a discourse by the other Moroni of the Book of Mormon (the military commander in Alma), there is preserved for us a prophecy that Joseph's father, Jacob, made shortly before his death. Having before him a remnant of Joseph's coat, given to him by his sons when they declared Joseph lost, Jacob noticed that part of the remnant of that coat had decayed with the passing of years, while part of the coat's remnants had been preserved. Seeing this, Jacob prophesied, "Even as this remnant of garment of my son hath been preserved, so shall a remnant of the seed of my son be preserved by the hand of God, and be taken unto himself, while the remainder of the seed of Joseph shall perish, even as the remnant of his garment" (Alma 46:24).

Moroni, in response to dissensions within his own nation, rent his coat and wrote upon it, making of it a memorial to God, their religion, their freedoms, and their families, and then fastened it upon the end of a pole. "He went forth among the people, waving the rent part of his garment in the air, that all might see the writing which he had written upon the rent part, and crying with a loud voice, saying: Behold, whosoever will maintain this title upon the land, let them come forth in the strength of the Lord, and enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion, that the Lord God may bless them" (Alma 46:19-20).

Responding to Moroni's challenge, many came forth "rendering their garments in token, or as a covenant, that they would not forsake the Lord their God," and that they would not transgress his holy laws, nor would they be ashamed to take upon them the name of Christ, for should they do so, "the Lord should rend them even as they had rent their garments." Those entering this covenant were reminded by Moroni that they were "a remnant of the seed of Joseph, whose coat was rent by his brethren into many pieces," and that they must keep the commandments of God or their garments would be rent by their brethren and they "be cast into prison, or be sold, or be slain." Rehearsing Jacob's prophecy about the remnant of Joseph that would perish, Moroni, likening the prophecy unto his own people, said, "Who knoweth what the remnant of the seed of Joseph, which shall perish as his garment, are those who have dissented from us? Yea, and even it shall be ourselves if we do not stand fast in the faith of Christ." (Alma 46:21-27.)

Though we see the shadows of Jacob's prophecy reaching far beyond the circumstances to which Moroni applied them, of greatest interest to the present work is that Book of Mormon and Bible prophets alike saw Joseph's life as a prophetic type. In that same spirit, let it be suggested that its greatest significance to those of our day is as a marvelous foreshadowing of the life of Joseph Smith, his great labors and those of the tribe of Joseph, of which he effectually stands as the head in this the last dispensation. We know that Joseph of Egypt knew the Prophet Joseph Smith by the spirit of prophecy and revelation, that he described the work that Joseph Smith would do, that he named him by name, and declared that "he shall be like unto me" (2 Nephi 3:15).

Viewing the life of Joseph of Egypt as a type foretelling the destiny of his tribe in the last days as it centers in the experiences of Joseph Smith, the following parallels are suggested:

1. Because they have forsaken the true way, the older brothers (that is, the Christian churches) have lost the spiritual birthright. The great evidence of this is that the Lord no longer speaks to them.

2. The birthright is then given to the youthful Joseph (Joseph Smith and the tribe of Joseph). Evidencing this, the Lord speaks freely to both. The world has never known a more prolific prophet, one who has recorded more revelation, than the prophet Joseph Smith. The tribe of Joseph, as identified by revelation and found within the restored church, are a people familiar with the spirit of revelation.

3. Joseph (both Prophet and tribe) have been clothed in the same coat or robes of authority that Jacob gave his "most loved" son. Thus they go forth seeking others of the family of Israel to clothe in "robes of righteousness" (D&C 109:76) and to endow with "power from on high" (D&C 38:32).

4. The name Joseph is itself a prophecy of events of the last days. The etymology of the name is usually given as "the Lord addeth" or "increaser." Though appropriate, such renderings have veiled a richer meaning. In the Bible account wherein Rachel names her infant son Joseph the Hebrew text reads Asaph, which means "he who gathers," "he who causes to return," or perhaps most appropriately "God gathereth" (Genesis 30:24; see also the footnote to the LDS edition). No more appropriate name could be given to the prophet of the restoration or to the tribe destined to do the work of the gathering than the name of their ancient father who gathered his family in Egypt.

5. Like their ancient father, Joseph Smith and the tribe of Joseph have had their destiny revealed to them. The dream of the "sheaves in the field," or Joseph's dream of earthly dominion, is matched by the promise given to Joseph of the latter days wherein the Lord has said, "I hold forth and deign to give unto you greater riches, even a land of promise, a land flowing with milk and honey, upon which there shall be no curse when the Lord cometh; And I will give it unto you for the land of your inheritance, if you seek it with all your hearts" (D&C 38:18-19). Joseph's dream of heavenly dominion, that of the sun, the moon, and the stars, finds fulfillment only in the sealing powers of the priesthood. Jacob interpreted Joseph's dream as having reference to himself (the sun), Rachel (the...
moon), and Joseph's brothers (the stars) bowing down to Joseph (Genesis 37:10). The unanswerable difficulty that this presented to Bible interpreters is that Rachel had died many years before, while giving birth to Benjamin. The context of promises associated with the sealing power and the assurance given Joseph Smith that the keys and authority he held would never be taken from him in this life or "in the world to come" (D&C 90:3) give meaning to Jacob's interpretation. The promise of the continuation of the family and eternal dominions are granted alike to the faithful of all ages.

