

Prolepsis, Types and Embedded Theology

The Bible is suffused with the anticipation of future glory. Prolepsis is one literary way of anticipating something in the future. Prolepsis means events and persons one way or another anticipate or represent something in the future that is similar but of far greater significance. The Scriptures are also filled with types and embedded theology. A type is something in the Old Testament (persons, events, things, ceremonies or even entire institutions) that is parallel to and thus prefigures or illustrates some truth that will be clear later, e.g. in the New Testament. Thus Adam, marriage, and the Exodus are types. Not all types are necessarily explicitly identified as such by the N.T., but they're there. Embedded theology is just that, moral or spiritual truths that are below the surface of the text but that are recognized by texts later in time. There's so much prefigurement in the O.T. that it's often unclear whether something is proleptic, a type, or embedded theology, and it doesn't matter. All Scripture is a unity. It is this amazing coherence of all Scripture that is one of the most compelling evidences of its supernatural origin. God is there, He speaks, and the Bible is His Word. We dare not be indifferent to it nor fail to obey it.

Following are a few examples of prolepsis, types and embedded theology. Just to clarify, I need to point out that Scripture isn't allegory. What it narrates is true history but with theological significance. The persons Scripture discusses existed and really said or did what the text states. It's because God knows the future exhaustively, He rules history in total sovereignty, He is infinitely purposeful, and in truth and holiness He supervised the writing of Scripture, that we are assured that what we read is trustworthy and inerrant.

1. So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David . . . And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself. . . David got up from the south side of the stone and bowed down before Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept together—but David wept the most. Jonathan said to David, 'Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your seed and my seed forever' (1 Samuel 20:16-17, 41-42).

Saul was a failed king, a king who disobeyed God and who did wickedness in his rebellion against God. Saul despised David and sought repeatedly to kill him. And Jonathan was the son of Saul. But Jonathan loved David! Jonathan transferred his loyalty and love from his father to David. Jonathan knew the Lord, and he knew that the Lord's will was for David to be king over Israel. But it wasn't just an intellectual awareness of God's will that moved Jonathan, it was love. Selfless love. Love for the person of David. And the love was mutual.

Let's think about this: Jonathan made a huge personal sacrifice, giving up his right to the throne so that David could reign instead. Jonathan trusted David to do good, both for him and for Israel; he did not trust his father. Jonathan made no contract with David, his relationship was one of love, trust, and commitment, despite the great cost to himself.

Jonathan's relationship to David anticipates or prefigures the relationship that we have with Jesus. We abandon our loyalty to Satan and pledge devotion and allegiance instead to Christ. We do it in love. As we become increasingly familiar with the Person of Jesus in the Gospel texts, we find ourselves in a deep, loving relationship. Out of love we make personal sacrifices. We trust Him, and because we trust Him, we obey His teachings and commands. And we love Him because we know that He first loved us and sacrificed Himself for us. Jonathan's love for David and his transferring loyalty to David is proleptic of the love that motivates us to eschew the world and its idols and instead to love and obediently follow Christ.

2. "The Lord said, ' . . . I have come down to rescue them [the Israelites] from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey . . . So now go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt' (Exodus 3:8,10). And, **" . . . Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt"** (Deuteronomy 34:10-11). Moses was God's servant to deliver the nation of Israel from bondage to Pharaoh, and to lead them then to the Land God had promised they would dwell in, with God in their midst. As a prophet, Moses was also a law-giver. God gave to him His laws for the people of Israel, and Moses faithfully gave them to the people. The laws were necessary so that a sinful people could dwell in the presence of a holy God. Moses demanded of the people love for God, as well as obedience, service, and faithfulness. Moses was a type of Christ. The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as a second Moses. Jesus fulfilled all that Moses was commissioned to do. Jesus delivers us from the powerful grip of Satan, gives us His laws, and teaches us how to live in the presence of a holy God. Our baptism by immersion reprises passing thru the Red Sea to freedom. Obeying the Law of Christ sanctifies us, just as obeying the Mosaic law sanctified Israel. That Exodus event was repeated two thousand years ago when the Son came to earth in human form, and we're all invited to participate in this vastly greater deliverance, a deliverance from the penalty, power and guilt of sin itself.

