

The Typology of the Word

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Certainly the most sublime confession of Johannine theology is that the Word of God became flesh in Jesus, who tabernacled among us (John 1:1-3, 14). Through this means God became man; the immaterial became material, the immortal became mortal. The Creator was enclothed in clay of the creation. The eternal Word was now heard through an authentically human voice. The Lord who thundered at Sinai now cried in a cradle.

This great mystery of John's Gospel is echoed at the climax of John's Revelation. The seer's consummating vision of the heavenly Christ tells us that the exalted Rider on the white horse at the head of the hosts of heaven is called the Word of God (Rev 19:13). The recognition of the Word of God as incarnate in Jesus thus frames the entire theological enterprise of the son of Zebedee, both in his depiction of the earthly ministry of Jesus in the beginning of the Gospel and in the heavenly exaltation of Jesus at the end of Revelation.

This identification of the Old Testament Word of God with Jesus is central to other apostolic teaching as well. Paul makes clear the identification of Christ with the incarnate Word of God in his Romans letter. Citing Moses' claim that the word of God¹ was near to the people such that no one had need to ascend to heaven to bring it down or to venture beyond the sea to retrieve it (Deut 30:11-14), the apostle interprets the original Old Testament passage to speak of Christ. He cites the text in its fuller sense, stating, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)" (Rom 10:6-7).

Likewise the Hebrews author opens his epistle with the argument that the Word of God, which formerly spoke through the prophets in different times and diverse ways, has now spoken to us in God's Son, the Heir of all things, who also created the world (Heb 1:1-2). He thus identifies the Son of God with the prophetic word of God spoken throughout the entire Old Testament. Likewise Luke reports that Christ was the culmination of all the prophetic voices in the Scriptures, the Savior having in common with the prophets the suffering of persecution unto death, particularly in the opposition of Jerusalem (Luke 4:24, 6:23, 13:34; Acts 7:52). Matthew also reports that Jesus understood His prophetic continuity with the word of God spoken by the prophets of old, especially in the fact that they have in common great rejection and suffering in Israel (Matt 5:12, 23:29-37).

Now the claim that the Word of God was incarnate in Christ Jesus opens the possibility of a typology of the word of God. While the voice itself is divine and thus

¹ I have chosen to capitalize the "Word" of God when it refers to the preincarnate or incarnate Lord God and not to capitalize when the "word" of God refers to the word (written or spoken) of the prophets.

eternal, the expressions of the voice, that is the “diverse ways” that God spoke in the Old Testament, offer a typological anticipation of the life and ministry of Christ as the incarnation of the Word of God in the Old Testament.

Jesus taught that the Old Testament sets forth the suffering and the glory of the Christ to come (Luke 24:25-26). This section will explore previews of Christ’s suffering through the figurative emblems of the rejection and mishandling of the word of God in the Old Testament. We will consider the prophetic intent suggested by Moses when he took the book of the covenant and sprinkled it with blood, of his breaking the tablets of the law in the face of the great disobedience of Israel, of King Jehoiakim’s contempt for the word of Jeremiah when he pierced the scroll with a knife, shredded it, and burned the book whole, and of the book which Ezekiel was commanded to eat when he confronted the rebellious house of Israel. Moreover, we will consider the significance of the role of the suffering prophets, whose living words were rejected by Israel as they were persecuted unto death. After suffering, however, the Savior promises a glory to come. We will then consider the emblems of the glory of the word that is indestructible even in the face of the breath of the Lord’s judgment, and the significance of the restoration to the remnant of the word of God as the tablets of the law were rewritten and the scroll of Jeremiah was penned once again.

Moreover, we will consider the typological anticipation of the word of God foretelling the highlights of the career of Christ. We will begin with the incarnation of the Word of God in the tabernacle of Christ’s body foresignified as the tablets of the law and the book of the covenant are placed into the ark and the tabernacle by Moses. We will then consider the significance of the word lost and then found in the temple in the days of Josiah, of the word baptized in the Jordan as the ark containing the law is carried through the waters by Joshua. We will consider the prophetic purpose of the law spoken from the mount of God at Sinai, of the word of healing sent forth as recalled by the psalmist, of the ark containing the tablets of the law delivered over to the Gentiles at Aphek, and then the ark and the law restored to a rejoicing Israel at Beth Shemesh. Finally we will consider the typology of the writing of the finger (hand) of God in the Old Testament as it is described at Sinai and Babylon, culminating in the New Testament second temple narrative of John 8.

