

How Old Testament Scriptures Were Used During the Time of Jesus

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Introduction

People view the Bible in different ways, for some it is the foundation of their beliefs while others view it as judgmental and irrelevant for today's society. The Jews refer to it as the Tanakh, or the Hebrew Bible, while Christians know it as the Old Testament. Both Jews and Christians believed the Old Testament to be the infallible word of God written by men who were directed by the Holy Spirit. However, during the time of Christ and the early church there was only one Bible and that was the Old Testament. Furthermore, the Old Testament scriptures are used in the New Testament almost three hundred times. In this paper I am going to discuss some of the ways that Jesus and the early church made use of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Use of the Old Testament During Jesus' Temptation

The Bible that Jesus and the early Christians used was not written in Hebrew but in Greek. It is normally referred to as the Septuagint so Jesus and his followers did not have an original copy of the Holy Scriptures. There are several ways that Jesus used Old Testament Scripture. During Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, he used the Scripture to combat Satan's schemes. For instance, when Satan asked him to prove that he was the Son of God, by commanding stones to be changed to bread. However, Jesus responded, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4, [ESV]). That phrase is found in Deuteronomy 8:3 and Moses used it when he was instructing the Israelites not to forget what God did for them in the wilderness.

Satan followed with a second question, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you.'" Jesus responded with another quote from the Old Testament, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" (Mt. 4:4, [ESV]) which is found in Deuteronomy 6:16. These passages demonstrate Jesus' use of the Old

Testament whenever he had a direct confrontation with Satan. In the book of Deuteronomy Moses was telling the Israelites that they should not test God through the worship of other gods. If a person examines the Old and New Testament scriptures Jesus used during his temptation they will find some variations or extra words. However, Jesus declared the scriptures within the correct context and applied it to the situations he experienced while in the wilderness.

The Old Testament Messiah Revealed

Throughout Christ's ministry many people questioned whether he was God's Son. This included the Scribes, Pharisee, Sadducees, and others including his disciples. Another way that Jesus used the Old Testament was to show that he was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Jesus states "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me" (Jn.5:39 [ESV]). In this passage Jesus is explaining to his critics that he is the one they have been reading about in the scriptures. Moreover, there were times that even that his followers had doubts about who he was so he used Old Testament scripture to explain that he is the Son of God.

The eighth chapter of John gives a beautiful description of Jesus showing his critics that he is the Messiah that is spoken of in the Old Testament. Here we find that the Pharisees are upset with Jesus because he stated, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." So, the Pharisees using legal terms said to him, "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true." Jesus answers them by telling them what is written in their law that says, "On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness" (Deut. 17:6 [ESV]). Jesus clarifies that God is the witness because of how he manifests himself through Christ works.

Early Christian Use of The Old Testament

To the early Christians the Old Testament was revered because it was the Bible that Jesus used. They also used it when ministering to the Jews to attest to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah. The Hebrew Bible was also used in worship services. “It was obviously natural for the early Jewish Christians to continue to follow Jewish traditions. They continued to gather in the temple and the synagogues during the regular times of worship.”¹ The reading of Scripture was a common practice in both the Jewish Synagogue. It is obvious that when the early church began the only scriptures they were privy to came from the Old Testament.

Lastly, it is important to mention that the early Christians did run into problems because their way of interpreting the scriptures differed from the Jews. Jeff Doles of “Walking Barefoot Ministries” states, “Though the early Church found Christ everywhere in the Old Testament, they did not do so by a literal or grammatical method of interpretation but by allegorical or figurative readings of the Scriptures.”² This is evident of how Paul quotes Psalm 68:18, “When you ascended on high, you took many captives; you received gifts from people, even from the rebellious.” However, Paul used in a different context changed some of the words in Eph. 4:8, “This is why it says: ‘When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.’”

Conclusion

In week two of our class discussion one of the questions asked by Professor Armstrong was, “How would it affect your personal understanding of the Bible if you learned that Jesus Himself may not have said and done things exactly the way the Bible explains them?” Thanks to what I learned in class and my research my understanding has been enhanced.

¹Bob Williams, “Origins of Christian Worship,”

²Jeff Doles, “Reading the Old Testament with the Early Church,”

Bibliography

Doles, Jeff. "Reading the Old Testament with the Early Church." *The Faith Log*. October 6, 2017. <http://www.thefaithlog.com/2017/10/reading-old-testament-with-early-church.html> (accessed October 12, 2017).

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