

TYPES, SHADOWS, AND SYMBOLS OF CHRIST SEEN BY THE CHURCH FATHERS

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After the close of the New Testament, the exegetical torch laid down by the Apostles at their deaths was first taken up by the apostolic fathers, then by the apologists, and eventually by other bishops, priests, and doctors of theology. These men, commonly known as the church fathers, were the authors of the most important Christian writings after the New Testament. Some, like the apostolic fathers, had been disciples of actual Apostles. Others were simply high-ranking clergymen or renowned theologians in the post–New Testament era. While Latter-day Saints traditionally do not place heavy emphasis on the writings of these men, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, along with some Protestant denominations, have elevated these writings to nearly canonical status.

Like Latter-day Saints, the Christian church of the second through eighth centuries was prone to see references to, images of, and prophecies about Christ in the Old Testament. A Christocentric reading of the Hebrew Bible certainly finds support in the Book of Mormon. For example, Nephi wrote, “Behold, . . . *all things* which have been given of

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God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him” (2 Nephi 11:4; emphasis added).¹ Nephi’s brother Jacob recorded, “Behold, I say unto you that *none* of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ” (Jacob 7:11; emphasis added; see also Mosiah 13:33–34). And in the book of Moses the Lord himself stated, “And behold, *all* things have their likeness, and *all* things are created and made to bear record of me” (Moses 6:63; emphasis added). From these prophetic utterances it appears that (1) *all* things given by God symbolize or typify Christ; (2) *all* prophets have prophesied and testified of Christ; and (3) potentially *all* things can remind us of Christ. Indeed, one modern typologist remarked, “The red line of [Christ’s] blood runs all through the Old Testament, and . . . thus we are constantly reminded of the shed blood, without which there is not remission.”²

Speaking in general terms, many of the church fathers from both Greek and Latin traditions would have resonated with the aforementioned scriptural declarations about the Christocentric nature of the scriptures. Indeed, most of the fathers tended to read the Hebrew Bible through Christian lenses, seeing references to, types and shadows of, and symbols for Christ in literally thousands of verses and stories scattered throughout the entirety of the Old Testament. Indicative of how the church fathers read the Hebrew Bible is the following comment from John of Damascus (circa AD 650–750):

The tree of life which was planted by God in Paradise pre-figured this precious Cross. For since death was by a tree, it was fitting that life and resurrection should be bestowed by a tree. Jacob, when He worshipped the top of Joseph’s staff, was the first to image the Cross, and when he blessed his sons with crossed hands he made most clearly the sign of the cross. Likewise also did Moses’ rod, when it smote the sea in the figure of the cross and saved Israel, while it overwhelmed Pharaoh in the depths; likewise also the hands stretched out crosswise and routing Amalek; and the bitter water made sweet by a tree, and the rock rent and pouring forth streams of water and the rod that meant for Aaron the dignity of the high priesthood: and the serpent lifted in triumph on a tree as though it were dead, the tree bringing salvation to those who in faith saw their enemy dead, just as Christ was nailed to the

tree in the flesh of sin which yet knew no sin. The mighty Moses cried, *You will see your life hanging on the tree before your eyes*, and Isaiah likewise, *I have spread out my hands all the day unto a faithless and rebellious people*. But may we who worship this obtain a part in Christ the crucified. Amen.³

John of Damascus's comment well represents how thoroughly, in the mind of the church fathers, Jesus is present in the Old Testament. Indeed, Irenaeus (circa AD 115–202) wrote, "If any one . . . reads the Scriptures with attention, he will find in them an account of Christ. . . . For Christ is the treasure which was hid in the field, that is . . . the treasure hid in the Scriptures, since He was pointed out by means of types and parables."⁴ Gracing the stage between the ministries of Irenaeus and John of Damascus, Augustine (AD 354–430) too saw the Hebrew Bible as thoroughly symbolic of Christ. He held that within the Old Testament, the New is concealed; in the New Testament, the Old is revealed.⁵

Of course, it should be understood that though many church fathers saw the stories, rites, people, and events of the Old Testament as types, shadows, or symbols of Christ, some went far beyond what a reasonable interpretation of the Bible would allow. Because of this, some fathers of the church either rejected a symbolic Christocentric reading of the Old Testament or, at the very least, expressed caution about how far such exegesis should be taken.⁶ Having said that, fathers from both traditions—East and West—and from both schools—Antiochene and Alexandrian—have provided us with literally thousands of examples of the patristic tendency to see nearly everything in the Old Testament as testifying of Christ.⁷ People, possessions, prophetic events, animals, and even actions were all seen by these early Christians as somehow symbolizing or foreshadowing Jesus and his divine mission and ministry. Quite literally, many of the fathers of the church would have borne witness as did Nephi that "*all things* which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him" (2 Nephi 11:4; emphasis added).

