

SYMBOLS, NUMBERS, & TYPES

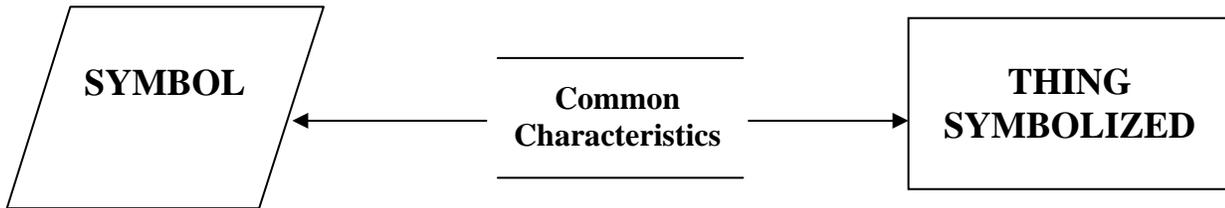
“The Symbolic Principle”

Introduction-

Definition

The principle by which a verse or passage of Scripture containing symbolic elements may be better understood by properly interpreting those symbols.

Symbolism is the use of one thing to stand for another. Often, the symbol is essentially different from the thing symbolized. The link is formed by the common characteristics of both.



Rom 1:19-20

19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: KJV

God teaches about the spiritual realm through the natural realm. The language of creation becomes the language of symbol, which becomes the language of redemption.

There are seven basic categories of symbols in Scripture: A) objects, B) creatures, C) actions, D) numbers, E) names, F) colors, and G) directions

I. Demonstration

A. Objects

Ps 18:2

The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.

1 Cor 10:4

And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and **that Rock was Christ**. KJV

Matt 16:18

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and **upon this rock** I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. KJV

[What rock is Jesus speaking about?]

B. Creatures

Lamb:

John 1:29

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, **Behold the Lamb of God**, which taketh away the sin of the world. KJV

1 Cor 5:7

Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even **Christ our passover** is sacrificed for us: KJV

Ex 12:3, 7

3 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house:

7 And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. KJV

What were the common characteristics between Jesus and the lamb?

Ex 12:5

Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: KJV

Lion:

Rev 5:5

And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. KJV

Gen 49:9-10

9 Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?

10 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. KJV

C. Actions

Matt 10:5-6, 14-15

5 These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:

6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

14 And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, **shake off the dust of your feet**.

15 Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city. KJV

‘Chapter Two - Jews & Gentiles in "The Land"

But "outside the land" everything was darkness and death. The very dust of a heathen country was unclean, and it defiled by contact. It was regarded like a grave, or like the putrescence of death. If a spot of heathen dust had touched an offering, it must at once be burnt. More than that, if by mischance any heathen dust had been brought into Palestine, it did not and could not mingle with that of "the land," but remained to the end what it had been--unclean, defiled, and defiling everything to which it adhered. This will cast light upon the meaning conveyed by the symbolical directions of our Lord to His disciples (Matt 10:14), when He sent them forth to mark out the boundary lines of the true Israel--"the kingdom of heaven," that was at hand: "Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet." In other words, they were not only to leave such a city or household, but it was to be considered and treated as if it were heathen, just as in the similar case mentioned in Matt 18:17. All contact with such must be avoided, all trace of it shaken off,¹

Barnes' Notes-

[Shake off the dust of your feet] The Jews taught uniformly that the dust of the Gentiles was impure, and was to be shaken off. To shake off the dust from the feet, therefore, was a significant act, denoting that they regarded them as impure, profane, and paganish, and that they declined any further connection with them.

Acts 13:50-51 NIV

50 But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.

51 **So they shook the dust from their feet** in protest against them and went to Iconium.

D. Numbers

Gen 14:4 KJV

Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

Thirteen is the number of rebellion.

Gen 17:25

And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. KJV

E. Names

1 Sam 25:25

Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. KJV

Nabal means foolish.

¹ from *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, Alfred Edersheim, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1999 by BibleSoft

Matt 1:21

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. KJV

Brown-Driver-Briggs' definition

Joshua or Jehoshua = "Jehovah (Yahweh) is salvation"

F. Colors

Rev 7:14

And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and **made them white in the blood of the Lamb.** KJV

Rev 19:8

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. KJV

Isa 1:18 KJV

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

White symbolizes righteousness.

G. Directions

Gen 12:10

And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land. KJV

Gen 13:1

And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. KJV

In Scripture, one tends to go down to Egypt and up to Jerusalem. Left and right also have significance.

Matt 25:32-33

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. KJV

II. Qualification

A. The first step in using the Symbolic Principle is to determine what parts of the verse or passage are to be interpreted symbolically.

1. If the language makes no literal sense, then it must be interpreted as having symbolic sense.

Dan 7:2-4

2 Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea.

3 And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another.

4 The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it. KJV

2. If it does have literal sense and the Scripture refers to symbolic components within it, then those components may be interpreted symbolically.

John 1:14

And the Word (Christ) became flesh (human, incarnate) and tabernacled (fixed His tent of flesh, lived awhile) among us; and we [actually] saw His glory (His honor, His majesty), such glory as an only begotten son receives from his father, full of grace (favor, loving-kindness) and truth. [Isa 40:5.] AMP

The tabernacle was a literal structure and the directions for building it were literally followed. But when John tells us that Jesus tabernacled among us, we understand that the whole structure was symbolic of Jesus.

