

Biblical Typology: A Neglected Key to the Book of Revelation?

Study No. 1 on the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation¹

Introduction

Like an elaborately detailed oriental tapestry, John's Gospel and the book of Revelation are intricately interwoven to present a composite picture, epic in scope and immortal in theme. Elaborate patterns portray the marvel and mystery of the heavenly Son of God who leaves the riches of His Father's court in quest of an earthly bride and a heavenly kingdom. The Gospel opens with the Spirit descending out of heaven like a dove upon the Son of Man. Revelation ends with the bride of Christ descending out of heaven, made ready for her Groom, and adorned in all the graces of the Spirit.

Together these books celebrate a love that spans time and eternity. We begin with the love of the Father for His Son before the foundation of the world. We survey all the ages, coming at last to the victorious wedding supper of the Lamb and the love of the bride for her Husband at the beginning of eternity future. The Gospel of the Bridegroom begins in a wilderness, but the bride of Revelation is brought at last to a pleasant garden. The darkness that struggled to overcome the Light has now been banished forever. Eternal dawn shines forth, unobscured, clear, and golden. The stones gathered of old by the banks of the Jordan are seen in this Light, by the banks of the river of crystal, to have been built into a vast city of glittering gems. And the bride is lovely in this Light. She is made ready for her Groom arrayed in the finest linen of heaven, white and pure. But as we admire her beauty, we remember that she can be dressed in white only because her Groom's robe was dyed in deepest red.²

¹ This document is excerpted from a syllabus entitled "An Introduction to Biblical Typology," prepared for a forthcoming course to be offered at Knox Theological Seminary.

² The classical genre of Revelation's climactic vision, describing the triumph of good over evil in the context of a divine wedding procession (*komos*), is comedy. Cf. Aristotle, *Poetica* 1449a; see Daniel Russ, "The Bible as Genesis of Comedy," in *The Terrain of Comedy* (ed. Louise Cowan; Dallas: Pegasus, 1984) 59. The quarrel among modern commentators on Revelation regarding the character of apocalyptic genre has generally not led to helpful textual analysis. Cf. F.D. Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective* (BZNW 54; New York: de Gruyter, 1989) 60-75, 160-84. The categories of Babylon the damned and Jerusalem the blessed, which largely reflect apocalyptic analysis, neglect the tension represented by Ps 87:1-4, where Babylon, the archetypal evil city, is promised salvific blessing, and Ezek 16 and 23, where the prophet excoriates Jerusalem for her whoredoms. The general absence of the comedic imagination in theological commentary, especially expressed in failing to appreciate the transformative nature of love (see Hos 1:2; cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*)

John the Beloved Disciple weaves together his two great books using elaborate parallel, chiasmic, and typological patterns.³ The two great works thus interpret and complete one another. Taken together, the Fourth Gospel and Revelation constitute a literary diptych, a picture whose temporal framework spans the beginning of the first creation (John 1:1), all the way to the vision of the new creation at the beginning of eternity future (Rev 21:1). Moreover, the two books of John offer a spatial horizon depicting the creative struggle of Jesus both from the perspective of earth (John) and of heaven (Revelation). Upon this wholly comprehensive canvas, John depicts Jesus' epic struggle as the typological fulfillment of all of the major figures in the OT. The following discussion focuses upon the Joshua typology as presented by John the Apostle.

Jesus as the New Joshua in the Gospel and in the Book of Revelation

The Fourth Gospel's Joshua typology largely tracks the account of the conquest of Canaan, beginning with the crossing of the Jordan and depicting two campaigns, one in the south (Judea) and one in the north (Galilee). The climactic battle involves the struggle of Jesus as the True Joshua against the confederated enemies of God, led by Jerusalem. This epic struggle occurs, from one perspective, on earth, depicted in the Gospel of John. Revelation portrays the same struggle from the perspective of heaven.⁴ In fact, Revelation offers a mimetic portrayal of the heavenly significance of Christ's earthly ministry in conflict with the Old Jerusalem, the history described for us in the Fourth Gospel.