It seems best to allow the words of the original authors to speak for themselves; thus what follows is a sampling of how patristic sources interpret the Old Testament as being a typological foreshadowing of Christ. The length of this paper will not allow for an exhaustive

treatment of the many categories and examples of Christocentric symbolism believed by the early Christians to be present in the Hebrew Bible. However, the following examples should be a sufficient sampling of how extensive those early Christian writers believed this Christ-centered biblical symbolism was.⁸

While Latter-day Saints may find the exegesis of these fathers curious, more valuable than their interpretations is their example of the dangers of ignoring context and authorial intent. Though various fathers at times offer interpretations or applications of passages that may be illuminating and insightful, as some of our examples will show, various church fathers were so set upon finding Christ in the Old Testament that they were prone to misinterpret passages simply for the sake of finding Jesus hidden within the pages of the Bible—a practice of which no Latter-day Saint should be found guilty.

PEOPLE DEEMED CHRISTOCENTRIC BY PATRISTIC SOURCES

The church fathers saw nearly every faithful figure in the Hebrew Bible as a type of the Savior. Indeed, the number of examples that could be cited here to establish this fact is voluminous. One singular illustration is a fourth-century Syriac-speaking monk by the name of Aphrahat (flourished circa AD 340), who in one treatise offered a dozen detailed examples of biblical figures whose lives typified Christ's in some detail.⁹ Extensive lists like this one were commonplace in the writings of the early church.

For the sake of brevity, I have selected one example of a biblical figure commonly seen in patristic sources as a typological foreshadowing of Christ—namely the man Adam. Of him, one early twentieth-century expert on biblical typology wrote, “The earliest foreshadowing of the Lord’s death seems to be given in *the deep sleep* that God caused to fall upon Adam when He formed [or organized] Eve.”¹⁰ This statement well summarizes how the majority of early Christian authors read the Genesis account of God causing a “deep sleep” (Genesis 2:21) to come upon the man Adam.

For example, Augustine wrote, “The woman was made of a rib taken from the side of the man while he slept,” and so “that sleep of the man was [symbolic of] the death of Christ, whose side, as He hung lifeless upon the cross, was pierced with a spear.”¹¹ Elsewhere, Augustine added, “Adam’s

sleep was a mystical foreshadowing of Christ's death, and when his dead body hanging from the cross was pierced by the lance [in] his side."¹²

Augustine's contemporary, *Quodvultdeus* (flourished circa AD 430)—a man who strove at length to establish that the New Testament fulfilled the Old Testament—penned, "Since Eve had been created from the side of the sleeping Adam, . . . from the side of Christ hanging on the cross the church . . . must be created. In fact the church is 'the woman.'"¹³

Drawing on the teachings of the Apostle Paul (see I Corinthians 15:45), Jerome (circa AD 347–420) stated, "We have heard about the first Adam [and how he was injured in his side in order to produce Eve]; let us come now to the second Adam and see how the church is made from his side. The side of the Lord Savior as he hung on the cross is pierced with a lance."¹⁴

Similarly, Tertullian of Carthage (circa AD 155–225) taught, "For as Adam was a figure of Christ, Adam's sleep shadowed out the death of Christ, who was to sleep a mortal slumber, that from the wound inflicted on His side might, in like manner (as Eve was formed), be typified the church, the true mother of the living."¹⁵

Each of these fathers argued that the symbolic message in the "deep sleep" that came upon Adam and the creation of Eve through that sleep is that Christ's death on the cross is the event that gave birth to his Church. In other words, in the eyes of the early Church, had Jesus not died, Christianity would not exist. Indeed, its teachings and rites would be purposeless and powerless aside from Christ's sacrifice. Thus his death gave life to the Church. Or, as one Latter-day Saint scholar noted, "The taking of Eve from Adam's side also bears a resemblance to the relationship between the church and the Son of God, who permitted himself to become weak that others of his body (the Church) might have strength."¹⁶

