

“You’re the Man!”

By: Isaac Stuart

Many pastors and theologians get nervous when the topic of typology is discussed. The reason is because people have gone off the "deep end" with this subject. There have been some schools of thought in the history of Christianity that have tried to make everything typological in the Bible. An example of typology taken too far comes from the book Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible. Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton say, “Justin Martyr, along with many other early church leaders, believed that the scarlet thread that Rehab hung out her window typified the blood of Christ.”¹ This is an example of someone taking typology to the extreme and not following some basic hermeneutical rules that help us interpret typology. Before we look at a specific example of typology in the book of Hebrews, we need to understand first what typology is and how a person can tell that he or she has a typological event, person, or institution.

The term “typology” can be defined as “the interpretation of earlier events, persons, and institutions in Biblical history which become prophetic entities, or types; anticipating later events, persons, and institutions, which are their antitypes.”² This definition states that an earlier event, person or institution points to a later event, person or institution. Types are things that are a shadow of something else. The word “type” always refers to the Old Testament foreshadowing, while the word “antitype” refers to the New Testament fulfillment.³ The

¹ Dan McCartney, and Charles Clayton, Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible. (Wheaton, Illinois: Brigdepoint, 1994) 155.

² McCartney 155.

³ Paul Nevin, “The Hermeneutics of Typology.” Evangelical Theological Society Papers. 13, Theological Research Exchange Network (1987): fiche 525, page 2.

antitype is always greater than the type.⁴ We have to remember that these events did not happen by accident. They were divinely planned by God to point people to His Son, Jesus Christ.⁵ This is what typology is all about. Taking something in the Old Testament (Type) and seeing this event, person, or institution pointing to the Son of God, as either a person, or His work on the cross, or His work that is taking place right now in our lives. But the question then becomes, what are some guidelines of typology?

The reason why this question is important is because it is very easy for us to go throughout the Old Testament and spiritualize every minute detail. When we do this, we are actually hurting the Old Testament Text and making the Bible say things that it was never originally intended to say. This was the tendency of the early church fathers, especially the Eastern or Greek Fathers.⁶ They went throughout the Old Testament and allegorized many parts of the Old Testament because they wanted to show people that everything pointed to Christ as the Messiah.⁷ The Western Fathers did not lag far behind their Eastern Brothers.⁸ Even though they were more moderate in their interpretation of typology, they too stretched the Biblical Text in order to see Jesus in every detail.⁹ But we cannot just point at the early church and say that we are innocent of the whole process because this happens in the twenty first century as well. But how can we safeguard against over analyzing the Biblical Text for types? There are a few ways we can know if we have a true typological event, person, or institution as we study the Old

⁴ McCartney 158.

⁵ Nevin 3.

⁶ Nevin 3.

⁷ Nevin 3.

⁸ Nevin 3.

⁹ Nevin 3.

Testament. The first way an event, person or institution can be identified as a true type is if the event, person or institution's redemptive-historical function is known and can show an organic relationship to the later redemptive history this event, person, or institution is foreshadowing.¹⁰

The second way is that the nature of the type must live in the main message of the event, person, or institution and not in just some incidental detail that takes place in the event, or in the life of the person, or some function of the institution.¹¹ In other words the type should be presenting the antitype over and over again in the action or process. The type should not be forced to describe the antitype if that is not the main message that the type is trying to convey. The third and final way is by seeing if the antitype is greater than the type, or the foreshadowing.¹² If it is the other way around, then it is not a type. If a person looks at an event, person, or institution in the Old Testament and tries to say that the event, person, or institution is a type of Christ, but it cannot fulfill one of these three requirements, then that event, person, or institution is not a type of Christ.

The study of Typology is actually very important and we should not stray away from it. Yes, we as fallen humans like to twist the Bible to say what we want it to say, but a study of real examples of typology is very important and can boost a person's faith in God. The reason for this is because typology shows us as Christians that the Old Testament and the New Testament are united by the promise, fulfillment motif, and are united by the one message of salvation.¹³ As we study typology, we see that God has had one plan throughout the entire history of the world. He did not have a "plan A" and because that plan failed, He then switched to "plan B."

¹⁰ McCartney 158.

¹¹ McCartney 158.

¹² McCartney 158.

¹³ Nevin 1.

God from the very beginning of the world had one plan and that plan was to send His Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross to take away our sins. This is the unifying message throughout the entire Bible.

We have looked at what typology is and have looked at ways we can safeguard against taking typology to the extreme. Now let us look at an example of typology. We know that our example is a true type of Christ because throughout the entire New Testament, including this passage in Hebrews, Christ is compared to this person. The author of Hebrews uses typology throughout his letter to show his readers that Jesus is the true Messiah and He is the one that they have been looking for ever since God made His promise to Eve in Genesis 3:5. Jesus was the one that their ancestors were watching in anticipation, but the problem is that Jesus came in a way that the Jews did not expect the Messiah to come. The group of people that the author is writing to is typically labeled as Jews who were Christians, but were thinking about returning to Judaism.¹⁴ The author wants to tell his audience that they should not do this, because everything that deals with Christianity is far better than Judaism.¹⁵ The author shows his audience that Christianity has a better sanctuary, a better priesthood, a better sacrifice, and a better covenant because of what Jesus Christ has done for their lives by dying on the cross.¹⁶ One of the ways that the author of Hebrews proves this to his audience is by comparing the life of Jesus Christ to the life of Moses and saying that Moses was only a type of Christ. His argument on this subject begins in 3:1.

¹⁴ Donald Guthrie, The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary. The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 32.

¹⁵ Guthrie 32.

¹⁶Guthrie 32.

