

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #16:

TYPES IN THE BIBLE

By John Temples

Probably as long as you have been a Christian, you have heard about *types*. (“The tabernacle is a type of the church, Adam is a type of Christ,” etc.) But have you ever made a formal study of types? I believe such a study will enrich your understanding of God’s word and appreciation for its rich complexity.

WHAT IS A TYPE?

Here are some definitions:

- “A figure or representation of something to come; a token, sign, or symbol” (Webster).
- “...a premeditated resemblance which God built into the Bible to illustrate and teach truth” (Bob Smith).
- “A person, place, thing, or event in the Old Testament that foreshadows some significant circumstance in the future” (Wayne Jackson).
- “Something in the Old Testament that prefigures, points to, or resembles some entity in the New Testament and makes a Bible concept easier to understand” (my definition).

By the way, the fulfillment of the type--the thing signified or represented by the type--is called the *antitype*.

There are a few types in the New Testament, but the vast majority of them are features of the Old Testament.

WHY DID GOD PUT TYPES IN THE BIBLE?

To help us understand difficult spiritual concepts. Types are like “visual aids” to Biblical understanding.

To demonstrate God's wisdom, power, and foreknowledge. Only He could connect two unrelated things or persons separated by centuries to teach some spiritual lesson or make some comparison.

To show connection and continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Type are links--they connect physical realities in the Old Testament to spiritual truths in the New Testament.

To demonstrate the superiority of the new covenant over the old. The writer of Hebrews used Old Testament types as a powerful tool to show Jewish Christians the superiority of Christianity over Judaism.

In general, God put types in the Bible to clarify and magnify important truths.

HOW CAN WE KNOW ONE THING IS A TYPE OF ANOTHER?

One way is when the Bible tells us it is a type. Romans 5:14 says, "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, *who is a type of Him who was to come.*" And Colossians 2:16,17 reads: "Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths; *which are a shadow of things to come;* but the substance is of Christ." And again: "For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, *which are copies of the true,* but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." In 1 Peter 3:21, baptism is said to be the antitype of the salvation of Noah through the waters of the Flood. That makes his salvation a type of ours.

When you see the words *type, copy, shadow, figure, pattern,* or similar words, the Bible is telling you "this is a type."

We can also identify types when typical language is used or a typical comparison is made. Many times, the words *as, like, or so* point to types. "And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man" (Luke 17:26). Jesus said in Matthew 12:40, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." One more, John 3:14--"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, *even so will the Son of Man be lifted up.*"

Types are amazing and instructive--they make us stop and think, "Wow--I never would have made that connection." But it is easy to get carried away with types and think that every little detail in the Old Testament is a type of something in the New Testament. There are certain rules we need to follow to determine whether one thing is a genuine type of another.

RULES FOR IDENTIFYING TYPES IN THE BIBLE

Rule 1: There must be a real point of resemblance between the type and the antitype. To be a type of Christ, Moses had to resemble Him in some way. Moses declared himself to be a type in Deuteronomy 18:15--"The Lord your God shall raise up for you a prophet *like me* from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear." We know this is a prophecy of Christ, because Peter quoted it on Pentecost (Acts 3:22) and applied it to Jesus.

How did Moses resemble Christ? Both were prophets. However, there were many other prophets. What made Moses unique is that he was both a lawgiver and a prophet. Of course, Christ is also. That is the typical relationship.

Rule 2: The type and the antitype are not the same in every detail. If they were, we would have identify, not typology. One person may be a type of another person in some ways, but not in all ways.

Adam was a type of Christ. Paul said so in Romans 5:14. But Adam was not like Christ in every detail. For one thing, Adam was a created being; Jesus was not. Also, Adam was a sinner; Jesus was not.

So how was Adam a type of Christ? Romans 5:15 says, "For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many." And verse 18--"Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life." The point of resemblance between Adam and Christ is this: Adam's single act of disobedience affected all mankind, bringing in death; Christ's single act of obedience affected all mankind, conquering death. Both Adam and Christ affected the entire human race in what they did.