WATER FROM THE ROCK

Some years after the Exodus from Egypt, the children of Israel found themselves in Kadesh, in the desert of Zin in the extreme south of Canaan. During their time there, the people began to complain against Moses and Aaron because "there was no water for the people to drink" (Exodus 17:1; see also Numbers 20:2). In response to the developing rebellion, Moses and Aaron entered the Tabernacle to pray for guidance. In answer to their pleadings, the Lord appeared to them (see

Numbers 20:6). He commanded Moses to perform a miracle on behalf of the people by causing water to flow from a rock, thereby quenching Israel's thirst and increasing their faith in him. Thus, in Numbers 20:11, we read: "And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also."

Millennia later, the Apostle Paul referred to this event with Christological application. He wrote, "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers . . . did . . . drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:1, 4). While Paul clearly supports a Christocentric reading of the passage, the church fathers took the symbolism one step further than Paul did and offered a twist that may be surprising to many readers. Of this verse Augustine wrote, "The rock was Christ in sign. . . . The rock was smitten twice with a rod; the double smiting signified the two wooden beams of the cross."¹⁷ Elsewhere Augustine penned this about the miracle recorded in Numbers 20:11: "'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.' And our thirst is quenched from the rock in the wilderness: for 'the Rock was Christ,' and it was smitten with a rod that the water might flow. But that it might flow, the rock was smitten twice: because there are two beams of the cross. All these things, then, which were done in a figure, are made manifest to us."¹⁸

Like Augustine, Caesarius of Arles (circa AD 470–542) also saw a foreshadowing of Jesus's crucifixion in Moses's double smiting of the rock. He wrote: "'Therefore Moses struck the rock twice with his staff.' What does this mean, brethren? . . . The rock was struck a second time because two trees were lifted up for the gibbet of the cross: the one stretched out Christ's sacred hands, the other spread out his sinless body from head to foot."¹⁹

Though less specific, John of Damascus (circa AD 650–750) clearly saw the same symbolic message in the Mosaic miracle. He wrote that the "precious Cross" of Christ was symbolized by "the rock [rent] and pouring forth streams of water."²⁰

Around the same time that Augustine began serving as bishop of Hippo, John Chrysostom (circa AD 347–407) wrote, "Instead of water

from a rock, [we have received the] blood from His side; instead of Moses' or Aaron's rod, the Cross."²¹

Thus, for early Christians, this miracle of Moses served to remind readers of the staff that pierced Christ's side and the blood and water that flowed therefrom (see John 19:34). To the fathers of the church, the rock was more than just Christ, as Paul explained it. Rather, it was "Jesus Christ, *and* him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2; emphasis added).²² Though the water flowing from the rock quenched Israel's physical thirst, it foreshadowed the reality that Jesus's atoning sacrifice would quench covenant Israel's spiritual thirst. As one modern typologist noted, "The smitten rock was the source of the rivers of water; just as the death of Christ must precede the descent of the Holy Spirit."²³

THE GATHERING OF ISRAEL

In the thirty-third chapter of Deuteronomy, we find a secondary account of Jacob's blessings pronounced upon the twelve tribes of Israel (see also Genesis 48–49). In Moses's Deuteronomic version of Jacob's blessing on Joseph, we read, "His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth" (Deuteronomy 33:17).

At face value, this passage appears to be speaking of the promised glory and power that will come to Joseph and his descendants (Ephraim and Manasseh). Though this passage is traditionally seen by commentators as highlighting the military strength of Ephraim and Manasseh,²⁴ the church fathers saw this as a promise of spiritual strength rather than temporal power. According to patristic sources, the glory of Joseph and his descendants was to be as the glory of Christ, and because Christ was in their glory or countenance, they would (on behalf of Christ) be capable of moving thousands toward Zion and eventually toward the Savior.