The Suffering of the Word

In the original text of Exodus we are told that Moses initiated the covenant binding of Israel to the law of the Lord by the ceremony of a bloody aspersion against the altar and the people, all as the book of the covenant was read before the people (Exod 24:6-8). The author of Hebrews adds the detail that the book of the covenant itself was sprinkled with blood (Heb 9:19).² The sight of the scroll of the book sprinkled with blood

² See F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990) 225-226. While the Hebrew text mentions only the altar and the people as having the bloody sprinkling, the mercy seat of the

is a graphic emblem of the Word of God, which in the incarnation would likewise be covered in the blood of covenant consecration.

Another striking anticipation of the suffering of the word is found in the context of the great revolt of Israel against God at Sinai, a rebellion which caused the word of God written upon the tablets of the law to be broken by Moses (Exod 32:19). Clearly this graphic gesture was intended by Moses to illustrate the disobedience of the people and the effect of sin upon the word of God. But the emblem of the word of God broken for the sin of the people suggests a Christian reading that illustrates the effect of sin upon the incarnate Word of God, who was Himself likewise broken for the sin of His people (Matt 26:26).

The enmity of Israel for the word of God is amply illustrated in the contumacious treatment shown to the scroll of the prophet Jeremiah by King Jehoiakim of Jerusalem. Summoning the scroll of the prophet that had been read publicly in the temple by Jeremiah's scribe, the king demanded that the scroll be read before him. After hearing a few columns, the king took a knife and cut the scroll, throwing the shreds into a fire³ until the entire scroll was consumed.⁴ Jeremiah notes that in all of this neither the king nor his court showed any fear of God at this public desecration of His word (Jer 36:9-26). Likewise in the days of His flesh the Word of God who spoke openly in the temple (John 18:20) was summoned by the ruling authorities (John 18:28), His body was pierced, His flesh shredded (John 19:1, 16), and His sacrifice fulfilled the purpose intended by the whole burnt offerings. And in all of this neither Israel nor the Roman authorities showed any fear of God at the desecration of His Word (John 19:19-22).

The word of God is frequently compared to bread (Deut 8:3, Matt 4:4). It is the metaphoric sweet food of the godly kings and prophets of Israel (Psa 19:10; Jer 15:16). But national Israel's rejection of the bread of heaven in the wilderness, their grumbling at the food of angels (Psa 78:24-25), which they despised (Num 11:4-13), anticipated the rejection of the incarnate Word of God, the True Manna, which they likewise grumbled against and found loathsome (John 6:30-59). But the bread of the word of God could only come forth when the grain of wheat first fell into the earth to die and then to come forth from the earth with great abundance (John 12:24). Anticipating this suffering of the word of God, Ezekiel the prophet, in the face of the rebellion of Israel, was commanded to take the scroll of "lament, moaning, and woe" from the hand of God and to eat it. This bitter writing of God became sweet like honey in the mouth of the son of man (Ezek 2:3-3:3).

ark, which contained the tablets of the law, was annually sprinkled with the blood of atonement (Lev 16:11-14), a ritual which for our purposes would suggest the same typology of the blood sprinkled word.

³ The Word of God spoke openly in the temple (cf. John 18:19-20) before being summoned before the governor. The fire of Jehoiakim was kindled because of the cold (Jer 36:22). It was likewise cold, which caused a fire to be kindled, when Israel and the Roman governor mistreated the incarnate Word of God (John 18:18).

⁴ The picture is of a whole burnt offering, a figure for the complete sacrifice of Christ (cf. Gen 22:1-2, 8).

The word of God likewise suffers the reproach of ridicule. In the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah, the son of David sent letters throughout the devastated parts of Israel, inviting the remnant who had escaped the Assyrian deportation to repent and to come to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover at Jerusalem. The couriers brought letters from the king summoning the faithful, words that are inscripturated in 2 Chronicles 30:6-10. The word of the king, which was inspired by the Spirit, met with large rejection among the remnant. The words were rejected as the people laughed them to scorn and mocked at them. Nonetheless, a remnant of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to celebrate with the people in Jerusalem. (2 Chron 30:1-12).⁵

Perhaps the most direct prophetic anticipation of the hostility of Israel toward the word of God is seen in the consistent and unremitting opposition, even unto death, of the prophets who spoke the word of God in the hearing of the people.⁶ Jesus Himself said that it was hardly possible for a prophet to die outside Jerusalem (Luke 13:33-34). This hostility of Israel against the word of God spoken through the prophets foretold the enmity of the people against the incarnate Word of God in Jesus (cf. Acts 7:52). Israel's prophets were consistently hated, excluded, reviled, and spurned as evil, according to Jesus' own testimony, and suffered all these things because they spoke the word of God, which provoked the disobedience of the people (Luke 6:23). When the Word of God became flesh, the persecution of that word in Christ intensified and found its culmination.

