

How to Do Expository Bible Teaching (Part 4 of 9: Early Christian Mindset for Interpretation)

Historic Faith Series on Expository Teaching

X. Viewing the Scriptures: Consider All Three Levels

- a. My house in Massachusetts was designed and built over 100 years ago as a two-family home. The overall house has three floors.
 - i. The lower unit has one bedroom on the first floor and one on the second floor. However, a fact that most who visit that apartment are not aware of: there is a hidden stairway in the back that leads up to the third floor bedroom.
 - ii. The second-floor entrance to the stairway leading up to the third floor bedroom was walled off by one of the previous owners, who reassigned that bedroom to the upper unit of the two-family house.
 - iii. As originally designed, the downstairs unit had three bedrooms: one bedroom each on the first, second and third levels of the house. However, someone living in the downstairs unit might never know that. One would have to look very carefully to discover the missing, covered-over, abandoned stairway leading up to the original third bedroom of the apartment. If you were a contractor or carpenter, you might more readily discern the covered-over secret hidden behind a thin wall of plaster.
- b. Similar to the analogy of my home, at the beginning of the church, Christians readily saw *three levels* of significance in the stories of the Old Testament. However, modern readers generally miss the “hidden” third level. In studying the Old Testament, let us take care to consider all three levels. The three levels are:
 - i. **Level 1: Basic Storyline** (the facts of what happened)
 - ii. **Level 2: Moral Lessons** (applications from the story)
 - iii. **Level 3: Prophecies** (things to come after the time these stories were written). This is, for most modern Christians, the ‘hidden third level’.
- c. Example of a well-known Old Testament story that includes *all three levels*: the account of the Passover Lamb, in **Exodus**.
 - i. **Level 1 - Basic Storyline**: Read the details in **Exodus 12-13**.
 - ii. **Level 2 - Moral Lesson for Us**: See **1 Corinthians 5:6-8**, where yeast represents sin (applications there regarding sexual immorality).

iii. Level 3 - Prophecy Foreshadowing Christ

1. The Passover Lamb foreshadowed Jesus in the following respects:
 - a. Without defect.
 - b. Sacrificed at twilight, eve of the Passover.
 - c. Blood of that lamb saves God's people from death.
 - d. None of the bones of the lamb could be broken.
 - e. A commemorative meal involving eating the flesh of the sacrificed lamb was to be celebrated regularly thereafter.
2. After the lamb was slain, all yeast must be removed from the community for the next seven days. This foreshadowed getting all the sin out (Christians repenting and leading holy lives) after Christ, the true Passover Lamb, was slain.
- d. Early Christians believed that not all of the foreshadowings in the Old Testament were identified and fully explained by the New Testament writers. There is more in there, yet to be discovered.
 - i. Justin Martyr's writings, especially his *Dialogue with Trypho*, a Jew helped open my eyes to the fact that early Christians saw a lot more of this "third level" in the Old Testament than what I had been aware of. They also saw more things than were specifically mentioned in the New Testament by Jesus and the apostolic writers.

XI. Eastern vs. Western Style Prophecies

- a. From David Bercot's book *Common Sense*, from 'Chapter 14 - What We Would Rather Not See':
 - i. "If we are to accurately understand Scripture, we must learn to think as easterners. And that's not easy for us to do. It is the eastern thinking of the early Christians that so often repulses the uninitiated western reader. He finds himself muttering, 'These people don't think like I do! Their logic doesn't make any sense to me.' So he quickly dismisses both them and their writings as strange.
 - ii. "However, the New Testament writers followed the same 'peculiar logic' as did the second century Christians. If we hadn't already westernized and sanitized the New Testament, we would be able to see that. But as it is, our eyes are safely closed to the eastern way of thinking that is woven all throughout the pages of the New Testament. But since the early Christian writers have not been westernized and

sanitized, we immediately notice their eastern thought process when we read their works.”

