

Typological and Artistic Interpretations of Biblical Bodies of Water

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ABSTRACT: *Biblical typology is a form of interpretation in which a person, event, or thing found in the Old Testament is seen as a prefiguration of a person, event, or thing found in the New Testament. This essay features typological readings of various bodies of water described in the Hebrew Scriptures, specifically, the “river of water of life” (alluded to in Genesis and later described in Revelation), Noah’s flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, the spring Moses brought forth from a rock, and the crossing of the Jordan River. The essay concludes with a proposed typological reading of Jesus’ washing of his disciples’ feet. The goal is to illuminate fundamental connections within the Christian Bible and to suggest these connections indicate an overarching divine plan.*

KEYWORDS –Bible, Jordan River, Noah’s Flood, Red Sea, Typology, Water of Life

I. INTRODUCTION

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says that he came down from heaven to fulfil the old covenant Law and prophecy (Matthew 5:17). He would both embody and crown the written Law of Moses (or Torah) and be the realization of the Hebrew Scriptures’ Messianic predictions. The New Testament characterizes the old covenant as “a shadow of good things to come,” a shadow of a new covenant sealed with the blood of Jesus on the cross (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 10:1 KJV). Thoroughly examining the biblical texts uncovers a plethora of amazing links and “shadows” alluding to a divine plan unfolding over time.

For millennia, Bible students have searched the Scriptures for connections revealing God’s progressive design for humanity. Some connections are explicit, for example when Jesus likened his three-day burial “in the heart of the earth” to Jonah’s three-day burial in the belly of a whale (Matthew 12:39-40; Jonah 1:17). Usually, though, connections are more subtle. For instance, the Gospel of John tells of Jesus visiting the temple in Jerusalem, the center of Jewish sacrificial worship. When the scribes and Pharisees questioned Jesus’ authority, he responded, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). The religious leaders scoffed because it had taken decades to build the temple, and they did not understand Jesus was foretelling his own death. Three days after his crucifixion, Jesus’ temple (or body) arose through resurrection. The old covenant temple was “a shadow” of the new covenant body of Christ.

Typology is a method of biblical interpretation in which Old Testament people, things, or events (*types*) are understood as prefigurations of New Testament people, things, or events (*antitypes*) [see 1; 2]. The word prefigure comes from the Latin term *praefigurare*, meaning to show beforehand. Typology was a principal method Jesus and his disciples used to interpret the Hebrew Scriptures [3, p. 198]. On many occasions Jesus said the Old Testament anticipated events occurring in his life and ministry (see, for example, Matthew 13:14, 26:54; Mark 14:49; Luke 4:21, 18:31, 24:44; John 13:18, 15:25).

While foreshadowing occurs throughout the Bible, seeing the entirety of the Old Testament as “typical” of the New Testament is a mistake. Some early *Church Fathers*, such as Origen of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 185-254), Ambrose of Milan (ca. 340-397), and Jerome of Stridonium (ca. 347-420), looked for types in “every incident and event” recorded in Scripture, “however trivial,” and they found “mystery and mysticism” everywhere [4]. Such fanciful overreach tends to offset Scripture’s bases in history and nature and, in the minds of some, may seem to dilute the Bible’s trustworthiness. To avoid this danger, many theologians suggest biblical types must be based solely on authentic historical facts, persons, actions, and institutions, and not on hidden meanings subjectively perceived in biblical text [3, p. 17]. They insist the only reliable types are those explicitly

recognized as such by a New Testament author, under the Holy Spirit's inspiration; anything else is a mere illustration or analogy, devised in the minds of men and women [5].

Despite these admonitions, Bible students should not disregard or minimize apparent types. Biblical scholar, William G. Moorehead (1836-1914) asked a compelling question. If the New Testament authors truly "exhausted the types of the Old Testament," what are we to make of the "multitude of others of the same class," with similar characteristics, which New Testament authors failed to identify or explain? [4; see also 6]. Bible students need dependable criteria and defining characteristics to help determine the existence of trustworthy types [7].

What are essential and distinctive features of a biblical type? First, a type should either clearly resemble or share distinct common qualities with the person, thing, or event it represents (the *antitype*). These shared qualities suggest an "identifiable Scriptural pattern" [8, p. 629]. Next, the Lord God must be the author of both the type and the antitype. If they are each part of a preordained scheme of redemption and salvation, they must each be of divine origin. Finally, the type must be predictive. Like predictive prophecy, types disclose something about the future, they suggest something the Lord has chosen to veil for a time but will reveal later. Often, the antitype elevates the importance or broadens the applicability of its type.

It is important to differentiate the *type-antitype relationship* from other ways biblical texts associate people, things, and events. The Bible is a treasure trove of rich metaphorical, allegorical, and symbolic language. The type-antitype relationship, though, is inherently unlike the figurative language, allegories, metaphors, and personifications that frequently appear in Scripture.

