



Introduction to Christ in the Old Testament

Do the Hebrew Scriptures contain specific and detailed prophecies and types about the person and work of the coming Messiah?

That question has intrigued me from the earliest days after I gave my life to Jesus Christ and began to seriously study God's Word.

Nearly sixty years ago, I discovered the supreme joy of the two men walking with their unknown guest along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. That "stranger" said to them: "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Messiah (Christ) to suffer these things and to enter into His glory? And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:25-27). The two travelers invited Jesus into their home for a meal that evening. As He took the bread and blessed it, He began giving it to them, "And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight" (v. 31). I pray that your response will be like mine and the two men when they asked one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us when He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" My desire is this will be a fresh new beginning of an intimate journey with our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Our Lord's own use of the Old Testament is His invitation to us to find Him in the Old Testament," notes Bernard Ramm. Jesus referred to the whole Old Testament canon. "The Christian interpretation of the Old Testament stems directly from the teachings and example of our Lord."

The Unity of the Message

When we study the Bible we should keep in mind its totality, its harmony, and its concept of a divine plan that is being fulfilled both in immediate historical context and in a final, climatic realization in the last days when Christ returns.

Augustine said, "In the Old Testament the New is concealed, in the New the Old is revealed." Bernard Ramm observed that "the New is latent in the Old, and the Old is patent in the New" (*Protestant Bible Interpretation*).

H. R. Holcomb wrote: "In the Old Testament we have the shadow. In the New Testament we have the substance. In the Old Testament we have the figure. In

the New Testament we have the true. In the Old Testament we have the forest. In the New Testament we have the fire. Jesus said, 'In the volume of the Book, it is written of me.' . . . On Jesus Christ hangs an entire Bible. . . . He has appeared to put away the penalty of sin; He does now appear to put away the power of sin; He shall appear to put away the presence of sin" (*New Testament Fires in Old Testament Forests*, pg. 13).

By studying the New Testament writers we know that there are many pictures of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. The New Testament continually makes the argument that the Old Testament is a foreshadowing of the person and work of Christ. It gives portraits of the coming of Christ long before He came.

There is a messianic signature that runs through the Bible. James Orr in *The Problem of the Old Testament* also argued correctly for the unity of the message. "From Genesis to Revelation we feel that this book is in a real sense a unity. It is not a collection of fragments, but has, as we say, an organic character. It has one connected story to tell from beginning to end; we see something growing before our eyes. This is a plan, purpose, progress, the end folds back on the beginning, and, when the whole is finished, we feel that here again, as in primal creation, God has finished all His works, and behold, they are good" (p. 31-32).

Christ is the key

The person and work of Christ is the key to our understanding the Scriptures. The entire Bible finds its meaning and explanation in the redemption provided by Jesus Christ. It progressively unfolds the theme of redemption from Genesis to Revelation. Shadows, types and fore gleams of the great doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in the death and resurrection of Christ are revealed from the opening pages. The meaning of any single passage of Scripture is always determined and governed by the larger context of redemption through Jesus Christ.

Michael Horton expresses this truth beautifully: "Christ is the thread, the unifying message from Genesis to Revelation. When we read the Bible in the light of its main plot--Christ--things begin to fall into place. Behind every story, proverb, hymn, exhortation, and prophecy is the unfolding mystery of Christ and His redemptive work" ("Interpreting Scripture by Scripture," *The Reformation Study Bible*, p. 2367).

When Jesus Christ went to the cross, died for our sins, and rose from the dead, He provided eternal salvation for all who would accept Him by faith. Every individual in the Old Testament who was saved was saved by trusting in the provision that God would make when Christ came and died as their substitute. The ceremonies and sacrifices pointed to a future day when God would make sure all His promises in that one person. In the fullness of time we know that person was God's unique, only begotten, one of a kind Son, Jesus Christ. Those who were saved were saved by faith in the coming of His death as their sacrifice.

We need to read the Old Testament with the expectation that we will encounter Jesus Christ there. The Old Testament is Christocentric. Christ is predicted and anticipated in the Old and proclaimed in the New.

There is continuity between the two testaments.

The New Testament is full of references to the Old. The Old lays a foundation for the New. Even a casual reading of the Scriptures reveals God's progressive revelation of the message of redemption that culminates in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Ultimately the Old must be read through the light of the New. The Old Testament reaches its fulfillment in the New. We can understand the Old Testament more clearly through the light of the New Testament.

Patrick Fairbairn in *Prophecy* made this keen observation: "If believers in Christ are Abraham's children, and heirs according to the God's promise, they are assuredly interested in all that was said or promised to him. And the outward and temporal can never stand alone; rightly considered, it will be seen to have a spiritual element pervading and animating it." What greater understanding of the prophecy or type can we gain from the fuller revelation of the New Testament message on it?

Olhausen wrote: "The explanation of the Old Testament in the New is the very point from which alone all explanation that listens to the voice of divine wisdom must set out. For we have here presented to us the sense of Holy Scripture as understood by inspired men themselves, and are furnished with the true key to knowledge."

