

Typology

But there is more to the prophetic character of Scripture than the direct fulfillment of spoken promises. God not only speaks, he is also the Lord of history. This means that God providentially orders events and individual lives so that they serve to prefigure what is yet to come. The Scriptures therefore record the lives of real people and the course of real events, and yet these people and events serve as historical analogies that correspond to future fulfillment.

What Types Are and What They Are Not

The biblical language for this is “types,” which simply means “pattern” or “example.”² One theologian describes it this way: “Typology is simply symbolism with a prospective reference to fulfillment in a later epoch of biblical history. It involves a fundamentally organic relation between events, persons, and institutions (type) in one epoch and their counterparts (antitype) in later epochs.”³

But to refer to types as symbols doesn’t mean that they are nothing more than fanciful, arbitrary allegories or vague expressions of general truths. Someone might allegorize the parable of the Good Samaritan, for instance, by saying that the inn is the church, the innkeeper is Paul, and the oil and wine are the sacraments. In other words, arbitrary connections are made between

² A good, basic introduction to this idea can be found in David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible: A Study of the Theological Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 185–189.

³ Lints, 304.

symbols and the things symbolized. With a biblical understanding of types, on the other hand, there is an organic “relationship between some ‘essential’ aspect of the type and antitype.”⁴ What’s more, unlike a fable, the type wasn’t invented by the author in order to make a symbolic point. Rather, a type is an actual historical person or event that God has providentially ordered in order to use that person or event to point beyond himself or herself. In the type-anti-type relationship, there is a comparison of historical realities that establish an analogy or pattern, which then organically develops and expands.

Again, let’s consider an example from Scripture. In [Romans 5](#), Paul is concerned to explain how it is that Christ’s obedience to death on the cross could bring the gift of life to sinners like us. In [Romans 5:14](#), he refers to Adam as a pattern or type of Christ:

Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern [type] of the one to come.

This is no random coincidence or arbitrary imposition of Paul’s on the accidents of history. Paul is asserting that God set the whole thing up. And it’s on this typological foundation, Paul says, that the gospel hinges. Here’s how he develops the point in the next verses.

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man’s sin: The

⁴ *Ibid.*, 304n17.

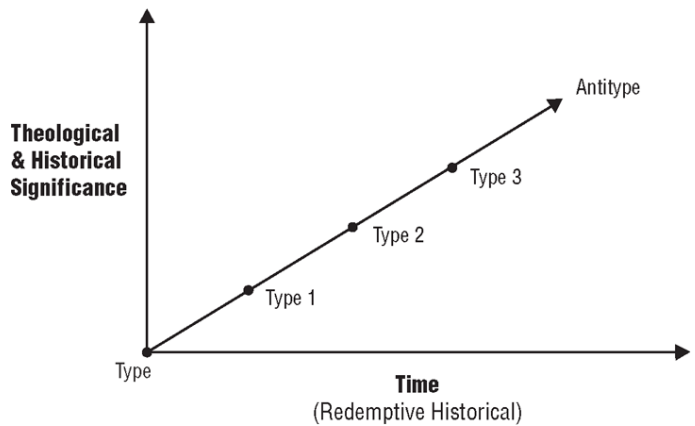
judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Just as Adam represented the human race, and so brought the whole race into condemnation through his act of disobedience, Paul says that Christ, the second Adam, stood as a federal representative too. But instead of rebelling against God, Christ obeyed. And his obedience now brings life and forgiveness for those who are in Christ. 📌

Paul is not simply drawing a comparison or allegorizing Adam. He's arguing for a historical correspondence in which the type, Adam, points forward to and finds its redemptive fulfillment in the antitype, Christ. 📌 The former helps us to understand and even defines for us the work and meaning of the latter. But Christ is not merely a repetition of Adam. Like the multiple horizons we saw earlier, the fulfillment in the antitype involves a difference in degree. The type points forward to something greater than itself! (See chart 3.3.)