Tertullian of Carthage saw a clear reference to Jesus's Crucifixion in the blessing Jacob pronounced upon Joseph. Tertullian wrote:

For Joseph is withal blest by his father after this form: "His glory (is that) of a bull; his horns, the horns of an unicorn; on them shall he toss nations alike unto the very extremity of the earth." Of course no one-horned rhinoceros was there pointed to, nor any two-horned minotaur. But Christ was therein signified:

“bull,” by reason of each of His two characters,—to some fierce, as Judge; to others gentle, as Saviour; whose “horns” were to be the extremities of the *cross*. For even in a ship’s yard—which is part of a *cross*—this is the name by which the extremities are called; while the central pole of the mast is a “unicorn.” By this power, in fact, of the cross, and in this manner horned, He does now, on the one hand, “toss” universal nations through *faith*, wafting them away from earth to heaven; and will one day, on the other, “toss” them through *judgment*, casting them down from heaven to earth.²⁵

Tertullian saw Jacob’s choice of words to his chosen son, Joseph, as prophetic rather than coincidental. It was his belief that Jacob was conveying to Joseph—either knowingly or under the influence of the Holy Spirit—the promise that he and his descendants would serve the world as powerful reminders and examples of Christ. Their lives of sacrifice and service would provoke conversion and change in the lives of those to whom they bore witness.

DANIEL’S PROPHECY

Latter-day Saints are wont to quote a passage from the second chapter of Daniel as a foreshadowing of the Restoration of the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.²⁶ The germane verse reads, “Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces” (Daniel 2:34).²⁷

While early Christian interpretations of this verse are not necessarily contradictory with Latter-day Saint views, patristic sources do tend to put a more Christocentric spin on the passage than do most Latter-day Saint exegetes. For example, Augustine interpreted Daniel’s prophecy as follows:

The prophet [Daniel] wishes that by the mountain should be understood the Jewish kingdom. But the kingdom of the Jews had not filled the whole face of the earth. The stone was cut out from thence, because from thence was the Lord born on His advent among men. And wherefore without hands? Because without the cooperation of [a mortal] man did the Virgin [Mary] bear Christ. Now then was that stone cut out without hands before the eyes

of the Jews; but it was humble. Not without reason; because not yet had the stone increased and filled the whole earth: that He showed in His kingdom, which is the Church, with which He has filled the whole face of the earth. Because then it had not yet increased, they stumbled at Him as at a stone. . . . At first they fell upon Him lowly: as the lofty One He shall come upon them; but that He may grind them to powder when He comes in His exaltation, He first broke them in His lowliness. They stumbled at Him, and were broken; they were not ground, but broken: He will come exalted and will grind them.²⁸

Augustine's fourth-century interpretation of Daniel is curious, though not unique when compared with the writings of other church fathers.

Like Augustine, Irenaeus saw Daniel's prophecy as pertaining to Christ and his manner of birth. He wrote: "Daniel, foreseeing His advent, said that a stone, cut out without hands, came into this world. For this is what 'without hands' means, that His coming into this world was not by the operation of human hands, that is, of those men who are accustomed to stone-cutting; that is, Joseph taking no part with regard to it, but Mary alone co-operating with the pre-arranged 'plan.' For this stone from the earth derives existence from . . . God. . . . So, then, we understand that His advent in human nature was not by the will of a man, but by the will of God."²⁹

Similarly, Jerome wrote, "He [Christ] is foretold to be 'a stone cut out of the mountain without hands,' a figure by which the prophet [Daniel] signifies that He is to be born . . . of a virgin."³⁰ Thus the fathers of the church commonly saw Daniel's prophecy as a reference to the virgin birth rather than the Restoration of the gospel.³¹

MOSES'S OUTSTRETCHED ARMS

In the seventeenth chapter of the book of Exodus is recorded the famed story of Joshua's fight against the Amalekites. The salient portion of the account reads as follows:

The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to

fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.”

So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword. (New International Version, Exodus 17:8–13)

Moses's outstretched or upraised arms—traditionally implying his communion with God on behalf of Joshua and his soldiers—appears to have given Israel's army confidence to fight against her enemies. Yet patristic sources see more in this episode than simple manifest faith in the power of prayer or, as Latter-day Saints traditionally read the passage, an obligation on the part of the Saints to uphold and sustain their prophets.³² For example, Cyprian of Carthage (circa AD 200–258) interpreted this passage as follows: “In Exodus, when Moses, for the overthrow of Amalek, who bore the type of the devil, raised up his open hands in the sign . . . of the cross, and could not conquer his adversary unless when he had stedfastly persevered in the sign with hands continually lifted up.”³³

