

Signs of the Old Testament in the New Testament

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Introduction

The Bible is considered to be a book from God. As mentioned by Geisler, “the biblical writers say they were moved by the Holy Spirit to utter His very words.”¹ History and Christianity must be studied together. “Also, the New Testament assumes the historicity of the Old; many of its most crucial teachings are based on it.”² The Old testament is full of metaphor and symbolism; it is a comprehensive literature about the relationship between God and His people. It is the basis for scriptures that much time later would compose the New Testament, that tells us the story of the so called ‘the second Adam’.

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”³ And that’s how Joseph knew his wife would give birth to the most important religious figure who ever lived: Yeshua, short name for Yehoshua, the Hebrew name for Jesus. When He came to this world, for obvious reasons, the New Testament had not been written yet, so “Jesus’ words apply directly only to the Old Testament”.⁴ Actually, Jesus referred to the Old Testament several times as you will read further in the text.

In a certain way, the two books are complementary. As Beale mentions, “later biblical quotations of and allusions to earlier Scripture unpack the meaning of that earlier Scripture, and yet the earlier passage also sheds light on the later passage”⁵, what he

1 . Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002), 169.

2 . Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 329.

3. Matthew 1:21, New International Version (NIV)

4 . Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 197.

5 . Gregory K. Beale, *A New Testament biblical theology: the unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012).

defines as a kind of intertextuality. “Intertextuality refers to the ability of texts to be connected to other texts and in this way to be drawn in to the ‘quasi world’ of literature. It is possible to see this in action wherever it can be indicated clearly that one text carries reminders of another text.”⁶ Julia Kristeva, one of the first author to use the term “intertextuality” argues that “every text is a mosaic of other texts, which have been absorbed and transformed”⁷. In applying the concept of intertextuality to biblical studies, it is important to consider the intentionality of the author and the appropriate knowledge of the reader to identify allusions and echoes to other texts.⁸

In order to have a better understanding of the scriptures, we must be familiar with the several books that compose the Bible, and undoubtedly, intertextuality may guide us through this journey. It is not an easy task, “the distance of our cultures is an immense barrier to clear communication. Now multiply that by two thousand years and a culture that ceased to exist in A.D. 70, when the Second temple Judaism was destroyed, and Judaism had to reconstitute itself.”⁹

The Rise of Jesus

Studies about the influence of the Old Testament in the New Testament, are not new. “The study of the Old Testament in the New brings Christian biblical interpretation full circle.”¹⁰ If we analyze the narrative of Jesus in the New Testament, we will be able

6. Leene, Henk. *Newness in Old Testament Prophecy: An Intertextual Study* (Leiden: Brill NV, 2014) eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost (accessed October 5, 2017), 4

7. Julia Kristeva et al., *Desire in language: a semiotic approach to literature and art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

8. Peter Mallen, *The reading and transformation of Isaiah in Luke-Acts* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 103.

9. Grant R. Osborne, *The hermeneutical spiral: a comprehensive introduction to biblical interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 24.

10. Huizenga, Leroy A. “*The Old Testament in the New, Intertextuality and Allegory.*” *Journal for The Study Of The New Testament* 38, no. 1: 17-35. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed October

to observe that the Old Testament is mentioned several times. Although identifying signs of the Old Testament in the New is relatively easy, it could become a complex study analysis demanding dedication and knowledge from the reader. As Osborne mentions “the problem of interpretation begins and ends with the presence of the reader”¹¹.

It is undeniable that a clear understanding of the Hebrew scriptures is the hermeneutic key to understanding the New Testament. As an example, the incredible amount of times the Old Testament is alluded in the book of Revelations, about 311, although there isn't a single direct citation.¹²

There's a gap of over 400 years between the last events of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. In those four hundred years the Roman Empire emerged and had a significant impact in the world of Jesus. Two thousand and seventeen years ago, Rome was the largest city in the world. Nearly one million people lived there. Although Pilate and representatives of the Herod family are the most prominent political figures in the Gospel accounts, the real center of political power in Jesus' world lay in the person of the Roman Emperor. At Jesus' birth the emperor Augustus ruled the empire.¹³

In Galilee, the most beautiful and fertile of all the districts of Palestine, a young Galilean became famous for his holiness, his loving kindness and his miraculous powers.¹⁴ Jesus was unique, one of a kind. Sheen in his book “Life of Christ” mentions “when the Divine Child was conceived, Mary's humanity gave Him hands and feet, eyes

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11. Grant R. Osborne, *The hermeneutical spiral*, 467.

