

THE OT IN THE NT: WHAT ISSUES COME INTO PLAY?

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Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.

President Emeritus, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

S. Hamilton, Massachusetts, USA

Recently I picked up my copy of the Holman Apolgetics Study Bible¹ and my eye ran across the article in the table of contents entitled, "Does the New Testament Misquote the Old Testament?" written by Paul Copan. This article began by asking the key question that is usually asked by some in this regard: Why does the NT appear to take Old Testament verses out of context to make them seem to fit their theology about Jesus' teaching and ministry? Copan used as his examples the standard sets of Biblical passages. For example, he wondered why Matthew 2:15, which spoke of Jesus going into Egypt to get away from King Herod, used Hosea 11:1 ("Out of Egypt I called my son"), when the prophet Hosea in his context was talking, most say, about Israel's exodus from Egypt and their attempt to get away for Pharaoh? But the prophet Hosea was not writing about an escape of Jesus from Roman arms of King Herod? He continued by asking, And why did Matthew 1:22-23 use Isaiah 7:14 about "Behold a virgin shall conceive," when the OT prophet was speaking about a child who would be born in King Ahaz's time, rather than its talking about the miraculous nature of the birth of Jesus? Or, why did Matthew 2:18, in order to comfort those crying over King Herod's despicable act of murdering the young boys in Bethlehem in order to include the baby whom the wise men has tipped off Herod that a king had recently been born in that city, use Jeremiah 31:15 to talk about Rachel weeping for her children, as the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah seemed to refer to the mothers' mourning over the captives being taken into the Babylonian exile years more than 500 years prior to this event in Bethlehem?

Copan's solution surprised the life out of me, for he said the problem was that critics and Christians alike (which included me) thought that "prophecy" meant the "realization of the prediction," but this was a "great mistake!" "'Fulfill'

¹ Cabal, Ted (General Editor) The Apologetics Study Bible. Nashville, TN.: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007, pp. 1q408-1409.

doesn't necessarily (or even primarily) refer to the mere fulfillment of a prediction," argued Paul Copan. Instead, he asserted that "fulfillment" was a type of "this-is-that" method of Jewish interpretation called a "pesher" interpretation. He felt that there were, however, elsewhere in Scripture some straightforward predictions, such as Messiah's birthplace in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2; Matt 2:5), and Messiah's death and atonement (Isa 53), but fulfillment generally in the Bible referred to a broader idea of embodying, typifying, epitomizing, or even reaching a climax to a word given in the older Testament!

But how were we to distinguish between these alleged two kinds of fulfillments? Should we conclude that if a prophecy with "realized fulfillment" didn't work, then we should try to defend the writers of Scripture by saying they didn't mean it was an actual fulfillment, but it merely embodied some of the concepts of the same idea, or that they somehow typified what was in the earlier word that could now be connected with the word in the New Testament?

All too many interpreters have tried to argue for God doing a "new thing" in the New Testament, because the "old thing" he had done for Israel was now being jettisoned, and thereby either permanently removed from Israel, or was now to be spiritualized and made over as a promise to the church instead, since Israel failed by her disobedience to keep their part of their promises to God. This later move was generally known as Replacement Theology or a form of Supersessionism!

However, an enormously extensive case can be made for a huge number (or we might even say, the greater number) of Old Testament prophecies relating to Messiah, Israel, the land, and the temple that can be understood in a natural, literal, or straightforward way with what is called by some "realized fulfillment." For example, among those who made a strong case for real fulfillment we can go back to the work of Horatius Bonar, who in 1847 wrote his book, Prophetical Landmarks, Containing Data for Helping to Determine the Question of Christ's Premillennial Advent. Bonar, who is best remembered as the beloved nineteenth century hymn writer, for instance, took the predictions concerning the Messiah and showed how many of their fulfillments were overwhelmingly realized in a natural or literal one. Look, he urged, for example at such a large number of predictions concerning Messiah. Yeshua, according to the Old Testament prophets was:

Born of the house of David,

Born of a virgin,

Born in Bethlehem,

Carried down to Egypt to avoid King Herod,

He healed diseases,
He entered Jerusalem on an ass,
He was betrayed by one of his disciples,
He was left by all his familiar friends at his trial,
He was smitten, buffeted, and spit upon,
He had his side pierced by a soldier,
None of his bones were broken,
His raiment was divided by lot,
He received vinegar for his thirst,
He was crucified between two thieves,
He was laid in a rich man's tomb,
He lay there for three days in that tomb,
He rose from the dead on the third day,
He ascended on high and is now sitting at the right hand of God.

