

Biblical Typology

Introduction

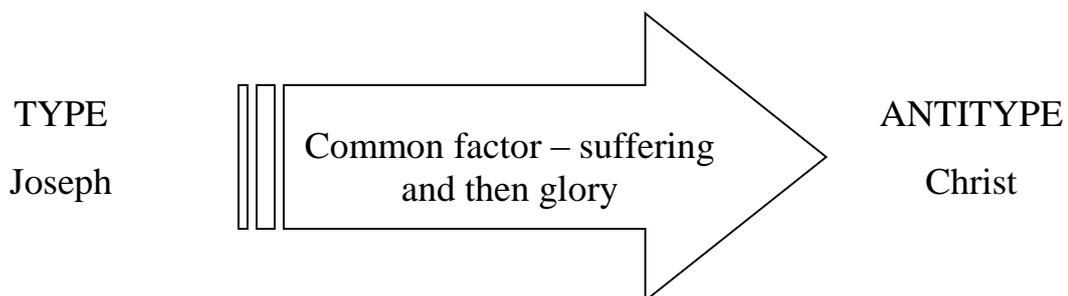
In this article we introduce the subject of *biblical typology*– the study of types, explaining what it is and noting its value to the believer. Simply put, a *type* points to or foreshadows something that will become a reality. Sometimes a type is referred to as a *figure*. For example, Moses delivered his people out of Egyptian bondage. In this sense he is a type or a figure of Christ. He foreshadows the work of Christ as the greater Deliverer who delivers man from the bondage of sin. Sadly, biblical typology is a neglected subject and sometimes disparaged among Christians. Little of it seems to be handed down to the young believer today. There are at least two reasons for this.

First, biblical typology is little appreciated because it is little understood. Many shy away from studying it because it requires more effort than some other subjects of Scripture. But be assured, any effort invested studying biblical types will yield a glowing dividend to a devoted heart. The Lord’s advice to the disbelieving Jews was to “search the scriptures.....they are they which testify of me” (Jn 5:39). On the other hand, some have made hard work of studying biblical types. We are told that its study falls within a discipline called *hermeneutics* – the science of biblical interpretation. Here students debate past, present and evolving philosophies that they then use to interpret God’s word. May we never lose sight of two vital truths – the Spirit of God can lead the simplest soul into all truth and that Scripture interprets itself.

Second, some people understandably avoid biblical typology because others have taken its application into realms of fantasy and falsehood. Just about everything in Scripture is seen to have a “typical” meaning, or a type is taken to have just about any meaning. But we must never value biblical truth according to man’s failure in regard to it. Let us then rightly divide the Word of God, and have a determination to better understand what God has said by acknowledging the rich and various ways in which He has said it, be it in types, symbols, similes, parables, allegories, metaphors, images or direct statements.

What is biblical typology?

Biblical typology involves a study of two things; both make up what is generally referred to as typology – the study of types. There is the **type** as we have noted and that which the type *anticipates*, called the **antitype**. Joseph like Moses is a type of Christ. In Joseph’s life we see something of the sufferings of Christ and His glory that should follow (1 Pet 1:11). Joseph, like Moses, is the *type* and Christ is the *Antitype*.



The antitype in Scripture is that which the type anticipates. Young believers sometimes have difficulty with the prefix “anti”, which commonly means “opposite” as in “antichrist.” Perhaps the best way of understanding the use of the prefix “anti” in typology is to remember that the type is “replaced” by the reality – it stands instead of the type.

The importance of biblical typology

There are compelling reasons why we should never minimize the importance of biblical typology; no reason is more persuasive than the first.

