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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROPHECY AND TYPOLOGY

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The Bible Training Institute¹ stands for biblical Christianity, for the full authority of Scripture and for its great evangelical doctrines.

The most obvious feature of the Bible for a new reader is its two-fold division. This means that one of the most important items for research must always be the relationship between the two testaments. This paper seeks to explore two of the more important ways in which they are related and to consider whether these ways are completely different or whether, in fact, there are links between them.

Christ in the Old Testament

The distinction between grammatico-historical and theological interpretation is an important one. The first seeks to discover the meaning of the text for the Old Testament writer himself, setting his book in its historical context. The second considers the text in the light of the whole Bible as the word of God. When it is viewed in this way in the context of all Scripture it is obviously of importance to take much account of New Testament comments on Old Testament passages.

A study of these comments makes it clear that the New Testament writers saw Christ in the Old Testament in a wide variety of ways. Their concept of fulfilment is a very varied one, as can be seen, for example, by a study of the Gospel of Matthew.² The fulfilment of an Old Testament passage in the New Testament means that a New Testament event provides an appropriate counterpart to the Old Testament passage in such a way as to go beyond it, giving the reader a deeper understanding of the significance of the passage. Appropriateness and progression are therefore the two leading ideas in the concept of fulfilment. We will now seek to explore some of this variety.

1. *Employing Old Testament Terminology*

The New Testament takes up certain Old Testament terms and applies them to Christ, thus filling them with fuller meaning. In the Old Testament, God's word created the universe and revealed God to men through the Law and the Prophets. In Christ, that Word has become

1. This paper is, in written form, the Seventh Annual Lecture of the Glasgow Bible Training Institute, delivered on Monday June 18th 1984.
2. cf. G. W. Grogan 'The New Testament Interpretation of the Old Testament' in *Tyndale Bulletin*, 18 (1967), pp 54-76.

incarnate (John 1:1-18).

The Divine Wisdom, extolled and personified in Proverbs 1 and 9, is also seen to be incarnate in Christ (Colossians 2:2-3).

There is a New Testament passage where even a relationship of sound between a New Testament and an Old Testament word is described in terms of fulfilment. Matthew 2:23, alone among Matthaean references to the fulfilment of prophecy, speaks of 'prophets' rather than 'the prophet', and this might well suggest to us that Matthew has a prophetic theme rather than one passage in his mind. Just as Micah, in chapter 1, verses 10-16 of his prophecy, draws message after message for particular towns from the names they bear, so Matthew here may well be seeing significance in the fact that Jesus the Branch (Hebrew, *nēšer*) grew up in a place called Nazareth.

2. *Endorsing Old Testament Teaching*

The New Testament does this on a most extensive scale and makes frequent use of quotation formulae such as 'it is written' and 'thus says the scripture'; such formulae clearly imply recognition of the authority of the material quoted.

3. *Focussing Old Testament Demands*

The 8th and 10th commandments are in some ways similar to each other, for the 8th deals with stealing and the 10th with covetousness; outward act and inward motive respectively. In this way, the Decalogue reveals that God is concerned not only with our actions but with our hearts. This concern is shown by Christ, in relation to the 6th and 7th commandments, in his treatment of them in Matthew 5. This means that the New Testament does not let man 'off the hook' of the Law. It reveals Christ as the answer to his need only after showing, in an even more penetrating way than the Old Testament itself, how deep that need is.

4. *Exhibiting Old Testament Principles*

The Old Testament speaks, for example, of love as an important principle of godly living. Contemporary Judaism recognised this by the place it gave to the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). This is emphasised also in the New Testament, both in our Lord's reference to the Shema (Mark 12:29-30) and in Paul's teaching that love fulfils the law (Romans 13:8-10).

5. *Embodying Old Testament Ideals*

There are passages in the Old Testament which present ideal godliness. We might take Psalm 1:1-3 and Psalm 40:6-8 as examples of this. Christ is the most perfect fulfilment of such an ideal picture as that given in Psalm 1.³ The passage in Psalm 40 occurs in a Psalm where the Psalmist, although committed to his God, nevertheless confesses personal sin (verse 12). Christ, of course, fulfils the Psalm in terms of his absolute commitment to God's will (Hebrews 10:4-10), but is in contrast with the

3. There is however no quotation from this psalm in the New Testament.

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Psalmist in his perfect sinlessness.

