

## **How a Christian Can Read Any Old Testament Passage**

### **Outline of Beale and Greidanus -- See Below \***

#### **The Basic Presuppositions of the Redemptive Historical Christocentric Interpretation of the Old Testament**

- A. The assumption of corporate solidarity or representation.
- B. That Christ is viewed as representing the true Israel of the Old Testament and true Israel, the church, in the New Testament (Isa. 49:3-6 > Lk. 2:32; Acts 13:47; 26:23). Christ and the church fulfill what is prophesied of Israel in the OT.
- C. That history is unified by a wise and sovereign plan so that the earlier parts are designed to correspond and point to the latter parts (Matt. 11:13-14; Eccl. 3:1-11; Isa. 46:9-11; Rev. 1:4, 8, 17; 4:8; 21:6; 22:13; Eph. 1:11).
- D. That the age of eschatological fulfillment has come in Christ (Mk. 1:15; Acts 2:17; Gal. 4:4; 1 Cor. 10:11; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:3; 1 Jn 2:18; Jude 18).
- E. As a consequence of (C) and (D), the fifth presupposition affirms that the latter parts of biblical history function as the broader context to interpret earlier parts because they all have the same, ultimate divine author who inspires the various human authors, and one deduction from this premise is that Christ as the center of history is the key to interpreting the earlier portions of the Old Testament and its promises. Be sure to make note of both continuity and contrast (2 Cor. 1:10-21; Matt. 5:17; 13:11, 16-17; Lk. 24:25-27, 32, 44-45; John 5:39; 20:9; Rom. 10:4).

#### **The Basic Approach of the Redemptive Historical Christocentric Interpretation of the Old Testament**

##### **1. Understand the passage in its own historical-grammatical (immediate) context (grammatico-historical method of interpretation).**

This original, historical meaning provides the only objective point of control against deriving from the text all kinds of subjective and arbitrary messages. Once the plain meaning has been abandoned, control over interpretation is gone and Scripture may mean anything that the interpreter may see in it.

Once you have the basic meaning of the passage in its own context, you basically have a glass partially filled with a description of God's divine revelation of his nature or a painting only partially completed. A Christocentric method of interpretation fills this description/meaning full with Christ as the most complete revelation of God's progressive revelation of Himself (ie. the attributes of God, the law of God, teachings, prophecies, visions, etc.).

How do we view the whole counsel of God in light of Jesus Christ? Only after we have heard a passage the way Israel heard it can we move on to understand this message in the broad contexts of the whole canon and the whole of redemptive history.

##### ***A. Literary Interpretation:***

1. How does it mean?

What is the genre? (narrative, wisdom, psalm, prophecy?)

What is the sub-genre? (law, parable, proverb, lament?)

What are the figures of speech? (metaphor, simile, hyperbole, irony?)

2. What did it mean in the context of this particular book? How does the passage function in the context of the book? (study the grammatical questions of the text).

### ***B. Historical Interpretation:***

1. What was the author's intended meaning for his original hearers? (author, original hearers, approximate period, social and geographical setting, purpose of writing -- who wrote this text? to whom? when? where? and why?)

2. What need of the hearers did the author seek to address?

### ***C. Theocentric Interpretation:***

What does this passage reveal about God and his will? (God's acts, providence, covenant, law, grace, faithfulness, etc.)

This question gives the passage a God-centered focus.

## **2. Understand the passage in the contexts of canon and redemptive history.**

We cannot understand an Old Testament text in isolation, but must always understand the text in the contexts of the whole Bible and redemptive history.

### ***A. Literary or Canonical Interpretation:***

What does this passage mean (not just in the context of the book, but) in the context of the whole Bible? Each passage (whether promise, prophecy, type, law, etc.) is developed or filled up with meaning until it finds its fullest meaning in Jesus Christ. Because of progression in God's redemptive history and revelation, one will discover both continuity and discontinuity in Old Testament promises, themes, and laws.

### ***B. Redemptive-Historical or Historical Interpretation:***

NOT, "what was the human author's intended meaning for his original hearers?," BUT rather, "How does the redemptive historical context from creation to new creation inform the contemporary significance of this text?" The context of redemptive history will reveal continuity as well as discontinuity.

### ***C. Christocentric or Theocentric Interpretation:***

NOT, "what does this passage reveal about God and His will?," BUT rather, "what does this passage mean in the light of Jesus Christ? And what does this passage reveal about Jesus Christ?"

Some scholars speak of this as the "sensus plenior," or fuller sense, or the "theological literal sense" which means nothing other than the meaning of the scripture read as a whole and in the analogia fidei (rule of faith). Others refer to the "canonical interpretation" or better yet the "redemptive-historical interpretation." Whatever we call it the important point is that a passage understood in the contexts of the whole Bible and redemptive history may reveal more meaning than its author intended originally.