The author begins by stating the two offices of Christ. The author calls Jesus both an “apostle” and a “high priest.” The Bible does not really talk about Jesus’ role as an apostle, but He did fulfill this position in relationship to God the Father. If we look at what the word apostle is, we will see that Jesus was the perfect apostle. The basic definition for the word “apostle” is “one who is sent.”¹⁷ But this term has a deeper meaning when it comes to the specific role of an apostle. An apostle is actually more like an ambassador of a country.¹⁸ Kistemaker says that “An apostle is not merely sent; he is empowered with the authority of the one who sends him. Furthermore, he can and may speak only the words his superior gives him. He is forbidden to utter his own opinion when they are at variance with those of the one who sent him.”¹⁹ The Bible speaks about Jesus’ apostleship in other places throughout the New Testament, in a limited fashion though. The Gospel of John talks about Jesus’ apostleship clearly because John tells us that Jesus was doing the Lord’s will on this earth and that He could only speak what the Father had told Him.²⁰ But an ambassador is not just a representation of the other person. An ambassador has the same authority as the one who sent him and was legally identical to his master.²¹ That is why Jesus could say in John 14:10-11 that He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. Jesus just did not represent God, but as an apostle He was legally identical to God. He was God’s spokesman and when He spoke they were the very words of God. Jesus was an

¹⁷ Craig R. Koester, Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary. The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 2001) 249.

¹⁸ Simon J. Kistemaker, Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews. New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984) 84.

¹⁹ Kistemaker 84.

²⁰ John 14:10

²¹ George Wesley Buchanan, To the Hebrews: Translation, Comment, and Conclusions. The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1972) 57.

apostle and fulfilled this role perfectly because over and over we see that Jesus obeyed God and proclaimed His message, even if that meant dying on the cross for all of humanity.

But our author also calls Jesus a high priest. Jesus is now fulfilling the high priest role as He is sitting at the right hand of God and interceding for us to the Father.²² The Bible tells us in Hebrews 1:3 that Jesus as our high priest is in the best location for fulfilling this role because He lives in the presence of God. But the author just mentions this role of Jesus and continues on his argument for why Jesus is better than Moses.

The first thing that the author shows us as he compares Jesus with Moses is that they were both faithful in what the Lord had called them to do.²³ The question then comes was Moses really faithful? As we read through the life of Moses we see that He was faithful to the Lord's voice, for the most part. The author of Hebrews does not mention the fact that Moses disobeyed God by striking the rock for water, instead of speaking to the rock, and because of this incident, God tells Moses that he is not allowed to enter the Promise Land.²⁴ But our author looks at all the great things that Moses did, especially when it comes to the time Moses spent with the Lord on Mount Sinai. It was through Moses that God spoke to the people of Israel in order to set up the covenant.²⁵ Moses also interceded on the Israelites behalf when God was about ready to destroy them because of the golden calf incident.²⁶ With all of this, the Israelites thought that Moses was the greatest man to ever live. But our author goes onto say that Moses was not the "real deal," but just a shadow of the man Jesus.

²² Hebrews 7:25

²³ Hebrews 3:2

²⁴ Numbers 20:1-13

²⁵ Exodus 19-40

²⁶ Exodus 32

Our author begins in verse 3 by stating that Jesus should receive more praise than Moses just like a builder gets more praise than the house itself. Then the author goes on to state that God is the creator of everything. By making this statement we must remember that Moses was faithful to God and that the author does not want to minimize the work that Moses did for God.²⁷ Moses' faithfulness is not in question here, but the reason why Jesus is better is because He is the creator. At the same time we should not ignore Moses all together because we need to respect the creation just as we need to respect Moses and how great a godly man he was.²⁸ We cannot give glory to Moses like we give glory to the Son, whom we know through 1:2 that it was through the Son that God created the universe.²⁹ This puts Jesus far above Moses and our author continues to point this out in verses 5-6.

Our author tells his audience that Moses never thought that he was the one that the Lord had promised to Eve in Genesis 3:5, but that he was just a shadow of the one to come. This is shown in Moses' very words when he says "The Lord your God will raise up from [Israel] a prophet like me from among your own brothers."³⁰ Therefore this only makes Moses a servant in the household of God. But this word for servant is not the usual word that is used in the New Testament.³¹ The Greek word used here means "a person who is in service to someone who is superior...connotes one whom wishes to serve, in contrast to a slave who must serve."³² Moses was a servant of God's house and He served God faithfully because he wanted to serve. But

²⁷ Kistemaker 85.

²⁸ Koester 252.

²⁹ Koester 252

³⁰ Deuteronomy 18:15

³¹ Kistemaker 87.

³² Kistemaker 87.

Jesus is the Son of God and that makes Him over God's household or in charge of it, not a part of it like Moses.³³ This means that when Moses was administrating God's household, he was also administrating himself.³⁴ John Calvin said that "Moses while ruling others, was ruled also himself, as he was a servant; but Christ being a Son possesses supreme power."³⁵ The author says that because of Jesus Christ not being a part of God's household Himself, Jesus is better than Moses who was just a servant in God's house.

Moses was just a type of Christ, which means that Jesus fulfills the role better than Moses did in God's house. Moses knew that he was pointing to a prophet greater than he and knew that one day the Lord would send him to Israel. But yet, we as Christians today should not just throw Moses out completely because of Jesus being greater than him. We do need to honor him and give him praise like he deserves, but Moses' praise should never compare to the praise that we give to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who is our great high priest and apostle from the Lord.

³³ F.F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews. The International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990) 92.

³⁴ Bruce 93.

³⁵ John Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews. Calvin's Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949) 79.