6. *Answering Old Testament Questions*

The Old Testament raises questions, either explicitly or implicitly, which are not answered within that body of literature itself. In many cases, the New Testament revelation complements the Old, providing answers to its deepest questions. In Psalm 89:49 the Psalmist expresses in a question his bewilderment at the ways of God with the dynasty of David. He has extolled the great faithfulness of God to the covenant promise of 2 Samuel 7, but current events seem to be calling God's faithfulness into question. The New Testament shows that these covenant promises are completely fulfilled and forever established in the eternal kingdom of Christ, the great Son of David. G. C. Morgan in *The Answers of Jesus to Job*⁴ demonstrates that the many questions raised in and by the book of Job are answered in the New Testament revelation of Christ.

7. *Identified within Old Testament History*

A. T. Hanson, in his book, *Jesus Christ and the Old Testament*⁵, maintained that the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament economy was mostly in terms of personal appearances, Christophanies, as far as the New Testament writers are concerned. His thesis has been considered somewhat eccentric by other scholars, but there is an element of truth in it. Certainly, Melchizedek is not to be regarded as a Christophany. The writer to the Hebrews says that he is like the Son of God, but does not identify him with him (Hebrews 7:3). It is, however, clear from John 12:37-41, that the Gospel writer saw Christ, not only in Isaiah 53, but also in Isaiah 6. Although the former could not be dubbed a Christophany, he must have held the latter to be so. A full study of the Old Testament phenomenon of the Angel of Yahweh is not possible within the limits of this paper, but it is possible to argue, not only that the Angel is both identified with and yet distinguished from God in many Old Testament contexts, but also that there are possible links with Old Testament Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2 and Malachi 3:1.

8. *Gives Substance to Old Testament Shadows*

This typological element will be considered later in this paper.

9. *Realising Old Testament Predictions*

The question of predictive prophecy in the Old Testament will also be taken up later in this paper.

The Nature of Typology

George Adam Smith in 'The Spirit of Christ in the Old Testament'⁶ pointed out the lack of definition in the use of terms like 'Typology' and

4. London, 1950.

5. London, 1965.

6. A chapter in his *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, London, 1901, pp 145-176.

'Messianic prophecy' by many writers and the fact that terminological vagueness is serious, because it can lead to artificial or even arbitrary interpretation.

There can be no doubt that interest in Typology went into eclipse for a time due to its widespread abuse. Some who wished still to make use of the idea felt it desirable to employ a different term, such as homology⁷, in order to emphasise their repudiation of *undisciplined* typology. The publication of *Essays on Typology* by G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woolcombe⁸ in 1957, however, heralded the re-birth of Typology as a legitimate study, and its renewed interest has continued to the present day.

The term 'Typology' is derived from the Greek *tupos*. This word originally meant 'a mark made by a blow', then the impression made by a stamping device, then an image, and finally a pattern or example. So, in these last two senses, a type relates to something else; there is similarity, analogy, continuity between the type and that to which it points, its antitype. The term itself is little used in the New Testament, but without doubt the idea is much more extensive than the term. We shall see that in fact the concept even occurs within the Old Testament. Although we notice its explicit use in a verse like Romans 5:14 we also take note of James Barr's reminder⁹ that an idea might be present where its most characteristic terminology is not.

Without doubt the concept of typology is widespread in the Bible, and its constituent elements must now be set forth in such a way as to distinguish it from other ideas some times confused with it.

1. *It involves resemblance*

In Typology, two persons, events or institutions resemble each other in some way or ways; e.g. the Exodus is a type of Christ's Cross in Luke 9:31, where the Greek word *exodos* 'departure' is used. Both are redemptive, in both God saves his people, although the nature of the salvation differs, for it is physical in the type and spiritual in the antitype. David is a type of Christ because he is a king, and, moreover, one appointed by God, although the nature of the kingship is different, at least in some respects. In Romans 5:12ff, Adam is a type of Christ for, like his great Antitype, his actions profoundly affected others, although the results of the actions were of course quite different.

