

# Biblical Typology: The Connecting Link between the Testaments

Accurate interpretation of Scripture is dependent upon a proper understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, and the proportion of continuity and discontinuity perceived between testaments is a result of hermeneutical presuppositions. Indeed, underlying principles of interpretation inevitably lead to a theology. Thus, one of the most important theological questions that can be answered is “Which hermeneutical principles are vital for properly understanding the relationship between the testaments?” In addressing this question, professor Michael Vlach writes:

According to Feinberg, the difference between dispensational and non-dispensational hermeneutics is found in three areas: (1) the relation of the progress of revelation to the priority of one Testament over the other; (2) the understanding and implications of the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament; and (3) the understanding and implications of typology. In sum, the main difference rests in how dispensationalist and nondispensationalists view the relationship between the testaments.<sup>1</sup>

The first difference is often referred to as “testament priority.” Vlach explains that “Testament priority is ‘a presuppositional preference of one testament over the other that determines a person’s literal historical-grammatical hermeneutical starting point.’”<sup>2</sup> Although dispensationalists assign a logical priority to the Old Testament with the intention of understanding it at face value (i.e., Old Testament priority<sup>3</sup>), non-dispensationalists, such as

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<sup>1</sup> John S. Feinberg, “Systems of Discontinuity,” *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 1988), 73-74. Quoted in Michael Vlach, *Dispensationalism* (Los Angeles, CA.: Theological Studies Press, 2008), 16-7.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert W. Bateman IV, “Dispensationalism Yesterday and Today,” *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids, MI.: Kregel, 1999), 38. Quoted in Vlach, *Dispensationalism*, 17.

<sup>3</sup> The argument for Old Testament priority is based on the presupposition that the Old Testament should be taken “on its own terms.” Proponents of this view (i.e., primarily dispensationalists), essentially make three arguments: (1) The Old Testament is perspicuous, that is, it is plain to the understanding and clear; (2) If the intended meaning of the text was not fully understood until the New Testament, then it would have had no significance for the original audience; (3) Not taking the Old Testament “on its own terms” would be a violation of grammatical-historical hermeneutics. Although these arguments look good at first glance, they are not valid. (1) The Old Testament is not perspicuous in all places. Both the Westminster Confession of Faith and 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith state, “All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all...” (1:7). Thus, the OT is perspicuous in many places, but it also contains types and shadows that look ahead to New Covenant fulfillment. By nature these lack full clarity (e.g., Genesis 3:15). (2) It is too extreme to state that anything that was not *fully* understood had *no* significance for the original audience. It is possible to understand in part and still have significance (e.g. 1 Corinthians 13:9-12). (3) Typology is not a violation of grammatical-historical hermeneutics. Additionally, progressive revelation implies that the New Testament is more clear and complete than the Old. The fact that we now have fullness of knowledge regarding Genesis 3:15 does no damage to the application of grammatical-historical hermeneutics; if it does, then perhaps we need to redefine our hermeneutical principles to be more in line with Scripture.

those who adhere to Covenant Theology, account for the unity of Scripture and *Analogy of Faith*, the presence of typology, and the progressive nature of revelation (i.e., later revelation is often more complete and clear than earlier revelation). Given this, Covenantalists understand that the New Testament sheds additional light<sup>4</sup> on the Old Testament (i.e., New Testament priority). Therefore, the New Testament, in many places, provides inspired interpretations of Old Testament passages.

This leads to the second difference listed by Vlach: the New Testament's use of the Old. Given the aforementioned convictions, many Covenantalists believe that the Holy Spirit via the inspired New Testament writers, is the best interpreter and expounder of His own Old Testament writings, and New Testament writers used Old Testament passages in a purposeful manner, explaining and shedding light on the original, and only, meaning of those texts.