1. The Lord Himself used types and He invites us as He invited His disciples to undertake a study of them. He presents Himself as the Antitype of Jonah and Solomon (Matt 12:39–42). In John’s Gospel He refers to Himself as the “true manna” from heaven (Jn 6:58). If biblical types were important to the Lord in His teaching then they are vital to us for our learning.
2. The Spirit of God inspired the NT writers to employ types when teaching about the Person and work of Christ. The Hebrew epistle abounds with rich and instructive types of our Lord and His work given in people such as Moses, Aaron and Melchizedek. These are not vain analogies, but inspired comparisons demanding the deepest attention from those who seek to know more of the glory of Christ and to better worship in the sanctuary.¹ Paul refers to Adam as “a figure [type] of Him that was to come.”² Here, too, the reader is immediately drawn into making the connection between Christ and Adam, using the *context* of the chapter and the *teaching* in the OT. Paul broadens the lesson by giving us a particular application, referring to Christ as the “last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45).
3. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). The Bible is wholly inspired by God – not just in its *content* but also in its *construction*. There is a dispensational reason why the Lord uses parables rather than types in Matthew 13; a moral reason why he uses the vine in allegory in John 15; a prophetic reason why the Spirit inspires imagery rather than typology in Daniel 2 and 7. Types, as with all other biblical constructions are divinely inspired and placed in Scripture for our spiritual edification. “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom 15:4).

What forms do biblical types take?

Biblical types are presented in a number of forms in Scripture, for example:

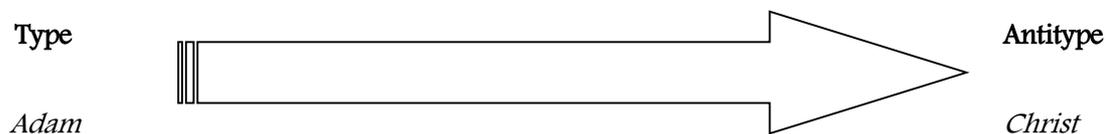
- Persons Adam, Moses, Aaron, Melchisedec, Hagar, Sarah
- People The Midianites, the Ishmaelites
- Places Egypt, Jerusalem, Jericho, Babel, Babylon
- Practices The various OT offerings and sacrifices
- Physical objects The Ark of the Covenant, Aaron’s rod that budded
- Physical structures The tabernacle, the temple

¹ 1 Cor 10:6 refers not to “types” as such, but to “types of us.”

² “Figure” is *typos* = type.

What is a biblical type?

There are two verses in Scripture (at least to the mind of the writer) that help us define and identify a biblical type. The first is **Romans 5.14** which gives us the *definition* of a biblical type – its nature and purpose. Adam, says Paul, is “a figure of Him that was to come [i.e., Christ – the Antitype].” We see in this expression what we have already noted; a type in Scripture *anticipates* or *foreshadows* someone or something greater in a day to come, as in the cases of Moses and Joseph in relation to Christ. It is important to understand too that a biblical type is not a biblical *symbol*. A symbol is merely *representative*, such as the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper; the covered head of the woman or the uncovered head of the man within the house of God. These represent present divine truths. If we wish to corroborate the nature and purpose of a biblical type then we need only refer to Colossians. “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days. Which are a shadow of things to come” (Col 2:16-17). The diagram below is a further illustration.