More than resemblance, however, is needed to establish a type. In Psalm 1:3 a righteous man is likened to a tree, and lessons about godliness are drawn from the roots, resources and fruit of the tree. This analogy is not, however, historical. An illustration from nature rather than history is not a type.

7. e.g. W. J. Phythian-Adams, *The Way of At-one-ment*, London, 1944, pp. 10,11.

8. London, 1957.

9. *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Oxford, 1961.

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Types and symbols are not the same, although they are close. The prophecy of Zechariah is full of symbols and the prophet is given visions in which, for example, horsemen symbolise acts of God, his judgments in death, war and famine. This is true also of the Book of the Revelation. Visionary material is not typological, because the contents of the visions are not, at least yet, part of history.

A kind of symbol which is a little nearer to a type is the acted prophecy. Zechariah for example, acted the part of two shepherds, one good, the other evil. The first of these is seen in Matthew 26:31, to be Christ. It is true that the prophet Zechariah himself belonged to history, but he was of course not really a shepherd but a prophet. As a prophet he *typified* Christ the Prophet, but as a shepherd he *symbolised* Christ the Shepherd. We need to make this distinction.

2. *It involves history*

This has, of course, come out in the preceding discussion. It is of great importance that we hold on to the fact that the revelation in Scripture is historical, although it is not possible for us to explore the reasons for this too fully in this present paper.¹⁰

The Bible contains a certain amount of fable, parable and allegory; e.g. Jotham's fable, the parables of our Lord and the allegories of the Good Shepherd and the True Vine. Much has been written about Galatians 4:21-26, but this also cannot be considered in detail now.

Type has, in fact, often been confused with allegory, and undisciplined use of Typology comes very close to it. Allegory dispenses with history. An allegory could be based on an historical event, but its historicity would have no bearing on its significance. Greek philosophers, for example, employed the works of Homer to teach philosophical and moral truths. They would have been undisturbed by the theory that the siege of Troy was unhistorical and that Odysseus never wandered through the Mediterranean. History is, however, of vital importance to Typology, because the types reveal God to be consistent. There is a kind of repetition in redemptive history because God is unchanging.

3. *It involves anticipation*

The term Typology, as normally employed, refers to persons, events, offices or institutions which have a future reference, so that the substance of the antitype casts its typical shadow before it. In Isaiah 40ff, the Exodus foreshadows the New Exodus; in Jeremiah 31:31-34, the Mosaic Covenant foreshadows the New Covenant. Even though the New Covenant is said to be 'not like' the Old, the very fact that the same word ("covenant") is employed of both means that there is also resemblance. Thus type and antitype form part of an ongoing purpose of God, in which the earlier points to the later.

10. See. P. K. Jewett, 'Special Revelation as Historical and Personal' in C. F. H. Henry (ed), *Revelation and the Bible*, London, 1959, pp 43-57.

This element of anticipation, of course, finds its fulfilment in Christ, who effected the New Exodus and established the New Covenant in his blood, as he himself declared at the Last Supper.

4. *It involves consummation*

This is emphasised particularly in the Epistle to the Hebrews, with its use of the adjective 'better'. We should also note, however, the phrase 'in these *last days*' in Hebrews 1:2, which indicates that the 'better' is really the Best. Comparisons may be odious because they are human, but superlatives are beautiful because they are divine. When applied to Christ all the comparatives of the New Testament turn out to be also superlatives.

We should note, however, that types, in themselves and considered in isolation from each other, do not designate him as unique. In the nature of the case they cannot do this, for they point to resemblance, and resemblance and uniqueness are mutually exclusive. Christ is, of course, unique, but not in terms of any one of those qualities which are typified in the Old Testament, but rather in the combination of them all, and the fact that in his deity, he goes even beyond all the types taken together.

5. *It involves retrospective recognition*

For our theme, this is important, for it involves a distinction from prediction. The latter is often easily identified, with its frequent use of future tenses, at least in English translation! Even if the prophetic perfect is used, it is normally evident that the prophet intends a future reference. Type, however, is usually recognised only in retrospect. We have to see its fulfilment first before we can recognise its typical quality.