These Old Testament predictions, along with many others like them, were all fulfilled to the very letter in the New Testament and were fulfilled literally. A similar case can also be made for Israel's return to the land of Israel (especially now that 6 million Jewish people have already returned to the land; it seems it is too late to be arguing otherwise!). These fulfillments ought to be strong arguments in favor of initially approaching these Old Testament predictions, at least at their first reading, as being literal before we suggest any alternative method of interpreting them. In fact, these provide us with a distinct, unambiguous and challenging natural canon of interpretation for approaching perhaps the largest number of the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO INTERPRETING THE OLD TESTAMENT PREDICTIONS

Some of us have wondered out loud, "If only we had an audio disc from an archaeological find that was a relic of an old Cleopas' cassette tape recorder that remained from his Emmaus road conversation with Yeshua in Luke 24:13-27. There Jesus explained to Cleopas and his buddy "what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (27b). Then we would be able to see how our Lord's explanation of the Old Testament text matched the events that were

taking place at that time. Were our Lord's meanings entirely, or even partially, foreign to the Tanak's contexts and "real fulfillment" of the original Old Testament text? Did our Lord need to nuance his predicted meanings of New Testament times so that the interpretation fit the real happening more comfortably, or did he show that the real events followed naturally from the Old Testament words pointing to the Messianic event? Obviously, tape recorders did not exist in those days and so there is no use hoping archaeologists would find such a relic.

In our day, however, some have tried to show, that since these texts come from God, there is the issue of a double meaning to the Old Testament texts. There is, in addition to the human author's meaning, a divinely-intended "fuller" meaning that goes beyond what was immediately apparent to the eyes of the writer, and especially the eyes of the reader as he or she first glances at the text. These additional meanings go by different labels, but chief among them would be the following: (1) the Sensus Plenior meaning, (2) the Typological meaning, and (3) the Jewish Exegetical Methods of those that come from the times of the Second Temple, such as Peshet, Midrashic, or Allegorical interpretation. Each of these three approaches we will now examine.

THE SENSUS PLENIOR APPROACH

The term sensus plenior was apparently coined by Father Andre Fernandez in his article on "Hermeneutica" published by the Biblical Institute in Rome in 1927. But it really was Father Raymond E. Brown's dissertation, published in Baltimore in 1955, that brought it to the wider scholarly audience. He defined this "fuller sense" of Scripture as that "additional, deeper meaning intended by God, but not clearly indicated by the human author" of Scripture (emphasis mine). This meaning, Brown later clarified, was not available by the normal rules of exegesis, for then it would have been within the clear intentionality of the human author. But that is where the rub comes in: It raised the question of the authority of the Scriptures, since what was "written" in the Scriptural text did not clearly include this divine-intention! It was to be located somehow apart from the syntax and grammar of the writing!

In most evangelical definitions of the Inspiration of Scripture, however, an emphasis always falls on the words as being given under the inspiration of God. That is why we called it "Verbal Inspiration;" The Spirit of God stayed with the writer of Scripture all the way up to his writing it down on the parchment. Agreeing with this emphasis on the verbal aspect of the text was the Apostle Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 2:13, where Paul instructs us that what he wrote in Scripture was "not in words taught us by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:13, emphasis mine). In other words, there was a living assimilation of the truth God wanted to get across to the human writers, but it was not done in a mechanical way, such as in dictation of concepts word for

word, or in whispering these words in the ear of the writer, or even by automatically moving the writer's hand on the manuscript page. Instead, the divine inspiration came "in words" that were "taught" by the Holy Spirit. Thus all the experiences, distinctive vocabularies, cultural backgrounds and personal styles of the human author were employed by the Holy Spirit as he stayed with the writer all the way up to the point where the human writer inscribed the words God wanted him to write on papyri or vellum.