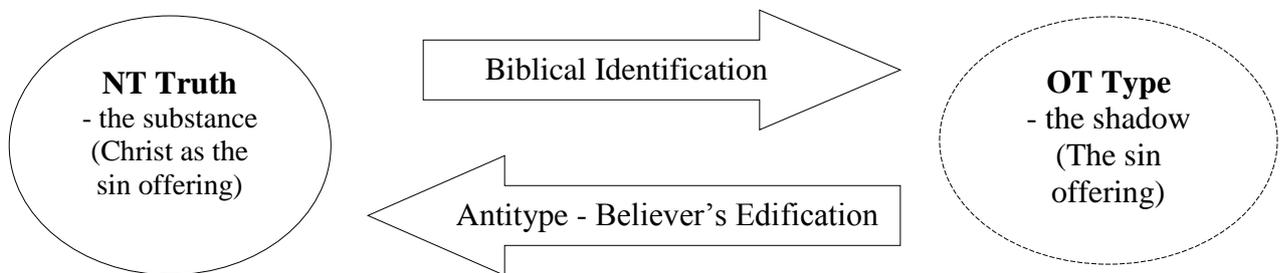
The second verse is **John 1.29**, which relates to the *identification* of a biblical type in Scripture – what *is* or is *not* a biblical type. There are things which some take as types which clearly are not biblical types at all. These fall into two categories – the *fantastic* and the *false*, although the distinction is sometimes difficult to make. Augustine in the 5th century took the five barley loaves, the two fishes and the lad who carried them as typifying the first five books of the Bible, Christ’s anointed offices of Priest and King and Israel respectively.³ This is a “little” fanciful. Ironically, it was Augustine who penned the lines often quoted by those who advance the cause of biblical typology: “The New is in the Old contained; The Old is by the New explained.” The statement is true enough, but many of the types he claimed and the doctrines they support are false. They fail the implicit test of John 1:29. John, referring to an OT type declared the Lord to be “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” John typified Christ as the sacrificial lamb, seen so often in the OT. But note that he only did so *after* he had seen Christ. An important *principle* is to be observed here. Only after we see Christ, His Person and work can we properly identify a biblical type in regard to Him. The *general* principle of interpretation that arises is a simple one yet vital in establishing what is or is not a biblical type. **Where there is no NT revelation of truth there can be no (OT) type of it.** For instance, infant baptism is nowhere taught in the NT. Therefore there can be no type of it in the OT.

May we suggest then that the **first** step in biblical typology is to begin with **NT truth** and then turn to the OT to identify the type. Failure in this can create false and fanciful types which in turn will result in a perversion of OT principles and practices. Because there is no teaching in the NT of infant baptism, the OT practice used to typify it (circumcision) is misunderstood and misappropriated. The

³ Augustine, (*Tract XXIV*, ch 5)

Ark of the Covenant we know to be a type of Christ. Why does Rome regard it as a type of Mary (the Lord's mother)? It is because Rome has never rightly divided the NT regarding Christ and His redeeming work. Why do amillennialists take the flood of Noah's day to be a type of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD? It is because they fail to rightly divide NT dispensational teaching. We can note many other instances of fanciful and false types that have arisen because of a failure to rightly divide NT truth. But the believer grounded in NT truth will have little trouble exposing the error in each case. May we assiduously avoid inventing OT types to fill the silence of the NT! There can be no shadow where there is no substance.

In regard to the *principle* of John 1:29 noted above, consider Christ as the sin offering, which is an indisputable NT truth. This means we can legitimately identify the OT sin offering as a type of Christ. The following diagram illustrates the proper method of biblical typology taught by Scripture, using the example of Christ as the sin offering.



The incompleteness of the type

This process of biblical verification is important for another reason. Just as a shadow is not a complete picture of the substance, a type is not a complete picture of an antitype. To regard a type as a complete figure is a contradiction – it must then be the reality (the substance), and then ceases to be a type. We see the incompleteness of a type in Adam as a type of Christ. Adam is a type of Christ in that he was the head of a creation; he was tempted; by one act he affected the eternal destiny of his posterity; he received a bride etc. However, where Adam failed Christ triumphed; Christ is the Last Adam, not the first; all in Adam die whereas all in Christ shall live. It is vital that we view the type through the antitype and not the other way around. Perhaps the most beautiful and comprehensive type of Christ is found in Joseph, but here too there is incompleteness in Joseph as a type of Christ. No one type can completely foreshadow His person and work.

Our focus – the antitype not the type

One final matter before we continue. Apart from its historical value, a type is only useful to us because of the light it sheds on the antitype and its associated spiritual truths. The type *itself* belongs to the past. It is vital in understanding what and why things took place in the past – such as we find in the offerings. But it must not become the object of our hearts today. This place is reserved for the antitype as taught in Colossians 2:16–17 – types are the shadows of things to come. We have it Hebrews as

well. “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect” (Heb 10:1). Sadly, there are professing Christians who have failed to discern the truth of the type as a mere shadow and have made it their object thus denying the reality.