Here are some basic principles to keep in mind as we think through some of these great pictures of Christ in the Old Testament.

Key to Interpretation

It is imperative that we first consider the teaching of the Old Testament in its historical and grammatical context. What was the author saying to his original audience and how did they understand the message? What is the literal meaning of the message in its historical context? The literal meaning will safeguard our falling into allegories and extremes of interpretation. Allegorizing results when the historical element is ignored or downplayed. Beware of those who seek a deeper spiritual sense in the text on the ground that the natural historical sense is unsatisfactory or inadequate spiritually.

What we must not do is read into the Old Testament what was never intended by the Holy Spirit as the author of all Scripture. At the same time, we must not overlook the clear New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament passages. These authors give us the key to the understanding of the Old Testament. From their example and Jesus, we can discover from them the correct principles of interpretation. How did they handle the Scriptures?

We also need to keep in mind the institutions and ceremonies of the Old Testament were powerless to save the souls of men. They were devised as types of the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ. They pictured the work Christ would do in His death for our sins. Jesus is the one and only perfect priest who dealt with our sins in His perfect sacrifice of Himself. The Tabernacle and later the Temple typified the place and manner in which the LORD God met with His people and dealt with their need of a redeemer. Each of the sacrifices and offerings, feasts and festivals dealt with redemption of God's people and how they should live as redeemed people. Thus, the entire Bible is the story of God's redeeming love. Therefore, we should seek the essential meaning of the type in its own place after we have discovered the central focus of the historical context.

For example, Old Testament scholar Dr. John R. Sampey says Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is, "The highest peak in the mountain range of Messianic prophecy." Therefore, we should spend the time and effort to climb it, and look upon the majestic beauty of the Suffering Servant of the LORD, Jesus Christ. John the Baptist beheld the glory of the Lord and declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Just like on the road to Emmaus Jesus comes to our aid to help us understand the Word of God. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). Our problem is in the heart, not the head. We have the evidence. It's all there. Jesus rose from the dead. He's alive! When we participate in the learning process He opens the eyes of our minds to recognize Him and causes our hearts to continue to burn within us. By faith we behold His glory. We can say, even so, let our hearts burn with conviction of who You are and joyful submission to Your sovereignty, Lord Jesus!

Later on the same day Jesus rose from the dead He told His disciples, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Again Luke tells us, "Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things'" (Luke 24:44-48). Now we are, too!

Prophets' Predictions

The truly great men in the Old Testament were the prophets with their message on the eternal redemption through the Messiah who was to come. Jesus said the whole Old Testament testifies to His person and work. Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me" (John 5:39). The Old Testament authors were "men moved by the Holy Spirit," and what they spoke and wrote was "from God" (2 Peter 1:21b).

The prophets were messengers to their own times for Israel and her neighbors, and their message was not always predictive or foretelling of the future.

However, we must keep in mind much that they did communicate foretold the future. The Old Testament "prophet was primarily a messenger of God whether he spoke of the past, the present, or the future."

Prophecy is centered in Christ

"The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). Russell Jones writes: "The whole purpose pervading prophecy is to testify to Jesus. He is at the center of all Spiritual prophecy, for He is the central theme of all the Scriptures."

Unfortunately, some interpreters of the Bible put other persons or things at the center and miss the meaning. Some have put the Jews instead of Jesus at the center of the Old Testament prophecy and lost the truth thereby. This must never be done. No one can share that center with the Redeemer. Bring every prophecy to the Cross in order to see it in its true light" (*A Survey of the Old and New Testament*, p. 182).

A Word about Types

Dr. John R. Sampey observed, "A type may properly be defined as a person, institution, or event in the old dispensation which was designed to prefigure a corresponding person, institution, or event in the new." The Old Testament "type" symbolizes or represents some corresponding figure in the New Testament.

"Types are pictures, object-lessons, by which God taught His people concerning His grace and saving power. The Mosaic system was a sort of kindergarten in which God's people were trained in divine things, by which also they were led to look for better things to come" (Morehead, "Type", *ISBE*).

Donald Campbell notes, "A type is an Old Testament institution, event, person, object, or ceremony which has reality and purpose in Biblical history, but which also by divine design foreshadows something yet to be revealed" (*Interpretation of Types: Biblioteca Sacra*).

Roy Zuck in *Basic Bible Interpretation* defines and contrasts type and illustration. "A type may be defined as an Old Testament person, event, or thing having historical reality and designed by God to prefigure (foreshadow) in a preparatory way a real person, event, or thing so designated in the New Testament and that corresponds to and fulfills (heightens) the type. An illustration, on the other hand, may be defined as a biblical person, event, or thing having historical reality, that pictures or is analogous to some corresponding spiritual truth in a natural and unforced way and is not explicitly designated in the NT as a type."

A type is the initial person, event, thing or institution in the Old Testament while the corresponding and later person, event, thing or institution is called the antitype.