The Hebrew Bible includes many spiritual, moral, and historical allegories: stories and poems that when properly interpreted reveal hidden meanings. For example, Bible commentator Elijah P. Barrows (1807-1888) described the eightieth psalm as "an exquisite example of the allegory ... where the transfer of the [Israelites] from Egypt to the land of Canaan, with their subsequent history, is described under the figure of a vine" [9, p. 571]. "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars" (Psalm 80:8-10). The eightieth psalm is a delightful, poetic passage, in which the psalmist employed allegorical language. The vine described, however, was not a type.

Biblical allegories are like *parables*. Parables describe imaginary, everyday situations in ways that impart a deeper, transcendent significance. Parables differ fundamentally from types because they generally begin with a fictitious story, whereas types are realities that foreshadow more-elevated realities. Jesus specialized in parables. Perhaps the most famous tells of a shepherd who watched over a flock of one hundred sheep and then lost one of them. The shepherd left "the ninety and nine in the wilderness," and went after "that which is lost." When he found it, the shepherd placed the sheep on his shoulders and celebrated. Then he went home, called together his friends, and said, "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." Jesus explained, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke 15:3-7).

It does not really matter whether the stories in Jesus' parables occurred or not, the stories are simply means of illustrating principles that are both true and timeless. A shepherd may or may not have truly lost and recovered one of his one hundred sheep, but there is rejoicing in heaven when a sinner repents. What makes biblical typology so special is that both the type and the antitype are historical, each existed or exists within the unfolding course of history, the former signifying the relevance of the latter. In the parable of the Lost Sheep, the shepherd symbolizes Jesus, and the lost sheep symbolizes a sinful person; but neither the shepherd nor the sheep is a type.

Metaphors, allegories, and parables are imaginative comparisons that derive their strength and profundity from the recognition of subtle similarities. They require a person to think deeply to appreciate fully the intended message. Jesus' disciples asked why he taught in parables and Jesus replied, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to [others] it is not given. ... Therefore, speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (Matthew

13:11-13; Luke 8:10). Disciples who sincerely wanted to understand Jesus' parables contemplated his stories deeply and asked follow-up questions to clarify their precise meanings; those who were unwilling to receive Jesus' message simply missed his points and remained in darkness. Typology is similar; recognizing and appreciating biblical types requires effort and reflection.

There are three broad categories of biblical types: 1) personal types, 2) legal or ritual types, and 3) symbolic types. Although this essay will focus solely on a related group of symbolic types, it may be useful to briefly describe each of the categories.

Personal types are people from the Hebrew Scriptures who were ordained by providence to prefigure a person of the Christian era. For example, many see Moses as a clear prefiguration of Jesus in his roles of prophet, lawgiver, and intercessor. However, there are no Scriptures that unequivocally reference Moses as a type of Jesus (Deuteronomy 18:15 notwithstanding). Some *typologists* (those who study types) make distinctions between *innate personal types*, which are identified as such in Scripture, and *inferred personal types*, which are not so identified [10, p. 37]. Adam and Melchizedek are innate personal types of Jesus (Hebrews 5:5-6; 7:3-17; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22); Moses is an inferred personal type.

"Legal" types refer to the Law of Moses. The related subcategory of ritual types refers to the rites and sacrificial offerings performed at the tabernacle, and later at the temple in Jerusalem. The book of Leviticus provides instructions for performing sacrifices, a form of ceremonial gift giving to God (Leviticus 1-7, 22-23, 27). The people of Israel periodically returned a portion of what they had received from the Lord, such as domesticated animals or other food offerings. The Scriptures connect Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to the Levitical sacrificing in the tabernacle and temple (see John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Timothy 2:6; Hebrews 7:27).

The third category of types is a catchall for other symbolic foreshadowing. In fact, symbolic types begin in the very first verses of the Bible and with the Lord's first recorded words: "God said, 'Let there be light': and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness" (Genesis 1:3-4). The Apostle Paul later identified this great event as a foreshadowing of the great redemptive mission of the Messiah: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). Paul's comparison shows the value of typological interpretation as a tool for seeing and understanding the Lord's evolving plan for humanity.

"Water is a powerful and pervasive image in the Hebrew Scriptures ... [and many] water images from the Hebrew Scriptures are reused by the writers of the New Testament, particularly in the Gospels and the book of Revelation" [11, p. 1; 12, p.2]. This essay offers typological analysis of several distinct biblical bodies of water, specifically the river of Eden, the waters of the Flood, the Red Sea, water Moses brought forth from a rock, and the Jordan River. Some are innate types; others inferred. Reproductions of relevant (public domain) artworks and captions illustrate the biblical narratives and supplement the primary analysis. Bible quotations come from the King James Version. The King James Bible is not only a reliable, scholarly translation of the Scriptures; it was also a momentous literary achievement, admired for its poetic phraseology and vivid imagery. Essentially, this is a "search" of Bible passages that "testify" of Jesus and his new covenant (John 5:39; see also Acts 17:11). As the Apostle Paul wrote, the Lord gave us "examples" in the Hebrew Scriptures, and "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11).

