Biblical Isotypes
Copyright, J. Michael Strawn

From Galatians 3:6-9; Genesis 15:1-6; Hebrews 11:8-12, 17-19: BIBLICAL
EPISODES: THE ISOTYPE FOR THE PRESENT.
PART 1: THE RELATION OF BIBLICAL REPRESENTATIONS TO THE PRESENT.

#1. The revealed truth, implicit in every biblical text, must bear a relation to the present; or it means nothing at all.

#2. Eternal truth is presented to the mind as a manifold of representations in the Lord's own words.

#3. This means that the meaning of every text is an *isotype*. Every house bears the same structure as the architectural design that preceded it. The design is the isotype. The isotype determines the structure.

#4. The Word of God contends that every human circumstance in the present bears the same structure as the biblical episodes that precedes them. They are the isotypes.

#5. They set the meaning for all subsequent time. Reading the Bible as history or as a catalog of moral imperatives curtails the understanding of Scripture as isotypical in all human circumstances.

#6. "Then he believed in the Lord; and He (the Lord) reckoned it to him as righteousness", Genesis 15:6.

#7. "Righteousness" was the Lord's representation of a man called Abraham. But that representation was very different from the *actuality*. Abraham was, indeed, a sinner. However, the Almighty was pleased to see Abraham as righteous; his sins being removed. And that, because Abraham had "believed in the Lord" and in His word.

#8. This necessarily means that biblical representations are fully independent of actuality: in the biblical episodes, and equally, in the present.

#9. The revealed biblical isotype, therefore, closes the gulf between the Bible and the mind of the believer.

#10. Reading scripture without the vestment of the isotype, disfavors and inhibits the formation of complete biblical faith.

From Romans 4: BIBLICAL EPISODES: THE ISOTYPE FOR THE PRESENT.
PART 2: THE ISOTYPE FORBIDS STARTING WITH THE ACTUAL.

#1. Abraham was represented by the Almighty as "righteous". "...Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness", v.3.

#2. That was not the actuality. In the actual, Abraham, like all men, was a sinner. This necessarily means that the representations of God upon anything, everything, have nothing to do with actuality. His words, promises and commands are not constrained by actuality; then or now! Abraham is the isotype of faith.

#3. "Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb" v.19.

#4. Without question, *the belief that makes us righteous has nothing to do with actuality*.

#5. One cannot claim the faith that makes one righteous, if he/she is constrained by temporal actualities.

#6. The apostle stipulated that the actualities of uncircumcision, circumcision, Jew, Gentile, put no constraint on salvation, v.9.

#7. Abraham, as must we be, was "fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform", v.21.

#8. The Red Sea was impassable, Goliath was too big, Sinai was not survivable, I am too sick to live, Jesus was expected to stay in the tomb. And so belief in God is constrained by all temporal and material actualities. One, in fact, believes that the actualities will prevail; they will obtain in this world. But, that is not the faith that makes for righteousness.

#9. The isotype of Romans 4 does not permit a distorted understanding of faith, then or now.

#10. "Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead", v 23, 24. The actualities with which we deal are subject to the representations of the Almighty. Nothing else matters.

Hebrews 11: BIBLICAL EPISODES: ISOTYPE FOR THE PRESENT.
PART 3: THE TRUE NARRATIVE CASE.

#1. Human beings possess a remarkable ability to correctly relate language to time. This is called *the true narrative case*.

#2. We stand, very much, in need of this enabling capacity. The true narrative case is a gamut of meanings.

#3. Every one of the patriarchs mentioned in Hebrews 11 had to deal with this phenomenon of representation. This is important because the true narrative case can be allowed to overrule the isotype of revelation. And it has!

#4. An example: Sarah's biology. Her true narrative case was that she was an elderly, barren woman. Such material conditions do not conduce to reproduction. However, the Lord had made a promise to Sarah that she would bear a child in fulfillment of the Lord's purpose, Genesis 18:1-16.

#5. Sarah "laughed to herself" in initial disbelief. The true narrative case had overruled belief in the word of God.

#6. But Sarah, effectively came to recognize that the true narrative case is *conditional*. "By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised", Hebrews 11:11.

#7. As reason comes into contact with actuality, one of the results can be the true narrative case. And that becomes the starting point for what can be believed.

#8. We are confronted by innumerable true narrative cases, every day.

#9. Isotypical episodes in Scripture demonstrate the remarkable truth that: Goliath is too big to defeat, but that is conditional; Sinai is inhospitable, but that is conditional; the Canaanites held every material advantage over Israel, but that is conditional.