and the purgatorial character of comedy (see Ezek 16:60-63, Dante's *Purgatorio* from the *Commedia*, and "Dante's Letter to Can Grande," *Essays on Dante*, ed. Mark Musa, trans. Nancy Howe [Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1964] 34-47), has led to an underestimation of the full range of literary possibilities represented by the Babylonian whore in Revelation. We would encourage biblical expositors to a consideration of the redemptive potential of the "fallen woman" represented most imaginatively in the western literary tradition by Dante, Cervantes, Hawthorne, and Dostoyevsky. Strikingly, theological commentary largely disregards this redemptive possibility in spite of the fact that the rescue of the immoral woman is also a significant theme in both Johannine and Biblical theology. See the account of the Samaritan woman (John 4:4-42), the woman caught in adultery (John 8:2-11), and the story of Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18, cf. Luke 8:2). See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Casta Meretrix," *Explorations in Theology*, vol. II Spouse of the Word (trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991) 193-288; Jean Daniélou, "Rahab a Type of the Church," *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Typology of the Fathers* (trans. Dom Wulstan Hibberd; London: Burns and Oates, 1960) 244-60; J. M. Vogelgesang, "The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1985) 98-112; and Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., *Whoredom: God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

³ This thesis is developed in W. A. Gage, "St John's Vision of the Heavenly City" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Dallas, 2001).

⁴ The Joshua typology between the two books of John is developed primarily within the parallel pattern of correspondence sustained between the books.

We begin our discussion of the typological patterns connecting the Book of Joshua and the Book of Revelation by recounting the warfare of Joshua as recorded in the OT. We will then consider the restatement of that conflict in the Apocalypse. In order to show the pattern of verbal concordance between the books of Joshua and Revelation, we will use bold type to identify significant words that share the same Greek root in the LXX and in the Greek NT.⁵ Words that are related thematically, but not lexically, will be shown in italic type. The reader should observe the striking pattern of details and the thorough comprehensiveness of these correspondence patterns between the two books.

Joshua's Battle Against Jericho: The Story of a Whore Who Becomes a Bride

The name of the **great city** "Jericho" brings to mind the greatest single battle recorded in the Old Testament. After crossing the Jordan and entering the land of promise, **Joshua** and all Israel camped in Gilgal.⁶ **Joshua** erected **twelve stones** taken from the riverbed as a memorial to represent the **twelve tribes of Israel** who crossed the **river** in safety. The Jordan crossing reminded the Israelites of their fathers, those who *crossed the Red Sea after they were delivered from pharaoh*, whereupon they **sang the song of Moses** (Exod 15:1-19, Josh 4:19-24).

But the **great city** Jericho was walled up to heaven (Deut 9:1), defying **Joshua** and the armies of Israel. This impassable **city** represented the decisive struggle of the people of God against the nations of Canaan. In order to inherit the paradisiacal land flowing with milk and honey, and to receive their *inheritance by their tribes* (Josh 18:3-10), as promised in the **book of seven parts** (18:9), Israel would have to destroy Jericho. But what was this inviolable

⁵ The logical and chronological patterns support the analogical and typological interrelationship between the two Johannine books. The more elaborate the patterns, the more convincing is the typology. Each of these methods of analysis: logical, chronological, analogical, and typological, as the several hypostases of the Logos, contribute to the method of exegesis presented in this paper. We will give considerable attention to the method of typological exegesis in due course.

⁶ Gilgal is the place of Joshua's renewal of the covenant for Israel. It is the camp where Joshua circumcised the people, fulfilling the requirements of the Abrahamic covenant, and where he reinstated the observance of Passover, the neglected feast of the Mosaic covenant. Gilgal is derived from the verb *g¹¹¹*, which means "to roll," for it was here that the Lord "rolled away" the reproach of the people from their neglect of the law of Moses. We note a further symbolic use of *g¹¹¹* in the victory ceremony at Makedah, where Joshua commanded large stones to be rolled against the grave of the Canaanite kings, memorializing their "reproach" (10:18). In the NT the True Joshua rolls away the reproach of the people of God at "Golgotha" (also derived from *g¹¹¹*). Moreover, the True Joshua reinstates the covenant for the people of God by fulfilling on our behalf all the righteous commandments of the law, by giving us a circumcision not made by hands with a flint knife, and by rolling away the stone that sealed our grave.

city to **Joshua**, who could command **the sun and the moon** *to cease in their courses* that the day of slaughter might not end (10:12-14), and whose God could rain giant **hailstones from heaven** upon the armies of the Canaanite **kings** (10:11)?