An example – Christ typified in the OT sin offering

In what follows we use a particular case to illustrate those things noted above regarding biblical types and demonstrate something of the value of typology to the believer.

Step 1 – Christ as the Sin Offering in the NT

We first observe that the NT clearly presents Christ as the *offering for sin*. We do not have to “massage” the idea of Christ as the sin offering into the NT from the OT.

1. It is given a clear voice in the words of John the Baptist, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29).
2. The Hebrew epistle declares Christ as the sin offering for He “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb 9:26).
3. Christ as the sin offering is nowhere plainer than in Paul’s words to the Corinthians. “For he hath made him to be sin for us [i.e., a sin offering], who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21).
4. And then again in Hebrews. “For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate” (Heb 13:11–12).

Step 2 – Christ the sin offering as a type in the OT

Having identified the clear truth of Christ as the sin offering from the NT we can *then* turn to the OT and identify the type. In Leviticus 4 we have the divine mandates relating to the sin offering, i.e.,

1. The animal had to be without blemish – for God is a holy God.
2. Its blood had to be shed and sprinkled before God – for without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.
3. Its fat was burnt on the altar of burnt offering as a sweet savor to God – it had to be an acceptable sacrifice.
4. Its body was to be taken outside the camp and burned – for God cannot look upon sin.

In all this we have the work of Christ foreshadowed.

1. He was the sinless sacrifice for sin – He did no sin; knew no sin; in Him was no sin.
2. His blood was shed at Calvary before a holy and righteous God.
3. As the perfect, obedient and sinless sacrifice He brought infinite delight to God.
4. It was outside the camp that He suffered for sin.

The spiritual value of typology to the believer

It increases our confidence in the Word of God.

Through the type and the antitype we understand more of the harmony and integrity of Scripture. For instance, the sacrifices for sin in the OT economy pointed to Christ as the sin offering and were fulfilled in Him in their particular aspects. Surely this invigorates our faith in God's word. We come to appreciate that the sacrifices of the OT are not mere emulations of heathen religion, but the "shadow of good things to come" (Heb 10:1). The redeemed heart marvels in reverential awe at the fulfillment of the counsels of God as revealed in His Word. What blessing is to be had in the types for the Christian Jew? "Much every way, chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom 3:2). Through these oracles they can worship in admiration at the sovereign hand of God setting forth the blessed types of Christ in the footprints of their forefathers. But the Gentile Christians are also greatly edified, for they have been "partakers of their spiritual things" (Rom 15:27).

It enhances our appreciation of the character of God.

Through the consistency and correspondence between the type and the antitype we can enter into a deeper appreciation of God's holy character and purposes. We see that the God of the OT is the God of the NT – a God whose holiness and righteousness is unchangeable, One who knows the end from the beginning. From Genesis to Revelation we see He is a God who hates sin, whose affronted holiness can only be vindicated by the putting away of sin through a spotless and acceptable sacrifice. And so we hear John declare, "Behold the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Though true, it was not said "Behold the lamb of God that brings great delight to God." Nor "Behold the lamb of God that brings great peace to the world." Christ in John's Gospel is very much the burnt offering and the revelation of the grace of God. But through the Spirit's inspiration, John would have the reader consider first Christ as the lamb offered for sin. Is it not because of the truth that before a holy God can reach out to man in grace sin must be dealt with? And, further, that before we can see what Christ is to God in the burnt offering we must see what He is to us in the sin offering?

It equips us in our spiritual warfare and witness for God.

Through knowledge of the types we are able to better contend for the truth that was once for all delivered (Jude 3). Many look upon the condescending stoop of Christ for sin and suppose that to be an effective Sin-bearer He had to be capable of sinning even though He did no sin. But we are informed in the type that the offering in order to be accepted by God had to be "without blemish." This fact together with the teaching of Christ's sinless perfection in the NT composes a consistent and confirming witness to the absolute holiness of Christ's person. And so Peter exhorts us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, "lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness" (2 Pet 3:17-18).