Archelaus (flourished circa AD 278), bishop of Carchar in Mesopotamia, drew a typological parallel between Moses and Christ. He wrote: “Moses . . . stretched forth his hands and fought against Amalek; and . . . the Lord Jesus, when we were assailed and were perishing by the violence of that erring spirit who works now in the just, stretched forth His hands upon the cross, and gave us salvation.”³⁴

In passing, Augustine noted the Christological typology:

There are, however, some who think themselves capable of being cleansed by their own righteousness, so as to contemplate God, and to dwell in God; whom their very pride itself stains above all others. For there is no sin to which the divine law is more opposed, and over which that proudest of spirits, who is a mediator to things below, but a barrier against things above, receives a

greater right of mastery: unless either his secret snares be avoided by going another way, or if he rage openly by means of a sinful people (which Amalek, being interpreted, means), and forbid by fighting the passage to the land of promise, he be overcome by the cross of the Lord, which is prefigured by the holding out of the hands of Moses.³⁵

Elsewhere, Augustine was more to the point when he penned, “Amalek’s resistance [was] subdued by the sign of the Cross.”³⁶

John Chrysostom wrote the following regarding the symbolic message of this Exodus passage: “See how the type was ‘given by Moses,’ but the ‘Truth came by Jesus Christ’ (Exodus 17:12). Again, when the Amalekites warred in Mount Sinai, the hands of Moses were supported, being stayed up by Aaron and Hur standing on either side of him (Exodus 17:12); but when Christ came, He of Himself stretched forth His Hands upon the Cross. Hast thou observed how the type ‘was given,’ but ‘the Truth came’?”³⁷

Finally, one of the Cappadocian fathers, Gregory of Nazianzus (circa AD 329–90), noted, “Moses is to conquer him by stretching out his hands upon the mount, in order that the cross, thus typified and prefigured, may prevail.”³⁸

Though the common message in the episode is traditionally interpreted by Latter-day Saints to be our obligation to sustain the Lord’s prophets as they align themselves with God’s will, for early Christians the message was more Christocentric. They saw this narrative as teaching the importance of faith in the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. For them, faith centered in that act—and in Christ’s mediating role—made it possible to successfully conquer all of our enemies and overcome all of our trials.

CONCLUSION

President Boyd K. Packer is known to consistently ask a question at the conclusion of a talk, lesson, or presentation: “Therefore, what?”³⁹—or, in the vernacular of our day, “So what?” In other words, what should the impact of what I have learned be on my life, mission, ministry, or stewardship? Elder Jeffrey R. Holland noted, “Sermons and exhortations [are of] no avail if the actual lives of [Christ’s] disciples [do] not change.”⁴⁰

A number of questions might be asked regarding the way the early church read the Old Testament. Chief among those questions is this: *Is their reading of the Hebrew Bible a legitimate approach to scripture?* Not all will agree on how to answer this question. For example, one colleague of mine conveyed to me his feelings about how the church fathers read the Old Testament in these words: “Symbolism as a genre of biblical studies is not typically recognized as a genuine academic enterprise. Therefore, early Christian writers . . . have nothing of value to tell us about the Old Testament as a witness for Christ.” While I do not agree with this colleague that the fathers of the church “have nothing of value to tell us about the Old Testament as a witness for Christ,” I must nevertheless admit that I find some of their symbolic readings of certain passages to be fanciful at best. Thus, it is the opinion of this author that they sometimes have helpful insights, but their exegesis is, at other times, quite forced. Of course, we must remember that they did not have the advantage we enjoy of contemporary prophetic guidance. Thus, we acknowledge that they did their best with what they had. However, as already noted, Latter-day Saints must be cautious that they do not force a symbolic reading of scriptural passages when the original author did not intend such a reading.

I suppose it is somewhat ironic that while one of my colleagues indicated that he wholesale rejected the symbolic approach of the fathers, another colleague described his feelings to me in these words: “I was quite touched and humbled, when I first began to read the fathers of the church, to realize how Justin Martyr, as an example, was able to see and interpret types of Christ in even the most obscure references. I use the word ‘humbled’ because I, for one, don’t think I read the scriptures with such a propensity to seek out the Savior in every word, and yet I would so like to learn to read scripture with an attitude akin to that of Justin.”

