

# The Forty Years in Biblical Typology

By Todd D. Dennis

Hebrews 3:8-10 "Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation.."

There are many wonderful methods of Biblical study that help to dredge up the depths of the "mysteries of God". These methods allow the average Bible student to go beyond the typical superficial gleanings of New Testament Scripture, and find the great and numerous means employed by God to foreshow the events that would find their eternal fulfillment in the first century. Among these all, the most exciting and rewarding may be the study of Old Testament typology, compared with the New Testament fulfillments thereof.

Paul declared the fundamental principle of this means of study, by saying, "Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual" (I Cor. 15:46). God revealed the mysteries of the eternal plan of redemption through the usage of temporal shadows. We are told that "Abraham had two sons," and thereby are given a glimpse into the significance of Scriptural allegory and typology. It is through this relationship between the two sons of Abraham that we are shown the eternal purposes of God, in regards to the two covenants, revealed from its previously shrouded mystery. Of all the types and shadows of the Old Testament, however, perhaps none is as pervasive, and therefore important, as the shadows revealed in the relationship between "forty," and the fulfillment of promises.

Throughout the Old Testament we find this usage of the number forty- God, through numerology, allowing a glimpse into the nature of the eternal realities, through the framework of temporal shadows. Examples of this usage are the forty days and nights that God caused it to rain upon the face of the earth; also, in the length of the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon (Acts 13:21; II Sam. 5:4). Besides these, we see forty used as a temporal shadow in the duration of Jonah's preaching of judgment to the Ninevites (Jon. 3:4), and the number of days that the spies of Canaan searched out the land (Num. 13:25).

The New Testament underscores the importance of this typological number, by showing God's continuance of its responsibilities well into the New Testamentary time. Christ fasted for forty days and forty nights, and continually preached that the generation then living would see the judgment of God. In fact, Christ preached the very same judgment upon the city that Jonah did.

We find the most significant numerological type of all in one of the most striking events in the account of Scripture - the forty years of wilderness wandering leading up to the possession of the temporal land of promise. In fact, Paul himself wrote that the surrounding events of the wilderness wandering "were our examples" (I Cor. 10:6), and that "they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world (aion-age) have come" (v.11).

That this event would be considered one of the greatest (and plainest) allegories of the Old Testament, should be no surprise to Bible students. In fact, one of the first lessons a student of types and shadows will learn is the lofty place given to the Exodus out of Egypt. It is this event which presents the clearest correspondences to the redemptive work of Christ, and the time-frame of its fulfillment.

To be more specific, the exodus out of Egypt and into the promised land, by the children of Israel under Moses, is a direct shadow of the exodus of the New Testamentary generation from the cross to the entrance into the eternal land of rest. We will see a number of similarities between the two; not only in the area of principles and concepts, but also in the chronological time-frame of the periods under consideration.

Below are two charts which display the correlation between the temporal shadow of the wanderings of the children of Israel, and that for which it stood in shadow: the "last days" of the Old Covenant "aeon".

It is the proposition of this writer that the exodus out of Egypt, the forty years of wilderness wandering, and the inheritance of the temporal land of rest, stood as declaratory shadows of the "last days" of the Old Covenant, which saw the counterparts thereof- the cross, the forty year generation of the "last days," and the inheritance of the everlasting land of rest at the parousia of Christ.

In looking at the above charts, we find a number of very important conceptual correlations that display the relationship between (1) the typology of the Exodus to the land inheritance, and (2) the fulfillment from the cross to the coming of Christ in His kingdom:

1. The first established a temporary contract of God with the people He chose- the Old Covenant. The second established a permanent contract- the New Covenant.
2. One introduced the first Passover with the blood of lambs. The other fulfilled the type with the sacrifice of the final Passover Lamb (i.e. Jesus Christ).
3. One brought God's people physical deliverance by crossing through the Red Sea. The other brought God's people spiritual deliverance by the working of the cross of Christ, whereby we 'cross through' the Crimson sea.
4. The first was preceded by physical slavery- the bondage of the Hebrews in Egypt. The second was preceded by spiritual slavery, man's bondage to Spiritual Egypt (i.e. The elements of the Law [Gal. 4:3] and the 'body of sin' - [Rom. 6:6]).

