

How Bible Types Work

A Type in the Bible is when an analogy/parallel is made between a physical thing in the Old Testament and a spiritual thing in the New Testament. It is not a type just because we see similarities between two things. It is only a type if God draws the parallel.

For example the most prominent type in the Bible is taught by texts like John 1:29 – “[The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.](#)” The parallel being made is between Jesus and all the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament. The OT lamb was sacrificed to take away sin, but only in type - Heb 10:4 says “[For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.](#)” So the sacrifice of Christ is really the only effectual sacrifice, the final sacrifice, it takes the place of all those animal sacrifices.

Let’s now observe some other Bible types. In Gen 22, God asked Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a burnt sacrifice. But at the last minute Abraham offered a ram “[in the stead of his son](#)” (verse 13). The ram being an animal sacrifice would represent Jesus as a type – we’ve already learned that. So if Isaac is a type in this story, he would represent us. The idea would be that Isaac was supposed to die that day, but the ram was offered instead of him. Likewise we are supposed to die because of our sin but Jesus dies instead of us. See the parallel? To me the most beautiful thing about this whole analogy is found in verse 7. You will remember in verse 7 Isaac says “[Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?](#)” In verse 8 Abraham replies “[My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.](#)” Well didn’t God provide a lamb/ram in Gen 22? He did; that ram wasn’t caught in a thicket by accident. But isn’t there a double meaning to the statement “[God will provide himself a lamb](#)”? We are lost because of our sin, on the way to spending eternity in fire with the devil. And there is no way we can solve that problem (that we created) ourselves. God solves our problem for us by providing the lamb Jesus Christ. Because of His death, those that trust and obey have changed their destination and are now on their way to spending eternity with God in paradise.

Another illustration of how a type works is found in the story of the institution of the Passover in Exod 12. You’ll remember the story of the tenth and final plague – the death of the first born. The Israelites sacrificed a lamb (verse 3) and placed some of the blood on the posts of the door of their houses (verse 7). When the angel of death came through, he would “[pass over](#)” the houses that had the blood (verse 13). In this way, none of the Israelites lost their first born, but all of the Egyptians did – including the Pharaoh himself (verse 29). I Cor 5:7 calls “[Christ our passover.](#)” What’s the parallel? In Exod 12 when the angel saw the blood on the door he passed over those houses and didn’t kill their first born. With Christ, when it comes time for God to hand out just retribution for our sins, he passes over those who trust and obey because he sees Jesus’ blood.

The scapegoat is also a type of Christ even though it was not sacrificed. Leviticus 16:21-22 states “[And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.](#)” That passage sounds just like Isaiah 53 and the sacrifice of Jesus, doesn’t it? Compare the appropriate parts of Leviticus 16:21-22 to Isaiah 53:6c “[and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all](#)” and 11c “[for he shall bear their iniquities.](#)” The wording is almost identical, isn’t it? It seems Isaiah 53 is quoting Leviticus 16 - three times. The scapegoat then is a type of Christ. In both the scapegoat type and the corresponding reality of Jesus, the people’s sins are placed on the one that then takes away their sin. In that sense both the scapegoat and Jesus bore the sins of the people.

Perhaps my favorite Bible analogy is found in John 3:14-15. In Num 21:4-9 the Israelites murmur against God. God sends poisonous snakes their way. Many are dying so they ask Moses to pray unto the Lord for help. God

has Moses put up a bronze statue of a snake on a pole. Whoever looks at the serpent on the pole would be healed of their snakebite. The parallel made by John 3:14-15 is that similarly Jesus will be put up on a pole (cross) and whoever believes in, looks to Him on that pole will be healed of their sin.

Col 2:11-13 supplies us with another interesting type or analogy. It reads “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.” The type is Old Testament circumcision, and the antitype is NOT baptism. This New Testament circumcision is made “without hands” and water baptism is done with hands. In the Old Testament the foreskin was cut off and the New Testament parallel is that our sins are cut (“put”) off (verse 11), i.e., our sins are “forgiven” (verse 12). Does that happen when a sinner is baptized? – yes verse 12, but baptism is not New Testament circumcision. The cutting off (forgiveness) of sins at baptism is. That is a very important distinction to make especially when debating infant baptism.

Consider James 2:24-25 – “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?” Perhaps that is a type in that a parallel is made between something physical in the Old Testament and something spiritual in the Old Testament? Josh 2:3-4,6,12-15, 6:21-25:

³ And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country.

⁴ And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were:

⁶ But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof.

¹² Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token:

¹³ And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

¹⁴ And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the Lord hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.

¹⁵ Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall.

²¹ And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and butt, with the edge of the sword.

²² But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her.

²³ And the young men that were spies went in, and brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel.

²⁴ And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord.

²⁵ And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

What is James' point?: Just as Rahab was saved physically by her works, we are saved spiritually by our works.

I Pet 3:20-21 says the salvation of Noah's family through the waters of the flood is a “figure” (KJV) of our salvation through water baptism.

For Radio Program:

The former is a figure of the latter in that both involve water and both involve a salvation. The first involves a physical salvation (from drowning Heb 11:7 - eight persons “were brought safely through the water” – NASB, ESV) while the second involves a spiritual salvation. Notice the latter part of verse 21 lets us know water baptism does not entail a physical cleansing (“not the putting away of the filth of the flesh”) but spiritual cleansing (“an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” - NASB). As usual the type refers to something physical (saved from drowning) in the Old Testament illustrating something spiritual (saved from sin) in the New Testament.

For Preachers Study:

I Pet 3:20-21 for sure proves water baptism is necessary to our salvation from sin. But the point of verse 20 is not that "water stood between Noah and the sinful world of old" but that "eight souls, were saved through water" (ASV), "eight persons, were brought safely through water" (ESV), "eight in all, were saved through water" (NIV), "eight persons, were brought safely through the water" (NASB), "eight souls, were saved through water" (NKJV). If we say "the storm shelter saved us through the tornado," we are not saying the tornado saved us, but that we are saved from the tornado. Verse 20 is talking about the physical salvation of the Noah's family from the waters of the flood (they didn't drown). Verse 21 is talking about our spiritual salvation through water baptism ("not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but ... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ"). The type and antitype here have two things in common - water and salvation (physical in verse 20, spiritual in verse 21). I think all Bible types use the physical to illustrate the spiritual. Why not just accept the obvious meaning here? No need for any contrived meanings for verse 20 or for verse 21.

Again something is not a Bible type unless the Bible draws the parallel. When we find our own parallel in the Bible, that is not a Bible type. Such is not necessarily bad if we identify these are our own parallels to make a teaching point. For example, the Bible tells us Paul had a “thorn in flesh” (II Cor 12:7) but it does not tell us what that thorn in the flesh was. No problem with guessing what that might have been as long as we identify our suggestion as speculation and not fact. But there is a big difference in inspired parallels and uninspired parallels, parallels that God makes versus parallels that only humans make.