II. THE RIVER OF EDEN (PARADISE)

The Lord concluded his original acts of creation when he formed Adam and Eve. Genesis 1:27 is the Bible's first poetic verse: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." The Lord gave the couple a home in the Garden of Eden. *Eden* is a Hebrew word denoting *paradise*, a delightful, pleasurable place to live. Adam and Eve had everything they needed. The Lord provided abundant nutritious plants for food, and a river that watered the garden and watered a sustaining "tree of life" [see 13]. The Lord even communed with Adam and Eve in their idyllic home, "walking in the garden in

the cool of the day” (Genesis 2:9; 3:8). Jesus later explained the Lord’s will is that men and women should not only “have life,” but also “have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Unfortunately, Adam and Eve failed to follow the Lord’s simple commandments and they were compelled to leave their paradise. They could not eat the fruit of the tree of life, which would have allowed them to “live forever” (Genesis 3:22).

Although humanity lost access to an earthly paradise, the Scriptures say paradise still exists in the spiritual realm. The Apostle John received a revelation and a vision of a “holy city” where “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb” abide (Revelation 21:2, 22). The holy city resembled the Garden of Eden. John wrote that an angel showed him, “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb ... On either side of the river, was there the tree of life ... and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:1-2). The book of Revelation and the Bible end with Jesus’ blessing on those that follow his commandments, “that they may have [the] right to the tree of life and may enter in through the gates” into the spiritual paradise (Revelation 22:14). The Apostle Paul wrote that “by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin,” but the Lord (and his son Jesus Christ) nevertheless offer a “gift by grace” and “justification” for many offences (Romans 5:12, 15-16). The Bible teaches that the Lord took the tree of life, and the river that sustained it, from the “midst” of the earthly paradise of Eden and placed it in the “midst” of his spiritual paradise in heaven, to nourish those who “overcometh” (Genesis 2:9; Revelation 2:7) [see 10, pp. 214-220, 240] (Fig. 1).



Figure 1.
William Blake. *The River of Life*, ca. 1805, Watercolor.

William Blake (1757-1827) was an English philosopher, poet, and visionary artist of the Romantic period. In his image of the holy city, Blake envisioned a crystal-clear river of life flowing from a distant sun, symbolizing the throne of God. In the composition’s foreground, an adult figure (perhaps Jesus) swims upstream holding the hands of two infants, past the tree of life and toward the presence of the Lord. Angels in flowing robes provide a serenade (see Matthew 24:31; Revelation 8:2).

The Gospel books say that after Jesus was condemned to die, he hung on the cross for six agonizing hours and during that time he made several statements (Matthew 27:46; Luke 23:34, 43, 46; John 19:26, 28, 30). Most of his disciples did not hear Jesus utter his last words before dying, because they deserted him and fled when he was arrested (Matthew 26:56). Even Jesus’ closest followers initially misunderstood his hopeful teachings on the resurrection and afterlife, and as Jesus was crucified, they felt rudderless and confused (Luke 24:7-12, 21-27, 36-49; John 20:9, 24-29). A repentant thief who was hanging on a cross near Jesus asked if he would remember him at his second coming and Jesus responded, “Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). As he died on the cross, Jesus reiterated a central theme of his ministry, the reality of resurrection. The word translated in the Gospel of Luke as “paradise” [παράδεισος] is identical to the word used in Genesis for the Garden of Eden and in Revelation for the dwelling place of God (Genesis 2:8, Septuagint; Revelation 2:7). The Garden of Eden was a type of the paradise awaiting after death. Jesus promised the repentant thief access to the “tree of life” and to the “pure river of [the] water of life.”

III. THE FLOOD

In the Bible, water is both a source of life and a cause of death. The Scriptures say that several generations after Adam and Eve, “The wickedness of man was great in the earth, and ... every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). The Lord was so grieved he decided to wash the evildoers from the face of the earth with destructive floodwaters, but to save a faithful remnant who had “found grace in [his] eyes” (Genesis 6:8). The faithful remnant included Noah, a just man who “walked with God,” and Noah’s family. The Lord told Noah to build an ark [in Hebrew *têbâh*], a chest-shaped floating vessel, and to go inside the ark with his family and an assortment of animals. The ark would protect them from the coming deluge. As the Lord said, floodwaters came and the evildoers perished, but Noah “remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark” (Genesis 7:23) (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Ivan Aivazovsky, *The Flood*, 1864, Oil on canvas.

Ivan Aivazovsky (1817-1900), who studied at the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, is considered one of Russia’s finest late Romantic artists. However, Aivazovsky descended from a family of Galician Armenians who lived in the small city of Teodosia on the Black Sea coast in south-eastern Crimea. Aivazovsky was a member of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and he painted many biblical subjects. The Scriptures say after the flood Noah’s ark finally settled on the mountains of Ararat (Genesis 8:4), which, perhaps coincidentally, is the national symbol of Ivan Aivazovsky’s ancestral homeland, Armenia.