#10. The diagnosis is bad, but that is conditional; the economics are foreboding, but that is conditional; there is no "realistic" foundation for hope; yet the revealed isotypes teach us that that matters little.

#11. Our inventory of true narrative cases is subject to *isotypical faith*" drawn from the Bible. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days", Hebrews 11:30.

From Hebrews 11: BIBLICAL EPISODES: ISOTYPE FOR THE PRESENT.
PART 4: HOW TO LINK BIBLICAL ISOTYPES TO PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES.
STEP 1: APPLY BELIEF AS THE ENGINE OF REPRESENTATIONS.

#1. "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son", v.17.

#2. The belief of Abraham was not a passive form of content alone. Biblical belief is an engine generating *parallel representations*.

#3. "It was he to whom it was said, 'In Isaac your descendants shall be called'" v.18. Abraham received an unexpected promise from God. Material, historical conditions did not supply any rationale for its fulfillment.

#4. "Abraham, when he was tested", to sacrifice Isaac, determined to follow through and take the consequences. The patriarch was running a risk of some magnitude and it was personal.

#5. But, Abrahamic belief is not a passive status. "He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type", v.19.

#6. Effective biblical belief acts as an engine, generating representations, parallel to the revealed Text, founded upon the revealed terms. This man of faith generated language that contradicted the whole of human experience, common sense and what is called the natural.

#7. The isotype specifies the relation of the entire Word of God to the whole of subsequent time and history.

#8. Belief is not just in the historicity of biblical events, but, in their extended meaning over language forced into personal circumstance; the engine of representations.

From Hebrews 11. BIBLICAL EPISODES: ISOTYPE FOR THE PRESENT.
PART 5: HOW TO LINK BIBLICAL ISOTYPES TO PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES.
STEP 2: PERFORM REPRESENTATIONAL REDUCTION.

#1. According to v.17-19, the patriarch did something quite unacceptable to contemporary thought. Abraham performed a peculiar act. He reduced all the complexity, the physics, the physiology and whatever quantification of the situation, down to revealed representations.

#2. Abraham was among the earliest in the Bible to do this. It is a staple of revealed truth throughout Scripture.

#3. Joshua and Caleb urged the Israelites to do the same thing at Kadesh Barnea (Numbers 14:8); "If the Lord is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us--a land which flows with milk and honey".

#4. The material facts and military logic were treated as non-factors.

#5. In the grip of a violent storm at sea, the apostle Paul, urged the 276 souls aboard ship (Acts 27:23-44), to discount the complexity of meteorology and hydrology.

#6. Abraham set aside the material complexity involved in the sacrifice of Isaac.

#7. That kind of reasoning today is considered scandalously irresponsible, unrealistic and irrational.

#8. This apprehension has an immediate effect upon how one reads scripture. The human mind is not comfortable with nor tolerant of that level applied belief.

#9. The power of God is overruled by rationalism. This is not a new development. An *isotypical Bible* is of no interest to the contemporary church and is especially repugnant to professional theology.

#10. The Bible is not to be held prisoner by the church nor by human wisdom. It is to be linked by Abrahamic faith to every personal circumstance.

From Hebrews 11; Genesis 18; James 4: BIBLICAL EPISODES: ISOTYPE FOR THE PRESENT.
PART 6: HOW TO LINK BIBLICAL ISOTYPES TO PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES.
STEP 3: PRAYER SETS THE LANGUAGE OVER THE CIRCUMSTANCE.

#1. The privilege of personal prayer is extraordinary. In the good will of the Almighty, He allows the believer *to set the language over historical conditions, events, situations and states of being.*

#2. Upon learning of the Lord's displeasure regarding "Sodom and Gomorrah", Genesis 18:20, "Abraham came near and said, 'Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?'", v.23.

#3. He was concerned about Lot and family. The patriarch was careful to set the language within the will of God. Yet, personal prayer may alter the direction of history and of very personal circumstances.

#4. Abraham's language was to ask God to favor the righteous who are caught up in world magnitudes.

#5. The Lord assured Abraham "...I will not destroy it on account of the ten", v.32. How remarkable! Prayer is not constrained by historical actualities! And that is why we should and must pray.

#6. As the gospel was preached, people of political power moved against its truth and its proclaimers, Acts 12:1-5. Peter was arrested and held for execution in prison: a dismal actuality. "So Peter was kept in the prison, [but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God]", v.5.

#7. The Lord altered the political actuality. Textual isotypes articulate this truth everywhere in the Bible. King Herod and world actualities were outmanned, outranked, outgunned.

#8. To live by faith, today, we must connect our actual circumstances to the revealed isotypes.

