

He Makes Her Desert Like the Garden of YHWH

*A Typological Understanding of the
Birth of Isaac as Resurrection from
Death*

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The discipline of biblical theology makes as its object the intended meaning of the biblical authors as revealed in the canon of Scripture. The contents of the Bible were written down by inspired human authors (2 Pet 1:21) in many portions and at different times (Heb 1:1). As a result, there is an observable progressive nature in biblical revelation that is prospective and anticipatory according to the interpretation of biblical texts by the biblical authors themselves, specifically shaped, as James Hamilton argues, by the promise of a serpent-crushing seed to come (Gen 3:15), which culminates in the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ as that seed in resurrection from death. As the anticipatory trajectory of the Bible itself is forward-looking, it is best in keeping with the intent of the biblical authors to observe and interpret what they wrote from the beginning of the canon forward rather than reading backwards as Richard Hays as proposed or taking up a retrospective hermeneutical position as G. K. Beale and Gentry and Wellum have argued. While Bible interpreters today

surely inhabit a position in salvation history from which we look backwards at the mighty works of the Lord, including the cross and resurrection, the validity of our interpretive arguments is best supported by reading and interpreting the prophetic writings and the intended typologies therein as they were given and by maintaining a precise distinction between meaning, implication, and significance when doing so.

This dissertation argues that the birth of Isaac from Sarah's barren womb typifies resurrection from death. This typology is author-intended, prospective, and culminates in salvation history in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, resurrection from death as typified by Isaac's birth is the anticipated means by which YHWH will accomplish his promised destruction of the serpent (Gen 3:15) and restoration to life in his presence. To defend this thesis, I argue that Moses inaugurates death and resurrection typology in the Eden narrative (Gen 2:4–3:24) with the disinheritance of Adam and Eve from the garden alongside the anticipation of return and renewed access to the tree of life through the promised seed (Gen 3:15). This promised return to Eden as resurrection from death is developed both in Deuteronomy's expectation of exile and return for the people of Israel (Deut 30–31) and in Sarah's veiled reference to Eden regarding YHWH's promise of restored fertility (Gen 18:12). Additionally, textual indications in the accounts of Abraham's encounter with Abimelech (Gen 20) and the barrenness of Rebekah (25:21) and Rachel (Gen 29:31) together with the macro-literary structure of Genesis further support the connection between barrenness and death and between birth and resurrection in the book of Genesis. Therefore, in the Pentateuch Moses inaugurates an anticipatory typology involving the metaphorical intersection of restoration from exile, birth from barrenness, and resurrection from death.

The interpretive perspectives of both the prophet Isaiah and the author of Hebrews, among several other later biblical authors, further join the barrenness of Sarah to the desolation of exile and the birth of Isaac to restoration from exile to the fertility of Eden (Isa 51:1–3). According to the authors of the New Testament, this typology culminates in both the resurrection of Christ from the dead and the Nazirite forerunner born from barrenness who identifies and makes way for the Christ. This dissertation seeks to demonstrate the prospective nature of anticipatory typological structures and the hermeneutical

primacy of inner-biblical interpretation based on authorial intent in biblical theology. Decades ago, E. D. Hirsch argued that validity in interpretation is tied inextricably to authorial intent and that to the degree that interpreter and author share a “type,” or common symbolic imagination, or worldview, communication of intended meaning is successful. My research and exegetical demonstration are predicated upon the hermeneutical necessity of the biblical interpreter gaining a shared worldview perspective and symbology with the biblical authors by engaging in close, literary reading of the biblical texts in their canonical positions and according to the anticipatory typological trajectories intended by the inspired authors. Thus, I seek to bring greater precision to the hermeneutical terminology employed in the discipline of biblical theology and exemplify the exegetical posture of the biblical authors themselves in interpretation.

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