

RESURRECTION OPC – ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL  
*Hermeneutics: How to Read the Bible*

WEEK 9 | JUNE 26, 2016

### **Introduction & Acknowledgement**

In our first session, we looked at an overall approach to reading Scripture *contextually, grammatically, theologically, and doxologically*. In our last session, we looked at the interpretation of poetry. Today, in our final lesson, we look at how the New Testament uses the Old Testament. In so doing, we continue to follow the lectures of Dr. Benjamin Shaw.

### **New Testament Use of the Old Testament**

*“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet...”  
(Matthew 1.22)*

#### **The Christian View of the Old Testament**

- We view the Old Testament as *God-breathed* and *inerrant* no less than the New Testament.
- We understand that the Old Testament is in itself *incomplete*:
  - “Like looking at an unfinished building, the reader of the Old Testament knows merely by reading it that there is more to come.” (*Shaw*)
- We should remember that the Old Testament writers *wrote with great prescience*:
  - “The authors of the Old Testament, having been admitted to the counsels of God, and having studied the inspired works of the predecessors, wrote with a great deal of insight about what was yet to come. Precisely how much [they] knew about what was to come is a matter of debate, but... modern scholars as a whole underestimate the understanding of the Old Testament authors.” (*Shaw*)
  - See Jn 4.25, 8.56, 12.41; Acts 2.30-31; 1Cor 10.1-4; Gal 3.8; Heb 11.13; 1Pet 1.10-12.

#### **Two Things to Remember**

- First, if you look up an Old Testament passage cited in the New Testament, you will sometimes find that it doesn't exactly match the New Testament quotation. This is because New Testament authors frequently quoted the Old Testament from the Septuagint (LXX), the commonly available Greek translation in their day. In these cases, remember two things:
  - The substance of the Old Testament text is not affected or altered, *and*
  - The New Testament authors write under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and so their interpretations of the Old Testament are authoritative and inerrant.
- Second, we tend to assume that all New Testament uses of the Old Testament work in the same way. As we will see below, this is most certainly not the case...

#### **Patterns of New Testament Use of the Old Testament**

- Sometimes, a New Testament author uses Old Testament language to express his own thought:
  - In our day, people use the biblical image of a “Good Samaritan” without implying direct fulfillment.
  - For example, in Romans 10.18 Paul uses the language of Psalm 19.4 to refer to the spread of the gospel.
  - In the larger context (10.14-21), there are 6 citations of the Old Testament (vv. 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21).
  - Of these, v. 18 is the only one *not* introduced as Scripture – seeming to indicate a non-fulfillment citation.
- Frequently, New Testament authors cite the Old Testament as literal prediction-fulfillment:
  - Matthew 1.22-23 cites Isaiah 7.14 and claims that the virgin birth of Jesus is its fulfillment.
  - Similarly, even the 1<sup>st</sup> century scribes recognized Micah 5.2 as containing a literal prediction of the birthplace of the Christ (see Matthew 2.5-6).
- Other times, New Testament authors cite the Old Testament as typological prediction-fulfillment:
  - Matthew 2.15 claims that Jesus’ return from Egypt fulfills Hosea 11.1.
    - Yet in its original context, Hosea 11.1 looked back to the Exodus of Israel. *What do we make of this?*
    - “It is something of a double typology. The experience of Israel in Egypt and the deliverance from Egypt was a type of the greater deliverance of the people of God from the dominion of sin. This deliverance takes place through Christ, who undergoes all the trials and sufferings on behalf of his people. Thus his experience recalls that of Old Testament Israel, and fulfills it...” (*Shaw*)

- Similarly, in Matthew 4.1-11 Jesus cites Deuteronomy three times in response to Satan's temptations:
  - "The fact that Jesus' temptation is a replacement for the temptation of Adam is generally acknowledged. But Jesus' temptation is also a replacement for the temptations that Israel faced in the wilderness. Where Israel failed, Jesus succeeded, thus undergoing temptation successfully on behalf of his people." (*Shaw*)
  - As not just the second Adam but the second Israel, Jesus shared and fulfilled Israel's experience.
- On occasion, New Testament authors cite the Old Testament as thematic prediction-fulfillment:
  - Matthew 2.17-18 cites Herod's murder of the children of Bethlehem as a fulfillment of the words of Jeremiah 31.15. *How should we understand this?*
    - The original image is from Genesis 35, where Rachel weeps as she dying in childbirth with Benjamin.
    - Benjamin ends up as one of the tribes of the Northern Kingdom, along with the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph (Rachel's other son).
    - Thus Rachel, by *synecdoche* (a part for the whole), comes to represent destroyed Northern Kingdom.
    - In predicting future restoration of Israel (31.31-34), Jeremiah reflects upon the earlier devastation of the Northern Kingdom (in 722 BC) using the image of Rachel weeping (31.15).
    - The overall sweep of Jeremiah 31, then, shows us that *lamentation precedes restoration*...
    - "As a result, when Matthew reflects on all that takes place surrounding the birth and young childhood of Jesus, he is drawn to this image of Rachel's lamentation. The deaths of the children in Bethlehem are a picture of the suffering that precedes the triumph. Because the triumph that Christ brings is so much greater than the return from exile was, Jeremiah's use of the image of Rachel weeping becomes a type fulfilled in the lamenting of the mothers of Bethlehem." (*Shaw*)
  - Matthew 2.23 states that Jesus' move to Nazareth occurred "so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene." *What should we make of this?*
    - First, note that there are no quotation marks – this is not a direct citation.
    - Second, note that Matthew uses the plural – 'prophets'.
    - "This suggests that he might be combining and summarizing the substance of a number of passages. It is also important to take the location into account, because the geography of Nazareth is central to the prophecy." (*Shaw*)
    - Nazareth was located in the district of Galilee, in the Northern Kingdom, which the Old Testament associates with the tribe of Naphtali (2Ki 15.29, Is 9.1).
    - In 2 Kings 15.29, we learn that the desolation of the Northern Kingdom began in this region...
    - In Isaiah 9.1-2, we are promised that Messianic restoration will begin where desolation began...
    - "Thus, the fact that Jesus settled in Nazareth, and began his ministry there, is a fulfillment of the bright promise of Isaiah against the dark background of the judgment that fell when the Northern Kingdom was destroyed." (*Shaw*)
- Finally, remember what we said last week about union with Christ:
  - As Christ has suffered in every way as we do yet without sin (Hebrews 4.15), and as he is the fulfillment of all God's saving promises, there is perhaps a sense in which any text which speaks of the suffering or triumphs of the people of God in the Old Testament point us to Christ.
  - This is an area for further study – but may well illuminate New Testament use of the Old Testament.

### Encouragement for the Overwhelmed

- One thing that is clear from the foregoing is that the New Testament writers were saturated in the Old. Thus, the more we know the whole Bible, the closer we will get to appropriating their perspective.
- "I remember when I first became a Christian. I would read through the Bible and many passages would simply be opaque to me. I couldn't understand them. This was particularly true of the prophets. Much of the prophetic literature seemed unclear and confusing. But as I have read and studied over the years, those things have become more and more clear to me. There are still difficult passages, and occasional passages where I confess I don't really have a clue what they mean. But the number of those passages is much smaller than it once was. So I encourage you: spend your time in reading and studying the Bible. The better you know it, the easier it will be to interpret." (*Shaw*)