The attempt to locate an additional or deeper meaning, which was intended by God, but not clearly indicated by the human author, or found by ordinary exegesis of the words or sentences, runs head-on into trouble with the exact opposite affirmation of the Holy Spirit. It was Bruce Vawter, another Roman Catholic scholar, who argued on the contrary that this fuller meaning just was not in Scripture, for it violated the teaching of the "Analogy of Instrumental Causality." To be more specific, if on the basis of the view espoused by Sensus Plenior, we postulate an additional meaning that is effected outside the control of the human writer's will and judgment, and not produced in any way by human instrumentality, which normally involved the working together with God, but a meaning that was only effected by God outside the knowledge of the human writer, then Scripture no longer was the joint product of God and man writing and working concurrently together to give us an authoritative word from God. The Sensus Plenior, at least in its classical definition, gave us a meaning that deprived Scripture of one of its essential elements, for it did not include, at least for some interpreters, the verbal authoritative meaning from God as written in some of its predictions. Furthermore, how could that additional meaning be called "Scripture, since it does not exist in the words of the text according to its official definition?" The Greek word for "Scripture" is graphe, meaning "writing," or "that which stands written." And if this new vista of meaning was not opened up until the New Testament came along, what were the original readers of the Old Testament to do when in Old Testament times they only had the writer's sense, but not the additional divine sense? And what were the Apostles to use for their preaching from A.D. 30 until about A.D. 48 when the New Testament had not yet been written?

Some readily acknowledge that the divine-intention exceeds what the human author wrote or knew, but they seek to locate this additional meaning, or "fuller sense" in the context of the entire canon of Scripture. But if that is so, how can what is not found specifically in any one single context of Scripture be found in the whole of Scripture? This however has only led to a quest for that which was beyond the text of Scripture, whereas earlier liberal quests had been trying to get behind the text of Scripture. That in turn seems to open the door up for tradition or the additional teaching of the Church to take us beyond Scripture. From a sola Scriptura position, that is seen as a dangerous move and one the Reformation strongly fought against. Sensus Plenior does not appear to

be the proper solution to our problem of how the NT used the OT. It carried too many problems with it to be useful.

THE TYPOLOGICAL APPROACH

Closely related to the Sensus Plenior method of understanding Biblical predictions is the method of finding types in the Old Testament that pointed to Antitypes in the New. The Greek word typos meant a “model” or a “pattern.” Therefore, it pointed to institutions, events, persons, or happenings, but not all such events of persons, but only those that divinely foreshadowed future events, persons, or institutions. What appeared in the Old Testament was by divine designation the “type” and what corresponded to it in the New Testament fulfillment was the “antitype.”

Of course, God is Sovereign over the whole course of history and directs all that takes place on planet earth. That part is most clear. The tricky part is that God has occasionally pointed out in his word by his own divine designation that only some significant persons, events, or institutions in history evidence a historical pattern that theologically foreshadows the reoccurrence of similar persons, events or institutions that would come later in history. When this happens, the final event in history often eclipses its earlier historical counterpart, for it, in some ways, goes beyond the original type. Frequently this pattern is said to be of the variety that shows an analogy between the earthly reality and the heavenly fulfillment. But lest this last remark take us into allegorical interpretation, stress must be given to the role that history must clearly play in typology, which is what sets it apart from allegory. Even so, the interpreter must be cautious, for typology can slide easily into allegorical interpretation, in which earthly events have a heavenly analogue. But then the historical aspect of the type begins to collapse.

Therefore, we must adhere to the strictures on typology given by Bishop Herbert Marsh in the 1700s. He taught that it was necessary for a type to have more than a mere resemblance, for the very essence of a type was that there was to be a necessary connection with the antitype and that this resemblance must be divinely designated from the very beginning of the pattern in the earlier type. Thus the type and the antitype had an inherent and an intentional connection as the type prefigured its antitype. Some types are pointed out in the New Testament, but there are more types in the OT than the NT needed for its purposes to recognize. However, some have over-extended the number of types in the Tanak, for as one of my teachers wryly commented: “Some of the pegs and ropes in the Tabernacle were actually meant to hold the tent up! But that too was “typical” of his type of comment!