It enhances our worship of God.

Through knowledge of the type and the antitype we become better worshippers in the sanctuary. Worship is taking what we know of Christ as taught by the Holy Spirit and presenting it to God as led

by the Spirit. The more we know of the Person of Christ and His glory the more the Spirit of God can present in worship through us. Through the types, the *magnitude*, the *gratitude* and our *attitude* in worship are all cultivated. Let us note a few examples.

1. Through the type of the sin offering we come to know more of the glory of Christ the perfect Man. What lay behind the Lord's cry on the cross "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me"? Why, and in what sense was Christ forsaken on the cross? He was forsaken as the *sin offering* – an offering that God could not look upon because it was treated as sin. It is the cry of the perfect man in bitter anguish as a holy God hid His face as He meted out His divine wrath against sin upon Him. This truth cultivates our worship of the Savior who suffered for sin.
2. Through the types we see something more of the devotion of Christ to God and of His unrequited love to man. This in turn enhances our devotion and worship.
 - a. Consider the Lord's statement "the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it" (Jn 18:11)? What did He mean by the rhetorical question "shall I not drink it?" The burnt offering provides the answer. It is Christ the *free-will* offering in *voluntary* submission to His Father. The burnt offering assists us in the meaning of Hebrews 9:14. "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? What deep meditations are brought out here for the worshipping and serving heart? "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD" (Ps 19:14).
 - b. Then we come to another statement of the Lord, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt 26:39). First, "Let this cup pass from me" – why? Because He the holy One shrunk from being treated as sin – the sin offering. Second, "Not my will but thine be done" – why? Because the sin offering was not a freewill offering but compulsory. Here we meditate upon a Savior in *mandatory* submission, despite the fact that His holy nature shrunk from sin and its curse. To the Ephesians sitting together in Christ in heavenly places, Paul can declare that believers are "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph 1:6). The acceptance here is given in Christ typified in the burnt offering – accepted according to what Christ *is* to God – His sinless Person, risen and glorified. In the burnt offering God's heart was governed by the value of the sacrifice itself, not by the sin covered by it. To the carnal Corinthians Paul declares that they are the "righteousness of God in Him" [Christ]. Christ crucified is brought before them as the sin offering, reminding them that when the offerer laid his hand on the sin offering, he was accepted because of what it represented – sin (cf 1 Cor 2:2). In the sin offering it is imputed righteousness because of what Christ *became* on the Cross, and what the offerer is before God – a sinful soul.
 - c. It is through the type that we derive a better understanding of the prophetic portions of Scripture that speak of the passion of Christ. The prophet declared: "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering

for sin” (Isa 53:10). Isaiah not only foreshadows Christ suffering as the sin offering, but also records the sublime truth of a holy God deriving delight in His Son who put away sin and vindicated His righteousness. Again, we have the coincident events of the type – the burning of the fat upon the altar as an ascending savor to God while judgment upon sin was being made outside the camp. At the Lord’s baptism and transfiguration we read of the heavens being opened and a voice from the excellent glory acknowledging the Son. But during the dark hours of Calvary, heaven is shut and silent. Man is shut out. Silence! Yet we know there was divine approbation, for it pleased the Lord to bruise Him, for He was made an offering for sin.

3. Through the types we know that when God accepted the sin offering He accepted the offerer and did so unconditionally. Knowing this we enter more fully into the blessedness of our eternal security which abides in the truth of imputed righteousness; that we are “the righteousness of God in Him.” Effective worship springs from assured hearts.
4. We worship in the sanctuary. Through knowledge of the type and the antitype we are given added appreciation of what it took to enable us to do so. In Hebrews 10 we are brought to consider the cross and the sanctuary in regard to the sin offering. We have boldness to enter the holiest because there is “no more offering for sin” (Heb 10:18). We are sin-purged worshipping priests – a blessing never possessed by the Israelite of old. We look to Christ as the sin offering – forsaken by God and treated as sin for us – “He was made sin for us” (2 Cor 5:21). It makes us more ardent to enter within the veil and to defend such a privilege against any intermediate priesthood of man.