The flood account presents a straightforward narrative. Most of humanity was unrepentantly sinful and in direct conflict with the Lord’s righteousness and his expectations and was deserving of death. A small minority, however, attempted to follow the Lord’s will, so he saved them through his grace. The ark (a physical instrument) protected them and saved them from the rising waters (a physical danger). Noah built the ark because he believed the Lord when he said that a great flood was coming. The author of the New Testament book of Hebrews wrote, “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house ... and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Hebrews 11:7). Elsewhere, the Apostle Paul explained, “For by grace are ye saved through faith,” which “is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). The Lord provides instruments of salvation to people who have faith.

The flood narrative provided more than one type for the Christian era. According to the Apostle Peter, the floodwaters represented baptism, a word that comes from the Greek term *βάπτισμα*, meaning immersion (1 Peter 3:20-21). Baptism is one act by which a confessing person publicly identifies as a disciple of Jesus and a member of his church. In Noah’s time, the flood literally buried the sinful in a watery death. In the Christian era, a sinful person is buried in baptismal waters, as Jesus was crucified and buried, then, again like Jesus, the baptized person is “raised up from the dead [and baptismal waters] by the glory of the Father ... [to] walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12). In addition, the flood account prefigured the earth’s last days (or *eschaton*), when Jesus will return for the final judgment [15]. Jesus taught that no one could predict when

that time will arrive, just as no one living in the days of Noah could predict the coming flood. Jesus did provide some guidance, though: “As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that [Noah] entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matthew 24:36-39)[10, pp. 280-287].

IV. THE RAINBOW AND OTHER COVENANT SYMBOLS

After the flood, the waters receded and Noah, his family, and the animals emerged from the ark. The Lord determined “in his heart [to] not again curse the ground any more for man's sake ... [nor] smite any more everything living,” as he had done (Genesis 8:21). He declared this unconditional promise to Noah and his sons, and he blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 9:1, 11). The Lord then selected the rainbow, a natural phenomenon, as a perpetual sign of his unconditional promise (Fig. 3) [16, p. 210]. “When I bring a cloud over the earth ... the bow shall be seen in the cloud, and I will remember my covenant” (Genesis 9:14-15). The Hebrew Bible records several instances when the Lord made conditional and unconditional promises, reflecting his grace, mercy, and concern for humanity’s welfare (see, for example, Genesis 12:1-3; 15:9-21; 17; Exodus 19-24; 2 Samuel 7:5-16).



Figure 3. Rainbow, 2021. Photograph.

The word *covenant*, which means a solemn formal agreement, comes from translations of the Latin *testamentum* and the Hebrew *berith*. The Mosaic (or Sinaitic) Covenant was an agreement established between the Lord and the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19-24). At Sinai, the Lord set aside the Israelites as a “chosen people” and gave them a Law outlined in the Torah. The Mosaic Covenant was conditional, meaning the Lord’s promises were subject to the Israelites’ obedience to his commandments. If the Israelites followed the Lord’s will, they received blessings; but if the Israelites violated his will, they received punishment (Deuteronomy 28). The Mosaic Covenant had decidedly physical elements: a furnished sanctuary (the tabernacle or temple), a system of animal sacrifice, and detailed laws regarding crime, business, and social interaction. Whereas the Lord signified his covenant with Noah with a natural phenomenon, the “rainbow of mercy” [9, p. 295], he signified the Mosaic Covenant with a physical object, two stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, “written with the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18; 34:28).

Jesus taught his disciples that he was establishing a new covenant (or testament) that would clarify and build upon what had happened in the earlier times, the times “of the Old Testament” (Luke 22:20; 2 Corinthians 3:14). Jesus taught that his body was a spiritual temple (John 2:19-22), and soon the righteous would not worship in the temple of Jerusalem, nor any structure made with human hands, but, rather, would “worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23; Acts 7:48-49). The writer of Hebrews described the tabernacle and temple as “figures” or types for Jesus and his new order (Hebrews 9:9-10). Likewise, the writer of Hebrews asserted the system of animal sacrifice had been superseded by the singular sacrifice of the “blood of Christ,” who “offered himself without spot to God,” to remove the guilt of sin from our consciences and souls (Hebrews 9:14). Noah’s rainbow after the flood physically symbolized the Lord’s mercy. The tablets inscribed with the

Ten Commandments physically symbolized the Lord's will. The sacrifice of the Lord's son Jesus, though, was of a different order; it was the spiritual symbol of the Lord's unmerited grace and the means of "eternal redemption" (Hebrews: 9:12).

The prophet Ezekiel compared the glory of God to the radiance of a rainbow. While living in Babylonian exile, Ezekiel had a fantastic vision of the Lord. Ezekiel wrote, "There was a voice from the firmament [and] the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. . . . and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the [rainbow] that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake" (Ezekiel 1:25-28). The Apostle John also wrote of his vision of a heavenly throne, "and there was a rainbow round about the throne" (Revelation 4:3), reflecting "Christ the *Sun* [emphasis added] of righteousness" [17].

