

FL104 Understanding Figures

Symbols become figures when they and their actions represent earthly events that are yet to come. Strong defines figures as “corresponding anti-types or counterparts” [G499].

Most figures are in the OT and most counterparts are in the NT Epistles. Because the counterparts happen after the figures, the phrase “*Which was a figure for the time then present*” [Heb. 9:8-9] agrees with the past tense of OT figures.

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten [son], Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God [was] able to raise [him] up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure [Heb. 11:17-19].

Isaac a figure of Christ

Abraham represents the Heavenly Father, and Isaac represents Christ. And because Abraham received Isaac [as] from the dead, Isaac became a figure of Christ. Moreover, the death and resurrection of Christ fulfilled the counterpart of this figure.

A Figure in the Flood

Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto [even] baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ [1Pe. 3:20-21].

Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives were the only people spared in the Great Flood. In the salvation of these eight souls, Peter saw a figure of New Testament, water baptism.

The same water that destroyed “All in whose nostrils was the breath of life” [Ge. 7:22] saved Noah’s family from death. This water is a figure of the water in rivers, creeks, or in the baptismal. How did the same water that destroyed multitudes saves others? Didn’t the flood destroy the multitude and the ark save these eight souls?

Symbols don’t lose their identity as symbols even when they become figures. To answer the question above, you need to know what water represents. Read the definition that Jesus gave in Joh. 7:38:39:

He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit...)

Water represents spirit. And like all symbols, this root divides into several branches. And to see how this symbol becomes a figure, you need to know which branch it represents relative to it becoming a figure.

Paul said this in Ro. 7:14: “For we know that the law is spiritual:...” And because the letter killeth and the spirit gives life [2Co. 3:6], the same law that kills also gives life. Therefore, as both a symbol and a figure, the same water that kills also gives life.

Now, the word [logos, law] was in the beginning [Joh. 1:1] and this word became flesh [Joh. 1:14]. And Jesus said that Moses wrote of Him [Joh. 5:46] and Moses wrote the Law. So, the foremost branch of water is the Law.

And because the flood water is a figure of water baptism, the water burial is a figure of putting off the “old man” [Col, 3:9]. And the raising of the body from the water is a figure of putting on the “new man” [Eph. 4:24] via the resurrection of the dead.

Knowing these things, we should now understand that the primary purpose of water baptism is to save believers from the curse of the law. Therefore, water baptism is much more than “an outward sign of an inward work of grace.”

Adam a Figure of Christ

Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come [Ro. 5:14].

Let’s begin with a correction. Adam was not “the figure of Christ;” he was “a figure of Christ.” Had Adam been “the figure,” he would have been “the only figure.” The word “the” permits one figure; the word “a” permits many figures.

Now let’s discuss two points that our previous topic brings to light. First, a figure’s counterpart agrees with its figure. For example, water is a figure, so water is its counterpart. Second, after identifying a figure, interpret its details in the light of its counterpart. We did this by showing how “the action in water baptism immunizes believers from the curse of the law.”

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In this topic, the man Adam is a figure and Jesus is his counterpart. Because Adam is a figure of Christ [Ro. 5:14], Paul's letter to the Corinthians help us interpret the counterpart in the light of the figure. You can study these details in 1Co. 15:2-23; 15:45-49; 15:51-54.

Your home-work is to examine and study the details in these scriptures. Now, however, let's look at one detail that Paul didn't explain.

After putting Adam in the garden [Ge. 2:8], God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone" [Ge. 2:18]. Because Adam was a figure of Christ, it was not good for Christ to be alone. [You won't find this in the Bible, but it's as true as 1Ti. 2:14. Paul knew that Adam wasn't deceived because he knew that Christ wasn't deceived.]

And the reason it wasn't good for Christ to be alone was the same reason that it wasn't good for Adam to be alone. [Figures and their counterparts enable you to learn about either from the other.] So then, why was it not good for Christ to be alone?

God's Eternal Purpose [Eph. 3:11] is to have many sons live eternally with Him in glory. Jesus was the seed God made to fulfill this purpose [Ga. 3:16, 4:4]. And Jesus told us why it wasn't good for Christ to be alone: "*Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit*" [Joh. 12:24].

Jesus is this corn of wheat. The fruit of this seed will soon become eternal sons in glory: "*For it became him, for whom [are] all things, and by whom [are] all things, in bringing many sons unto glory...*" [Heb. 2:10].