The third difference mentioned by Vlach is the matter of typology. Although Vlach and Feinberg argue that there are three core hermeneutical drivers, it is not an overstatement to assert that typology lies at the root of the issue. The other two – testament priority and the way in which one understands the Old Testament's use of the New – are, in reality, built on the foundation of biblical typology. Thus, positions on these issues arise from convictions concerning typology. Given that an accurate view of biblical typology is so critical for properly interpreting Scripture, the remainder of this essay will seek to demonstrate why typology can rightly be called “the connecting link between the testaments.” This will be done by examining the nature, function, clarity, and beauty of biblical typology.

## **The Nature of Biblical Typology**

A type is a historical person, event, institution, or office that prefigures something in the future (i.e., an antitype). Very often in Scripture, biblical typology spans the testaments in that someone or something in the Old Testament pictured or foreshadowed a New Testament gospel reality. According to Patrick Fairbairn, in his book *The Typology of Scripture*, “what one symbolically represented, the other actually possessed.”<sup>5</sup>

It is imperative to recognize several important aspects of typology. First, some degree of similarity is implied in the fact that types prefigure antitypes, yet types and antitypes are not the same in every respect. Assuming too much similarity is an egregious error:

To proceed without regard to this – to look for the proper counterpart of any particular type in the same class of objects and interests as that to which the type itself immediately referred – would be to act like those Judaizing Christians who, after the better things had

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<sup>4</sup> Although a New Testament text may provide clarity for understanding the *single* meaning of an Old Testament text, it does not add *additional* meaning.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1975), 1:55.

come, held fast at once by type and antitype, as if they stood upon the same plane, and were constructed of the same materials.<sup>6</sup>

Second, it is equally erroneous to assume little or no resemblance between type and antitype. Applying loose criteria for identifying implicit types approximates allegorical interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

Third, given the tendency for error in both directions, it is necessary to properly understand how to recognize types in Scripture. Just as it is unwarranted to define a type as anything in the Old Testament bearing a slight resemblance to something in the New, insisting that the only legitimate types are those explicitly acknowledged as such by New Testament writers<sup>8</sup> is also unwarranted. Patrick Fairbairn and Milton Terry wisely held a more moderate view wherein they accepted as types both those which are *explicitly* identified, as well as those which are *implicitly* identified via formal comparison and inference. Of course, this latter category of types requires meticulous analysis. Fairbairn writes, “How we ought to proceed in applying the general views that have been unfolded to the interpretation of such parts of the Old Testament symbols as have not been explained in New Testament Scripture, will no doubt require careful examination.”<sup>9</sup> Regarding the appropriate way to do so, Terry writes,

The principles of Special Hermeneutics must be gathered from a faithful study of the Bible itself. We must observe the methods which the sacred writers followed. Naked propositions or formulated rules will be of little value unless supported and illustrated by self-verifying examples. It is worthy of note that the Scriptures furnish numerous instances of the interpretation of dreams, visions, types, symbols, and parables. In such examples we are to find our principles and laws of exposition...Taken as a whole, and allowed to speak for itself, the Bible will be found to be its own best interpreter.<sup>10</sup>

Fourth, it is critical to understand that the antitype expands on and clarifies the meaning of the type but does not change, replace, or insert additional meaning. Fairbairn states, “we are

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 1:159.

<sup>7</sup> This was the approach taken by Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669).

<sup>8</sup> For example, Paul, in Romans 5:14, explicitly labeled Adam as a type (Greek: τύπος) of Christ. This was the view of Bishop Herbert Marsh (1757-1839). Milton Terry criticized this position as follows: “This principle, however, is altogether too restrictive for an adequate exposition of the Old Testament types. We should look into the Scriptures themselves for general principles and guidance, but not with the expectation that every type, designed to prefigure Gospel truths, must be formally announced as such...The persons and events which are expressly declared by the sacred writers to be typical are rather to be taken as specimens and examples for the interpretation of all types.” in Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1999), 255-6.

<sup>9</sup> Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 1:61.