This means that Typology is not normally to be thought of as exegesis. Exegesis of the Old Testament, as of the New Testament, is concerned with the meaning of the text for its human author and for its first readers. What did they understand by what was written? New Testament Typology, on the other hand, is the New Testament writer seeing theological significance in Old Testament persons, events and institutions. Exegesis and Typology are therefore two different ways of handling the Old Testament. The first sees its meaning within itself, in grammatico-historical terms, the second its significance within the whole word of God. Walter Kaiser Junior has emphasised this in recent years.¹¹ In fact, the recognition of this distinction goes back to the Reformers, especially Calvin, and before them to the School of Antioch in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., being emphasised by such writers as Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom, both of them taught the principles of exegesis by the great but badly neglected father, Diodore of Tarsus.

It could be argued, perhaps, that retrospective recognition of a type is

11. 'Legitimate Hermeneutics' in N. L. Geisler (ed), *Inerrancy*, Grand Rapids, 1979, pp. 133-138.

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involved in Isaiah's New Exodus¹² and Jeremiah's New Covenant¹³ themes, as both of these imply a type/antitype relationship within the Old Testament itself. This is, however, not entirely true. Isaiah and Jeremiah did not recognise the fulfilment of a type in an antitype within the history of their own time, but rather they predict it in the Advent of a New Exodus and New Covenant in the future. The New Testament makes it clear to us that the historical fulfilment of these types is to be found in Christ¹⁴. It is, however, interesting to find here that Typology is taken up into prophecy.

6. *It involves Divine Revelation*

The resemblance between the type and the antitype must be attested by God himself, at least in principle. It would certainly seem best to insist that there must at least be general New Testament warrant for the recognition of a type. It is vital that some principle of discipline should be established in this area of biblical interpretation. If exegesis needs discipline (and this is certainly widely recognised), so does theology, and typology is a mode of theological interpretation of the Bible. This must be governed by the way the New Testament handles the Old.

This really means that theology is governed by exegesis, for it is from New Testament exegesis that the theological principles of the interpretation of the Old Testament are to be obtained. Sober, disciplined, exegesis of the New Testament makes it clear that its writers have a theology of the relationship of the Old Testament to Christ, and that this is largely typological. Here then is Divine design.

It would be very profitable to ask how far away from *explicit* New Testament warrant theological interpretation, Christological interpretation, typological interpretation of the Old Testament may go. This cannot be taken up in this paper. It cannot, however, be too strongly maintained, that in interpretation, just as in inspiration, we must accept the *given*, otherwise we are at the mercy of subjective principles which may lead us and others through us far away from God's truth. If we accept God's word as true, we must accept his own revealed principles of understanding that word.

The Nature of Prophecy

This also must be carefully explored.

1. *It is God's message through human spokesmen*

The prophet speaks for God. Conservative writers have sometimes contested the idea that prophecy is essentially forthtelling and not foretelling, but it would certainly seem, in its essence, to be the former. This does not mean, however, that foretelling is excluded from it, but

12. Isaiah 11:11ff; 35:10; 43:16ff, *et al.*

13. Jeremiah 31:31-34.

14. e.g. in Luke 9:31; 1 Corinthians 11:25.

rather than foretelling is an even more general characteristic of prophecy than foretelling.

We do not know all the means used by the Divine Spirit in communicating God's message to the prophet, nor can we analyse completely the psychology of prophecy. What matters is that, in its utterance, it is the word, the words, of God. B. B. Warfield's magisterial exposition of biblical inspiration¹⁵ has been attacked, but there can be little doubt that it is at its strongest when the writer is dealing with biblical prophecy. He has emphasised that the Biblical prophets thought of their utterances as the verbal communication of divine truth.

This message is, of course, still prophecy when it has been committed to writing, for 2 Peter 1:20-21 deals with prophecies of *Scripture*.

We must also find a place for the fascinating phenomenon of acted prophecy, in which the word is illustrated and complemented in certain respects. Here it is the action which conveys the message, although, of course, this is often not a complete message until it has been interpreted.¹⁶ In some ways, acted prophecy is rather like God's interpretation of objective phenomena (e.g. a boiling pot — Jeremiah 1:7) and the contents of visions and dreams, except that the phenomena are not presented objectively to the prophet but rather are provided by him at God's command.