### **The 6 Ways of the New Testament Authors Read the Old Testament**

#### **A. The Way of Redemptive-Historical Progression:**

Redemptive history, or kingdom history, is the bedrock which supports all the other ways that lead to Christ in the New Testament.

##### **1. Pivotal Points in Redemptive History**

###### **Creation-Fall-Redemption-New Creation**

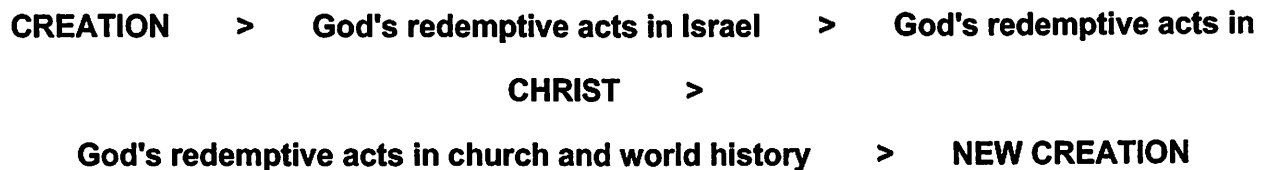
- a. Creation -- God's acts of turning chaos into his structured kingdom (Gen. 1-2).
- b. Redemption in the Old Testament times -- God's acts, after the fall into sin, of redeeming his people Israel to be a light to the nations (Gen. 3-Mal. 4).
- c. Redemption through Jesus Christ -- God's acts in Jesus to redeem all nations and restore his fallen creation into his kingdom (Matt. 1-Rev. 20); and,
- d. New Creation -- God's final victory over evil and the establishment of his perfect kingdom on earth (Rev. 21-22).

When we survey the entire Old Testament, we find ourselves involved in a great history of movement from promise toward fulfillment. It flows like a large brook -- here rushing swiftly, there apparently coming to rest in a quiet backwater, and yet moving forward as a whole toward a distant goal which lies beyond itself. That goal is Jesus Messiah and ultimately the rule of God over a restored and transformed creation.

##### **2. Characteristics of Redemptive History**

In order to confront men with the crucial questions of Christ, our preaching must center in the history of redemption. We do not confront men with Christ by preaching theological ideas, nor by ethical exhortations, but by rehearsing the saving events witnessed in Scripture.

Because redemptive history is a unified history, sound interpretation requires that every part of this history be interpreted in the context of its beginning and end or goal. The way of redemptive-historical progression sees every Old Testament text and its addresses in the context of God's dynamic history, which progresses steadily and reaches its climax in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and ultimately in the new creation. The whole Old Testament throbs with a strong eschatological beat.



### ***B. The Way of Promise-Fulfillment***

a. Take into account that God usually fills up his promises progressively -- in installments, as it were. Prophecy, in the sense that it reveals some part of God's redemptive purposes, is capable of being filled, of achieving fullness, so that when it is filled full it is fulfilled.

b. In interpreting the text, move from the promise of the Old Testament to the fulfillment in Christ and back again to the Old Testament text.

[eg. Isa. 61:1-4 in exile; Return of remnant 583 B.C.; Jesus Coming Dawn of Jubilee Lk 4:21 (but not day of vengeance yet); Day of Judgment and full Jubilee]

[eg. Isa. 7:11-17, Immanuel promise; Young woman in 732 B.C.; Jesus; Holy Spirit at Pentecost; God with us in New Creation]

### ***C. The Way of Typology***

Def.: a type is an event, a series of circumstances, or an aspect of the life of an individual or of a nation, which finds a parallel and a deeper (final, climatic, eschatological, Christocentric) realization in the incarnate life of our Lord, in his provision for the needs of men, or in his judgments and future reign.

Typology is rooted in the historical character of Old Testament revelation and the consistency of God's nature and actions. God repeats his actions of blessing and of judgment. But God does not merely repeat his deeds of the past; he will do greater things, climatically greater (eschatological movement).

God's mighty acts (*magnalia dei*) in history point forward to his final salvation/judgment and his relations with his people look forward to the restoration and renewal of the New Covenant. When God acts in history we progressively learn more truth about God's character and nature. That truth, which was taught in that previous act in history, carries through to the revelation in Christ where it finds its final, complete and heightened fulfillment. In Christ we see the truth of God's character and nature in its fullest revelation.

Edmund Clowney says, "Typology is grounded in God's design. It flows from the continuity and difference of God's saving work. There is continuity, for it is God who begins His work of salvation long before He gives His Son. Yet there is discontinuity, too."

Characteristics of a Type: A genuine type is historical, theocentric, exhibits a significant analogy with its antitype, and is marked with escalation.