#9. "...you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow", James 4:14. "...you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that'", James 4:15.

#10. To live apart from the revealed isotypes is the sin of pride, James 4:18. "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin", v.17.

From Hebrews 11; Genesis 22: BIBLICAL EPISODES: ISOTYPE FOR THE PRESENT.
PART 7: HOW TO LINK BIBLICAL ISOTYPES TO PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES.
STEP 4: CARRY BEHAVIOR TO THE CONDITIONAL THRESHOLD.

#1. Abraham had received great promises and much grace. But he was required to act in the swirl of historical conditions.

#2. "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going", Hebrews 11:8.

#3. Such conditions can prove stressful. When required to do so, Abraham "offered up Isaac", Hebrews 11:17.

#4. Both demands were absolute because of their eternal source. And there was something else. Both demands were apportioned an irksome characteristic: *no predictable outcomes*.

#5. These isotypes conduce to an irresistible generalization: *Trust in God and His Word displaces reliance upon predictability of outcomes*. To follow the revealed isotypes of Scripture puts the contemporary believer in the same straits as the historical actors named in the revealed Text.

#6. The human mind heartily inclines to measures designed to insure preferred outcomes.

#7. Think of it. Isotypical belief (that represented in the Bible) commits to the revealed truth without conditions.

#8. The Almighty favors us with His word and promises. He requires unconditional belief. Righteous belief carries us beyond rational objections to full obedience.

#9. Not a modern practice; many in the present churches demur when trust in the Lord transcends the rational limit.

#10. The biblical isotypes overrule the power of temporal actuality to control our faith. Revealed representations are given to leverage thought, speech and behavior.

From 2Kings 22:8-13: BIBLICAL EPISODES: ISOTYPE FOR THE PRESENT.
PART 8: BIBLICAL FAITH DOMINATES TEMPORAL ACTUALITY.

#1. The textual record confirms many times over *an invariant principle*: Under no circumstances is temporal actuality to be permitted to control the meaning of the Bible, nor the structuring of belief.

#2. Yet, it most often does. The violation of *the invariant principle* began in Genesis 3 and its history is replete.

#3. This revealed insistence puts immediate and sustained responsibility on believers in every age to guard the consciousness of it.

#4. Once it is violated and temporal actuality dominates human reasoning, then, the isotypical function of Scripture is jettisoned by the churches.

#5. This is, in fact, what has happened. Many contemporary believers hold a faith that is strictly shaped by temporal actualities.

#6. The Bible is perceived as being anchored in the irretrievable past and not in the Holy Spirit. This is the profile of *progressivism*.

#7. "Progressive believers" believe that they have rightly transcended revelation and its antiquated circumscription of human wisdom.

#8. When King Josiah suddenly became acquainted with the long-lost revelation, he realized that starting with temporal actuality had screened his mind from the greater reality of God and the word of God.

#9. "When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes", v.11.

#10. Josiah grasped the idea immediately; reading the Bible as isotypical means personal reformation. "Go, inquire of the Lord for me and the people and all Judah concerning the words of this book...", v.13. The consequences were too great; "the wrath of the Lord that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book." v.13.

#11. We had better *discover* this book.

From John 8:31-59: BIBLICAL EPISODES: ISOTYPE FOR THE PRESENT.
PART 9: THE PROFOUND CONTEXT ERROR.

#1. When Jesus spoke of "the truth" (v.32) He referred to revelation from the invisible God. Rejecting claims and the insinuations of His enemies, the Lord exclaimed, "...If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on my own initiative, but He sent Me", v.42.

#2. Implicit within the Lord's statement is another *invariant truth*. THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT OF THE WORD OF GOD IS THE MIND OF GOD.

#3. The force of this invariant truth serves as a persistent corrective to *the context erro*r.

#4. The context error is insidious. The error is this: It is to determine that the Scripture's more immediate context is time, human language and history. This is called the Bible's real world context.

#5. The idea is that no one part of human knowledge should be unnecessarily elevated above all others, so that it becomes the sole explanation for human existence. This includes the Bible.

#6. As long as the Bible is confined in its supposed real world context, then, its truths will not be treated as isotypical absolutes.

#7. In the present era, this context error is called phenomenology. By it the Word of God is watered down and prone to literary criticism.

#8. One expression of the context error is the practice of *the case study*, wherein the scriptural truth is considered one, among other contributing perceptions. No more than that.

#9. Jesus was quite adamant and convicting as He stated: "He who is of God hears the words of God, for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God", v.47.

#10. THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT OF THE WORD OF GOD IS THE MIND OF GOD. We should bow to nothing less.