<sup>10</sup> Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1999), 143.

not to be understood as ascribing to it some new sense or meaning.”<sup>11</sup> The “type “has properly *but one radical meaning*”<sup>12</sup> which is “a distinct and intelligible meaning.”<sup>13</sup> Fairbairn writes:

The “New Testament Scripture [does not] invest [the Old Testament Scripture] with a force and meaning foreign to its original purpose and design. The Old merely records the typical fact, which properly constitutes the whole there is of prediction in the matter; while the New reads forth its import as such, by announcing the correlative events or circumstances in which the fulfillment should be discovered.”<sup>14</sup>

Fifth, types, by their very nature, are prophetic. Every Old Testament type looks forward to a New Testament antitype. “A type...necessarily possesses something of a prophetic character...indicating beforehand what God was designed to accomplish for His people in the approaching future...connecting together the Old and the New in God’s dispensations.”<sup>15</sup> Terry writes:

The type must prefigure something in the future...Hence it is that sacred typology constitutes a specific form of prophetic revelation. The Old Testament dispensations were preparatory for the New, and contained many things in germ which could fully blossom only in the light of the Gospel of Jesus...Old Testament characters, offices, institutions, and events were prophetic adumbrations of corresponding realities in the Church and kingdom of Christ...The Old Testament theocracy itself was a type and shadow of the more glorious New Testament kingdom of God.<sup>16</sup>

Taking these five aspects into consideration, the nature of biblical typology has been well-summarized by Patrick Fairbairn:

[Typology’s] province does not indeed consist in definitely marking out beforehand the particular agents and transactions that are to fill up the page of the eventful future. It performs the service which in this respect it is fitted to accomplish, when it enables us to obtain some insight – not into the *what*, or the *when*, or the *instruments by which* – but rather into the *how* and the *wherefore* of the future, – when it instructs us respecting the nature of the principles that must prevail, and the general lines of dealing that shall be adopted, in conducting the affairs of Messiah’s kingdom to their destined results. The future here is mirrored in the past; and the thing that hath been, is, in all its essential features, the same that shall be.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 1:54.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:154-5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:155.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:110.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:106.

<sup>16</sup> Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 248-9.

<sup>17</sup> Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 1:188.

## The Function of Biblical Typology

Old Testament types served the purpose of revealing and introducing Christ and New Testament realities in a shadowy form prior to their historical manifestation in order to instruct and prepare God's people for their arrival. Before a baby is born, parents greatly appreciate the opportunity to see a rough silhouette of their child on an ultrasound screen. They never seem to tire of proudly showing off the ultrasound pictures to their family and friends...until, of course, the actual arrival of the baby. When the reality comes, although it is remembered and appreciated for the purpose it served, the shadowy picture is no longer needed. Biblical typology operates in much the same way. Fairbairn writes:

[We understand the idea of a type in] its strictly proper and distinctive sphere to lie in the relations of the old to the new, or the earlier to the later, in God's dispensations...had their ordination by God, and were designed by Him to foreshadow and prepare for the better things of the Gospel...the realities of the Gospel, which constitute the antitypes, are the ultimate objects which were contemplated by the mind of God, when planning the economy of His successive dispensations...to prepare the way for the introduction of these ultimate objects, He placed the Church under a course of training, which included instruction by types, or designed and fitted resemblances of what was to come.<sup>18</sup>

Given this understanding of biblical typology, it is helpful to note some implicit and explicit biblical examples.<sup>19</sup> Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, in his book *Interpreting Prophecy* notes that "Christ...insisted that the events of his final, and still future, coming were prefigured by the days of God's visitation in Noah's time...and in Lot's time"<sup>20</sup> He also notes the Aaronic priesthood and its sacrifices as "anticipatory and preparatory...[for] that priesthood and that sacrifice which would be perfect and forever effective."<sup>21</sup> Seventeenth century puritan John Ball, in his book *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, argues that there is "in the Law there is...perpetual adumbration and representation of [Christ]...Moses by diverse types and figures shadowed forth the death and resurrection of Christ"<sup>22</sup> He also argues that the redemption of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt prefigured "a spiritual Redeemer of them from the bondage of sin and Satan...from spiritual bondage."<sup>23</sup> Another significant example is given by O. Palmer Robertson in his book *The Christ of the Covenants*:

Old Covenant Israel may be regarded as a typological representation of the elect people of God...The old covenant nation of Israel typologically anticipated the new covenant reality of the chosen people of God assembled as a nation consecrated to God...If the new covenant people of God are the actualized realization of a typological form, and the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 1:46-7.

<sup>19</sup> The reader is referred to the original sources for the Scripture texts upon which the summaries cited are built.

<sup>20</sup> Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Interpreting Prophecy* (Eugene OR.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 36.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>22</sup> John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (London: Simeon Ash, 1645), 111.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 112.

new covenant is now in effect, those constituting the people of God in the present circumstances must be recognized as the “Israel of God.” As a unified people, the participants of the new covenant today are “Israel.”<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, “David himself was a type, and did bear the person of Christ,”<sup>25</sup> and “David’s kingdom and reign...were...intended to foreshadow those of Christ.”<sup>26</sup> O. Palmer Robertson agrees: “David and his throne anticipated the beneficent reign of the coming Messiah.”<sup>27</sup> Robertson is correct in asserting that “the denial of any connection between the ‘throne of David’ and Christ’s current enthronement at God’s right hand must be taken as an effort to limit the magnificent realities of the new covenant by the shadowy forms of the old.”<sup>28</sup> We must then agree that the “shadow-kingdom of Israel was real. God was reigning in their midst. But it was nonetheless only a shadow of the reality to come.”<sup>29</sup> Remember, Jesus Himself declared, “*My kingdom is not of this world*” (John 18:36).

Before citing one final example, it is important to see, in the example of David’s throne and kingdom, another significant principle pertaining to the nature and function of biblical typology. As stated above, types are by nature prophetic and they served to introduce Christ and New Testament realities to the Old Testament people of God. Given this, it is vitally important to recognize that, although some types prefigure future *earthly, physical* realities, many are *earthly* pictures of *heavenly, spiritual* realities. Robertson writes, “David’s throne [on earth]...typically [anticipated] the messianic reign of Christ [in heaven].”<sup>30</sup> Here we have a prime example of earthly type depicting a future heavenly reality. Robertson continues:

It is difficult to imagine any way in which Peter [in Acts 2:30ff<sup>31</sup>] could have expressed more pointedly that Jesus Christ’s current exaltation fulfilled God’s promise to David that his descendent was to reign as the anointed one of Israel...Today Jesus reigns ‘literally’ in Jerusalem because the ‘Jerusalem’ of the old covenant represented the place of God’s

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<sup>24</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), 288-9.

<sup>25</sup> Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 145.

<sup>26</sup> Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 1:114.

<sup>27</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 249-50.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 218-9.

<sup>31</sup> “And so, because [David] was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, <sup>31</sup> he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ...Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God...<sup>34</sup> “For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: *THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, “SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, <sup>35</sup> UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.”* <sup>36</sup> “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ-- this Jesus whom you crucified.”

enthronement, just as the ‘Jerusalem’ of the new covenant represents the place of God’s throne today.<sup>32</sup>

In the example of David and his throne we see clearly that “as the typical is divine truth on a lower stage, exhibited by means of outward relations and terrestrial interests, so, when making the transition from this to the antitypical, we must expect the truth to appear on a loftier stage, and, if we may so speak, with a more heavenly aspect...*there*, the outward, the present, the worldly; *here*, the inward, the future, the heavenly.”<sup>33</sup>