What rich truths and profitable meditations beckon the seeking and worshipping heart and mind by the type and the antitype! We can note other aspects relating to the sin offering, but our subject is not the offerings themselves but the importance and worth of biblical typology to the believer. In what follows we suggest a framework for studying biblical types – the *comparative*, *contrasting* and *composite* aspects of them, again using an example. This framework has been devised particularly for the young believer who desires to delve deeper into biblical typology. But before we go any further we must note the importance of observing the context of the Old Testament.

The importance of the OT context

Scripture gives us an *explicit* link between the NT truth of Christ as the sin offering and the sin offering of the OT. This enables a clear identification and connection between the type and antitype. In other cases however, the link to the OT type is not explicit – for example believer’s baptism. Believer’s water baptism is clearly taught and demonstrated in the NT (Matt 28; Acts 8, 10; Rom 6 etc). It is the believer’s public identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ upon salvation. But what is its OT type? Some point to the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea; others to their crossing over the Jordan. When the OT context is observed we find that the latter is the proper type of NT believer’s baptism. In the former we have the “rod”, in the latter the “Ark”; in the former, in association with the Passover night in Egypt, we have “redemption”; in the latter we have “identification” and

“sanctification.”⁴ The Red Sea looks forward to the Jordan and Gilgal; the Jordan and Gilgal look back to the Red Sea (and the Pascal night). This example serves to impress upon us how vital it is to have a sound grasp of the OT if we are to rightly divide God’s word.

Comparative, contrasting and composite aspects of biblical typology

We can identify three defining aspects of biblical typology. Let us refer to them as:

1. The **comparative** aspect
2. The **contrasting** aspect
3. The **composite** aspect

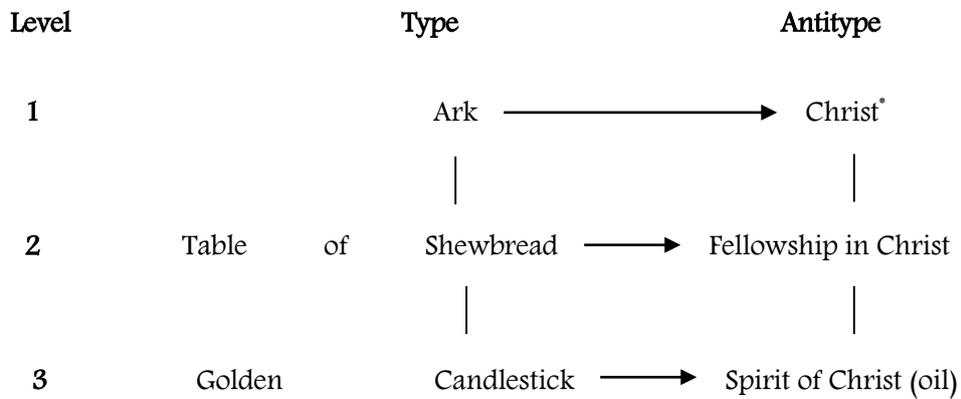
It should be clear from what we have already seen, that biblical types serve to bring out *comparisons* and *contrasts* between the type and the antitype. The comparative aspect establishes the *connection* between the type and its antitype. The contrasting aspect is to do with the *similarity* yet *superiority* of the antitype over the type. Adam is a type of Christ (the comparative aspect), but not a complete type (the contrasting aspect). Both are federal heads; both determine the spiritual destiny of their posterity etc. However, Adam was created and Christ is the Creator; Adam disobeyed but Christ obeyed God the Father; all in Adam die but all in Christ live. So we look for the comparisons but also note the contrasting aspects – both are vital in understanding NT truth. The fact that Adam is a type of Christ but falls short of Christ, prompts us to ask why and in what way he fall short. This opens up a vista of NT truth concerning Christ the last Adam and Second Man. We now come to the composite aspect. The term “composite” best describes the way in which biblical types *unite* to foreshadow NT truth. We will illustrate this using the Ark of the Covenant as a type of Christ. The following table presents a *basic* outline of the type and the Antitype.