2. *It relates to history*

The prophet himself is an historical phenomenon. So too are his original hearers who also belong to history. It is not surprising therefore to discover that much in the prophecies relates to the times in which the first hearers lived. The message of the prophet, however, also relates to past history. It is not without significance that the Jews referred to the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings as the Former Prophets. The writers of these books gave a word of God which was an interpretation of the past, his verdict on it. This was given to enable men of the present to learn lessons about the ways of God from the past. Prophecy occupies a place within history and surveys it in both directions.

3. *It relates especially to the future*

The God of the Bible is the God of the future as well as of the past. This fact is sometimes given special emphasis, especially in Isaiah 40-48, with its polemic against idolatry and its stress upon the fact that the true God, the God of Israel, is the God who speaks, and speaks especially about the future.¹⁷

An examination of the prophetic literature reveals that a great deal of it is concerned with the future, not only in terms of the way the New Testament interprets it, but in terms of a proper understanding of it

15. *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, London, 1951.

16. e.g. see Ezekiel 5:1-12.

17. Isaiah 41:21-24; 43:8-13, *et al.*

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within its Old Testament setting. The prophets profess to declare God's future purposes, sometimes the immediate future or at least the short-term future. They deal also, however, with much lying beyond their own day. There is also much material that is undefined as to its time, although its future bearing is evident on the face of it. The concept of futurity is therefore of great importance in relation to prophecy.

4. *It relates most of all to Christ's Person and Work*

The idea of a special coming era of fulfilment is found in the technical language of Old Testament prophecy, in phrases like 'in that day' and 'in the last days'. The Christian Church believed itself to be the people of the Christ. The New Testament documents therefore interpret Old Testament prophecy in terms of its reference to Christ.

It is not, of course, unique in this, for Rabbinic Judaism also believed that the Christ is the great theme of O.T. prophecy.

What therefore particularly distinguished the Christian Church was its identification of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. It recognised in him the true historical terminus of Old Testament prediction.

In terms of our distinctions between exegesis (the grammatico-historical approach) and theological interpretation, exegesis identifies prediction as such when it occurs in the Old Testament. New Testament exegesis identifies it as fulfilled in Jesus, because the New Testament presents a theological interpretation of the Old.

Typology and Prophecy

1. *They possess a number of similarities*

Both relate to history and to the future, and both point to the consummation of God's purposes in Christ. They are subjects of divine revelation.

2. *They exhibit important differences*

Typology involves retrospective recognition, for the antitype reveals the presence of the type. This is true even of prophecy as far as its content is concerned, for the Christ of the New Testament is really the great content of prophecy. In its Old Testament setting, the prophecy does not identify the exact nature of the fulfilment nor of the time of it. Its form, however, is often clear. We can tell that it is a prophecy, but not in whom or when it will be fulfilled. Retrospective recognition therefore involves both form and content as far as typology is concerned, but content only in relation to prophecy.

It is not easy always to say which psalms are typical and which are prophetic. David is a prophet (Acts 2:30), as the Old Testament itself makes clear (2 Samuel 23:2). He is also a type of Christ as King. When is he prophetic and when typical in his psalms? Does he always speak of himself, so that his experiences typify Christ's experiences, e.g. his rejection as God's anointed by his enemies — or does he sometimes speak of Christ directly in prophetic fashion?

Psalms 22 and 69 are both quoted extensively in the New Testament in relation to the sufferings of Christ. Although an examination of them shows many similarities, there is an important difference, for the speaker in Psalm 69 confesses personal sin (Psalm 69:5), which is excluded completely from Psalm 22. We must therefore designate Psalm 69 as typical rather than prophetic. It may well be that we shall never know for certain whether Psalm 22 is to be identified as type or prophecy. Does it in any way echo an experience of David? It is not impossible that he could have been guided by the Spirit in such a way as to describe his sufferings so that they would fit also the experiences of the Christ, which were, of course, much more profound than his own. On the other hand, he could be speaking of Christ alone.

Perhaps the major difference between typology and prophecy lies in the matter of resemblance and identity. In prophecy, prediction and fulfilment are identical; they relate to the same person, the same event. In type, however, there is similarity, not identity. David is not Christ, Moses is not Christ, the Old Testament sin-offering is not Christ, and yet they all typify him in their differing ways. This would seem to establish that Melchizedek was a type, for the writer to the Hebrews refers to him as 'make like the Son of God' (Hebrews 7:3).