This truth is also plainly demonstrated in a final example: the land of Canaan. Although many today wrongly anticipate a time when ethnic Jews will once again inherit the physical promised land, John Ball correctly argued that “the land of Canaan a type of Heaven: the Lord leading the Jews by the help of earthly things to heavenly and spiritual, because they were but young and tender,”<sup>34</sup> and “the possession of the Land of *Canaan*, as it was a part of their outward happiness, so it was a type of the eternal rest.”<sup>35</sup> Fairbairn, Robertson, and Hughes agree: “In the type we have the prospect of Canaan, the Gospel of an *earthly* promise of rest...in the antitype, the prospect of a *heavenly* inheritance, the Gospel promise of an *everlasting* rest.”<sup>36</sup> “Covenantal inheritance found its typological representation in the possession of the land of Canaan.”<sup>37</sup> “The land of promise was an earthly sign pointing beyond itself to a heavenly reality.”<sup>38</sup>

### The Clarity of Biblical Typology

Those who hold to a narrow/strict view of typology<sup>39</sup> scoff at the notion that land of Canaan was a type of heaven. One of the arguments levied against the typological position is that Abraham, his descendents, and the original readers of the book of Genesis, understood the land promise just as it was given – as a literal, physical promise. Additionally, they argue that, having the land of Canaan as a type of heaven without anyone knowing about it for thousands of years, until the New Testament was written, presents major hermeneutical problems. One must concede that, if their premises are accurate, their conclusions will hold. It is difficult to believe

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 221-2.

<sup>33</sup> Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 1:158.

<sup>34</sup> Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 34.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>36</sup> Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 1:65.

<sup>37</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 140 fn 9.

<sup>38</sup> Hughes, *Interpreting Prophecy*, 43-4.

<sup>39</sup> That is, those who, like Bishop Herbert Marsh (1757-1839), believe that the only legitimate biblical types are the ones explicitly acknowledged as such by New Testament writers.

that God would say one thing and mean another.<sup>40</sup> However, their assumption that Abraham and others saw the land promise in a purely physical light is unfounded, and the argumentation built upon this assumption is therefore fallacious. Ball writes:

Not only Promises of temporal good things, but of spiritual and eternal were made to the Patriarchs of in the Covenant of Grace, and sought and obtained by them. They looked for a City whose builder and maker the Lord is. Remission of sins and life everlasting was preached in the Covenant, sealed in the Sacrament, and typified by the Land of Canaan. To conceit the Fathers to be an assembly of brute beasts, which looked to be fed with earthly blessings alone, is highly to dishonor them, and lessen the grace and mercy of God towards them.<sup>41</sup>

Hughes presses this point. He explains that “Abraham willingly endured the hardships by which he was beset in the land of promise,”<sup>42</sup> because “he and those with him desired ‘a better country, that is, a heavenly one,’ which is precisely what God intended as the focus of their faith and hope.”<sup>43</sup> “Abraham’s hope was fixed on something far more than a mere this-worldly fulfillment of the promises God made to him...Abraham did not view the earthly territory to which God’s promise was attached as an end in itself, but understood it, sacramentally, as a sign pointing beyond itself to a distant and transcendental reality.”<sup>44</sup> A misunderstanding of the promise on Abraham’s part would have had serious implications on his faith. Hughes writes, “Abraham and the other patriarchs did not seek in the physical land of Canaan their everlasting possession or interpret in a carnal manner the good things promised by God. Had they done so, they would have been bitterly disillusioned men.”<sup>45</sup> Critics may argue that all of this amounts to nothing more than clever argumentation stemming from well-reasoned logic, but we must remember that Scripture itself explicitly unfolds this truth in Hebrews 11:8-19.<sup>46</sup> Robertson explains:

For pedagogical purposes, God under the old covenant did indeed foreshadow the ultimate goal of Abraham’s ‘salvation’ in terms of the possession of Palestine. But Scripture itself explicitly indicates that this hope of the patriarch found its consummate

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<sup>40</sup> Those who hold to a “literal hermeneutic” are quick to reject approaches that advocate double meaning or *sensus plenior* (i.e., “fuller meaning” – the divine author had a meaning in mind that was unknown and unknowable to both the human author and readership).