### **Rules for Using Typology:**

a. Always precede typological interpretation with literary-historical interpretation (literary includes grammatical). We must know the author's message for Israel before we look for ways to focus the message on Jesus Christ and apply it to the church.

b. Look for a type not in the details but in the central message of the text concerning God's activity to redeem his people. In short, don't wander off the typological trail in to the morass of incidental parallels and farfetched analogies.

c. Determine the symbolic meaning of the person, institution, or event in Old Testament times. If it has no symbolic meaning in the Old Testament times, it cannot be a type. Geerhardus Vos says, "A type can never be a type independently of its being first a symbol. The gateway to the house of typology is at the farther end of the house of symbolism . . . . Only after having discovered what a thing symbolizes, can we legitimately proceed to put the question what it typifies, for the latter can never be aught else than the former lifted to a higher plane. The bond that holds the type and antitype together must be a bond of vital continuity in the progress of redemption . . . . We must ask where do these religious principles and realities, which the event, person, thing (ie. type) served to teach and communicate, reappear in the subsequent history of redemption, lifted to their consummate stage?"

Clowney further adds, "An Old Testament event, a ceremony, or a prophetic, priestly, or royal action may . . . symbolize, pointing to a revealed truth at a particular point in the history of redemption . . . . We may be sure that this truth will be carried forward to Jesus Christ . . . . We may therefore connect the event, ceremony, or action directly with that truth as it comes to full expression in Christ . . . . the line of typology."

d. Note the points of contrast between the Old Testament type and the New Testament antitype. The difference is as important as the resemblance, for the difference reveals not only the imperfect nature of Old Testament types but also the escalation entailed in the unfolding of redemptive history: one "greater than Jonah is here." The contrast is between law/covenant of works and gospel/covenant of grace (John 1:17).

e. In moving from the Old Testament symbol/type to Christ, carry forward the meaning of the symbol even as its meaning escalates. Do not switch to a different sense.

f. Do not simply draw a typological line to Christ but proclaim Christ. John Stott writes, "The main objective in preaching is to expound Scripture so faithfully and relevantly that Jesus Christ is perceived in all his adequacy to meet human need . . . . The preacher's purpose is more than to unveil Christ; it is to unveil him that people are drawn to come to him and receive him." Beginning with the Old Testament type, Christian preachers can proclaim the person and work of Christ so that people will commit themselves to this Savior and Lord, put all their trust for salvation in him alone, and seek to obey him in every area of life.

#### ***D. The Way of Analogy***

There is a unity of redemptive history that adheres in Christ; the continuity between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church is accomplished only in Christ. Jesus Christ is the key connection within this analogous relationship. For through Christ, Israel and the church have become the same kind of people of God: recipients of the same covenant of grace, sharing the same faith, living in the same hope, seeking to demonstrate the same love.

To look for analogies between the Old Testament and the New Testament, you should ask:

- a. What God is and does for Israel and what God in Christ is and does for the church?
- b. What is the similarity between what God teaches his people Israel and what Christ teaches his church?
- c. What are God's demands in the Old Testament and Christ's demands in the New Testament?

Although there will be differences because of the progression in the history of redemption and revelation, analogy concentrates on locating the continuity, the parallels, between what God is and does for Israel, or demands of Israel, and what God in Christ is and does for the church, teaches the church, or demands of the church.

### ***E. The Way of Longitudinal Themes***

Clowney writes, "The Bible records revelation given in the course of history. This revelation was not given at one time, nor in the form of a theological dictionary. It was given progressively, for the process of revelation accompanies the process of redemption. Since redemption does not proceed uniformly but in the epochs determined by God's acts, so revelation has an epochal structure, manifested and marked in the canonical Scriptures."

Clowney suggests: Ask what truth about God and his saving work is disclosed in this passage? How is this particular truth carried forward in the history of revelation? How does it find fulfillment in Christ?

Major Old Testament themes which function as highways leading to the person, work, and teaching of Christ are the kingdom of God (reign and realm), the providence, covenant, the presence of God, the love of God, the grace of God, justice, redemption, law, sin and guilt offerings, God's concern for "the poor," mediator, the Day of the Lord, etc.

### ***F. The Way of Contrast***

The way of contrast clearly centers in Christ, for he is primarily responsible for any change between the messages of the Old Testament and those of the New. The person, the work, and the teaching of Jesus Christ are the main reasons for the contrasts we observe.

Look primarily for the contrast between law and gospel, or the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Progression will also necessarily mean that when something finds its fulfillment in Christ then that previous shadow or type will now become obsolete.

### ***G. The Way of New Testament References***

The New Testament authors frequently use Old Testament passages to support their messages. Many of these references (both explicit and implied) can be found in the appendix of the Greek New Testament, a good concordance, cross-reference Bible, or the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge.

## **Bibliography**

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