

"Not Like the Land of Egypt"

To understand the old covenant properly, we need to see its typological nature. The Bible in the Old Testament is full of typologies. If we don't understand them this properly, we run the danger of coming up with the wrong application. Well, what is a typology? One author (Graeme Goldsworthy) defines it like this: It is the, "Recognition that within Scripture itself certain events, people, and institutions in biblical history bear a particular relationship to later events, people, or institutions." In other words, the New Testament shows us how to understand the full significance of what God did and taught in the Old Testament. That different events, people, and institutions in the Old Testament looked forward into the New Testament, to point to our salvation in Christ and our eternal life with him. Jesus himself said in Luke 24 that all the Scriptures spoke about him. Those Scriptures that he was referring to were the Old Testament. When we see how the authors in the New Testament quote the Old, we see them using this idea of typologies. The way the New Testament reads the Old with typologies, teach us how to properly read the Old, in light of the New.

What this means is that when we read a text in the Old Testament, we need to first understand it in its original context. We have to ask, what was the truth being taught in this passage to its original audience. We then need to ask how this truth relates to the progressive history in the Bible that unfolds God's plan of salvation through Jesus. To say that another way, we need to place the truth taught in the passage within the greater context of redemptive history. And that greater context comes to a climax with Jesus. And so as we relate the truth of a passage to Jesus, we begin to understand this biblical truth in its fullness. This doesn't mean that there are two different truths in a passage; the way the original audience would have understood it, and the way we now understand it with the coming of Christ. Rather, the original audience would have understood the same truth in a more limited way; we now can understand the fullness of that same truth, with all its ramifications. This is looking for how this truth finds fulfillment in Jesus.

Once we understand how a truth from an Old Testament passage finds its greatest fulfillment and understanding in Christ, then we have a foundation to make a proper application to us as Christians in the new covenant. Our relationship to the truths in the Bible all come via our relationship to Christ. For example, it is Christ who makes the history of Israel relevant to us. As people who are not ethnically Israelites, Israel's history would have little importance to us, had we not been brought into relationship with it through Jesus. And so if we are to rightly apply the Old Testament to us, we must first understand the teachings and truths in light of Christ. Typology, then, in its broadest sense, is part of the New Testament's method for understanding the Old Testament. For seeing how the truths in the Old Testament look forward to Jesus, and ultimately to eternity.

But let me tell you something that typology is not. Typology is not *allegory*. A common mistake that people might make when they try to see typologies in the Old Testament is to actually end up allegorizing the text. Just because you see blood in the Old Testament mentioned, doesn't mean it points us to Jesus' shedding his blood on the cross. Just because you see a lamb in the Old Testament, doesn't mean it's pointing us to think about Jesus being the Lamb of God. God would have us to be "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Time won't allow us today to go further into defining how to properly see typologies in Scripture. That's something we've done during different Sunday Schools a lot and will continue to do so. But today we'll certainly get to see this by example. We're going to look at this passage which is a great example of how you can go wrong if you don't properly understand the context of this passage in biblical typology. And so we'll look at this passage from three points. We'll look first at the blessings and curses described in this passage. Second, we'll look at how this passage compares the promised inheritance with Egypt. Third, we'll consider how this passage calls the people to pass on the covenant to the next generation. We'll look at each of these three points keeping in mind the typology that's present in this passage. That will help us to arrive at the right application for each of these three points.

So let's look first at the blessings and curses described in this passage. Let's begin with verse 26. God said to them, "Behold I set before you today a blessing and a curse." This chapter describes these in brief; it will flush out this idea of blessings and curses more in chapters 27-28. But basically, here's what this passage is saying. It's talking about covenant obedience and faithfulness. God's telling Israel that to the degree that they obey the terms of covenant, they'll be blessed in the land. To degree that they don't, they'll be cursed in the land. This is what their life will look like in the Promised Land. This is what it says in verses 27-28. Blessings or curses as a nation based on how they keep the covenant as a people. Verses 13 and 22 also say the same thing. And they basically tell Israel to do this carefully and diligently. They need to really focus on obedience. It needs to be their utmost priority so that they can find blessing. They should stop at nothing less than perfection as their goal.