JEWISH EXEGETICAL APPROACHES

Some contend that the writers of the New Testament utilized Jewish interpretive methods, which allowed these Christian writers to derive meanings from the Old Testament texts that, at times, were separate and different from those in the minds of the Old Testament writers of those same texts. These methods included the use of such interpretive procedures as *pesher*, *midrash*, or *allegory*. But while some of modern scholarship has affirmed such methods of interpretation for the New Testament writers, one would be hard pressed to find such methods convincingly used to validate the messianic or the claims of the Old Testament when Christian scholars were in dialogue with Jewish scholars about their acceptance of the Tanak's messianic claims. To be sure, devotional sorts of interpretation can be achieved by Christians using some of the Rabbinical Second Temple Methods. However, it is one thing to use such methods for a devotional and spiritual reading of a text, but it is altogether different to use such methods in establishing doctrine or messianic claims. When prophecy was interpreted by second Temple interpretive methods in an apologetical argument for its fulfillment of certain Biblical doctrines or of Messiah's first or second coming, it showed less of an ability to convince Jewish listeners.

Already in 1885, Frederic Gardiner (1822-1889) anticipated such drawing of exegetical methods from Rabbinical schools, since the Apostle Paul was brought up in rabbinical schools. He argued:

In all quotations which are used argumentatively in order to establish any fact or doctrine, it is obviously necessary that the passage in question should be fairly cited according to its real interest and meaning, in order that the argument drawn from it may be valid. There has been much rash criticism that the Apostles, and especially St. Paul, brought up in rabbinical schools of thought quoted Scripture after a rabbinical and inconsequential fashion. A patient and careful examination of the passages themselves will remove such misapprehension. (emphasis mine).²

That judgment is still relevant to this day! For example, some argue that the Apostle Paul used an allegorical approach when he used Hagar and Sarah in Galatians 4:24-31. However, Paul was not exegeting Genesis at this point, for he distinctly said, "These things can be put into an allegory" (hatina estin allegoroumena). Paul had finished his argument from Scripture in Galatians 1-4:23, but if his Jewish listeners were accustomed to hearing the point of the

² Frederic Gardiner. The Old and New Testaments in their Mutual Relations. New York: James Pott, 1885, pp 317-18.

lesson in an allegory, then Paul would oblige them by constructing an allegory for them using Sarah and Hagar to illustrate the point he had already made.³

Likewise, others have unwisely argued that Paul “seems to leave the primary meaning of the injunction in Deuteronomy 25:4 ... and interprets the OT allegorically”⁴ Instead, Paul resists arbitrarily allegorizing the historical and natural meaning of the precept in the Torah by using an a fortiori argument that lifts the teaching from its application on a lower level where oxen needed to have their muzzle so they could occasionally take a swipe of grain as they went round and round on the grain removed to a higher level of application where humans needed to be just as generous and open-hearted to those pastors who served them in the ministry of the word by paying them adequately. Paul does not allegorize Deuteronomy 25:4 in the least; instead he illustrates exactly how we should note how the same precept found in the Scripture can have multiple applications from the generous heart of the farmer towards his animals to the way a congregation expresses its gratitude for a pastor who has also worked hard to bring them the words of life.

THE INFLUENCE OF REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY

Some of the largest numbers of St. Paul's explicit quotations from the Tanak seem to cluster around Galatians 3-4, Romans 4, and Romans 9-11, with this final section evidencing the highest concentration of citations from the OT found anywhere in his letters. What is remarkable is the fact that this cluster of citations deals with the issue of the Jewish-Gentile relationships. It is this issue that prompts Paul to quote Scripture in abundance.