Which of these two approaches is legitimate? The reader may form his or her own opinion. Perhaps neither is wrong, as each may have different needs from, or even agendas for, their reading of scripture. One commentary advised: “In reading any of the standard works of the Church it is well to ascertain the literal meaning of the passage read first, and the lesson it was intended to convey to those to whom it was first communicated. And then it might be well to ask, What lesson does it convey to my time and age? To my nation? My community? My family? Or to myself?”⁴¹

In the end, we cannot say (on behalf of God) whether the innately Christocentric reading of the Old Testament by those of the early church was correct or flawed. Some have argued strongly that it was eisegetical rather than exegetical. Yet in light of Nephi's declaration—"I did liken *all* scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning" (1 Nephi 19:23; emphasis added)—who is to say that the fathers were wrong in their approach, though unquestionably some were overzealous in their practice? As we noted at the beginning of this article, Nephi claimed that "*all things . . . are the typifying*" of Christ (2 Nephi 11:4; emphasis added), and Moses recorded that "*all things are created and made to bear record*" of the Messiah (Moses 6:63; emphasis added). One certainly must acknowledge that a Christocentric approach to the Old Testament, as attempted by many of the church fathers, finds strong support in such prophetic utterances. And, I suppose, one would be hard-pressed to make an argument that these scriptural declarations do not mean exactly what they say.

NOTES

1. Of this verse, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland noted, "Nephi testified that 'all things . . . are the typifying of [Christ].' The literary evidence of that is seen throughout the holy scriptures" (*Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997], 159).

2. Ada R. Habershon, *Study of the Types* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1974), 35.

3. John of Damascus, "Exposition of the Orthodox Faith," book IV, chapter XI, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—Second Series*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), volume 9, part 2, 80–81; emphasis in the original.

4. Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," book 4, chapter 26, paragraph 1, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 1:496.

5. See Augustine, "On the Spirit and the Letter," chapter 27, in Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—First Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 5:95; see also Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 100.

6. *Eisegesis* is reading into a scriptural text what one believes, regardless of context or the intent of the original author who penned the passage being interpreted. *Exegesis* is seeking to understand what the author who penned the scriptural text being interpreted intended, aside from the modern reader's particular preconceived

notions or beliefs. It is the attempt to let the text speak for itself rather than reading into the scriptural text what one already believes. Thanks to Alexander the Great's fourth-century BC conquering of the Persian Empire, the Egyptian "Alexandrian School," as it would become known, interpreted scripture allegorically. Following the Jewish thinker Philo, Christian Alexandrians (like Clement) held that scripture traditionally had a minimum of two levels of meaning: the literal meaning and the allegorical or symbolic meaning. Origen, Clement's successor, believed that scripture had three levels—the literal, the moral, and the spiritual. In the opinion of the Alexandrian School, only through the allegorical method could one ascertain the true hidden meaning that God had imbedded in the scriptures. In the eyes of its critics, one of the weaknesses of the approach of the Alexandrian School was that it tended to be arbitrary and subjective. What principle of exegesis guided or governed the Alexandrian interpretation of scripture? "Faith in Christ, in his person and in his work, is the key to scripture" (Robert M. Grant with David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, second ed., rev. and enlarged [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984], 56). As would be expected, some criticized the Alexandrians for reading into the Bible Christian beliefs, thereby practicing eisegesis rather than exegesis. But Origen of Alexandria responded to the critics by arguing that the Alexandrian School was not reading these things into the Bible. Rather, God inspired the original writers of each biblical passage to include the higher or symbolic meaning in the texts they wrote (William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* [Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1993], 35; Grant with Tracy, *A Short History*, 66).

In response to the Alexandrian School and its approach, a new school of biblical exegesis developed, known as the Antiochene School (originating in Antioch, Syria). Initially it generally rejected the symbolic or allegorical approach to scripture, preferring instead to teach that scripture had one meaning—that which was conveyed by the grammar and words. Nothing was hidden behind the obvious literal meaning of the words. The Antiochene School's greatest interpreter, Theodore of Mopsuestia, argued that Christians were inappropriately reading the Old Testament through Christian lenses, *per se*. Thus, the Antiochene School rejected the allegorical approach to scripture, insisting that a passage's historical sense was what one should seek to understand. Having said that, over time the Antiochenes began to accept typology as a legitimately present form of scriptural symbolism, though they remained uncomfortable with an allegorical approach. So the Antiochene School was not *entirely* antisymbolism.

