

The Whitefield League

INTERPRETING THE OLD TESTAMENT

Tools for understanding types,
shadows, and fulfillment in Christ



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Dear servants of Christ,

The Bible, containing sixty-six books, is divided into two testaments: Old and New. The term “testament” derives from a Latin word commonly used to refer to the biblical concept of “covenant.” So then, the two major sections of the Bible could rightly be called Old Covenant and New Covenant, referencing the two major administrations of the Covenant of Grace. Although we distinguish the two testaments with the incarnation as the dividing line when organizing the books of the Bible, it is crucial to also notice that they maintain a single message: there is one God, one salvation, one faith, and one church.

This single message is also progressive. For this reason, Augustine, roughly 1600 years ago, famously stated, “The new is in the old concealed; the old is in the new revealed.” That is, this one, consistent message from God has been made known to people, by God throughout history. The *OT* gives the message in shadow form, while the *NT* reveals these deep mysteries God has always proclaimed.

This booklet will equip you to trace every *OT* shadow – plot, promise, symbol, analogy, allegory, and type – to their ultimate fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ through a series of practical guidelines and tools.

1 Peter 1:10–12

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

Guiding Principles

Luke 24:27

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

1. **Pointing Forward:**
The Old Testament points ahead to the New Testament.
2. **Fulfillment:**
The New Testament fulfills, but does not cancel, the Old Testament. *Hebrews 10:1*
3. **Law & Gospel:**
All of the Old Testament law points to the need for Christ and his righteous sacrifice. The moral law remains in effect for all people at all times. *Romans 3:27-31*
4. **Christ the Center:**
Jesus, the Son of God, is the center point of all of Scripture, Old and New Testaments.
5. **Stable Meaning:**
The meaning of a passage remains the same, even as it is made more clear throughout the history of redemption.

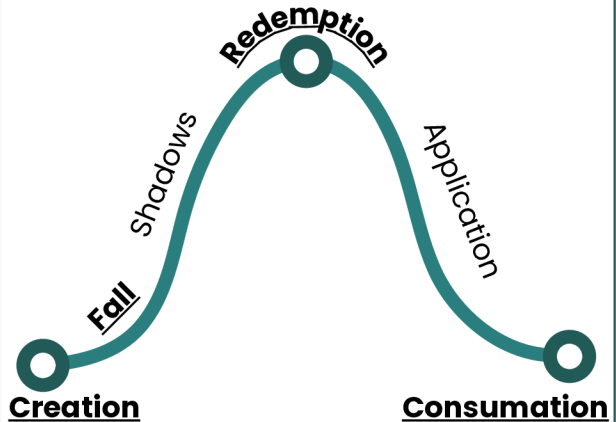
1. Plot

Every story has a plot. The Bible is the *redemptive story*, in which God progressively tells us how he saves rebellious sinners and makes them his own people. This true story follows the general progression of nearly every story written, because human stories reflect God's great story.

Key Plot Points

Introduction
Problem
Rising Action
Climax
Falling Action
Resolution

The Biblical Story Arc



This story arc covers all of the Bible: *OT* and *NT*. It also occurs in smaller ways to foreshadow, symbolize, or prefigure the bigger picture. For instance, Genesis 6:1–9:17 tells how:

1. Humanity rebelled against God;
2. God proclaimed their coming Judgment;
3. God provided salvation (Noah's Ark);
4. A remnant people was rescued;
5. The earth was made new;
6. God established his covenant with the remnant.

2. Promise

The OT is filled with promises from God. And God is trustworthy: he always fulfills his promises. These promises are rooted in God's character and the eternal covenant he made within himself (see Psalm 2:7-9; Ephesians 1:4-6).

1. Notice partial fulfillments: a saving act, a temporary king, a blessing given;
2. Focus on the singular ultimate fulfillment: Christ and the blessings he gives to his people;
3. Partial fulfillments are one example of *shadows*: dim pictures of what is yet to come.

Example:

Promise: Genesis 3:15

→ The Seed

Repeated Promise: Genesis 26:3-5

→ Seed/Seeds

Partial Fulfillments: Sons born until Jesus.

→ Maybe the Seed?

True Fulfillment: Galatians 3:16

→ Seed

Further Fulfillment: Galatians 3:27-29

→ Seeds

Numbers 23:19

God is not man,
that he should lie,
or a son of man,
that he should
change his mind.
Has he said, and
will he not do it?
Or has he spoken,
and will he not
fulfill it?

2 Corinthians 1:20

For all the
promises of God
find their Yes in
him. That is why it
is through him
that we utter our
Amen to God for
his glory.

Initial
Truth



Symbol

John 6:35

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

3. Symbol

Symbols are *representations* of the truth. In the OT, this usually means they are *representations* of redemptive truth. Such symbols provide useful pictures for understanding what God communicates to people.

Three key aspects of symbols:

1. The representation is physical;
2. The symbol points to something spiritual;
3. The meaning is focused on the time when it was written.
4. The symbolic connection is usually made clear somewhere in Scripture.

Example: Manna

In Exodus 16, God graciously provided manna as a means of bread for his hungry people. In John 6:25–51, Jesus had a conversation with the crowd in which he connects the manna that their ancestors ate to the true spiritual food that he himself is for all who believe. The Israelites in the desert ate their fill of manna, but God's people are given the true spiritual nourishment of Christ himself.

Although symbols sometimes are on their own, they are also frequently important parts of other shadows. For instance, symbols are an important part of the types we will look at later on in this booklet.