3. "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them" (Joshua 1:5-6). Joshua was a conqueror. He led the

Israelites into territory inhabited by wicked and powerful pagan people and, in the strength of their God, they took possession of the Land. Jesus' name is really, in Hebrew, Joshua. That's because Joshua was a type of Jesus. Jesus is also a Conqueror, except that He will take possession of not only a strip of land at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, but of the whole world. When Christ returns in glory and power, He will destroy all His enemies and take possession of the entire world to establish in it peace and righteousness. But not only in its extent will it be a far greater Conquest. Jesus' Conquest will remove from earth for a thousand years Satan and his army of demons, so those evil beings won't be present to take people bondage to do evil. And the physical world, the world of nature, will be restored to its creation perfections. Jesus is a greater Joshua.

4. **“Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness”** (Genesis 1:2-4). These verses narrate the creation of the natural world, the physical world we live in. But, “darkness”? Later on, we'll encounter “darkness” and “night” as symbols of evil. And “light” stands for moral goodness. The word “good” is here too. Everything God does is good because He is good. He suffuses His goodness in His work. So already at the very opening of the Bible, we encounter theology embedded in the text. We're instructed here that the Bible has a theme, a moral theme, separating goodness from evil. And at the very end of the Bible we read that there's no more night. There's only light, only goodness. God had (or has) a purpose in creating, a purpose in redeeming, and a purpose for the life of every one of His people.

5. **“Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence . . . So God said to Noah, ‘I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out . . .”** (Genesis 6:11-14). That Flood will be reprised, in the near future. It was both proleptic and a type, and the narrative is saturated with theology. God judges! Human sin justly deserves wrath. Because man was given dominion over the physical world, human sin necessitated a curse on the earth. And here – and again in the future – God's judgment includes destroying the earth too. Sin has profound consequences! That Flood anticipates the Tribulation Period that is to come, documented in advance in the Book of Revelation, Chapters 6 to 19. The physical world will be destroyed then along with rebellious humanity. The Flood also anticipates the Great White Throne judgment at the end of time (Revelation 20), a judgment of all humanity except those saved by Christ, who reprises the rescue the ark made possible for those who were obedient to God's Word.

6. **“The Lord said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. . . . So Abram left, as the Lord had told him”** (Genesis 12:1,4). And, **“Abram believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”** (15:6). Abraham was a man of faith – and obedience. God had said that from him a great nation would come and, despite his old age, Abram believed God that He would fulfill what He'd promised. And believing God, that is, trusting God at His word, he obeyed God. Abram even trusted God when commanded to sacrifice his miraculously born son, Isaac, for Abram obeyed God despite that ghastly personal sacrifice. That kind of trusting in God is the pattern, the model, the type for all who wish to be justified. Whatever modern church-goers suppose “faith” is, or what “believe” means, we need to replicate Abram's faith, which was trusting obedience to God. James argues this very point (2:20-24), that Abram's faith was (what shall we call it? proleptic? a type? a universal theological truth?) what God requires of us to be saved.

7. **“Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. . . His brothers said to him, ‘Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?’ And they hated him all the more . . .”** (Genesis 37:5,8). And, **“it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you”** (45:5). And, **“They told him, ‘Joseph is still alive”** (45:26). Joseph is a type of the nation of Israel throughout their history. He suffered humiliation, in a sense death, anticipating the Exile. But in God's will, he was exalted, in a sense experiencing resurrection. The phrase, “he's still alive!” makes the idea of resurrection explicit. So Israel will in the future experience restoration and exaltation; it'll be like a resurrection. So Joseph is also a vivid type of Christ. He suffered the hatred of his own people and terrible humiliation. But then came resurrection and exaltation. And rule will come, in the future when He returns.

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We could go on. Almost all of Genesis is proleptic. Types are everywhere in Torah. Reading the O.T. is thrilling because we see these patterns and pictures of future truths, and we not only understand them but are instructed by the theology that's there. And we see that Jesus was already the focus of Scripture at the very beginning of time. He is that important to us. The O.T. is a treasure chest loaded with precious and lovely gems to delight the one who loves Jesus. The Messianic prophecies (discussed previously) and the cohesion of all Scripture as demonstrated here serve as super-abundant evidence that we hold God's Word in our hands. Why is this important? Because there's a dearth of knowledge of God and His will in the Church today. We attend Sunday services but with a nonchalant attitude, an indifference to the preached Word as scandalously evidenced by unchanged lives. We're not pursuing the radically new life that followers of Jesus should be, and the world around us sees that. I offer this lesson in the hope that, if we're gripped by the excitement of being in God's presence in the Word, we'll be blessed with both fruit and maturity in Christ to the glory of God.