V. ESCAPE FROM EGYPTIAN SLAVERY THROUGH THE RED SEA

Joseph was the favored son of the Hebrew patriarch Jacob (who was also known as Israel). During the lifetime of Joseph (ca. 1900 B.C.), when the people of Israel first arrived in Egypt, the reigning Pharaoh treated them with great kindness and generosity because Joseph was his esteemed administrator and advisor (Genesis 47:5-6). As generations passed, "the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them" (Exodus 1:7). Eventually, a new king assumed power over Egypt, who did not know Joseph or appreciate his contributions to the kingdom and who did not know the Lord (Exodus 5:2). The new Pharaoh distrusted the Israelites and doubted their loyalty, so he put ruthless slave masters over them and forced them to perform grueling labor in his service. Therefore, "the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God." Remembering his previous covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Lord looked upon the children of Israel with concern and sympathy (Exodus 2:23-25). He found a deliverer for his chosen people, Moses, and he spoke miraculously to Moses through the burning bush. He said, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. . . . I have surely seen the affliction of my people, which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters. . . . I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land . . . flowing with milk and honey. . . . Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:6-8, 10).

Moses took the Lord's commandment to Pharaoh: "Let my people go" (Exodus 5:1), but Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he refused (Exodus 4:21). Therefore, the Lord sent a series of plagues to afflict Egypt, plagues of bloody water, frogs, lice, flies, animal diseases, boils, hail, locusts, and prolonged darkness. Despite these burdens, the Egyptian king would not yield, so the Lord finally told Pharaoh (through Moses) that he would "go out into the midst of Egypt: And all the firstborn [would] die, from the first born of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill" (Exodus 11:4-5). The Lord instructed the Israelites that each family was to take a male lamb "without blemish," sacrifice it, smear its blood around the doorframes of their houses, and eat the flesh. The Lord would "passover" those houses that were under the sign of the lamb's blood when he struck down the firstborn of Egypt. After the night of Passover, Pharaoh finally agreed to allow the Israelites to depart from Egypt (Exodus 12)(on the typology of the Passover and the Eucharist, see [18]).

The Lord's intervention and eventual deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery found a later echo in the Lord's intervention to deliver all humanity from the bondage and punishment of sin, through Jesus Christ. Jesus said that if his disciples heeded his words and followed his instructions they would "know the truth" and the truth would set them free; if they disregarded his instructions, they would remain the "servant [or slave] of sin" (John 8:31-36). Through Moses, the Lord liberated the Israelites from their physical captivity; through Jesus, the Lord offers all people liberation from spiritual bondage [10, p. 73].

Freedom from sin (and the restrictions of the old Law) are recurrent themes in the Apostle Paul's *epistles*, or letters (see, for example, Galatians 2:4; 4:1-31; 5:1). Paul wrote that those who have "been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" should no longer consider themselves either Jews or non-Jews, either enslaved or free, for "all [are] one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:27-28). Baptism is a type of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. When Jesus' disciples are "buried" in water, they reflect his burial in the tomb, and when Jesus' disciples emerge from baptismal waters, they reflect his emergence or resurrection from the tomb, "freed from sin" (Romans 6:1-7). Under the Lord's guidance, the Israelites left Egyptian slavery and followed Moses to the Promised Land of Canaan (Genesis 17:8; Exodus 3:8, 17). Jesus, though, promised his followers a much greater home: an eternal paradise in the presence of the Lord, freed from the bondage of sin (Matthew 6:19-21; 25:46; Luke 12:33-34; 23:43; John 3:16; 6:47; 10:28; 14:2-3; see also Revelation 20-21).

After the deadly night of Passover, Pharaoh expelled the Israelites. They left Egypt "through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea" and were led by the Lord, who went "before them by day in a pillar of a cloud ... and by night in a pillar of fire" (Exodus 13:18, 21). Before long, Pharaoh reconsidered his decision to release his enslaved workforce. He set out an army of soldiers and chariots, intending to force the Israelites to return to their bondage. When Moses saw Pharaoh's army approaching, he said to the people, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you today" (Exodus 14:13). The Lord told Moses to lift his rod and stretch it over the Red Sea "and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea" (Exodus 14:16). When Moses lifted his staff, a strong wind blew the waters apart and a pathway appeared. The Israelites walked through the sea between walls of water and safely reached the other side. "The water represent[ed] a transition made possible by God's grace" [19, p. 4]. Pharaoh then pursued the Israelites on the pathway between the water and the Lord told Moses, "Stretch out thine hand over the sea that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians." When Moses stretched out his hand, "the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them" (Exodus 14:26, 28) (Fig. 4). Because of his miraculous display of power and deliverance, the people of Israel "feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses" (Exodus 14:31).



Figure 4. Marc Chagall, *The Train Crossed the Red Sea*, 1966, Lithograph.

Marc Chagall (1887-1985) was born in an area of the Russia Empire called the Pale of Settlement, one of the only places the Tsarist government authorized Jews to reside. Chagall's Hasidic family lived in a segregated village, called a *shtetl*. Throughout his long career as an artist, Chagall returned repeatedly to biblical themes (on Chagall's "Jewishness," see [20]). In this lithograph, he illustrated Exodus 14:27-29: "Moses stretched forth his hand ... and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. ... But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left."