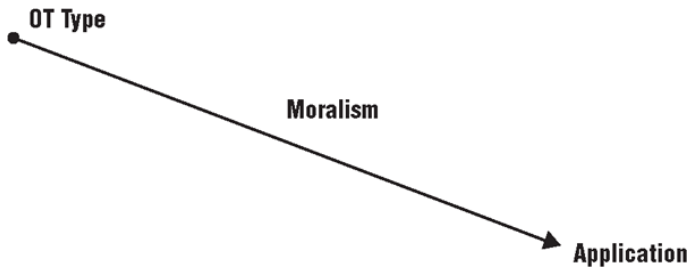
We could multiply the examples—Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, Samson, and Jonah, just to name a few. All of these, in one way or another, serve as types of Christ, and are explicitly identified in the Scriptures as pointers to Christ. By making these connections, the epochs of the past are linked to the present by the New Testament authors, and vice versa. Types literally stitch the Bible together as a single narrative. 📌

Chart 3.3: Typological Fulfillment



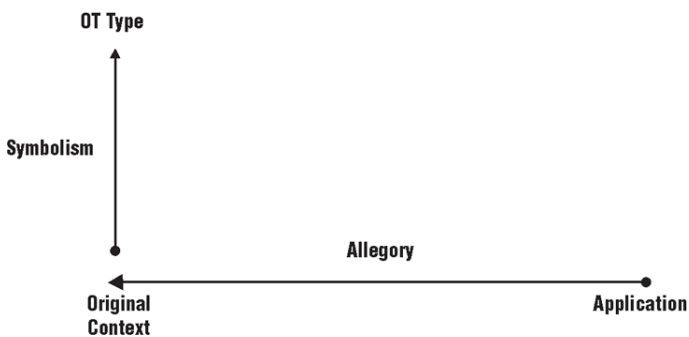
But it's not just the New Testament that uses typology. The Old Testament explains itself in these terms as well. In the prophets, for example, the Babylonian captivity and subsequent return from exile are repeatedly explained in terms of the exodus (e.g., [Isaiah 49](#) and [Jeremiah 16](#)). Even more significantly, Jesus' redemptive activity in the Gospels, together with the apostles' proclamation of Christ, are explained as a second exodus (e.g., [Mark 6](#) and [2 Corinthians 3](#)). Like God's prophetic promises, the type in Scripture often finds its fulfillment in multiple antitypes, each pointing beyond itself to one still greater that is yet to come. 📌 And that's true until we get to Jesus, who declared that he was the fulfillment and the point of the Law and the prophets ([Matt. 5:17](#); [Luke 24:27](#)).

Chart 3.4: Moralism and Personal Application



More common in the Middle Ages, but not unheard of today, is the approach of allegory. In that case, we start with preconceived ideas of application, and then turn the details of the Old Testament story into symbols that represent our application. For example, David’s five smooth stones in his battle with Goliath become the five tools of a faithful pastor: Scripture, prayer, the sacraments, and two other things you think would be useful for a pastor to focus on! The movement is from today back to the text via arbitrary symbols that the original readers would not have recognized as significant (see chart 3.5).

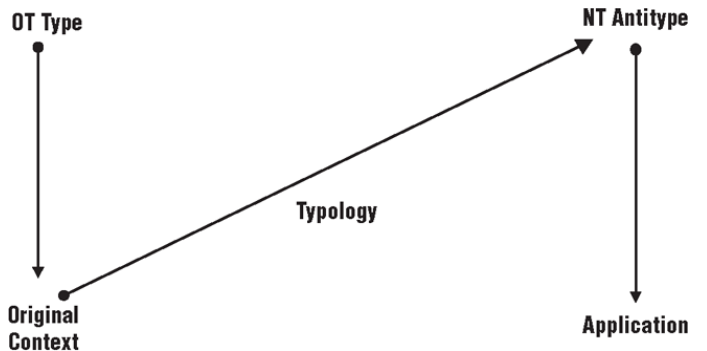
Chart 3.5: Allegory and Personal Application



Typology actually safeguards us from moralism and allegory, as well as assuring us that the Old Testament was not written just for “them.” This is because it starts with the Old Testament and seeks to understand the significance of the type in its original context, and in terms that

would have been significant to the original readers. Then it moves not to us, but to the type’s fulfillment in Christ and his redemptive work as the antitype. Only then does typology make the move to contemporary application (see chart 3.6).

Chart 3.6: Typology and Personal Application



The story of David and Goliath therefore is neither an allegory on pastoral leadership nor a morality tale on courage, nor an interesting but finally useless bit of ancient history. Rather, this real Old Testament event gives us insight into what Christ accomplished for us in our salvation, as God’s anointed but veiled king, a mediator who delivers God’s people through individual mortal combat with our greatest enemy. The primary point of application thus moves from moral effort on our part to worship and faith in Christ our champion!