The contrast between the blessings and curses was to be so vivid for them, that God tells them in verse 29 that when they get into the Promised Land that they are to symbolize this with two different mountains. On Mt Gerizim they'd place blessings. On Mt Ebal they'd place curses. This is spelled out in Deuteronomy 27 which basically describes a ceremony that the people would do to very visibly remind them of their two paths: the path of blessings versus the path of curses. The people will actually act that out in Joshua 8 when they get into the land.

And look at what kind of blessings and curses these are. This chapter describes them in relationship to the Promised Land. The Promised Land was God's inheritance for the people. And so the blessings here are described as blessings in the land. Verse 9. They'd be blessed in the land by having their days prolonged. In other words, more time to enjoy the inheritance of the Promised Land. Verses 14 and 15 describe the blessings in terms of agricultural blessings. They'd be blessed with rain for the crops and the livestock. Even acquiring all the land in the first place is put here as a blessing according to verses 23-25. Of course the curses described in this passage are the opposite. The curses are summarized in verse 17. They will perish quickly it says; in other words they won't live long in the land. They'll not have agricultural blessings, but instead they'll have drought and famine.

Well, how do we understand these blessings and curses in terms of typology? We can understand the immediate truth. Israel was going to be blessed in the Land if they obey and cursed if they don't. It teaches us that righteousness and obedience has a reward to it. It teaches us that sin and wickedness has a punishment attached to it. But what's the significance of this in terms of redemptive-history? How does it look forward to Christ?

Well, just look at how Israel lived this out. We see that they ultimately tasted of the curses. They'd never live up to their blessings. They had better moments

and they had worse moments. But ultimately they kept finding curses because of their disobedience. They wanted blessings, but kept finding curses. And it was their own fault, frankly. But we know that nobody keeps God's laws perfectly. We know that if we were in their shoes, that our outcome wouldn't have been much different.

But Christ brings fulfillment to these blessings and curses. He himself earned all the blessings by his perfect obedience. And he himself tasted of the curses of the covenant on the cross. This is Christ's active and passive obedience. His active obedience earned all God's blessings for us. His passive, or his suffering obedience, is that on the cross he became a curse in our place. Galatians 3:13, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')." What is taught here to Israel by extension teaches a message to all humanity. We haven't earned God's blessings, but we've actually earned divine curse. But the gospel tells us that Christ suffered the curses in our place and earned the blessings for us. The gospel tells us to trust in this by faith.

And so do you see how this biblical typology keeps us from an incorrect application of this passage? An *incorrect* application would be this: If as Christians we live obediently to God's laws we will be blessed, and if we live disobediently we'll be cursed. Basically that's moralism. It's missing the redemptive significance of what Christ did for us. Now, yes there are benefits in this life for godliness. But the gospel doesn't say that if you are good enough you'll be blessed and if not you'll be cursed. That's not what the New Testament teaches us. No, Ephesians 1:3 says that you have *already* been blessed with *every spiritual blessing* in Christ Jesus. And so the New Testament shows how these blessings and curses looked forward to the work of Christ in saving us. The fact that God set these blessings and curses before Israel here teaches us an important truth. It tells us how divine blessings and curses are earned, but it ultimately points to Christ's work.

So let's think further about this as we turn to our second point. Let's look at how this passage compares the promised inheritance with Egypt. Verses 10-13 make this comparison. God was giving Israel the Promised Land. Here God tells them that this is a different kind of land than where they had come from. The people had come from Egypt. But this new land was something far better than Egypt. God basically says it's one that he cares for. Now of course, we know that God ultimately takes care of all the lands on Earth. But the point that he's making is nonetheless clear. God's comparing how the land in Egypt produced crops versus how the Promised Land would produce crops. Verse 10 says that in Egypt basically they had to do all the work. They had to somehow bring in the water by foot, which means they either had to dig some irrigation system from the river, or probably more likely, had to carry it in buckets. But in the Promised Land, it's different. God sends the rains from the heavens according to verse 11. Throughout the year, God gives special care for the Promised Land. So this is the immediate point God's making. The Promised Land is far better than Egypt. God was giving them something far better than their old life in Egypt.