12. Jon Paulien, *The deep things of God* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Association, 2004).

13. Stephen L. Harris, *The New Testament: a student's introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012), 92

14. Selina O'Grady, *And man created God: a history of the world at the time of Jesus* (New York: Picador, 2014), 131

and ears and a body with which to suffer”¹⁵. It is as if Jesus were truly a Divine Spirit that became human through the nine months He was cloistered within her.

Jesus and the Bible

In Matthews 4:4, 7, 10 and in Luke 4:4 Jesus declared “It is written”. He instructed, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”¹⁶ That is found in Deuteronomy 8:3. Amazingly if we analyze both scriptures and its contexts, we will find Jesus in the wilderness facing Satan’s temptations, and in Deuteronomy we have Moses speaking to the people of Israel in the wilderness as well. Attention to the fact that the forty years into the wilderness relate to the forty days Jesus was tested in the desert. Still about Moses, one of the most important evidences for him being the author of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible¹⁷) is that Jesus Himself refers this section of the Old Testament as the “Law of Moses” (Luke 24:44).¹⁸

When Jesus was tempted by Satan, he was starving, facing this difficult challenge, and despite all that, he never gave up hope and the trust in God. He never did what he knew it wasn’t right, inspiring us to follow his steps. Here again, Jesus quoted the Old Testament in several moments, like when he said to Satan “It is also written: ‘Do not put

15. Fulton J. Sheen, *Life of Christ* (New York: Image Books/Doubleday, 2008), 11

16. Matthew 4:4 (NIV)

17. Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: a historical and literary introduction to the Hebrew scriptures*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 49.

18. Luke 24:44 (NIV)

the Lord your God to the test.”¹⁹, found in Matthew 4:7, quoted from Deuteronomy 6:16
“Do not put the Lord your God to the test as you did at Massah.”²⁰

This connection between Jesus’ forty days in the desert and Moses’ forty years in the wilderness is one example of a “symbol-laden event in Jesus’ life that call to mind antecedent events in the life of Israel”.²¹ Jesus is portrayed as representing true Israel, and many are the prophecies in the Old Testament that predict his coming.

The book of Isaiah, full of prophecies, is one of the most important book of the Old Testament. There are over four hundred citations of this book in the New Testament. Isaiah has several references the cometh of a savior the would be sent by God. In Isaiah 7:14, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel”;²² also in Isaiah 9:6 “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”²³

According to the book of Luke, chapter 4, while in a synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus read the scroll of Isaiah and told everyone: “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”²⁴ Also in Luke, there are allusions in passages as Luke 2.30-32 and Luke 24.46-49 that are a general reference to Isaiah’s concept of salvation. As we are discussing the intertextuality of those texts, Mallen suggests that Luke might have

19. Matthew 4:7 (NIV)

20. Deuteronomy 6:16 (NIV)

21 . G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), xxvi.

22. Isaiah 7:14 (NIV)

23. Isaiah 9:16 (NIV)

24. Luke 4:21 (NIV)

“shaped the message of Isaiah through his selection and use of certain texts and themes.”²⁵ Also, there is an assumption that Luke’s audience were familiar with Scriptures, therefore capable of detecting quotations and allusions.²⁶ Bart J. Koet mentions that it is possible that the writings of Isaiah were available to Luke, as he has a tendency to refer to the same scriptural passage or verse more than once.²⁷