4. Analogy

Frequently in Scripture we see one thing, or sometimes many things, resembling another. These resemblances are analogies. In biblical analogies:

1. The similarities are circumstantial;
2. Principles or events are repeated, but without any direct relationship to one another;
3. No fulfillment is required from one part of the analogy to the other.

Truth



Truth



Truth



Truth

Example: God's Purposes

In Genesis 50:20, Joseph told his brothers that what they intended for evil, God intended for good. Similarly, when Peter was preaching to the crowds in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2:23), he told them that what they meant for evil, God meant for good. There is no *direct* relationship between these events through something like prophecy, yet both events proclaim the same redemptive truth: God remains sovereign and fulfills his purposes even through the actions of sinful men.

Analogies are one of the most frequent connections that we see between various passages of Scripture. Such connections are spread throughout Scripture. The key when drawing analogical connections is to allow each passage to speak for itself, before trying to connect multiple passages together.

5. Allegory

Allegories are stories that symbolize – through the characters, events, or other story elements – other people, events, or ideas. In biblical allegories there is normally a spiritual component to the symbolized meaning.

In the *NT*, some of Jesus's parables, like the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23, are allegories. There are also allegories in the *OT*.

Judges 9:8–21 is one example: God uses a fictitious story about trees to teach the Israelites about kingship and acting honorably.

One of the most famous allegories is not found in the Bible, but is instead written about the Christian life: John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. This story follows the life of a fictional man, Christian, who faces all sorts of trials, temptations, and blessings on the journey that God guides him through. Each character, location, and event points the reader to some aspect of the Christian life we face every day.

When interpreting allegories:

1. Focus on the full context and how it fits;
2. Identify the main point;
3. Look for an explanation in the immediate context or somewhere else in the Bible;
4. Center on Christ.

See Galatians 4:21–31 for an example from the Apostle Paul.

Dangers: Allegorizing and Moralizing

One of the most common dangers in interpreting the OT is **allegorizing**: treating every passage as an allegory.

Allegorizing involves:

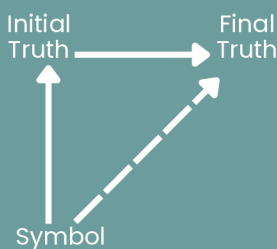
1. Seeking out hidden meaning in a passage;
2. Accidental, incidental, or artificial relationships;
3. Importing our own ideas into the text.

Instead, focus on the intended meaning by:

1. Noticing the human author's intention;
2. Observing the original hearer's understanding;
3. Allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture;
4. Focusing on Christ.

Example: *David's defeat of Goliath is not a self-help call to face our giants, but rather a foreshadowing of Christ's victory over sin and death.*

Another common danger in OT interpretation is **moralizing**: looking at a passage only for the moral principle it can teach us. Although there often are moral principles, all of God's Word is centered around Christ and his work, and therefore in some way points us to him. Christ ought always to be our primary focus in interpretation.



6. Type

Types are another form of shadow found in the OT in which historical people, places, things, or events foreshadow redemptive truth.

Types consist of two components: the type and the antitype.

The **type** is the symbol.

The **antitype** is the thing which was symbolized, revealed in Christ.

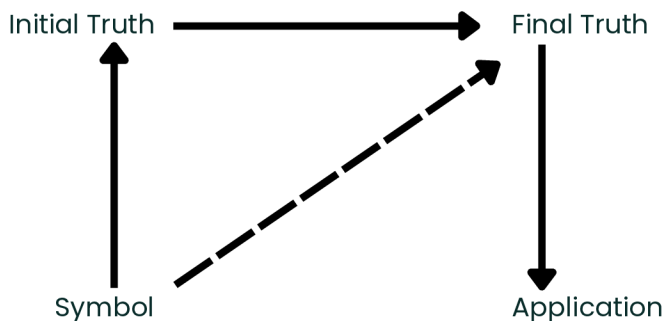
1. The full meaning of a type is not clear until it is fulfilled in the antitype.
2. If a type is not identified in the Bible, exercise caution in identifying it.
3. Types are revealed, not hidden.

Colossians 1:26–27

“... the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

A few verses later, in 2:16–17, Paul goes on to point out that OT food regulations, festivals, new moon observances, and sabbaths were all types, shadows, that pointed ahead to the far greater reality: Jesus Christ and the work that he has done on behalf of his people.

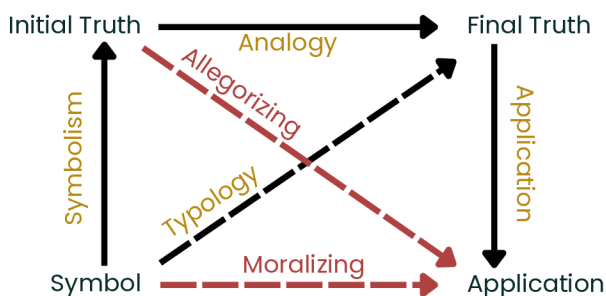
A Helpful Framework



Try it using the Passover in Exodus 12 and the sacrifice of Jesus as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:7

Steps for understanding types:

1. What is the symbol?
2. What truth did the symbol represent to the original audience?
3. What final truth did it foreshadow?
4. How does this final truth apply to us?



Earlier we spoke of the dangers of allegorizing and moralizing. In this chart we see the problems: allegorizing jumps from the original truth directly to the application, skipping over the crucial fulfillment; moralizing skips both truths, looking directly from the symbol to the application.



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