NT Truth	Sphere of NT truth (Antitype)	Type	Material
Jn 1:14; Rom 8:3; 2 Cor 5:21 etc.	Christ’s incorruptible humanity	Ark	Acacia wood
Jn 1:1-2; Col 2:9; Heb 1; etc.	Christ’s eternal deity		Pure gold

The Ark presents a type of the Lord, His person and work. We may refer to this as the *first* level in this typology. Now in Exodus 25 we observe that the Ark was the first thing specified relating to the Tabernacle. This is because everything in the Tabernacle had its relevance in relation to the Ark – a lovely figure of Christ and His preeminence. We notice the next item specified was the Table of Shewbread made of acacia wood, overlain with gold and having a crown of gold along its perimeter. Upon this table was placed the twelve loaves of bread representing the tribes of Israel. These loaves were to be forever before the Lord. What a blessed truth, after the Ark typifying Christ is specified, we have in very next thing, the believer typified in relation to Christ and in fellowship with Him. This

⁴ The Pascal night and the Red Sea typify the two aspects of divine redemption. The former declares the *price* and *principle* of divine redemption (death and shed blood), the latter its *power*.

type and antitype we may deem as the *second* level in this typology. A *third* level would involve the Golden Candlestick. Using this method we can construct a diagram showing the various levels and their associated NT truths, giving us a basis for further study into the types involved, seeing more clearly how they braid with NT teaching concerning the antitypes.



Each level can be studied in detail adding to the composite picture of NT truth, as suggested below in the case of the first level.

Type		Sphere of NT truth (Antitype)	NT Truth
Ark's contents	Tablets of the Law	Christ's personal propitiation.	Rom 8:3; 10:4; Gal 3:13; 4:5. etc.
	Pot of manna	Christ's personal provision	Eph 1:6 etc.
	Aaron's rod that budded	Christ's personal priesthood	Heb 1:13; 8; 10:12;
Ark's cover	Mercy seat – pure gold	Christ's sacrificial propitiation	Rom 3:25; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10
Ark's place	Within the veil	Christ's high priesthood	Matt 27:51; Heb 10:19
Ark's journeying	With the people	Christ's abiding presence	Matt 28:18; Jn 15

This process is one of many enabling an in-depth study of biblical types and their antitypes. May the above outlines stimulate such an endeavor and, when undertaken, see its findings brought to the attention of the saints of God for their edification and to His glory.

Appendix

It is vital to keep in mind that the Spirit of God used various constructions to *simplify* the presentation of the Word of God.

Construction •	Meaning	Example
Allegory	A story (historical or fictitious), which is given a spiritual meaning.	The Lord's use of the vine and the branches (Jn 15); Paul's use of Hagar and Sarah (Gal 4).
Images	Word pictures.	The four beasts, Daniel 7
Metaphor	The attributes of one thing are given to another thing.	The church which is the Body of Christ – and we members of His Body.
Parable	Earthly story with a heavenly meaning.	Parable of the good Samaritan.
Simile	Something resembles another, the words "like" or "as" are usually used.	"She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar" (Pr 31:14).
Symbol	Represents a divine truth.	Bread and cup at the Lord's Supper. Head covering.
Type	Anticipates (foreshadows) a future reality.	Adam as a type of Christ

*Some of these are related and often used together, i.e., the allegory in John 15 contains metaphors; the parables contain similes – the kingdom of God is like...! In Galatians 4:24, the allegory contains types – Hagar and Sarah.