3. *Prophecies sometimes shows typological awareness*

Sometimes a prophecy will incorporate a type within itself. Isaiah 53:10, for example, speaks of the Suffering Servant as 'an offering for sin'. When prediction uses sacrificial language it employs typology to serve its purpose. Here then are prophecy and typology together within the Old Testament, but finding fulfilment in Christ.

4. *Prophecy sometimes refers to past or present phenomena*

The prophetic books do not, of course, consist entirely of predictions. There are, for example, quite a number of references to past history and some of these are employed typologically in the New Testament. A good example of this is to be found in the use made of Hosea 11:1, which in its original setting clearly refers to Israel (cf. Exodus 4:22,23), but is employed of Christ in Matthew 2:15. In emerging from Egypt, the greater, perfect and individual Son repeats in his experience that of the lesser, imperfect, collective son.

Matthew 13:14-15 takes up Isaiah 6:9,10, which, in its original setting, applied to the unbelief of Israel in Isaiah's own day. Israel's supreme act of unbelief was its rejection of Christ when he came. This means that Isaiah was himself a type of Christ as a mouthpiece of God whose message was rejected.

5. *Prophecy sometimes predicts future phenomena which typify Christ*

There are times when Old Testament prophecy itself focusses on a person or event which proves to be typical of Christ. A New Testament passage will help us to understand this. 1 John 2:18 reads, 'you have heard

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that antichrist comes and even now there are many antichrists.' It is true that in this verse John links the present and the future rather than the future and the more remote future, but the passage is helpful in that it suggests the presence in history of many figures falling short of and yet anticipating the final antichrist, and therefore foreshadowing him and partaking of his qualities. Over-enthusiastic students of prophecy have, in their own day, identified many figures of history as the antichrist. All such identifications were, of course, incorrect, and yet many of them contained a grain of truth, for the figures thus identified typified the ultimate antichrist.

Turning now to the Old Testament, we see in Deuteronomy 18:15-18, the promise of the whole sequence of the prophets. This certainly seems to be the implication of the passage. Not one of these, of course, was the perfect embodiment of the prophetic ideal, as is recognised within the book itself (Deuteronomy 34:9-12), but the promise was completely fulfilled in Christ (Acts 3:22). The long line of Old Testament prophets typified the ultimate Prophet and were themselves the objects of the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18.

In 2 Samuel 7, it is made clear that God would regard David's son as his son. Was this fulfilled in Solomon and his successors? Yes, in terms of the Divine attitude, for God looked after them, loved them and, of course, because they were sinners, chastised them, but Christ, as the New Testament shows (Hebrews 1:5), fulfils the promise of a son of David who would also be Son of God in the most perfect way.

Every true prophet, every Davidic king, in fact was a fulfilment of prophecy but also a type of Christ.

6. *In this way God so orders history that it points to Christ, finding in him its climax and true significance.*

The God of the Bible is Lord of all history. His greatest concern in the Scriptures was to reveal Christ. We see him, therefore, as the end and purpose of that great history partly described and partly predicted in the Bible. Everything moves towards its climax in him.

The Old Testament predicts the coming of the seed of the woman, not Seth, as Eve appears mistakenly to have thought (Genesis 4:25), but Christ. The Old Testament predicts the seed of Abraham, not Isaac, although this son of Abraham foreshadowed him. The Old Testament predicts the coming of the son of David, not Solomon, although he points to him. The prophet like Moses, was not Samuel nor Elijah nor Jeremiah, although each of these anticipated him, the ultimate and perfect Prophet. The ultimate Priest was not Aaron nor even Melchizedek, although both foreshadowed him as did every true Old Testament priest of the Lord. The first Exodus from Egypt foreshadows the great Exodus from sin effected by Christ, and the Old Covenant through Moses foreshadows the New Covenant in Christ. The first Adam in his far-reaching act

foreshadowed the greatest event in the world history, the far-reaching atonement in Christ's act of obedience to death.

Christ in his two comings is the climax of the ages and all redemptive history points to him. This means that in our reading of the Old Testament our knowledge of him is greatly enriched, and we are the better able to trust, obey and worship him.