6. Joseph Smith in his youthful innocence also shared his visionary promises with his "Christian" brothers, only to be severely rebuked. He recounts: "Some few days after I had this vision, I happened to be in company with one of the Methodist preachers, who was very active in the before mentioned religious excitement; and, conversing with him on the subject of religion, I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had had. I was greatly surprised at his behavior; he treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them." (JS-H 1:21.) The Joseph Smith story itself appears to be a type or pattern, the individual experiences of Joseph Smith being but representative of the composite experience of the body of the Church. The rejection in this instance of Joseph's vision typifies the greater rejection by the churches of the world of the testimony of Joseph Smith and the principle of revelation.

7. The thought that Joseph had some promised destiny that was not theirs caused Joseph's brothers anxiously to "hate him yet the more." Again our story contains the type or pattern: "I soon found," Joseph Smith said, "that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion, and was the cause of great persecution, which continued to increase; and though I was an obscure boy, only between fourteen and fifteen years of age, and my circumstances in life such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world, yet men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me, and create a bitter persecution; and this was common among all the sects—all united to persecute me" (JS-H 1:22). The popular Jewish author Elie Wiesel in writing of the life of Joseph of Egypt observed: "He aroused hate or love, fear or admiration. Never indifference. Some sought him out, while others avoided him, but nobody failed to notice him. Nobody failed to take stand for or against him." (Wiesel, Elie. *Messengers of God, Biblical Portraits and Legends*. New York: Random House, 1976, p. 129.)

How striking it is that the testimony of both Josephs evoked such reaction! Surely such announcements from obscure boys should have been passed off as youthful prattle, resulting in amusement or perhaps sympathy, but not a murderous hatred. It is truth that kindles the wrath of hell today as it did anciently.

8. It is of interest that the promise of future destiny was given to Joseph of Egypt when he was seventeen years of age (Genesis 37:2). Similarly, it was when Joseph Smith was seventeen that Moroni appeared to him and unfolded the great destiny that was his and many passages of scripture promising the restoration of Israel in the last days (JS-H 1:33-41).

9. As Joseph's brothers anciently found it impossible to speak "peaceably unto him," so we of the last days can anticipate an endless parade of anti-Mormon literature.

10. Such emotions as noted above constituted the setting in which Joseph of old was sent as a special messenger of his father to his brothers, and such is the setting in which Joseph Smith and his followers are sent as messengers to all the world in the name of the Father.

11. Joseph Smith, like his ancient prototype, obediently responded to the call, knowing full well of his brothers' bitterness toward him.

12. Joseph's brothers, seeing him coming, plotted to betray him. So we find Joseph Smith martyred by those in whom he should have been able to trust, a mob that had in its number leaders of the Christian churches and some who had once been his brothers in the faith of the restored gospel.

13. As Potipher's wife accused Joseph of her own sins that she might have him cast into prison, so Joseph Smith was accused of the crimes of his enemies who had him cast into prison.

14. "The keeper of the prison" anciently "committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison" (Genesis 39:22). And so were "committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners" in the spirit world. As he stands at the head of this dispensation of the gospel on earth, so he stands at its head in the spirit prison.

15. As Joseph was sold into Egypt, so Joseph (the Church in the last days) was forced into the bondage of a desert, where it was assumed that it would perish. As this happened to Joseph when he was seventeen, so it happened to the Church in 1847, or in its seventeenth year.

16. As Joseph interpreted the dreams of those in prison anciently, so Joseph Smith by the power of that same spirit has been able to interpret revelations given to others (the Bible, the papyrus of Abraham, and so on) in our day. Anciently Joseph was granted the title or name Zaphnath-paneas, "reveler of that which is hidden," as today Joseph Smith is testified of in all the world as a prophet, seer, and revelator. And as Joseph of Egypt prophesied good to one and evil to another, so Joseph Smith has promised blessings to the obedient and sorrow to those rejecting the message of the restored gospel.

17. To the hungry, Pharaoh, lord of Egypt, said, "Go unto Joseph" (Genesis 41:55). As Joseph was the only source of bread to a starving world, so Joseph Smith, to whom the truths and authority of salvation have been revealed, becomes the only source of the bread of life to a world perishing for want of the truth.

18. As Joseph of Egypt was lifted up and sustained by a foreign power, thus enabling him to restore his family, so Joseph of the last days has been lifted up by a great Gentile nation and granted the power to again restore Israel.

19. Joseph's brothers, the ten tribes, will yet come to him (the Church) seeking the bread of everlasting life (D&C 133:26-32). As Joseph of old was a temporal savior to Israel, Joseph (the Church or the tribes of Joseph) will now be recognized as the source of salvation by gathering Israel, who will bow the knee and acknowledge their younger brother.

20. As Joseph opened his arms and granted his wealth to his family anciently, so will Joseph of the last days receive his brothers as once again the family of Israel will be united.

21. As the whole nation of Egypt was blessed anciently because of Joseph, so the United States and all nations of the earth will be blessed because of the labors of the latter-day Joseph.
22. As Joseph saved his family anciently, so Joseph of the last days will be a savior to Israel (D&C 86:11). As the Lord said to Jacob who was nearly blind, "Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes" (Genesis 46:4), so he has said to Israel of the last days: "For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith. For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory." (D&C 21:5-6.)