Well in light of our first point today, another application from this jumps out to me. In light of the typology we've already talked about, I see another application for us here. When I think of God comparing the Promised Land with Egypt, I can't help but think of comparing the inheritance we have as Christians with the inheritance in the old covenant. We as Christians have a promised inheritance. When we compare that to *not* having an inheritance from God, what we have now is far better, of course. And when we compare our inheritance with the Promised Land, again, we have something far better.

Just think of that comparison between the Promised Land and our inheritance as Christians. Our inheritance is heavenly. The Promised Land is earthly. Our inheritance isn't one where we just live long in an earthly land. No, we'll live forever. Eternally. There in heaven we'll never worry about famine, or hunger, or sickness, or enemies. All of those things will be done away with.

Of course, what you really have here is another typology. The Promised Land in the old covenant is a type of the heavenly inheritance that was to be revealed in Jesus Christ. That's why Hebrews 11:10 can tell us that even Father Abraham recognized that the Promised Land was just a type and shadow of a heavenly city that would one day come. The earthly Promised Land was indeed something far better than anything Israel had experienced before that. It represented a blessed life given by God. But it ultimately looked forward to a better inheritance to come. That better inheritance was seen from a distance in the Old Testament. But in the New Testament it's made abundantly clear. It's described in 1 Peter chapter 1 as an inheritance reserved in heaven for us. In Revelation chapter 20 it's described symbolically as the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. Hebrews 11:16 describes it as a heavenly country. Jesus talked about it in terms of heavenly treasure, in contrast to earthly treasure. And so Jesus does a similar comparison as God does here with Israel; he compares our heavenly treasure as far better than any earthly treasure.

So again, understanding biblical typology helps us to come up with a right application here. An *incorrect* application would be what's known as the "health and wealth" gospel. There's some who'd want to look at these promises here of blessings in an earthly land as a promise to Christians of earthly prosperity. They'd say that obedience to God results in material prosperity in this life. But that would be a wrong application of this passage. It would fail to recognize both the context of this passage as well as the thrust of redemptive history. The context of this passage was a specific promise given to ethnic Israel at a point in history. This is not a promise given to all people at all times. And the thrust of redemptive history clearly shows that we should see the land typologically. That the Promised Land looked forward to our eternal reward in heaven beyond this life. A gospel that preaches a health and wealth gospel goes against personal experience. There are poor Christians, and many wealthy pagans. Just look at Marin county. We're full of people here who found material success quite apart from God. But not only does a health and wealth gospel go against our personal experience, it also goes against the Bible. It doesn't see this passage in relationship to Christ and thus wrongly applies it.

Instead the New Testament tells us not to be consumed with gaining earthly treasures. Instead, Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). And there the context is that God will provide for our earthly needs, so let's focus on gaining heavenly treasure instead of earthly treasure. Probably the closest passage in the New Testament that someone could try to use to make a case for a health and wealth gospel is in Mark 10:30. It talks about how people will receive a hundredfold in this life for the earthly things that they give up for Jesus. But it says in that same verse that it will come with persecutions in this life. But then it goes on to say that our ultimate reward is that in the age to come we will receive eternal life. That is the life of the believer in the new covenant. A life that involves sacrifice and persecutions. Yes, we may find some earthly blessings in this life, but our ultimate inheritance is not here, but in heaven.

So my point here is that the New Testament again helps us to rightly apply this passage. We need to see the typological nature of the Promised Land here in this passage. And what this tells us is again very good news. It's gospel. We don't

obey God in order to receive an earthly inheritance in Palestine. No, instead, by faith, we already have a heavenly inheritance secured for us. Again, what amazing good news we have with the coming of Jesus. And so instead of a material focus in this life, we now live heavenly-minded, knowing that we have an inheritance *far* better than what was given to God's people in the Mosaic covenant. And if God could compare here between Egypt and the Promised Land, how much more could he say in comparing our heavenly inheritance with the earthly Promised Land?