Only God can make types because they always prefigure something in the future. The type is by divine appointment because God designs it in the likeness of the

antitype. Both are in the overall design of redemption. God plans the resemblances and shows the fulfillment in the "heightening" of the type.

In these devotions and meditations on Christ in the Old Testament, we will keep our focus on the coming of Jesus Christ as the redeemer of lost mankind. The one story that ties all of the respective parts of the Bible together is redemption.

Please do not become obsessed with typology. Do not try to make every person or object in the Old Testament prefigure some person or event in the New Testament. Do not push the limits of your observation. "The unwarranted straining is both unnecessary and unfortunate since there are enough clear, obvious types in the Old Testament to properly occupy the mind without spiritualizing tests and distorting principles of hermeneutics" (Gene Garrison, "Preaching from Exodus," *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, Vol. 20, Num.1, p. 85).

On the other hand, "a proper, sane treatment of typology constitutes a fascinating fact of any preaching from Exodus" (*ibid*).

Do not go looking for "deeper" or "hidden" meanings or secret codes. Stick to the historical facts as recorded in the Old Testament. Do not read something into the text that is not there. Let the text speak for itself. A good example is the Tabernacle which is a Biblical type. However, every small detail in its construction is not intended to teach some New Testament truth. How many have gone astray looking for details in types!

Stick to the tested methodology: observation, interpretation, application, and in that order.

An allegory is not a type. Allegorical interpretation is not typology. The theological road is littered with allegorical interpretations and applications.

Types were always prophetic pointing to the future with the emphasis on some aspect about our redemption. Someone said, "Types are predictions woven into history." They have a predictive element. They foreshadow something greater. It is a shadow that points ahead to another but superior reality. A type is a form of prophecy that predicts by correspondence between two realities. Prophecy is a prediction by use of words. There must be a predictive element or it is not a type.

We should always keep in mind the type and antitype were both specific, concrete, historical realities in the lives of individuals in both the Old and the New Testaments. What is the resemblance or correspondence of the type and antitype? Many things that are resemblance, similarity or correspondence in the Old Testament to the New are not types. There must be more than mere resemblance between the two.

In typology, the physical object, event or person is used to represent a greater truth. It always points to something greater in the future. The type is not an allegory because it affirms the reality of the historical context, and points to a future higher fulfillment. Keep the historical fulfillment clearly in mind as you interpret the passage.

Look for the consistent use of the specific symbol or type in the Old Testament. It must be an illustration of and consistent with New Testament truth. It cannot represent one thing in the Old and something unrelated in the New. What is the common principle that binds the type and antitype together? There must be unity or common principle that binds the two together.

Keep in mind that the Old Testament teaches the same truth as the New Testament. There is a heightening and increase or escalation in the antitype. The antitype is greater than and superior to the type. A good example is the use of the types in the Book of Hebrews. There is a fuller unfolding of the truth in the New (cf. Heb. 1:1-3). Christ is superior to Melchizedek. Christ's redemptive work is greater than the Passover. Therefore, don't use type to build essential Christian doctrines. They can illuminate what is clearly taught in other scriptures. The antitypes are always on a high plane than the types in the Old Testament.

Limit the topic under consideration to the context of the Scripture passage. Don't expect the type to cover every subject of theology.

Examine the meaning of the details in the passage under observation, but don't expect every detail to fit a type. Every analogy, by its very nature, falls short of the full reality. Don't force details that aren't there to materialize from a passage.

Set aside the superficial speculative interpretations and look for the basic meaning of the symbol. What is the central focus of the passage? What does the passage say, not what do you want it to say.

Determine an accurate definition of any type or symbol by identifying interpretational constants that fit all the uses of that type in Scripture. For example, "lion" symbolizes power, whether applied to Satan as "a roaring lion" or to Christ as the "lion of the tribe of Judah."

Perhaps this unknown author says it best. "God in the types of the last dispensation was teaching His children their letters. In this dispensation He is teaching them to put the letters together, and they find that the letters, arrange them as they will, spell Christ, and nothing but Christ."

Perhaps the ultimate question to consider, is the examination of the "type" profitable or is it simply entertaining, a tickling of the ears. Be careful not to see types everywhere in the Bible. Keep focused on the central message -- redemption.

Keep your heart tender toward God and humbly submit to the teaching of His Word.

Like the apostle Paul: "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:8-11).

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Wil is a graduate of William Carey University, B. A.; New Orleans Baptist
Theological Seminary, Th. M.; and Azusa Pacific University, M. A. He has pastored
In Panama, Ecuador and the U. S, and served for over 20 years as missionary in
Ecuador and Honduras. He had a daily expository Bible teaching ministry heard in
Over 100 countries from 1972 until 2005, and a weekly radio program until 2016.
He continues to seek opportunities to be personally involved in world missions.
Wil and his wife Ann have three grown daughters. He currently serves as a Baptist
Missionary, and teaches seminary extension courses and Evangelism in Depth
Conferences in Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru, India and Ecuador. Wil also serves as
The International Coordinator and visiting professor of Bible and Theology at
Peniel Theological Seminary in Riobamba, Ecuador