This fortress city of Jericho, in the plain of the Jordan, was filled with great wealth. Her treasures included **silver and gold**, articles of **bronze and iron** (6:19), *linen* (2:6), and **scarlet** (2:18). Jericho evidently sustained a commercial relationship with Shinar. Among her many treasures was *the beautiful Babylonian garment*⁷ that was to prove so tempting to Achan (7:21). Jericho was an impregnable fortress town, whose **fall before Joshua** would cause **the kings** of Canaan to **fear** the God of the armies of Israel (9:1-3, 24; 10:1-4).

Joshua initiated the conquest of Jericho by sending **two spies** to view the land and **the city** (2:1). But the presence of the spies was reported to the **king** of Jericho, who *sought to kill them* (2:2, 14). Attempting to escape the **king**, the spies turned into the house of Rahab, a **whore** of Jericho *identified by her scarlet* chord (2:18), whose house was evidently open to strangers (2:1). Rahab protected the spies, whom she could have *delivered over to death* (2:14).

The battle of Jericho began with **Joshua's unexpected vision** of a divine **Man**. Having sanctified all Israel from uncleanness caused by their neglect of covenant circumcision, **Joshua** was contemplating holy war against Jericho (5:1-12). As he lifted up his eyes, **he saw** a divine **Man** standing with His **sword** drawn for battle. **Joshua** fell before the **Man** and was told to remove his sandals from his **feet** (5:14-15).

The battle began as **Joshua** directed the campaign against Jericho. He commanded the people to circle the city once a day for **seven** days and **seven** times upon the **seventh** day (6:3-4).⁸ On the **seventh** day, **Joshua** arose early in the morning (6:12). He caused the priests carrying **the ark of the covenant to sound seven trumpets** of judgment before **the city**. Then he commanded all the people to *shout out* against her (6:8,20). Suddenly the walls of the wicked **city fell** (6:20). All those who remained in Jericho were put to **the sword**, and **the city was burned with fire** (6:21,24).

But Rahab **the whore** *was delivered along with all her house*. She came **out of the city** in safety because she had obeyed the word of the **two** spies (6:25). According to Matthew, Rahab became *the bride of Salmon, who was of*

⁷ The coat coveted by Achan was from "Shinar," the Semitic name for the land the Greeks called Mesopotamia (the land between the rivers). The eastern cities of Babel, Erech, and Accad were in Shinar (Gen 10:10). The text suggests that Jericho had a commercial relationship with Babel in the east. The AV thus rendered the word Shinar in this context with "Babylonian."

⁸ The pattern of telescopic heptads in Joshua, that is, seven trumpets sounding upon the seventh march of the seventh day, sets the pattern in Revelation for the seven bowls poured out upon the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the trumpets being the seventh seal.

the royal tribe of Judah. Through this marriage the Gentile **whore** of Jericho became an ancestress of **Jesus** the Messiah, the True Joshua (Matt 1:5-16)!

Jesus' Battle Against Babylon in Revelation: The Story of the True Joshua and a Whore Who Becomes a Bride

The name of the **great city** "Babylon" brings to mind the greatest battle depicted in the New Testament. The sins of Great Babylon reached up to heaven (Rev 18:5), an affront to the God of all the earth. This mighty **city** represented the decisive struggle of the Lord **Jesus** against the unrepentant of earth. Babylon must be destroyed for the people of God *to inherit* the paradise of God (21:1-5), and receive their distribution *by their tribes* (21:12), as the fulfillment of the **book of seven** seals (5:1). But what is this **great city** to **Jesus**, the True Joshua, whose own light causes **the sun and the moon to cease** (21:23), and whose God will rain great **hailstones from heaven** down upon Babylon (16:19-21)?