However, the issue of the relationship of Jew to Gentile is the one that opens up for some the most pressing hermeneutical task in our day! As James W. Aageson described it:

...scriptural interpretations ought not (perhaps cannot) be reduced to a mere task of trying to discover in the texts of Scripture, as if Scripture were something to mine for nuggets of truth. Rather, [Scripture] is a generative and creative task that is invariably open-ended and that speaks to our circumstances in the contemporary world.⁵

³ See the full argument in R. J. Kepple, “An Analysis of Antiochene Exegesis of Galatians 4:24-26,” Westminster Theological Journal 39(1977):239-49.

⁴ Richard Longenecker. Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975, p. 126. Contrast Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Current Crisis on Exegesis and the Apostolic Use of Deut 24:4 in 1 Cor 9:8-10,” Journal of Evangelical Theological Society 21(1978):3-18.

⁵ James W. Aageson, “Written for Our Sake: Paul's Use of Scripture in the Four Major Epistles, with a Study of 1 Corinthians 10,” in Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament. Ed. Stanley E. Porter. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006, pp. 157-58.

Apart from Aageson's apparent playing down of the objectivity of Scripture in a preference for some kind of creativity we can bring to the text, we can certainly agree that the Bible does not have a hidden code in its pages. In order to avoid what many consider a mechanical, archaic and lifeless objective meaning of an OT text, a greater stress is often placed on the spiritualizing, allegorizing, or a supersessionistic method of interpreting an OT text is used to get a new or deeper meaning from that text that redirects the promises made to Israel in the text made over to the Church. This move often leads to what we call Replacement Theology. This usually happens when some interpreters are confronted with understanding what the repeated rebellion of Israel entails for her future. But Israel's failure to keep the commands of God cannot overcome the grace of God or cause his plan to backfire, for the gift of the land still holds for Israel, as does the promise of her return back to the land. If it is decided, as it has been done all too often by some Protestant interpreters, that God has terminated his promises to his people which he gave to the Patriarchs and to David, because of the people's constant disobedience; then our doctrine of God is in enormous trouble, for he cannot deny himself or his word.

But for such interpreters, there has been an alleged change in the direction of the favor and grace of God. But the gifts and the calling of God is "irrevocable" (Rom 11:29); therefore his promises in the covenants of gift of his son, the gift of the land, and the gift of the promise of the return of the Jewish people back to the ancient land of Canaan still stands. How then can some still say that these promises cannot be fulfilled as they were originally given in a literal form, but they must be made into spiritual realities that carry heavenly, not earthly or temporal values?

Such interpretive actions, however, set the course for viewing other texts in Scripture as using words in a symbolical, analogical, and spiritual way. Thus, Jerusalem, for example, on this basis can be seen as a heavenly city whose builder and maker is God. The land is no longer Canaan, but the spiritual inheritance of heaven that God has planned for all of us.

Paul's argument is that God has not rejected his people (Rom 11:1), for just as he did in Elijah's day, he has reserved a remnant who are loyal to himself. So some were hardened by the work of sin, but the elect have responded well and will continue to do so! This is because "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29). Yes, the prophet Hosea taught that God loved Israel when she was a child, for that is why he "called [his] Son out of Egypt" (Hos 11:1). The exodus was a sub-theme here, but what was highlighted was that Israel was "My Son;" it was also highlighted that that is why they had been "called." God's plan had been in force ever since the adolescent days of this nation's existence. Some of those who escaped Egypt and went across the Red Sea were already marked out as the human line through which the incarnation would take place! That is why God issued the "Call."

CONCLUSIONS:

The message of the Bible is that there is one unifying plan of God that stretches through all 66 books. This plan of God is focused on the nation of Israel, not because they were the largest group of peoples on earth or because they were the most faithful, but simply because they were the called and chosen to be the vehicles through whom God would bring blessing to the whole world.

Our generation is most fortunate to be living in the times when we are personally witnessing the largest return of the Jewish remnant from all over the world. When approximately one-half of all Jewish persons have returned to Israel, we are surely given a huge indication that the final day is approaching rapidly. This could mean that the "full number" of the Gentiles is quickly filling up and the time for the "full number" of Israel to be saved is rushing on in history to meet us. May Yeshua come quickly and may "all Israel be saved!"