Usually, there is one clear point of resemblance between the type and the antitype. When we find that one clear point, the typology becomes clear. This can become quite important to understand to keep from drawing erroneous conclusions.

For instance, look again at John 3:14--"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so will the Son of Man be lifted up." Is this saying that a serpent was a type of Christ? No; in the Bible, the serpent is always associated with Satan. It is not the serpent that is the type, but the lifting up of the serpent. The image of the serpent was "lifted up" on a pole so the people of Israel could look upon it and be healed; Christ's being "lifted up" on the cross brings healing to us. Jesus alluded to this likeness in John 12:32--"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."

Rule 3: The type always precedes the antitype. The Flood is a type of the judgment (Matthew 24:37, 2 Peter 3:6,7); the judgment is not a type of the Flood. Moses was a type of Christ; Christ is not a type of Moses.

Rule 4: The type is always inferior to the antitype. The shadow is not as important or as valuable as the substance. Usually, the type is earthly or physical; the antitype is spiritual. (Remember, one of the main purposes of Biblical types is to emphasize the superiority of certain things or persons over others.)

Rule 5: The type is not a type until the antitype appears. We could not know that Adam was a type of Christ until we could see the points of resemblance in the life of the Lord. And that brings out this important truth: *only God can design and create types.* We can point out examples and devise illustrations and analogies; but only God can make one thing a true type of another.

WHAT KINDS OF THINGS IN THE BIBLE CAN BE TYPES?

Persons, things, institutions or rituals, offices, events, or places can be types.

Persons as types. We have already seen that Adam and Moses were types of Christ. Another person who was a type of the Lord was Melchizedek. Study Hebrews 7 to learn about this mysterious Old Testament figure. Hebrews 7:15

says Christ is a priest “according to the order” of Melchizedek. “According to the order” is type language. The main typical points are these: Melchizedek was a type of Christ in that he was both king and priest at the same time; and both were made priests by appointment of God, not by ancestral descent.

Things as types. Leaven is a type of sin. The tabernacle is a type of the church. You can see the richness of that typology in Hebrews 9:8-11-- “[The tabernacle] was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices were offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect... But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands.”

Institutions or rituals can be types. The whole system of animal sacrifices under the law of Moses, for example. The sabbath was a type of the rest we have in Christ (Hebrews 4:1-10).

Offices can be types. Many of the Old Testament prophets, priests, and kings were typical of Jesus. Joshua was a type of Christ--he led the people into the promised land.

Historical events can be types. Paul compared the struggles of the Israelites in the wilderness to our struggles against sin in 1 Corinthians 10:1-12.

Places as types. Eden is a type of heaven; so is Canaan, the Promised Land. Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon are types of the bondage of sin (Zechariah 10:10, Revelation 14:8). Jerusalem is a type of heaven (Revelation 21:2).

THREE CAVEATS REGARDING TYPES:

Don't go overboard and make everything you read in the Bible a type. It's only a type if the Bible identifies it as a type, or makes a definite connection using comparative language. Just remember: only God is smart enough to make types!

Don't build essential doctrines on types. Types are the supporting cast, not the stars. Use them to shed light on concepts and doctrines taught clearly elsewhere.

Don't zero in on the type and ignore the antitype. Many religious people today are carried away with restoring the Jewish temple and the Jewish ceremonies (and even the Jewish nation), observing the sabbath day, bringing Christ back to rule the earth on a refurbished Jewish throne, etc. These are all *shadows* of New Testament things. Which is more important--the shadow, or the person or reality that casts the shadow?

I hope this study has helped you better understand and appreciate types. They are powerful "visual aids" God has put into Scripture to help us understand spiritual concepts. And they show the incredible foreknowledge and wisdom of God. Ponder them and give thanks to God! --John Temples

FOR FURTHER STUDY: <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/126-study-of-biblical-types-a>