Babylon was a **city** filled with great wealth. Her treasures included **gold and silver, bronze, iron, linen, and scarlet** (18:12-13). In the **city** lived a woman arrayed in *an alluring Babylonian garment of scarlet* and purple (17:4).⁹

⁹ There are clues to the identity of the Babylonian whore woven within the Johannine material according to the parallel and chiasmic patterning that tie the two books, the Fourth Gospel and Revelation, together. The Great Whore of Revelation, who drinks her **cup** of loathsomeness and is arrayed in **scarlet** (Rev 17:4), is a mockery of a **queen** (Rev 18:7) now that her great **hour** of judgment and death **has come** (Rev 18:10). Parallel to the Great Whore of Revelation is the blessed Lord Jesus of John's Gospel, who in His suffering for us drank the loathsome **cup** (John 18:11), was arrayed in **scarlet** (John 19:2), had His **kingdom** mocked (John 19:3), and suffered death when the great **hour** of judgment **had come** (John 17:1). John justly charges the Great Whore with **blasphemy** (Rev 17:3) and **fornication** (Rev 17:4-5). Bearing her reproach, the precious Lord Jesus suffered the calumnious charges of **blasphemy** (John 10:33) and **fornication** (John 8:41). Clearly, John is telling us that the Lord Jesus took the reproach of the whore of Revelation upon Himself. For anyone who has a reformed doctrine of particular redemption, the identity of the whore should become immediately apparent.

Moreover, the chiasmic pattern of correspondence between the Gospel of John and Revelation also provides a clue to the identity of the whore. For Lady Babylon, who thirsts although she sits upon the waters (17:1,4,6), has a relationship with seven kings, of whom **five have fallen**, one **is**, and the other has **not** yet come (17:10). And when John recognized her, he **marveled** (17:6). Chiasmically, the whore of Babylon corresponds in the Gospel account to the Samaritan woman, who in her thirst came to Jesus, sitting upon the well (John 4:6-7). The Samaritan woman likewise has a relationship with seven men. Jesus says to her, "You **have had five** husbands, and the one you now have **is not** your husband" (4:18). And when the disciples and John saw her, they **marveled** (4:27).

Surely the identity of the Great Whore should cause us to marvel as well. For the OT type of the whore of Babylon is none other than Rahab, the whore of Jericho and a type of the church. If we conclude from this evidence that the whore of Babylon will become the bride of Christ, then there could not be a more graphic emblem of the

The **fall of this great city before Jesus** would cause **the kings** of the earth to **fear** and mourn (18:9-10).¹⁰

Now the Lord sent **two witnesses** into the wicked **city** (11:3-12), but the nations *sought to kill them* (11:7). Nevertheless, *they were delivered from death* in the sight of their enemies (11:12). Dwelling in the great city was a **whore identified by her scarlet** (17:3-5), who committed fornication with the **kings** of the earth (18:3). The **whore had the power of death over the saints** of God (17:6).

Jesus' battle against Babylon began with John the Apostle's *unexpected vision* of a divine **Man** (1:12-19). The True **Joshua** appeared with a **sword** proceeding out of His mouth (1:16). He commanded John to write **seven letters** to His churches, calling them to purity for holy war (2:1-3:22). John fell before the **feet** of the **Man** as though dead (1:17).

The battle began and **Jesus** directed the campaign against Babylon. He opened the **book of seven seals** (5:1), the **seventh seal** becoming **seven trumpets** of judgment (8:1-2). As the **seventh trumpet sounded** (11:15), **the ark of the covenant** appeared in heaven (11:19), and there were *loud voices* in heaven *crying out*, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ!" (11:15). In one hour Great Babylon, the wicked **city fell** (18:2). All **the city was burned with fire** (18:8).

But a voice had cried out before Babylon, "**Come out of her my people**, lest you share in her sins, and lest you partake of her plagues." (18:4).¹¹ And so some of those who had belonged to the whorish city were delivered from death, even those who had obeyed the word of the **two witnesses**.

biblical truth of the reformed soteriology of *sola gratia*. On the other hand, this vindication of reformed soteriology against Rome is at the price of falsifying the unilateral and most common historical identification of the whore of Revelation within Protestant circles, which, consequently, becomes five full centuries of slander.

