

Types in the Scriptures

Bud Morris

There seems to be a movement among respectable Bible believing teachers of the Scriptures to discourage the time-honored "Typical" exegesis of the Word of God these days. I admit that people's imaginations can get out of control; and I share these scholars' objections to some of the totally ridiculous things that have been proposed as types and shadows in the Bible. But it seems to me that we are being urged to throw the baby out with the bath.

For instance, the book, INTERPRETATION, by Roy Zuck (Dallas Theological Institute) suggests six prerequisites for designating anything in the Scriptures as a type. The interpretations in italics are my own brief synopsis of what I think was meant by the terms:

1. Resemblance (*There must be a reasonable correspondence between the type and the antitype*)
2. Historical reality (*The type must be derived from something real rather than something inferred*)
3. Prefiguring (*The type must be prophetic, prefiguring something future*)
4. Heightening (*The antitype must be an escalation of what is seen in the original type*)
5. Divine design (*God had to have intended the thing or passage to be typical or symbolic*)
6. Designation (*The Bible should state or imply that the passage in question is typical*)

Other than the fact that the term, "Type," implies resemblance, it seems to me that "Divine design" is the only essential criterion for what is or is not a type in the Word of God. If God intended for something in the inspired Word to be typical, it is; and if He did not intend it to be typical, it isn't. We can be certain that some things are typical because other Scriptures designate them as types; but insisting that everything that was intended to be typical in the Scriptures is internally designated as a type reduces much of the multi-colored panoramic view of the Scriptures to a black and white perspective.

The similarities that these scholars point out in the few designated types found in the Bible are of questionable significance. They certainly are not internally designated as criteria for what may be considered typical. I personally feel that God simply pointed out a few of the types in the Scriptures to whet our appetites to find the rest of them. They are the cream that floats to the top of the sincere milk of the Word. Take the fig tree in Mark's gospel, for example:

Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, (Jesus) was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again." And His disciples heard it. *Mark 11:12-14 NKJV*

Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away."*Mark 11:20-21 NKJV*

It is not as though Christ needed to eliminate the fig tree because it was hindering the Lord's work. If the incident had no deeper significance than that the tree simply failed to produce fruit when He wanted it, it would seem that Jesus was throwing a temper tantrum when He cursed it. Hopefully, our Christian sensitivities reject any such blasphemous idea. There has to be some other explanation.

It is true that when Peter pointed out that the cursed tree had withered the next day, Jesus used it as an example of what could be accomplished by faith, and so it was. But if that is all that the incident was really about, it would almost seem that Jesus was teaching the disciples that if they only had faith enough, they could zap anything along their Christian pathway that did not serve their personal interests, and the annoyance would disappear. Not likely!

The general context of the incident is the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem as the Messiah, and Israel's subsequent rejection of Him. When His authority was challenged after He had cleansed the temple, He told the parable of the vine dressers who kept the fruit of the vineyard for themselves instead of giving it to the owner. The religious elite of Israel understood that Christ was suggesting that they were about to be judged. It is obvious to many, like myself, that the judgment of the fig tree that did not produce fruit for the Lord when He sought for it was the charcoal sketch from which the picture of the vine dressers was painted. We are compelled to believe that the fig tree incident was designed by God as a type of what He would do with the whole nation of Israel when they rejected Christ. We can't prove it is, but neither does an arbitrary set of criteria on determining what is or is not a type prove that it isn't.

The value of understanding the typical meaning of the fig tree becomes more evident at the end of Christ's subsequent prophetic discourse following the disciples' question about when the temple would be destroyed, etc. Jesus told them,

"Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near--at the doors!"

Mark 13:28-30 NKJV

Admittedly, the parable could simply mean that when the world starts experiencing more war and earthquakes and famines, the end-time clock is about to start ticking. The problem is that the world has always seen a lot of war, earthquakes, and famines, so most of us would be unsure of the point at which any increase in them would be significant. But if the theory that the fig tree represents the nation of Israel is valid, we gain a bit more specific insight into when the end-times are eminent. When the nation of Israel starts budding again, as it has, it's time to start watching more closely for the end times.

The types and shadows scattered throughout the Bible re-enforce the concept of its divine inspiration. The account of Abraham offering Isaac on Mt. Moriah is only designated as symbolic of Christ's resurrection (Hebrews 11:17 & 18); but who can deny that the incident is even more typical of God offering His Son on Calvary's altar. It follows reasonably that his sending his servant to get a bride for Isaac prefigures God sending the Holy Spirit out to get a bride for His Son. It is not designated as a type, but is remarkably consistent with the parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:15-24. And finally, when Isaac's bride became pregnant, the struggle between the two peoples within Rebecca's womb symbolizes the internal struggle between the two natures within each member of the bride of Christ, as described in Romans 7:14-25 and elsewhere. Again, I can't prove the typical significance of the last two accounts because they are not designated as types within the Scriptures. But they are so consistent with what was going to happen that I find the whole trilogy a beautiful prefiguring of the Church of Christ long before it was actually announced in the Scriptures.

I believe that the Bible is full of types and shadows that enhance the Word of God. It is possible to put a jigsaw puzzle together with the picture side face-down; but the types in the scriptures are like the components of the picture on the face of the puzzle. They facilitate and enhance the enjoyment of putting the prophetic puzzle of the scriptures together. Enjoy them, but be reasonable rather than ridiculous. Never draw your doctrine from what you believe to be a type. If you only use types to support concepts definitively taught elsewhere in the Scriptures, little damage is done if you are wrong about the type. Don't be dogmatic, but don't let a scholarly fad take the wonders of the typical teachings of the Scriptures away from you, either.