The Glory of the Word

Isaiah contrasts the glory of man, which falls like the fading flower or withers like the grass, with the indestructibility of the Word of God, which stands forever, even in the face of the breath of the Lord's judgment (Isa 40:8). The contrast is telling. Mankind falls to the ground in the judgment of the Lord. The Word of God, however, rises up.⁷ Emblems of the indestructibility of the Word of God (cf. Matt 5:18) are found in the Old Testament as the tablets of the law of Moses, which had been shattered because of the people's sin and the judgment that incurred, were restored to the people as God rewrote them on tablets Moses prepared (Deut 10:3-4). Likewise, God commissioned Jeremiah to write again the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim had destroyed (Jer 36:27-28, 32). All of this restoration of the word of God anticipated the resurrection of the incarnate Word of God, who suffered the blast of the God's judgment in tasting mortal death and yet rose again, because in Him operated the power of an indestructible life (Acts 3:15; Heb 7:16).

⁵ I am grateful to my student Mr. Tommy Johnston for pointing me to the significance of this passage.

⁶ See Matthew 5:12, 23:29-31, 37. The best account of the suffering tradition of the prophets of Israel is found in Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (X-XXIV), The Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1985) 1032.

⁷ The Hebrew verb in Isaiah 40:8 is *qum*, which is cited (in Aramaic) in the NT in the context of resurrection from death (Mark 5:41).

The Everlasting Word and the Incarnation of the Word

The tabernacle of Moses represented the presence of God in the midst of His people. That presence was made complete when the tablets of the law, written by the finger of God (Deut 10:2), and the book of the law (Deut 31:26) were placed in the tabernacle by the ark. All of this figuratively foresaw Christ's incarnation, when the Word became flesh to tabernacle among the people (Deut 18:18; John 1:14).

The identification of Jesus with the tabernacle/temple of Israel makes possible another correspondence between the Old and New Testaments. In the days of Josiah there was the surprising discovery of the word of God in the temple, the scroll which had been feared lost (2 Kgs 22:8; 2 Chron 34:21). In the days of the Christ there was the surprising discovery of the Word of God in the temple, whom His parents had likewise feared lost (Luke 2:46).

The ark of the covenant anticipated several aspects of the ministry of Jesus, who "tabernacled" among us. In a striking preview of the death of the immortal God, Joshua took the ark, which represented the presence of God (Pss 80:1; 99:1) and carried the word of God (Deut 10:2), down into the waters of the Jordan River. The Jordan was associated with the waters of the flood (Josh 3:15); they were liminal waters,⁸ for after the death of the old generation the new generation under Joshua passed over to receive their inheritance in the land of promise. On the third day (Josh 3:2) God, represented by the holy ark, passed through the waters representing death and stood firmly once again on dry ground (Josh 3:9-17). Now the crossing of the Red Sea on dry ground, which authenticated Moses' ministry, was called a "baptism" (1 Cor 10:2). Likewise, God authenticated His presence with Joshua through a similar "baptism" by bringing dry ground out of the Jordan for the people to pass over (Josh 3:7). In this sense we can reasonably infer that the ark, representing the presence of God among His people, was made to pass through the waters that symbolized death and resurrection. Perhaps this is what Jesus means when He instructs John the Baptist to permit His personal baptism, for it was necessary for Christ to "fulfill all righteousness" and complete all the types of His death and resurrection in the Old Testament (Matt 3:15).

Moses reminds Israel that God spoke to the people "face to face" upon the mount (Deut 5:4). Similarly, Jesus spoke to the people face to face upon the mount, speaking with authority about the word of the Lord (Matt 5:1-2, 7:28-29).

⁸ The dry land emerging from the waters is a mark of the original creation (Gen 1:9) and recurs at the flood of Noah (Gen 8:13), which marks the transition from the old heavens and earth to the present heavens and earth, and the Red Sea (Exod 14:16), which marks the transition from bondage to liberty, from Egypt to the land of promise.

The psalmist recalls how the Lord sent forth His word and healed the people when they cried out to Him (Psa 107:20). Similarly, Jesus sent forth the word of healing for the centurion's servant, and he was healed at that very hour (Matt 8:5-13).

In the days of the corrupt priesthood of the house of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas permitted the ark to be used as a talisman against the Philistines in the battle of Aphek (1 Sam 4:1-4). The Philistines were dismayed at the sight of the ark, recognizing that "a god" had come into the camp (1 Sam 4:7). Nonetheless Israel was defeated in the battle, the wicked priests were slaughtered, and the ark was taken captive (1 Sam 4:17). In all of this the glory departed from Israel, for God appeared to be in custody in the hands of the enemies of the covenant people (1 Sam 4:21-22). Similarly, wicked priests delivered over Jesus to the uncircumcised, figuratively surrendering the tabernacle and the ark of God and all they represented to the pleasure of the Romans (Mark 15:1).