5. Fifty days after the first Passover in Egypt, the Law was given to the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, written upon tables of stone. (according to Jewish tradition - Ex. 19:1). Fifty days after the final Passover was sacrificed, the Law was given to the "Israel of God", written upon their hearts by the Spirit of God (II Cor. 3:3; Heb. 8:10).
6. On the day that the Law was given, 3,000 died for worshipping the golden calf, signifying the covenant of the law that brought death (Ex. 32:28; cf. II Cor. 3:16-18). On the day the Spirit was given, 3,000 were added into Christ and received life (Acts. 2:41), signifying the covenant of the Spirit that brought life. Very few would disagree that the above points are fulfillments of the shadows given at the time of the Exodus. It is the opinion of this writer, however, that the correlation does not stop with the initial workings of the exodus, but also with the entrance into the land of temporal rest, forty years later. It is forwarded that, just as the children of faith were allowed to enter into the temporal land of rest the first time, the children of faith in the generation directly following the cross of Christ were given entrance into the eternal land of rest. Therefore, besides the conceptual similarities, there is also a direct chronological solidarity between the two, for:
7. With each covenant, a 40 year transition period followed the initial act of deliverance, unto the entrance into the land of promise. Christ specifically told the disciples at the "last supper," "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2-3). This reception was into, what is described in Hebrews as, "a better country, that is an heavenly" (11:16). The significance in this, is that the believers among the people of Israel did not receive the promises of the Promised land, when they entered into Palestine (Heb 4:6-9). This promise was in regards to the fulfillment of redemption and eternal life in the kingdom of God, which entrance was corporately given to all believers at the end of the 40 years from the cross to the coming of Christ.

The fulfillment, then, of the shadow of entering into the land of promise, was left to those of faith, who would be ushered into the kingdom when Christ returned to "bring them unto himself, that where he is they may be also." If Christ has not come yet today, then all believers are still waiting to be ushered into that eternal land of rest (Heb. 4:9, See also New Testament Eschatology). But we believe that He has returned, and has fulfilled all aspects of the "exodus shadow," using the very same chronology in the first century, as He did in the initial shadow; in fact, in addressing the actual generation of the "last days" of the Old Covenant (AD 30-70), the book of Hebrews (specifically chapters three and four) directly makes this argument.

The following points continue the shadow of the Exodus, and show the chronological similarities between the two. The purpose of this is to show the time-frame of the believers' entrance into the heavenly country, for which Palestine only stood in shadow:

1. Both forty year periods are described as a time of particular "temptation" (Heb. 3:8; Luke 8:13, 11:4, 22:40), through which they must needs endure unto the end, to be saved (Heb. 3:13-14; see also New Testament Eschatology).
2. During both periods, the people hardened their hearts, tempted God, and distinctly rejected the word of the Lord.
3. During both periods, the people saw God's works forty years (Heb 3:9; Acts 2:17-21). God manifested Himself to His people by signs and wonders; in the desert under Moses' leadership, daily manna, miraculous supplies of water or meat, and the appearance of the cloud and the fiery pillar revealed God's presence. In the transition period to the New Covenant, the apostles had special gifts of healing, prophecy, and tongues-speaking, and testified to the coming of the kingdom of God and the destruction of the wicked (I Cor 14:22, see Tongues, a Biblical View). These gifts were specifically slated to end, once Christ had come, and not until (I Cor. 13:8-10).
4. During both periods, God was particularly grieved with the generation of men then living (Heb 3:10; Matt. 23:34-36, etc.).
5. During both periods, the wicked were severed from among the just, and not allowed to enter into the land of promise (Heb 3:11,17; Matt. 12:30, 13:49 - see \$10,000 Challenge).
6. At the end of the first 40 year period, the Israelites of faith entered the temporal land of promise, in which God enabled them to defeat their physical foes. At the end of the second 40 year period, salvation was complete, and God's people entered their eternal Promised Land in which God enabled them to defeat their spiritual enemies (I Cor. 15:26,54-57).

The physical illustrations in the Old Covenant are fulfilled in each case by the spiritual realities of the New. The second is a spiritual (rather, an eternal) covenant with victory over spiritual slavery and spiritual death, bringing eternal deliverance through a spiritual Passover resulting in our new eternal life and eternal salvation.

All of these types and shadows displayed in the Exodus, found their fulfillment in the exodus of God's people from the bondage of sin, to the eternal rest in Christ. Any expectation of another coming, or future fulfillment of these promises of rest reflects a lack of appreciation for (due to a lack of understanding of) what we now have in Christ - eternal life in His kingdom.