1. (Source: David Bercot, *Common Sense*, chapter 14, p. 96)
 - b. *Western style* prophecies such as **Isaiah 53** are more straightforward. They tell you more or less directly that such-and-such will happen in the future.
 - c. In contrast, *Eastern style* prophecies are more allegorical, like the parables Jesus told. Think of an onion, where the shape of the surface layer has the same pattern as the deeper layers. This type of thinking is more typical of eastern cultures (such as Persia, India).
 - i. Many ‘Eastern style’ prophecies from the Old Testament are identified in the New Testament. Examples include:
 1. Passover Lamb and casting out the yeast (Feast of Unleavened Bread)
 - a. “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.” (**1 Corinthians 5:7**, NKJV)
 2. Paul’s argument for financially supporting those in full-time ministry is based on this Eastern-style of reading the Law of Moses:
 - a. “For it is written in the law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.’ Is it oxen God is concerned about?” (**1 Corinthians 9:9**, NKJV; quoting from **Deuteronomy 25:4**)
 - b. Clearly Paul saw a deeper, allegorical significance in the statement in **Deuteronomy** regarding not muzzling the ox. This is characteristic of an Eastern-approach reading of the passage.
 3. Paul’s argument about not being intimately connected to unbelievers (which would include not marrying them!).
 - a. “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” (**2 Corinthians 6:14**, NKJV)
 - b. It seems clear to me that this statement by Paul this was based on an Eastern-style reading of the following passage found in the Old Testament:

- i. “You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.” (**Deuteronomy 22:10**, NKJV)
- 4. **1 Peter 3**, the Flood was a *type* (= a pattern that foreshadowed) baptism
 - a. “...when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” (**1 Peter 3:20–21**, NKJV)
 - b. Water of the flood was the *type*; baptism is the *antitype*.
 - i. The Greek prefix ‘*anti-*’ typically means ‘instead of’.
 - 1. (This should not be confused with the similar-sounding Greek prefix ‘*ante-*’, which means ‘before’.)
 - ii. Think of *type* is like an old-fashioned type on a typewriter, and the letter that results is the *antitype*.
 - iii. Another example of a ‘*type*’ is the seal or image on the face of an old seal-ring. In that case the ‘*antitype*’ would be the imprint left in the wax.
 - 1. Again, one (the antitype) conforms to the other, the original (the type).
- 5. Bronze serpent lifted up in the Wilderness (**Numbers 21**), which Jesus discusses in **John 3:14-15**.
- 6. The tabernacle of **Exodus 25-31** was a *type* or ‘scale model’ of heaven and the church.
 - a. The Most Holy Place represented “heaven itself” (**Hebrews 9:24**)
 - b. The High Priest who entered it once each year with blood represents Jesus (**Hebrews 9:11-14**).
 - c. The veil (torn in two from top to bottom when Jesus died on the cross) is the flesh of Christ (**Hebrews 10:20**).

- d. We are the priests, members of a royal priesthood who minister in the Holy Place (**1 Peter 2:9**).
- d. Early Christian writers saw additional foreshadowing (Eastern-type) prophecies not mentioned in the New Testament.
 - i. Examples pointed out by Justin Martyr (in his *First Apology*, *Second Apology* and *Dialogue with Trypo, a Jew*) and other early Christian writers include:
 - 1. **Exodus 17:8-15** – Moses vs. Amalekites (salvation would come through the cross).
 - a. Moses is told by God to assume a very unusual posture, unlike any of the ‘normal’ postures for prayer (such as kneeling or face to the ground).
 - b. Moses had to hold up the wooden staff with both hands, supported by one man on each side.
 - c. He had to maintain this unusual posture all day long in order for the victory to be won against their enemies.
 - d. This posture (Jewish prophet between two other men, hands extended to each side, on the wood, and posture maintained all day long) in order to point to God’s ultimate plan of saving all people through *Jesus on the cross*.
 - 2. **Joshua 2** - Scarlet cord of Rahab/Jericho (blood of Christ)
 - a. The two spies tell Rahab she must place a scarlet cord in her window if she is to be saved when the day of destruction comes upon Jericho.
 - b. She and her family must stay within the protected room that has the scarlet cord hanging from its window.
 - c. This is reminiscent of the blood of the Passover Lamb, which similarly protected those who were inside the homes that had the sign of the blood.
 - d. Early Christian writers such as Justin Martyr saw the scarlet cord as a type or foreshadowing of the *blood of Christ*.