In the days of the Philistine capture of the ark of God, wicked hands were unable to hold the emblem of God's presence among the Gentiles (1 Sam 5:1-6:13). At last the ark was released from capture, and was received again in Israel with great rejoicing (1 Sam 6:13). The same pattern of capture and release is seen in the suffering of Jesus, who was delivered over to death. But in His glory, the incarnate Word was delivered from death and received again by true Israel with great rejoicing (Luke 24:41, 52-53).

The Writing Hand of God

The finger of God writes in the context of judgment in the Bible.⁹ The tablets of the law were written with the finger of God (Exod 31:18; Deut 9:10) and represented the ministry of death carved in letters on stone (2 Cor 3:7) and the covenant of condemnation to the New Testament writers (Gal 4:24-25; Heb 12:18-21).

The fingers of a Man's hand¹⁰ likewise appeared to write final judgment on the wall in the court of the king of Babylon, on the day when the Jerusalem temple vessels were being desecrated at the banquet of Belshazzar (Dan 5:3-4, 23).

These two writings of judgment by the finger of God in the Old Testament prefigure the twofold writing of Jesus with His finger upon the ground of the temple in Jerusalem. John specifically notes that Jesus wrote with His finger (John 8:6) and that He wrote a second time (John 8:8).¹¹ The context of the quarrel in the Gospel is the question

⁹ The magicians and sorcerers of Egypt identify the "finger of God" in the midst of the judgment of the plagues against Egypt (Exod 8:19). The religious opponents of Jesus, however, were less discerning than the Egyptian magicians and so failed to recognize the "finger of God" operating through the kingdom claim of Christ (Luke 11:20).

¹⁰ It is certain that the hand is God's (Dan 5:23-24).

¹¹ At Sinai God wrote the Ten Commandments twice, inscribing them with His finger. Between the two writings, and in fact the occasion of the second writing, was the disobedience of the people in the sin of

of whether or not Jesus would vindicate the law of Moses and condemn the adulteress (John 8:5). In the event, Jesus forgave the adulteress, but the Jerusalem temple was itself found to be morally incompetent to condemn an adulteress (John 8:7), a confession which condemns the temple itself of adultery.¹² Moreover, the Babylon of Belshazzar had destroyed the temple of Jerusalem. Daniel charges that because the Babylonians had forgotten God, they too would be destroyed (Dan 5:18-28). In John's Gospel Jerusalem too, like Babylon, was destined to destroy the Temple of God (John 2:19). The religious leaders of the second temple would likewise be found wanting, and the finger of God that wrote against them (John 8:6) would be found to have foretold their destruction as well as Jerusalem became the antitype of Babylon, the great city (Luke 19:41-47).

The Christian Believer as the Writing of God

The great promise of the new covenant, as proclaimed by Jeremiah, was that God Himself would write the law upon the hearts of His people (Jer 31:33). The Apostle Paul develops the import of this when he describes the Corinthian believers as the letters of Christ, "written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of hearts of flesh" (2 Cor 3:3).¹³ This theology analogizes conversion under the new covenant to the incarnation of Christ. In both events the eternal Word of God is made to dwell in an earthly house or tabernacle.¹⁴

John also expresses the theology of the believers being the writing of God. He reports Christ's promise that the overcomer will receive a white stone with a new name written upon it (Rev 2:17), and that he will have the name of God, the name of the city of God, and Jesus' own name written on him as well (Rev 3:12).

In all of this the doctrine being expressed is that Christian believers are formed into the image and likeness of God, who writes the law of God on their hearts at conversion. In this manner Christian believers are made into the image of Christ, who is Himself the image of God (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3). Christ, the antitype of the tabernacle, becomes the prototype of Christian believers. And thus the original dominion commission to man, namely, that all the earth should be filled with the fruitful progeny of Adam and his bride (Gen 1:26-28), is fulfilled by the last Adam, who with His bride fills all creation with images of God (Matt 28:19-20; Rom 8:19-23; 1 Cor 15:45-49).

idolatry and sexual immorality (Exod 32:2-6). The double writing of Jesus, of which John takes special note (John 8:8), recalls the great disobedience of Israel at Sinai.

¹² In fact Jesus does vindicate the law of Moses by hurling great hailstones out of heaven against the whorish city (Rev 16:19-20).

¹³ By the same theology that corresponds the heart of the believer to the ark of the covenant, the body of the believer was likened to the tabernacle by Paul (2 Cor 5:1-4) and Peter (2 Pet 1:13-14).

¹⁴ If the world hated the incarnate Word of God, it is certain that they will hate the Christian believer upon whose heart is written the law of the Lord (John 15:18).

Through this means all the earth is being filled with living epistles, whose hearts have been written upon by God Himself. All of this is the writing that Jesus has done. When all of these epistles are finished, “I suppose that the world itself will not be able to contain the books that shall be written” (John 21:25).