Intertextuality in the book of Esther

Scholars claim that another example of intertextuality comes from the book of Esther. “The book of Esther as a whole also has its intertexts, an obvious one being the story of Exodus and Passover in the book of Exodus.”²⁸ According to Fewell there are many similarities in both stories (Exodus and Esther). The foreign protagonists, the Passover and the Purim as religious traditions that were to be repeated for all time, oppressed people and stories of the deliverance of God. However, some differences are found in both narratives. In Exodus, God is a main character, guiding Moses and He is present most of the time. In Esther, on the contrary, God is never mentioned.²⁹ Other scholars believe that the texts are so different, that it is very unlikely that Esther’s book had been modeled on Exodus.³⁰

The book of Esther and the book of Daniel also share similarities. They are both about survival in politically delicate situations for they are foreigners co-opted for service

25. Peter Mallen, *The reading and transformation of Isaiah in Luke-Acts* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 103.

26. Peter Mallen, *The reading and transformation*, 103

27. Steve Moyise and M. J. J. Menken, *Isaiah in the New Testament* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 80.

28. Danna Nolan. Fewell, *Reading between texts: intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 12.

29. Danna N. Farewell, *Reading Between texts*, 11.

30. Steven L. McKenzie and M. Patrick Graham, *The Hebrew Bible today: an introduction to critical issues* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 15

to the oppressor, they became the king's "favorite", and are victims of conspiracy.³¹ But also, some authors disagree and insist that Esther's story differs from Daniel's. Like Joseph, Daniel is described as a wise man and an interpreter of dreams who gained influence at the court of foreign kings.³² On the other hand, scholars affirm that Esther's influence is not necessarily due to her wisdom but to her femininity although her actions preserved Israel and Davidic lineage, clearing the path to God's plan to bring the new Messiah, his son, Jesus. There are several other examples, but we can see that not all authors agree or identify intertextuality at the same passages or books.

Conclusion

The study of biblical intertextuality is indeed very complex. This paper has barely scratched the surface as there is a huge amount of information available in hundreds of books regarding this topic. If we see the big picture, we will notice that everything is connected. From Shem, Noah's eldest son, going through Abraham and reaching God's promise to David that the Messiah would come from his family line, all the actions taken after that to guarantee that the lineage remained intact until more than one thousand years after that when Jesus was born right on time with the prophecy, "but when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law."³³

Intertextuality allows us to read between the lines, to go deep inside the secrets and the history of the Biblical scriptures. "It is that perpetual and indeterminable process

31. Danna N. Farewell, *Reading Between texts*, 15.

32. Steven L. McKenzie and M. Patrick Graham, *The Hebrew Bible today*, 187

33. Galatians 4:4 (NIV)

of deferral from text to text to text.”³⁴ Of course that intertextuality with no boundaries is much like opening Pandora’s box. So many different interpretative bias can produce tons of stories that takes the reader far away from the truth. “Truth in interpretation is possible, therefore, because the process of interpretation in the history of an interpretive community tends towards the final Interpretant.”³⁵

The independent reading of all the books of the Old Testament and the New Testament is hard enough due to the complexity of their interpretation. Reading both at the same time and exploring their intertextuality can be an even bigger challenge, but each of the books in the Bible can only be understood if we analyze its relation to the other texts in the Holy Scripture.

The original writers wanted us to have a certain bias of the stories they wrote. They exalted several characters according to their interests and I believe the stories we read have much influence of their own point of view. A book with so many authors, including the different “Jesuses” presented by the Synoptic Gospels in the New Testament (Markan, Lukan), reveal to us their own vision of who Jesus was and how they wanted to portray him to generations to come.

Intertextuality allows us to have a better appreciation of the texts. We must pay attention not only to the intents of the original writers but also the literary abilities of those who used those originals as inspiration to write new texts. However, the ability of

34. Danna N. Farewell, Reading Between texts, 27.

35. Huizenga, Leroy A. *"The Old Testament in the New, Intertextuality and Allegory."* Journal for The Study Of The New Testament 38, no. 1: 17-35. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed October 5, 2017), 27

this new writers cannot ever overrule the ‘art’ of the original writers. Quoting T.S. Eliot, “Art never improves, but... the material of art is never quite the same.”

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