Basics of Bible Study: Understanding Types and Antitypes

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Introduction

Continuing our series on the basics of Bible study, in this lesson, we consider various figures of speech, namely types and antitypes.

Types Defined

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines type as “(1) a category of people or things having common characteristics; (2) a person or thing symbolizing or exemplifying the defining characteristics of something; (3) printed characters or letters; (4) a design on either side of a medal or coin; (5) Theology, a foreshadowing in the Old Testament of a person or event of the Christian dispensation.”

Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary defines type as “a figure, representation, or symbol of something to come, as an event in the Old Testament foreshadows another in the New Testament.”

The Greek word tupos, translated “type,” has several interesting and interrelated meanings.

- **Thomas** defines tupos as from tuptō [to strike, smite, beat], meaning “the mark (of a blow), an impression, stamp (made by a die)” [5179b].
- **BDAG** say it refers to “(1) a mark made as the result of a blow or pressure, mark, trace (John 20:25); (2) embodiment of characteristics or function of a model, copy, image; (3) an object formed to resemble some entity, image, statue of any kind of material (Acts 7:43); a kind, class, or thing that suggests a model or pattern, form, figure, pattern (Rom. 6:17); (3) the content of a document, text, content (Acts 23:25); (4) an archetype serving as a model, type, pattern, model; (a) technically design, pattern (Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:5); (b) in the moral life example, pattern (1 Tim 4:12; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:7; 2 Thess. 3:9; Titus 2:7; 1 Pet. 5:3); (c) of the types given by God as an indication of the future, in the form of persons or things (Rom. 5:14).”
- **Strong/Thayer** say it refers to “(1) the mark of a stroke or blow, print; (2) a figure formed by a blow or impression; (a) of a figure or image; (b) of the image of the gods; (3) form, the teaching which embodies the sum and substance of religion and represents it to the mind, manner of writing, the contents and form of a letter; (4) an example: (a) in the technical sense, the pattern in conformity to which a thing must be made; (b) in an ethical sense, a dissuasive example, a pattern of warning; of ruinous events which serve as admonitions or warnings to others; (c) an example to be imitated; of men worthy of
imitation; (d) in a doctrinal sense, of a type, i.e., a person or thing prefiguring a future (Messianic) person or thing.”

**Antitype Defined**

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines *antitype* as “a person or thing that represents the opposite of another.”

Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary says an *antitype* refers to “a fulfillment or completion of an earlier truth revealed in the Bible.”

The Greek word *antitupos*, translated “type,” carries a related, though opposite, meaning.

- **Thomas** defines ἀντίτυπος [antitupos] as a compound of *anti* [over against, opposite] and *tupos* [the mark (of a blow), i.e., an impression, stamp (made by a die), type, pattern], meaning “struck back, corresponding to” [499].
- **BDAG** say antitupos, used generally “of something that corresponds to another; esp. used metaphorically.” specifically “(1) pertains to that which corresponds to something else, adj. corresponding to; (2) substantivally, a copy, antitype, representation.”
- **Strong/Thayer** say it refers to “(1) a thing formed after some pattern; (2) a thing resembling another, its counterpart; something in the Messianic times which answers to the type, as baptism corresponds to the deluge (1 Pet 3:21).”

This word occurs 2x in the NT (Heb. 9:24; 1 Pet. 3:21).

**The Two Adams**

Adam, the first man, foreshadows Jesus Christ, the last man (Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:42-49). In this case, opposites exceed similarities.

**The Two Kings**

Although not explicitly identified as a type/antitype, Melchizedek perfectly fits the pattern. This king-priest of Salem (Gen. 14:17-20; Psa. 110:4) prefigures the priesthood and kingship of Jesus Christ (Heb. 5:5-10; 6:19-20; 7:1-22).

**The Two Crosses**

The bronze serpent in the wilderness, which promised deliverance from the venom of fiery serpents (Num. 21:4-9), implicitly anticipates the cross of Christ, which provides deliverance from the curse of sin to those who look to Him in faith and obedience (John 3:14-21).
The Two Tabernacles

The tabernacle/temple of the Old Testament explicitly foreshadows the redemptive work of Jesus: “Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy [Greek: antitupos] of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 8:1-6; 9:23-28). The Old Testament arrangement was a vague and shadowy copy of the true tabernacle in which Christ ministers.

The Two Salvations

Baptism in the New Testament fulfills the function served by Noah’s ark in the Old Testament: the ark was a type and baptism is an antitype (1 Pet. 3:18-22; cf. Gal. 3:26-27). Noah and his family were delivered from an old sinful world to a new cleansed environment by the waters of the flood. In a like manner, we are delivered from an old life of sin into a new life of righteousness by the waters of baptism. Only those in the ark were saved from the destruction of the flood. In like manner, only those in Christ will be saved from the curse of sin. Those who submit to Bible baptism obtain forgiveness of sins and thus can stand before God with a clear conscience.

Conclusion

May we appreciate the richness of divine revelation. Let us study to show ourselves approved unto God, properly distinguishing literal and figurative language in the Bible. Let us make proper application of divine truth to our daily lives.

Do you walk after the first Adam or the last man Jesus? Do you honor the Lord like Abraham honored Melchizedek? Do you look to the cross for deliverance from the curse of sin? Have you taken advantage of the priestly work of Jesus? Have you been baptized into Christ for the remission of sins?