- B. The interpreter must recognize the three fundamental elements of symbolism:
 1. The significance of a symbol is based on the real qualities of that which is used as a symbol.
 2. A symbol is meant to represent something essentially different from itself.
 3. The link between the symbol and that which is symbolized is the characteristics common to both. (One can't say that Jesus had curly hair because He is the Lamb of God.)
- C. This principle must be used in constant conjunction with the context group of principles, for they will help in interpreting the symbol.
- D. The study of the symbol must be based on the original language (e.g. there are several Hebrew words translated "lion" in Scripture and they have different nuances).
- E. The interpreter must keep in mind that something may be used to symbolize more than one thing (e.g. Jesus is the Lion of Judah, the devil is a roaring lion).
- F. If Scripture does not give a direct interpretation of the symbol (Rev 1:20 "the seven candlesticks are the seven churches), then the context must be viewed to glean the nature of what the symbol is representing.

III. Exercise – the Plants of Israel²

A. The Vine

Ps 80:8-11

8 Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.

9 Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land.

10 The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars.

11 She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river. KJV

The above verses give a synopsis of Israel's national history. It was birthed when it came out of Egypt.

Deut 26:5

And thou shalt speak and say before the LORD thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous: KJV

How does the vine represent human government?

- It grows and spreads horizontally.
- It requires artificial support.
- It requires pruning and restraint.
- It tends to expand at the expense of others.

Isa 5:7

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry. KJV

Judgment is a governmental function and righteousness exalts a nation. And we all know how oppressive governments can be!

Ezek 19:10-11

10 Thy mother is like a vine in thy blood, planted by the waters: she was fruitful and full of branches by reason of many waters.

11 **And she had strong rods for the sceptres of them that bare rule**, and her stature was exalted among the thick branches, and she appeared in her height with the multitude of her branches. KJV

It was the vine that provided strong rods for the sceptres!

² I owe these insights to “Three Trees and Israel’s History”, Part II in *Time and Eternity*, vol. 6 of *The Doorway Paper Series* by Arthur C. Custance available from Zondervan.

Matt 21:33-43

33 Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:

34 And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.

37 But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.

38 But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

39 And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.

40 When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?

41 They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

43 Therefore say I unto you, **The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.** KJV

A couple of points of interest: they had recognized the heir and killed him, which means that the national leaders of Israel knew who they were handing over. National Israel's monopoly on the kingdom of God was going to be given to other national governments.

John 15:5-8 KJV

5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

The amount of authority we wield in the Kingdom of God (vs. 7) is dependent upon us remaining in the Vine (vs. 5).

B. The Olive Tree

Gen 8:11

And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth. KJV

The first occurrence of the olive (tree) in Scripture is in the beak of the dove. The leaf of the anointing tree is found in the mouth of the most recognizable symbol for the Holy Spirit.

Zech 4:11-14

11 Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof?

12 And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves?

13 And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord.

14 Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the LORD of the whole earth. KJV

The olive tree stands for the anointing and thus the spiritual life of Israel.

Ps 52:8

But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever. KJV

The vine was the house of Israel. Olive trees are in the house of the Lord!

Jer 11:15-16

15 What hath my beloved to do **in mine house**, seeing she hath wrought lewdness with many, and the holy flesh is passed from thee? when thou doest evil, then thou rejoicest.

16 The LORD called thy name, **A green olive tree**, fair, and of goodly fruit: with the noise of a great tumult he hath kindled fire upon it, and **the branches of it are broken**. KJV

Because they rejoiced in doing evil in the house of the Lord, the branches of the olive tree were broken off. Notice that it was a branch, not the whole tree, for God always has a spiritual remnant.

Rom 11:1-5

1 I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

2 God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying,

3 Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.

- 4 But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.
- 5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. KJV

Rom 11:16-27

- 16 For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.
- 17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;
- 18 Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.
- 19 Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.
- 20 Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:
- 21 For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.
- 22 Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.
- 23 And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.
- 24 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?
- 25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.
- 26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:
- 27 For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. KJV

Israel's spiritual life is going to be restored because the Lord is going to take away their sins.

C. The Fig Tree

Gen 3:7

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. KJV

After eating the forbidden fruit, sewing fig leaves together is man's first religious act! Now, religion has two aspects. Purely bad religion is simply man made forms of worship. But the way we express our right worship of God can rightly be called religion. Religion arises out of spirituality (one way or another), but religion can not give birth to spirituality.

James 3:12

Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. KJV

The fig tree represents Israel's religious life.

Judg 9:7-15

7 And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you.

8 The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us.

9 But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

10 And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us.

11 But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees?

12 Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us.

13 And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

14 Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us.

15 And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon. KJV

In this parable, three levels of correct authority were rejected.

Jer 8:13

I will surely consume them, saith the LORD: there shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and the things that I have given them shall pass away from them. KJV

Jeremiah kept telling the people that the nation would be taken in exile and the temple destroyed (vine and figs).

Hos 9:10

"When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your fathers, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree. But when they came to Baal Peor, they consecrated themselves to that shameful idol and became as vile as the thing they loved. NIV

Joel 1:7-9

7 He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white.

8 Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth.

9 The meat offering and the drink offering is cut off from the house of the LORD; the priests, the LORD's ministers, mourn. KJV

Matt 21:18-20

18 Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered.

19 And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.

20 And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away! KJV

Jesus cursed the fig tree and went where? The Temple!

Matt 21:23-27

23 And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

24 And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things.

25 The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?

26 But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet.

27 And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things. KJV

Matthew 24 follows in the flow of this context.

Matt 24:1-3

1 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple.

2 And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? KJV

Jesus explains the signs of the end times and then teaches them a new parable.

Matt 24:32-34

32 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:

33 So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.

34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. KJV

The replanting of Israel's vine was of definite prophetic import. When we see the fig tree replanted, we will know that we are at the very end. And when they are once more grafted into the olive tree, it shall be the salvation of the world.