Today the Antiochene School's influence is more evident in contemporary Christian exegesis than is the Alexandrian School's. However, not all commentators feel that the triumph of the Antiochene approach was necessarily a victory for Christianity.

7. As to the overarching consistency among the fathers of the early church in interpreting the Old Testament in a Christological manner, one source notes, "While there were definite differences among the fathers regarding their understanding of the literal-historical sense of Scripture, as well as the typological and allegorical, there existed a general consensus that Scripture should be interpreted

christologically” (David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992], 157). One scholar noted that from the third through the sixteenth centuries, the symbolic (i.e., allegorical and typological) reading of the Old Testament was the primary approach used in Christianity (Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 70).

8. I have intentionally avoided some of the more common symbols Latter-day Saints would likely see as Christocentric, such as Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac or the Passover meal of Exodus chapter 12. Like Latter-day Saints, most early Christian fathers also saw these as symbolic of Jesus’s Atonement. However, the focus of this paper will be on passages of scripture which many Christians would not recognize as having a Christocentric message.

9. See Aphrahat, “Select Demonstrations: Demonstration XXI—Of Persecution,” vv. 9–20, in Schaff and Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—Second Series*, 13:395–400. Aphrahat’s list of typologically significant figures includes Joseph of Egypt, Moses, Joshua, Jephthah, David, Elijah, Elisha, Hezekiah, Josiah, Daniel, Hananiah, and Mordecai.

10. Habershon, *Study of the Types*, 43–44.

11. Augustine, *City of God*, book 22, chapter 17, in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—First Series*, 2:496.

12. Augustine, *City of God*, 22:17, in Andrew Louth, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament I—Genesis 1–11* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 70.

13. Quodvultdeus, “Book of Promises and Predictions of God” 1:3, in Louth, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 71.

14. Jerome, “Homilies,” 66, in Louth, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 70. One fifth century bishop wrote: “Since Eve had been created from the side of the sleeping Adam, . . . from the side of Christ hanging on the cross the church . . . must be created. In fact the church is ‘the woman.’” See Quodvultdeus, “Book of Promises and Predictions of God” 1:3, in Louth, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 71.

15. Tertullian, “A Treatise on the Soul,” in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:222.

16. Roger R. Keller, “Adam: As Understood by Four Men Who Shaped Western Christianity,” in Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, eds., *The Man Adam* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 177.

17. Augustine, “On the Gospel of St. John,” tractate 26:12, in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—First Series*, 7:172.

18. Augustine, “On the Gospel of St. John,” tractate 28:9, in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—First Series*, 7:182.

19. Caesarius of Arles, “Sermon” 103:3, cited in Joseph T. Lienhard, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 239.

20. See John of Damascus, “Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,” book IV, chapter XI, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—Second Series*, 9:80–81.

21. John Chrysostom, "Homilies on Second Corinthians," Homily 11:18, in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—First Series*, 12:333.

22. This is not to say that Paul missed the point of the type or its relationship to the cross. The only point I wish to make here is that Paul did not highlight the cross-Atonement symbolism, whereas the church fathers traditionally did.

23. Habershon, *Study of the Types*, 43.

24. See, for example, J. A. Thompson, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 314; Ian Cairns, *International Theological Commentary: Deuteronomy—Word and Presence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 298.