<sup>41</sup> Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 91.

<sup>42</sup> Hughes, *Interpreting Prophecy*, 39.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-4.

<sup>46</sup> *By faith [Abraham] lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; <sup>10</sup> for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God... <sup>13</sup> All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. <sup>16</sup> But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them [which is described in 12:22 and 13:14].*



realization only by his firm faith in the resurrection of the body (Heb. 11:17-19). The old covenant patriarch, as the father of all who believe, is characterized by Scripture as looking for a 'better' country, which is 'heavenly,' although not thereby nonphysical (Heb. 11:14-16).<sup>47</sup>

The example of Abraham and the promised land<sup>48</sup> provides a fitting illustration of the principle that the recipients of types were by no means completely uninformed about the antitypes to which they pointed. To claim otherwise would destroy the purpose and function of types, as would the claim that types provide full knowledge of their corresponding antitypes. The former severs the connection between type and antitype, while the latter equates the two. Instead of these extremes, a healthy, well-balanced view ought to be maintained. Types introduced antitypes in a shadowy form in order to instruct and prepare God's people for their arrival. Although types did not provide *full* knowledge of what they typified, they did provide *sufficient* knowledge. The Westminster divines realized this fact and therefore taught that the "types and ordinances...were for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah" (Westminster Confession of Faith, 7:5). Remember, types are, by nature, prophetic. Thus, "a shadowy promise anticipated the reality of fulfillment."<sup>49</sup> So, although the typical pictures were not perfectly clear, they were certainly unambiguous enough to elicit eager expectation.

To what degree did types provide clarity? John Ball describes types as "obscure and dark... general words...seldom more specially described."<sup>50</sup> When discussing the Scripture's first mention of the gospel and Covenant of Grace (i.e., Genesis 3:15<sup>51</sup>), Ball portrays it as "propounded in dark and cloudy terms, not easy to be understood, and most things sparingly expressed, and indeed rather implied than expressed."<sup>52</sup> Fairbairn goes so far as to state that Old Testament saints "did not necessarily perceive their further reference to the things of Christ's kingdom...they knew little, and perhaps in some cases nothing, of the germs that lay concealed in them of better things to come."<sup>53</sup> Here, Fairbairn takes it too far. As noted above, to assume that they knew *nothing* is to altogether sever the relationship between type and antitype. Why would Fairbairn make such a seemingly extreme argument? He rightly asserts, "The prophets

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<sup>47</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 215.

<sup>48</sup> It is proper to understand the land promise to Abraham as typologically pointing to heaven. However, we must not miss the progressive expansion of the borders of this promise. In the New Testament economy, the church is understood to be the "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16), "true circumcision" (Philippians 3:3), "House of Israel...and House of Judah" (Hebrews 8:8), "chosen race [and] holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9). This holy nation is not limited to the geographical borders of Palestine but inherits the earth (Matthew 5:5; cf. Genesis 12:3; Matthew 28:19) as the seed of Abraham, who was declared to be the "heir of the world" (Romans 4:13)..

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>50</sup> Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 32.

<sup>51</sup> *And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>53</sup> Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 1:145.

