

The gospel according to Abraham, week 2: Hermeneutic/methodological principles

Grace Evangelical Presbyterian Church

Sunday, September 20, 15

Purpose: Develop some generic interpretational principles to help guide our understanding of the gospel in the life of Abraham

Summary: This week's lesson aims at providing a foundation for interpretation that enables us to see Christ in the story of Abraham (and in the OT generally). It focuses on two aspects that relate to the unity of Scripture and the observation that biblical content points to and finds ultimate fulfillment in Christ. First, Scripture is characterized by progressive revelation, which means that redemptive-history unfolds creatively over time rather than in one single event. Second, we'll discuss how Scripture is organized typologically, which means that elements in and across the OT point toward and generate an expectation for greater realities that are elaborated in the NT. Putting these together, we see in retrospect (a) how redemptive-history develops across time to portray an increasingly nuanced picture of God's plan for salvation through Jesus, and (b) how components of revelation anticipate.

1 Introduction

Lead-in: Seeing Christ in the life of Abraham (or of the OT more broadly) isn't just about identifying prophecies or seeing how "Christ died for me"

- These are important, but other prominent aspects of Scripture have a prophetic flair retroactively from the perspective of Christ's death, resurrection, & ascension
 - The point of the road to Emmaus: *retroactive illumination* through a Jesus lens (the apostles, too, experienced this retroactive illumination with Christ and His cross as the *axis mundi* (Behr, 2006))
 - We are enabled to see meaning retrospectively because we interpret the OT in light of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection (i.e., God revealed through the cross)

"[T]he disciples of Christ came to know him as the Son of God [...] through the Cross and the manner in which the Passion is interpreted and proclaimed" (Behr, 2006:19).

- This Lucan passage also invites us to pay heed to the *typological* nature of Scripture (Vos, 1996[1948]:146)
 - Patterns & themes emerge that anticipate Christ and His work

2 Other background & assumptions

Axioms/basic principles we'll assume: Unity, humanity, & divinity of Scripture

- Unity: immediate context is important, but we must also give regard to the overarching canonical context (Beale & Kim, 2014:148)
- The phrase “the Gospel According to Abraham” (title of this class) presumes inter-testamental unity, or at least some connectedness. But, how is this unity achieved? What literary/linguistic tools are at play?
 - How does God, through human authors, express His divine plan of redemption?
 - Progressive revelation
 - Typological correspondences

3 Progressive revelation

Core idea: Scripture doesn't give all the details all at once from the very beginning

- Hidden, but now revealed; “mystery” (Beale & Gladd, 2014)
 - Not “mystery” as in “detective mystery” – we aren't trying to solve puzzles & codes
 - “Mystery” in the biblical sense involves a special relation between the Old and New Testament where latent meanings in the former are made clear in the latter
 - “Mysteries” expressed in the OT and revealed in the NT point to Christ in some way or another (Beale & Gladd, 2014)
- Patterns, meanings, etc., may not be adequately discerned at earlier points
 - Revelation unfolds across salvation history
 - E.g., the *proto-evangelion* (Genesis 3:15): God didn't reveal every detail of the coming Messiah from the outset
- “Creative development” (Beale, 2008): NT writers build on OT ideas, respecting authorial intent and context, and clarify them in light of developments in redemptive-history
 - Vos' “seed” metaphor

“Geerhardus Vos's metaphor for this creative development between the Testaments is that Old Testament prophecies and texts are like seeds and later Old Testament and New Testament understandings of the same texts are like plants growing from the seeds and flowering; from one angle the full-bloomed plant may not look like the seed (as in botanical comparisons), but careful exegesis of both Old and New contexts can show, at least, some of the organic connections.” (Beale, 2008:29)

4 Typology¹

Nothing new; historically a core part of early Christian interpretation (O’Keefe & Reno, 2005: 69); basis in Christian patristic writings and in the OT

- Basic idea: types (Greek *tupos*) & antitypes (Greek *antitupos*)
 - Analogy of the typewriter: The typebar carries a key (the antitype) that creates and imprint/image (the type)
 - The print isn’t “the reality,” it’s an image of such
- Part of how progressively revealed Scripture maintains/creates unity (through intertextuality – relationships between texts)
 - In biblical typology, types historically precede antitypes

“If we do not understand how types work in Scripture, then we will be surprised at their presence. Typology, however, brings a far greater awareness of the rich interconnectedness of Scripture” (Beale & Kim, 2014:152)

- Analogies, correspondences, shadows & realities/substances (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1); divinely-intended patterns (Mickelson, 1977[1963]; Zuck, 1991; Beale, 2012)
 - Prefiguring/foreshadowing/pointing to Christ (Christocentric [Treier, 2005:826]): “Christ not only fulfills the prophecies but also the people, institutions, and events of the Old Testament” (Beale & Kim, 2014:151)

“[T]he diverse stories of Scripture are not randomly thrown together but are part of a larger tapestry that finds its terminus in Christ.” (Gentry & Wellum, 2012:101)

- Typology is essentially “reading about Christ”
- Christ is the hermeneutical principle of Scripture
- Types are predictive/anticipatory, and involve “escalation” (pointing to heightened realities); they are forward-looking (albeit in retrospect from our vantage point, or from that of NT writers, but not necessarily OT ones)

- A definition:

“the study of analogical correspondences among revealed truths about persons, events, institutions, and other things within the historical framework of God’s special revelation, which, from a retrospective point of view, are of a prophetic natures and are escalated in their meaning” (Beale, 2012:14)

- Types thus have 5 characteristics (Beale, 2012:14):
 - 1) analogical correspondence
 - 2) historicity

¹ For simplicity, I won’t address the relationship between typology and allegory, or whether or not these should be seen as contrastive (see discussions in the various sources listed in the References section).