25. Tertullian, "An Answer to the Jews," in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:165. Elsewhere, Tertullian made a similar comment, noting that "Joseph [of Egypt] . . . was a type of Christ. . . . He is blessed by his father in these words: 'His glory is that of a bullock; his horns are the horns of a unicorn; with them shall he push the nations to the very ends of the earth,'—he was not, of course, designated as a mere unicorn with its one horn, or a minotaur with two; but Christ was indicated in him—a bullock . . . whose horns were the extremities of His cross. For of the antenna, which is a part of a cross, the ends are called *horns*; while the midway stake of the whole frame is the *unicorn*. By this virtue, then, of His cross, and in this manner 'horned,' He is both now pushing all nations through faith, bearing them away from earth to heaven; and will then push them through judgment, casting them down from heaven to earth" ("Against Marcion," in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:336). Justin Martyr's reading of this verse is almost identical to Tertullian's ("Dialogue with Trypho," in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:245). Justin and Tertullian's symbolic approach to this Deuteronomic passage is somewhat challenged by the fact that the Hebrew does not read "unicorn," as the King James translates it. Rather, "wild ox" would be a more accurate rendering. Thus, the image of a singular unicorn horn rising up as the vertical sake of a cross is lost when the passage is accurately translated, and Justin and Tertullian's suggested meaning of the passage appears to be without support. On the other hand, the overarching message they draw from the imagery is that Joseph's descendants will act as representatives of Christ, pushing thousands towards Zion and her God. In this regard, though the symbolism of the cross is weak, the metaphor of an ox and a bullock using their horns (i.e., power) to move an object along a desired path (as a representation of what Joseph's descendants were called to do as representatives of their God) seems harmonious with the general intention of the passage.

26. While Latter-day Saints are not necessarily unique in their interpretation of most of the passages examined in this paper, this particular verse is an exception. Non-Latter-day Saint exegetes are far from united on the meaning of Daniel's words cited here. Latter-day Saints, on the other hand, consistently interpret Daniel 2:34 as having prophetic reference to the Restoration of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For that reason I have chosen to highlight the seeming distinction between Latter-day Saint and early Christian readings of this verse.

27. Verse 45 of this same chapter reads, "Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the

brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.”

28. Augustine, “On The Gospel of St. John,” tractate 4:4, in Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene—First Series*, 7:26.

29. Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” book 3, chapter 21:7, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:453.

30. Jerome, “Letter 22:19,” in Schaff and Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—Second Series*, 6:29.

31. The reader may wonder how these early Christian interpretations square with the traditional Latter-day Saint view that the “stone” is the restored gospel of Jesus Christ “rolling forth” to “consume” or convert the earth. See, for example, Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 130–31; Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 293–94; Ezra Taft Benson, *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), 168; Neal A. Maxwell, *Things As They Really Are* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 46. These two alternate interpretations are not as much at odds as one might think. First of all, note that though the early Christian church *did* fall into apostasy, the message that Jesus is the Christ *has* rolled forth consuming much of the earth—and continues to do so. Additionally, we must remember that the word “gospel” means literally “good news.” The gospel of Jesus Christ is not only founded upon Christ, but Christ is himself the “good news” or “gospel” of which we testify to the world. And he is, after all, the “Stone of Israel.” Thus, the two interpretations of Daniel’s words are hardly contradictory. Though the emphasis may appear to be slightly different, the meaning is basically the same—particularly since the restored gospel is only the vehicle which brings us to Christ. Ultimately, however, Christ is the message, and it is Christ that must consume the world, entering into the hearts of all mankind (see Proverbs 2:10), causing every knee to bow and every tongue to confess that Jesus is the Christ (see Philippians 2:10–11).

32. See, for example, M. Russell Ballard, *Counseling with Our Councils: Learning to Minister Together in the Church and in the Family* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 123; Harold B. Lee, *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), 536; Roy W. Doxey, *The Doctrine and Covenants Speaks* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), 2: 312–13; Brett P. Thomas, “The Weak Things of the World,” in *The Heavens Are Open: The 1992 Sperry Symposium on the Doctrine and Covenants and Church History*, ed. Byron R. Merrill and others (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 310–11.

33. Cyprian, “The Treatises of Cyprian,” treatise 11:8, in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 5:501.

34. Archelaus, “Disputation with Manes,” in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 6:220.

35. Augustine, “On the Trinity,” in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—First Series*, 3:79–80.

36. Augustine, “On the Psalms,” Psalm 44:8, in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—First Series*, 8:142.

37. John Chrysostom, “Homilies on St. John,” Homily 14:4, in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—First Series*, 14:50.

38. Gregory of Nazianzus, “In Defense of His Flight to Pontus,” Oration 2:88, in Schaff and Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—Second Series*, 7:222.

39. See Jeffrey R. Holland, “Therefore, What?” Twenty-fourth annual Church Educational System religious educators conference—CES conference on the New Testament, Provo, Utah, August 8, 2000, 4–5.

40. Holland, “Therefore, What?” 4–5.

41. George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1955–61), 1:206.