were not properly the authors of their own predictions, but spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” However, his conclusion that follows, “Their knowledge, therefore, of the real meaning of the prophecies they uttered, was an entirely separate thing from the prophecies themselves,”<sup>54</sup> lacks biblical support and contradicts the aforementioned statement in the Westminster Confession that types “were for that time sufficient and efficacious...to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah [i.e., the antitype which these types foreshadowed].” It also fails to align with 1 Peter 1:10-12,<sup>55</sup> which clearly indicates that those in the former age did not possess full detail regarding the antitypes (e.g., the person and time), but nonetheless, they had sufficient enough information to make careful searches and inquiries regarding the antitypes. Although Fairbairn appears to have painted a picture of scarce to no knowledge, two pages later, he changes his tone a bit: “That sincere worshippers of God in former ages...were acquainted not only with God’s general purpose of redemption, but also with some of its more prominent features and results, we have no reason to doubt...considerable light was sometimes obtained respecting the work of salvation”<sup>56</sup> Oddly enough, he makes this statement almost immediately after arguing that “we should seldom venture to give more than an approximate deliverance, how far the realities typified even by the more important symbols and transactions of ancient times were distinctly perceived by any individual who lived prior to their actual appearance.”<sup>57</sup>

Although Scripture does not always offer precise details pertaining to the exact degree of light that types shed on the true nature of the antitypes they foreshadowed, we can make four key conclusions regarding the clarity of biblical typology. First, we may safely argue that types most certainly pointed toward and instructed the saints enough to provide not *full*, but *sufficient* knowledge of the antitypes.

Second, clarity increased as time progressed. Fairbairn writes, “It is the proper aim and business of Typology to trace the progress of this development, and to show how...there were great principles steadily at work, and in their operations forecasting, with growing clearness and certainty, the appearance and kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>58</sup> Similarly, the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) states:

Although the price of redemption was not actually paid by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefit thereof were communicated to the elect in all ages, successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices wherein he was revealed, and signified to be the seed which should bruise the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 1:146-7.

<sup>55</sup> *As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, <sup>11</sup> seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. <sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look.*

<sup>56</sup> Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 1:149.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 1:148.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 1:95.

serpent's head; and the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, being the same yesterday, and today and for ever. (8:6)

Third, the New Testament sheds the greatest light. In other words, full clarity is only found in the New Testament antitype (cf. Romans 16:25-26;<sup>59</sup> Hebrews 9:8-12<sup>60</sup>). For this reason, Fairbairn stated that the most complete knowledge of an antitype rests “chiefly on the light furnished by the records of the New Testament, and thence reflected on those of the Old.”<sup>61</sup> The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) states, “This covenant is revealed in the gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by farther steps, until the full discovery thereof was completed in the New Testament...” (7:3).

Milton Terry argued:

It is of first importance to observe that, from a Christian point of view, the Old Testament cannot be fully apprehended without the help of the New. The mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known unto men, was revealed unto the apostles and prophets of the New Testament (Eph. iii.5), and that revelation sheds a flood of light upon numerous portions of the Hebrew Scriptures...The Old Testament...abounds in testimony of the Christ...the illustration and fulfillment of which can be seen only in light of the Christian revelation...The Old Testament types are susceptible of complete interpretation only by the light of the Gospel.<sup>62</sup>

This addresses the idea of “testament priority” as discussed in the introduction.

Fourth, although biblical typology necessarily leads to a “New Testament priority,” one must also recognize that the New Testament builds upon the foundation of the Old: “the religious truths and ideas which were embodied in the typical events and institutions of former times, must be regarded as forming the ground and limit of their prospective reference to the affairs of Christ’s kingdom.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, <sup>26</sup> but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;*

<sup>60</sup> *The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, <sup>9</sup> which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, <sup>10</sup> since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation. <sup>11</sup> But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; <sup>12</sup> and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:150.

<sup>62</sup> Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 18.

<sup>63</sup> Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 1:150-1.