The Apostle Paul used the Red Sea narrative to teach about the importance of appreciating grace. In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul wrote, “Brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea. [All were] baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness” (1 Corinthians 10:1-5). Paul had three main points: 1) The Lord saved the Israelites at the Red Sea through a type of baptism; 2) Jesus was present at the crossing of the Red Sea and during the wanderings through the wilderness; and 3) In spite of the Lord’s grace, some of the Israelites continued to sin and perished before reaching the Promised Land. Paul advised the Corinthians to learn from the Israelites’ “examples,” and to not “murmur,” or lust “after evil things,” or otherwise “tempt” God (1 Corinthians 10:6, 9-10). Such behavior leads a person away from *the Promised Land of heaven*.

Paul compared the crossing of the Red Sea to baptism (Fig. 5)(on this typology see also [21]). From the advantage of hindsight, it is clear going through the waters of the Red Sea signified the end of Israel’s slavery. The Israelites were hemmed in at the water’s edge and seemingly at the mercy of Pharaoh’s vengeful army, but Moses stepped forward and proclaimed, “Hold your peace,” “the Lord shall fight for you” (Exodus 14:14). The Lord then liberated his people from their oppression and defeated their oppressors, by taking them through the waters of salvation. This is the story of the exodus, and it is symbolic of Jesus’s gospel message. Baptism is a gracious, essential gift of God. Jesus taught, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5; see Matthew 28:19-20).



Figure 5. Marion Post Wolcott, *Baptism near Morehead, Kentucky*, 1940, Photograph. Marion Post Wolcott (1910-1990) photographed this baptism service, held by the Primitive Baptist Church of Triplett, Kentucky, while on assignment for the Farm Security Administration (“FSA”). The FSA was one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal agencies, tasked with documenting poverty in rural and agricultural communities during the Great Depression. Primitive Baptists offer baptism only to “believers,” individuals who have reached sufficient maturity to repent of their past sins and profess their faith (see Matthew 3:13-16; Mark 1:4; 16:16; Acts 2:38).

VI. MOSES BRINGS WATER FROM A ROCK

For forty long, difficult years, the people of Israel wandered through the wilderness, between Egypt and their Promised Land. They spent much of this time in the harsh terrain of the Sinai Peninsula. Sinai is extremely arid and there are few natural sources of drinking water. At one point, the Israelites camped at a spot called Rephidam, near Mount Sinai. Despite having many reasons to feel blessed, the people were discontented. They quarreled with Moses and tested the Lord by saying, “Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?” (Exodus 17:3). They demanded that Moses give them water and they asked, “Is the Lord among us, or not?” (Exodus 17:2, 7). Their question showed a myopic disregard of the Lord’s providence and indifference to the assurances he had made to them about the future. The

Lord told Moses, “Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod ... Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock ... and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink.’ And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel” (Exodus 17:5-6). Artists often symbolize Moses’ role as mediator with the image of a “rock from which flows a stream of water” [22, p. 62] (Fig. 6). The Scriptures do not record how the Israelites reacted to this miraculous gift of water, or whether they expressed gratitude. Moses called the place where this occurred *Massah* (which means testing) and *Meribah* (meaning rebellion).



Figure 6. *Moses Striking the Rock*, Cathedral of St. Michael and St. Gudula, Brussels, Belgium.

The seventy-eighth psalm is a reflection on the Lord’s grace toward Israel and a call to trust him even in difficult times. The psalmist wrote, “Marvellous things did he in the sight of [our] fathers, in the land of Egypt ... He clave the rocks in the wilderness and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock and caused waters to run down like rivers” (Psalm 78:12, 15-16). The prophet Isaiah wrote similar verses of poetic praise: “And they thirsted not when he led them through the deserts: he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them: he clave the rock also, and the waters gushed out” (Isaiah 48:21). The Apostle Paul compared the “gushing” rock at Rephidam to Jesus. Paul wrote the Israelites all drank “the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4). The physical water that flowed from the physical rock at Rephidam symbolized the spiritual water that flows from the spiritual rock of Jesus. “Every good and perfect gift” comes from the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (John 1:14; Romans 12:6; James 1:17; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; 1 Peter 4:10), and the Scriptures repeatedly show that when the Lord’s people thirst, their thirst is quenched.



Figure 7. Fernando Gallego, *Christ and the Samaritan Woman*, ca. 1490, Oil.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus passed through the region of Samaria and sat down by a well that the Old Testament patriarch Jacob had dug. Jesus had a conversation with a Samaritan woman. It was unusual for a Jewish man to speak with a Samaritan woman. In doing so, Jesus demonstrated his care for people of all nations and all social positions (John 4:1-42). Jesus compared the water provided by

the well to the spiritual water he provided. Jesus said, “Whosoever drinketh of this water [in the well] shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13-14). Jesus contrasted “the water in Jacob’s well, symbolizing the old order “inherited by Samaritans and Jews alike,” with the *living water*[emphasis added] of his “new order, [and] the gift of the Spirit,” which sustains a person for eternity [23, p. 104] (John 4:11; 6:35).