The last point I'd like us to consider today is how this passage calls the people to pass on the covenant to the next generation. This is another specific emphasis about this passage. Notice verse 2. There God says that he's not speaking to their children. He's speaking to the older generation. This would have been the generation that had spent most of their lives in the wilderness, but had been young children at the time when God took the people out of Egypt. As God reminds them in verse 2, this means they had personally witnessed all the amazing things God had done from the time of the Exodus until then. They witnessed all the miracles God did in Egypt. This would have involved all the plagues; plagues that afflicted the Egyptians but miraculously spared the Israelites. They had then witnessed the amazing parting of the Red Sea. That meant safety for them but death for the armies of Pharaoh as the waters came crushing down upon them once they had made it safely through. That's what verses 3-4 describe. And in verse 5-6 God recounts some of the amazing things he had done in the wilderness to teach and train the people in godliness. The point is clear in verse 7. Their eyes have personally seen these great acts of God. Their children hadn't. And so that's why verse 2 says that God's not speaking to the children in this sermon. He's speaking instead with the older generation. This is an interesting qualification, because normally we see God speaking to the entire assembly, including the children.

But the reason for this is found in verse 19. In verse 19 we find out why God's making this emphasis here. God's not speaking to the children in this chapter, because God's going to have the older generation speak to them. Verse 19. "You shall teach them [these things] to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land."

And so the older generation was responsible to pass on their testimony to the next generation. The older generation was an eye witness to all God's miraculous work. They had lived through it all. And so then they were being called to make this a part of the life for the next generation. The language here is like what we read back in chapter 6 where parents are to make this a way of life for their kids. They should always be talking about God's Word. They should always be telling them about the mighty acts of God. They should constantly be raising up the kids to know the covenant God had made with them. The older generation were eye witnesses, and they need to pass on their faith.

Well, of course as Christians, the New Testament reiterates this command to us. Ephesians 6:4 commands parents to raise up their children, "In the training and admonition of the Lord." But the New Testament also broadens this. Now we're called to pass on the faith not only to our children, but to all the nations. Jude 1:3 exhorts us, "To contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." The New Covenant, like the Old, was one full of eye witnesses to God's redemptive actions. God's redemptive aspects in the Exodus and his fatherly discipline in the wilderness was experienced and witnessed. This was to be passed on to the next generations. Well, all the more the redemption that has come in Jesus, has been witnessed and experienced. There were hundreds of eye witnesses to the resurrected Lord Jesus. The gospel of salvation in Christ was

once for all delivered to these saints. Then they were called to pass on this faith, to their children, and to all who were far off.

Again, the New Testament helps us to see how to read a passage like this. We don't just find a call to share our faith with our children. But the work of Christ has opened wide the floodgates of God's grace, calling us to bring our testimony to the world. The forefathers of our faith have done this. That's why we are here today as believers. Some of us learned of Christ by our earthly parents. Praise God. Some heard from people who were maybe strangers at first. Praise God for however you came to believe. But you ultimately came to faith because someone at some point shared with you their testimony. They shared with you how Jesus had changed their life, just as someone had shared with them.

And so brothers and sisters, this is my closing application for us today. Moses could appeal to this older generation very specifically because they had such an intimate firsthand knowledge to all these wonderful things God has done. Well, we who have tasted of God's grace in Christ have intimate firsthand knowledge of the gospel. That's what we must share with our children and others around us. We need to tell them about the real inheritance to strive for, a heavenly, eternal, inheritance. We need to tell them about the goodness of godly living. Yet we need to tell them that we obtain all this through Jesus Christ. Through faith in him. Justification by faith. Sanctification by faith. An eternal inheritance and glorification by faith. What we've read here today reminds us of how much more we each have personally experienced through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us also then make it our way of life to talk about this whenever and wherever we are. Amen.

Copyright © 2010 Rev. W. Reid Hankins, M.Div.
All Rights Reserved.