## The Beauty of Biblical Typology

The very fact that biblical typology exists, and that Old Testament types served to prefigure New Testament gospel realities, indicates that there is a necessary connection between the Old and New Testaments. From the perspective of Covenant Theology, this points to a single Covenant of Grace which began in Genesis 3:15 and spans the entire length of redemptive history. It also supports the fact that there have been multiple, interconnected administrations of the Covenant of Grace throughout history.<sup>64</sup>

According to Patrick Fairbairn, “[there is] an organic connection between the Old and the New dispensations, giving rise to the relation of type and antitype.”<sup>65</sup> The role of typology in understanding the fundamental unity between the testaments and the relationship between the covenant administrations cannot be understated. Fairbairn argues that “historical types...were absolutely necessary...to render the earlier dispensations thoroughly preparative in respect to the coming dispensation of the Gospel.”<sup>66</sup> This organic unity evidenced via typology bears witness to God’s unified plan and design throughout history. Fairbairn writes:

It will be found that the connection of the Old with the New is something more than typical, in the sense of foreshadowing, or formally imaging what was to come; it is also inward and organic. Amid the ostensible differences there is a pervading unity of spirit and design – one faith, one life, one hope, one destiny. And while the Old Testament Church, in its outward condition and earthly relations, typically adumbrated the spiritual and heavenly things of the New, it was also, in so far as it is realized and felt the truth of God presented to it, the living root out of which the New ultimately sprang. The rude beginnings were there of all that exists in comparative perfection now.<sup>67</sup>

Although God chose to display this inward and organic unity through types and antitypes, we must not think that He did so in a random fashion. Instead, it must be recognized that Scripture demonstrates a clear progress of revelation and fulfillment from the inception of the Covenant of Grace to the coming of the Messianic age. Robertson writes, “God’s words to Adam [in Genesis 3:15] foreshadow the subsequent history of redemption.”<sup>68</sup> John Murray stated that the “Covenant of Grace...was regarded as having begun to be dispensed to men in the first promise given to Adam after the fall, but as taking concrete form in the promise to Abraham and progressively disclosed until it reached its fullest realization in the New Covenant.”<sup>69</sup> Robertson agrees: “As history progresses, the fuller implications of the covenant...become manifest [and]...reaches its consummation in the appearance of Jesus Christ ‘in the fullness of

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<sup>64</sup> See again Westminster Confession of Faith 7:5.

<sup>65</sup> Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 1:157.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:70.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:177.

<sup>68</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 106.

<sup>69</sup> John Murray, *The Collected Writings of John Murray* (Carlisle, PA.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983) 4:223.

time' (Gal. 4:4). The unified purpose of the covenant...binds together the gradual unfolding of the varied aspects of this single bond."<sup>70</sup>

In the final analysis, it is true that the existence of biblical typology implies a difference in historical administration among God's people: "The great divide in the history of redemption for covenant theologians distinguishes the old covenant with its prophecies and shadows from the new covenant with its fulfillments and realities."<sup>71</sup> However, each outward administration of the Covenant of Grace typified the same realities, and each change in administration brought the people of God progressively closer to the realization of those realities: "Each of the successive covenants made with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David finds its fulfillment in the new covenant."<sup>72</sup> This is the beauty of biblical typology and why Fairbairn could rightly assert:

The Old and New Testament Churches, though differing widely in light and privilege, yet breathed the same spirit, walked by the same rule, possessed and manifested the same elements of character. A correct acquaintance with the Typology of Scripture alone explains how, with such palpable differences subsisting between them, there should still have been such essential uniformity in the result.<sup>73</sup>

## Conclusion

Biblical typology spans the testaments in that Old Testament types pictured or foreshadowed New Testament gospel realities in order to instruct and prepare God's people for their arrival. Although types did not provide *full* knowledge of what they typified, they did provide *sufficient* knowledge.

The very fact that biblical typology exists, and that Old Testament types served to prefigure New Testament gospel realities, indicates that there is a necessary connection between the Old and New Testaments. It also provides evidence for a single Covenant of Grace, which spans the entire length of redemptive history and has been manifested in multiple, interconnected administrations. Additionally, a proper understanding of typology provides answers regarding testament priority and how to properly interpret the New Testament's use of the Old. Thus, typology can appropriately be called "the connecting link between the testaments."

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<sup>70</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 92.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 1:172.

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