VII. CROSSING THE JORDAN INTO CANAAN

At the close of the Torah, the people of Israel were camped on the plains of Moab, east of Jericho. After enduring decades of difficulty wandering in the wilderness, they were finally ready to take possession of the Promised Land. To enter Canaan, though, the Israelites needed to traverse the Jordan River. Moses told the people, “When ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the Lord your God giveth you,” you will “rest from all your enemies” and “dwell in safety” (Deuteronomy 12:10). As the Lord had done so many times before, including when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, God intervened to help the Israelites overcome an obstacle[see 24, p. 227]. He instructed the priests of the tabernacle to carry the ark of the testimony in front of the people and walk into the waters. The ark represented the Lord’s presence among the Israelites; thus, the Lord would symbolically lead his people. When the priests carrying the ark put their feet in the Jordan, the waters suddenly and miraculously receded and they “stood firm on dry ground.” The Israelites were able to pass through the Jordan into Canaan on solid land (Joshua 3:17) (Figs. 8, 9). Crossing the Jordan was a simple three-step process: 1) the people left behind their previous suffering; 2) they followed the Lord through the waters; and 3) they received the wonderful home he had promised. Jesus’ gospel call to salvation is similar.



Figure 8. Gustave Doré, *The Israelites Cross the River Jordan*, 1866, Woodcut illustration.

Figure 9. A recent photograph of the Jordan River.

Sadly, the contemporary Jordan River is far narrower (and much more polluted) than it was during biblical times. Its water flow is only one-fiftieth what it once was. The Scriptures say that the Israelites crossed the river at the time of the barley and wheat harvest (springtime), when meltwaters flow downward into the waterway from Mount Hermon. The book of Joshua says that although the Jordan was overflowing its banks, when the priests dipped their feet into the river’s edge, the waters “were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho” (Joshua 3:15-16).

VIII. THE JORDAN IN JESUS’ MINISTRY

Crossing the waters of Jordan served as an important transition for the people of Israel and, similarly, going into the waters of Jordan served as an important transition for Jesus’ earthly mission. In fact, his ministry began “on the shore of the Jordan” [25, p. 70]. The Scriptures say the Lord first sent John the Baptist, Jesus’ distant cousin, to preach “the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” and to prepare the people of Israel for the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah (Luke 3:3-4). Before John’s birth, an angel of the Lord had appeared to

Zechariah, John's father, and proclaimed, "[Your son] shall be great in the sight of the Lord ... And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias [Elijah] ... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:15-17). John called on the Israelites to repent and he offered them "water baptism" in the Jordan River, but he also announced another was coming who would baptize "with the Holy Ghost and with fire" (Luke 3:16) [25, p. 64]. One day when he saw Jesus approaching, John declared, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). This was a prophecy of Jesus' eventual death on the cross. The shedding of lamb's blood was emblematic of the sacrificial system of Mosaic Law and the New Testament teaches the shedding of "the blood of Jesus Christ ... cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7) (Fig. 10).

The Scriptures say John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). After Jesus came up from the water, the Spirit of God alighted upon him, and a voice came down from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit manifested themselves simultaneously at this awesome, transitional event. Christians try to follow Jesus' example and his instructions concerning baptism. The Scriptures teach that a person must stop living in the wilderness of sin and be baptized "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," "for the remission of sins" (Matthew 4:17; 28:19-20; Acts 2:38). The Lord adds to the church those who are saved, and they can look forward to an eternal inheritance, including a magnificent home in heaven (John 14:1-4; Acts 2:47).

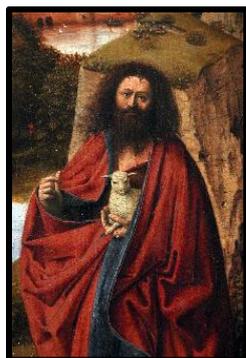


Figure 10. Petrus Christus, *Saint John the Baptist in a Landscape* (detail), ca. 1445, Oil.

Petrus Christus (ca. 1410-1475) shows John the Baptist standing before the Jordan holding a tiny lamb, symbolic of Jesus and his sacrifice to free his followers from the punishment of sin. The Apostle Paul wrote that Christians are "are buried with [Christ] by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

IX. AN EXAMPLE OF SERVICE

At the beginning of this essay, there was a brief mention of three groupings of types: *innate* types, which New Testament writers identify as such in the Scriptures; *inferred* types, which are not explicitly identified as such in the Scriptures (but nonetheless are widely accepted); and *apparent* types. Apparent types are like inferred types, but less widely accepted and, some might say, are better suited to the realm of analogy. This essay will end with a brief examination of an apparent type, to demonstrate the subtle connections of inspired Scriptures and to encourage more investigation.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus continually taught on the importance of helping others; he came to serve, not to be served (Matthew 20:28). Jesus did something extraordinary to make this point at the Last Supper. He stood up, wrapped a towel around his waist, poured water into a basin, and began washing his disciples' feet! When he got to Peter, Peter said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet," and Jesus replied, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Peter then responded, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head" (John 13:8-10) (Fig. 11).