¹⁰ St. Gregory of Elvira (AD 396) made explicit the typological identification of Joshua's destruction of Jericho with John's account of the judgment of Great Babylon in Revelation. The pattern that would suggest the redemption of the whore of Babylon as a new Rahab is clearly present in this fourth century witness from Spain. While the *editio princeps* was not available to us, a translation of the relevant passage occurs in Daniélou's *From Shadows to Reality*. The following quotation is from page 257: "Just as the Church made up of many nations is called a harlot, so, as a type of the Church, we see Rahab welcoming the Saints. The fall of Jericho prefigures those last days when the destruction of this world will be brought about and the seven plagues through the seven trumpets or the seven angelic vials will strike the human race together with Antichrist. Then no one will be saved except those shut up in Rahab's house, that is, the Church."

¹¹ The identification of the whore of Babylon as the antitype of Rahab, and thus a type of the church, does not lead to a salvific universalism. Rahab was surely not the only whore in Jericho, and certainly all the wicked, who did not "come out" of the city, perished. The command in Revelation for the people of God to "come out" of Babylon (18:4) is the invitation to participate in Rahab's repentance. For all of those who remain, their whorish city will be utterly destroyed (18:6-24).

And all of those who were delivered from their fornications and adultery became a part of the city of the true Israel of God, the New Jerusalem, *the bride of the Royal Lion of Judah*, **Yeshua, the True Joshua** (21:2). And to memorialize their safe passage to the paradise of their inheritance, **Jesus** gave them **a city of twelve precious stones by the river** of crystal waters, even to *all of those who had been delivered from the beast and had come safely across the sea of glass*, all who **sang the Song of Moses** and the Lamb (15:1-4).

Conclusion

This glorious message of hope for those so desperately lost is the heart of the teaching of the Son of God. It is the crux of His gospel message. The Lord Jesus has come to this world's Jerichos to rescue His Rahabs and to deliver His Zacchaeuses, all those self-confessed "harlots" and "publicans" who, like their predecessors who sought the repentance of John the Baptist (Matt 21:31-32), would dare to imagine that the love of a holy God could reach down far enough to deliver them.

The True Joshua requires a new army to fill His pulpits with those who will once again learn to be strong and very **courageous** (Josh 1:7), an army of poets and songwriters who will sound again the gospel's silver trumpets before the walls of this world's Jerichos—trumpets warning of a terrible judgment for the unrepentant, but trumpets sounding a wonderful jubilee for all those who, like Rahab, will forsake their sins.

We need a new army of men with disciplined **faith**. An army of those with strong imaginations. Imaginations courageous enough in the knowledge of the free grace of God to believe that a whore from Babylon could in truth become the bride of Christ. Imaginations that hear so scandalous a message and can believe it is not blasphemy. Imaginations that can envision the depths of their own sin, and so recognize that this scandalous message is the gospel's very truth.

We need a new sword for the battle. A sword of the Word, awakened from dogmatic slumbers and fashioned in the fiery foundry of metaphor. Just like Milton, who knew that the power of poetry would prove at last to be more compelling than all the armies of Cromwell, we need a new and more poetic restatement of these ancient truths. We need a new and **zealous** proclamation of the old gospel of Paul and the apostles, faithfully transmitted through Augustine and the Protestant Reformers—under no illusions about either the nature of man or the power of God in the gospel.

We must, however, sound a more certain sound upon these ancient trumpets of truth. A more biblical sound. We need those skilled in the **knowledge** of the gospel in its native dress—a bridal dress—told in the metaphor of an eastern wedding. Our tale is the story of a heavenly romance.

It tells of a love that begins in the heart of Father God, who unconditionally chose a bride in grace, one who would be suitable for His beloved Son. It is a drama about a bride whose unfaithfulness made her totally unfit and utterly unworthy of that Son. It speaks of the steadfast love of the Son, who nonetheless paid a great dowry price for her in confidence that she would return His love. It tells of the Spirit, whose love irresistibly wooed the betrothed back to a pure love for the Son. And it promises the hope of a heavenly and everlasting love, a faith that enables Jesus' betrothed to persevere unto the glorious day of her redemption, when she will descend from heaven as a bride, having made herself ready for the Prince of Glory!