- 3) a pointing-forwardness
 - 4) escalation
 - 5) retrospection
- (Good) Examples
- the flood → baptism (1 Peter 3:20-22)
 - Adam → Jesus (Romans 5:12-14)
 - the sacrificial system → Jesus’ sacrifice (Hebrews 10:1-18)
 - Passover → Jesus’ bodily sacrifice (e.g., Christ’s bones not being broken “that the Scripture might be fulfilled” [John 19:36])
 - Jonah → Jesus’ death/resurrection
 - the tabernacle → heavenly temple (Hebrews 8:5) (fulfilled in Christ)
 - the temple → Christ
- “Christ not only begins to fulfill all that the Old Testament temple and its prophecies of the future temple represent, but Christ is the unpacked meaning for which the temple existed all along” (Beale & Kim, 151)
- (Bad) Examples (though sometimes from really great Christians!)
- 3 spies hidden by Rahab were types of the Persons of the Trinity (Irenaeus; note first that he gets the number of spies wrong)

“Thus also did Rahab the harlot, while condemning herself, inasmuch as she was a Gentile, guilty of all sins, nevertheless receive the three spies, who were spying out all the land, and hid them at her home; [which three were] doubtless [a type of] the Father and the Son, together with the Holy Spirit.” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book IV, Chapter 20)

Origen’s treatment of Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem (the triumphal entry represents Christ’s ascension into heaven; the donkey represents the OT; the foal of the donkey the NT, etc.)

Number of Abraham’s servants

“For [the Scripture] saith, ‘And Abraham circumcised ten, and eight, and three hundred men of his household.’ What, then, was the knowledge given to him in this? Learn the eighteen first, and then the three hundred. The ten and the eight are thus denoted - Ten by I [*iota*], and Eight by H [*eta*]. You have [the initials of the, name of] Jesus. And because the cross was to express the grace [of our redemption] by the letter T [*tau*], he says also, ‘Three Hundred.’ He signifies, therefore, Jesus by two letters, and the cross by one.” (*Epistle of Barnabas* 9.8)

“As then in astronomy we have Abraham as an instance, so also in arithmetic we have the same Abraham. For, hearing that Lot was taken captive, and having numbered his own servants, born in his house, 318, he defeats a very great number of the enemy. They say, then, that the

character representing 300 is, as to shape, the type of the Lord's sign, and that the *Iota* and the *Eta* indicate the Saviour's name; that it was indicated, accordingly, that Abraham's domestics were in salvation, who having fled to the Sign and the Name became lords of the captives, and of the very many unbelieving nations that followed them." (Clement, *Stromata*, Book 6, Chapter 11)

Scarlet thread of Rahab as prefiguring the blood of Christ (possibly first taught by Clement of Rome in the 1st century & also by Justin Martyr in the 2nd) (see Vos, 1996[1948], 146)

- How do we know when we are dealing with good examples, and not "extravagances" (Vos, 1996[1948]:146)? How do we safeguard ourselves against eisegesis, and "reading Christ into OT passages that have nothing to do with the Messiah or the church" (Beale, 2012:13)?
 - One possibility: Limit ourselves exclusively to ones that are explicitly mentioned as types in Scripture (i.e., the *typi innati*)
 - E.g., Zuck (1991:)
 - Another option: Leave open the possibility of additional types (*typi illati*), but provide constraints to restrain us from entertaining/fabricating unsupported "extravagances"

"The bond that holds type and antitype together must be a bond of vital continuity in the progress of redemption" (Vos, 1996[1948]:146).

- Typical relations are not just accidental resemblances

- Final thought on typology & its importance:

"Typological fulfillment of the Old Testament historical events in Christ may seem surprising, but they help us gain a deeper picture of the work that Christ has accomplished" (Beale & Kim, 151).

5 Covenants & progressive revelation

Importance of biblical covenants in redemptive-history

- God's plan isn't just about forgiving my/our sins...immediately after the fall God reveals His plan to restore Eden
- The promise-fulfillment motif establishes unity: Continuity between God's promises and His fulfillment of such (Lints, 1993)
- The biblical covenants provide a structure (emplotment) in and through which redemptive-history unfolds (Gentry & Wellum, 2012)

"In truth, unpacking the 'promise-fulfillment' motif is another way of unfolding the biblical covenants across redemptive-history, and this is why the biblical

covenants serve as the framework and backbone to the entire narrative plot structure of Scripture” (Gentry & Wellum, 2012:101).

- Again, this history is revealed progressively; as the biblical covenants unfold we move from promise to fulfillment
 - Noahic covenant → Abrahamic covenant → Mosaic covenant → Davidic covenant → New covenant
 - Each covenant provides a more nuanced account of the gospel, of salvation, of redemption, and the new creation
 - Typological properties anticipate NT realities fulfilled in Jesus Christ

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