Figure 11. Meister des Hausbuches, *Christ Washing the Apostles' Feet*, 1475, Oil and tempera.

Both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament convey the social and religious significance of foot washing for the people of Israel [26]. In the Hebrew Scriptures foot washing is presented as an important aspect of daily hygiene and a customary form of hospitality that hosts provided to guests visiting their homes (Genesis 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24; Judges 19:21). This social practice continued into the time of Jesus. On one occasion, a repentant woman entered a home Jesus was visiting. She “stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, [and] kissed his feet, and anointed them with ... ointment.” Because of her loving display of faith, Jesus forgave her many sins (Luke 7:38, 47). A week before Jesus washed his disciples’ feet (and a week before he was crucified) Jesus visited his friends Martha and Mary at Bethany (John 12:1-11). As he reclined at the dinner table, Mary poured a pint of expensive perfume on Jesus’ feet and wiped them with her hair. Jesus explained to those in attendance that Mary had acted appropriately, because he knew “the day of [his] burying” was fast approaching (John 12:7), and mourners customarily anointed bodies with oil for burial (see also Luke 7:36-50). These two incidents were quite unusual, though, because feet were typically washed with water.

Ritualized cleansing was a component of priestly service and worship at the ancient tabernacle and temple. When the Lord instructed Moses concerning the construction of the tabernacle, he said, “Make a bronze basin, with its bronze stand, for washing. Place it between the tent of meeting and the altar and put water in it. [The High Priest] Aaron and his sons are to wash their hands and feet with water from it. Whenever they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die. ... This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants for the generations to come” (Exodus 30:17-21). The writer of the book of Hebrews described Jesus as a new High Priest, a spiritual intermediary who sits on the right hand of his Father’s throne in heaven, a “minister of the [true] sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Hebrews 8:1-2). The High Priest of the old covenant entered the tabernacle’s Most Holy Place once per year to ask the Lord to cleanse the people of their sins (Leviticus 16:30), but Jesus continually lives in the Lord’s eternal dwelling place interceding for his followers. The High Priest of the tabernacle was an “example and shadow of heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5), a shadow of Jesus, the ultimate High Priest of “a greater and more perfect tabernacle.” By shedding his own cleansing blood as an atoning sacrifice, Jesus opened a door into the true Most Holy Place of heaven (Hebrews 9:11). Significantly, before Jesus ascended to the true Most Holy Place, he washed the disciples’ feet (perhaps to prepare them to follow him) and then Jesus told them “I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). After Jesus’ ascension, on the day of Pentecost, the same disciples helped establish the Christian church, a new “spiritual house,” and helped establish a new “holy priesthood” (Acts 2; 1 Peter 2:5). The ritualized cleansing at the tabernacle was apparently a type of Jesus’ washing of the disciples’ feet.

In addition, the washing of the disciples’ feet may have been a type of spiritual cleansing. The Apostle Paul wrote, “The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by *the washing of regeneration* [emphasis added], and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Titus 3:4-

6). The Greek words (λουτρόν παλιγγενεσία) translated as “the washing of regeneration” mean roughly “the bathing of new birth.” When Peter expressed disapproval that the Son of God would wash his feet, Jesus replied, “What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. . . . If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me” (John 13:7, 8), possibly meaning both in this life and in the life to come. The Apostle John referred to water many more times than any other New Testament writer [12]. John was the only writer to describe Jesus washing his disciples’ feet and John was also, apparently, the only Apostle to see Jesus shed his blood on the cross. It may not be a coincidence that John’s writings so often speak of Jesus’ power to wash away sins. John wrote, “[Jesus] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”, and “[Jesus] washed us from our sins in his own blood” (1 John 1:9; Revelation 1:5). Perhaps the water Jesus used to physically cleanse the disciples’ feet was a type of the spiritual “blood of Jesus Christ [that] cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

X. CONCLUSION

This essay analyzed various ways biblical authors wrote about water and bodies of water. From the beginning of the Scriptures onward, water symbolized key facets of a discernible plan. The Lord created a river to nourish the Garden of Eden’s tree of life, and when Adam and Eve transgressed his will, he took away their access to the tree and moved it to his heavenly paradise, beside the “river of life.” Water was used both to sustain and to wash away life, as evidenced by the account of Noah’s deadly flood, which the Apostles of the New Testament asserted prefigured Christian baptism (a form of burial and resurrection). The Scriptures encourage similar typological readings of the Lord’s delivery of the Israelites from slavery through the Red Sea (a passage through water representing “the salvation of the Lord”) and the Lord’s leading the Israelites into Canaan through the Jordan River (a passage through water into “the Promised Land”). Throughout the Bible, water consistently represents divine benevolence, as demonstrated by the miraculous stream that flowed from a rock in the wilderness, Jesus’ description to the Samaritan woman of the water of “everlasting life,” and Jesus’ example of service and selflessness in washing his disciples’ feet. From this evidence, it seems clear that water was intended to play a vital symbolic and typological role in the biblical plan of salvation.

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