

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

*THE ECLECTIC USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT  
IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.*

IN considering the use and interpretation by our Lord and His disciples of the Old Testament Scriptures one point has been somewhat overlooked, namely, what may be termed the area of quotation; in other words, the comparative use made of the different books. In investigating this point and drawing conclusions from the results it must of course be remembered that we have in the New Testament fragments only of our Lord's words, and of the Apostolic teaching. Consequently the absence of reference to this or that prophet, and to this or that incident in the Old Testament, does not by any means exclude the possibility of reference having been made to such books or incidents by Christ and His Apostles. Still the absence of reference on the one hand in some cases, and the fulness of quotation and reference in others, are facts too significant to be disregarded.

First, as to the absence of quotation. Out of the thirty-nine books which make up the Old Testament there are seventeen from which no direct quotation is made in the New Testament. These books are the following:—Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Zephaniah and Haggai. If to these be added Joshua, 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, from each of which books a single unimportant quotation is made in the New Testament, it will result that, with these slight exceptions, there are no citations from the historical books of the Old Testament from the book of Joshua to that of Esther inclusive.

It is true that, apart from direct quotation, references are made to incidents and characters in these books.

For instance, several examples of the inspiring energy of faith are drawn from the historical books of the Old Testament by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and our blessed Lord cites the lesson of the prophet Jonah in a passage of profound significance. Still the fact remains that as a special basis of New Testament teaching the history of the Judges and that of the Kings of Israel and Judah are, to a great extent, ignored. And—what is even more instructive and germane to the object of this paper—while the actual history of the Babylonish captivity and the return to Jerusalem, as narrated in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, are passed over in silence by the New Testament writers, the glorious hopes which arose out of the dark days of exile, as expressed in the glowing language of Isaiah ii., furnish a greater number of quotations in the New Testament than any other portion of the Old Testament except the Psalms.

The absence of direct quotation from the great prophet Ezekiel is remarkable,<sup>1</sup> even if the verbal parallelism of 2 Corinthians iii. 3 and vi. 16 with Ezekiel xi. 19, xxxvi. 26, and xxxvii. 27 be regarded as quotation. The influence, however, of this prophet is traceable in several passages of the New Testament, of which<sup>2</sup> Eichhorn cites Romans ii. 24, Romans x. 5, Galatians iii. 12, 2 Peter iii. 4, as instances, and in the language and imagery of the Apocalypse there is an undoubted reference to this book, especially in the closing chapters; compare, for instance, Revelation xviii. 1 foll. with Ezekiel xxvii. 13 foll., and Revelation xxi. 3, 10, 12, 15, 16, with Ezekiel xxxvii. 27, xl. 1 foll., xlviii. 31–34, xl. 3, 5, xliii. 16.

Turning now to the books of the Old Testament from which quotations are made with more or less frequency, we

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Swete does not include Ezekiel in his list of quotations from the LXX. Dr. Skinner, in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, says:—"He is not quoted expressly by any New Testament writer."

<sup>2</sup> See Kitto's *Bib. Dict. sub voc.* Ezekiel.

find that, in regard to New Testament citation, the Psalms and the prophecies of Isaiah hold a leading and pre-eminent position. "Upon a rough estimate," writes Dr. Swete, "the passages directly quoted from the Old Testament by writers of the New Testament are 160. Of these 51 belong to the Pentateuch, 46 to the Poetical Books and 61 to the Prophets. Among single books the Psalter supplies 40 and Isaiah 38; i.e., nearly half of the passages expressly cited in the New Testament come from one or other of these two sources."<sup>1</sup> Of the remaining books, Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy are most frequently referred to or quoted.

A mere enumeration like this, however, does not carry us far. As has been already intimated, the argument *a silentio* cannot be pressed; and reasons will readily suggest themselves why certain portions of the Old Testament should not have been noticed by the New Testament writers. Still with these facts before us it is worth while to examine further why prominence should have been given to special books or passages, and to consider whether some guidance for our own study and application of the Bible may not emerge from such examination.

And here the first and by far the most important point to consider is our Lord's use of quotations. The books from which passages are directly cited by Jesus are—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, the Psalter, Isaiah, Daniel, Hosea, Zechariah, and Malachi. Historical references are made to Genesis, Exodus, 1 Samuel, 1 Kings, Jonah and Daniel. That is to say, fourteen books only out of the thirty-nine which compose the Old Testament are quoted from or referred to by our Lord. On the other hand, when the risen Saviour preaches His own gospel on the way to Emmaus (Luke xxiv.), or in arguing with the Pharisees (John v. 39),

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, p. 386.

He regards the Scriptures as an inspired whole testifying throughout of Himself. Of such comprehensive surveys of Holy Scripture, modelled, as we cannot doubt, on our Lord's words, we have examples in the defence of St. Stephen and in the addresses of St. Paul at Antioch in Pisidia and elsewhere. But in neither case are we able to detect the particular passages on which stress is laid.

The Gospels, however, present valuable evidence of definite Messianic prediction adduced by our Lord Himself, as in the proclamation of His mission in "the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke iv. 18-19; compare Isaiah lxi. 1, 2), and in the fulfilment by His own ministry of the prophetic Messianic pictures in Isaiah (Matt. xi. 5, xiii. 14, 15; compare Isaiah xxix. 18, vi. 2, 10), and of the story of Jonah by His burial and resurrection.

Such definiteness of reference to fulfilment by our Lord Himself may be distinguished from the more general citations by the Evangelists, which sometimes rather suggest a parallelism than a fulfilled prediction.

In some of our Lord's citations there is a striking unexpectedness of application, as in the evidence for the rejection of the Jew and the admission of the Gentile, in incidents from the lives of Elijah (1 Kings xvii. 8) and Elisha (2 Kings vii. 3), the repentance of Nineveh (Jonah i. 17), and the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon (1 Kings x. 1-13).

But this unexpectedness of application is still more strikingly illustrated by our Lord's interpretation of particular texts; as, for instance, when He teaches that the true character of God, as a God of the living, and also the immortality of the human soul, are deducible from the words spoken to Moses "out of the midst of the bush" (Luke xx. 37 and Exod. iii. 6); or as when He shows the deep significance of such passages as: "I will have mercy and

not sacrifice" (twice quoted Matt. ix. 13; and xii. 7, see Hos. vi. 6); and "The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner" (Matt. xx. 42, see Ps. cxviii. 22), and the origin and primæval obligation of marriage (Matt. xix. 4, 5, see Genesis i. 27, ii. 24, v. 2).

Another important note in our Lord's treatment of the Old Testament is His recognition of the progressive character of revelation. His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is founded on the law, but leads on to a higher level. What was said to "them of old time" is superseded by the law of the new covenant (Matt. v. 17 foll.). And it is important to observe that sometimes the ideal to be arrived at is a reversion to a primitive perfection, as in the last instance cited above, the ideal conception of marriage is far higher and purer than the enactments of the Mosaic law. And only by such reversion is the approach to divine perfection (Matt. v. 48) even conceivable.

Such advance in moral teaching is of course also observable in the inspired reflexion on the part of Israel by its own prophets. The teaching of the most spiritual passages of the Psalter rises far above the ethical level of the times of the Judges; and the approval passed on the acts of Jehu by contemporary prophecy (2 Kings x. 30) is reversed by the maturer judgment of Hosea (chap. i. 4). Again, the older theory of transmitted guilt is exchanged for that of personal responsibility for sin by the authoritative teaching of Ezekiel (chap. xviii. foll.).

That Old Testament history has its solemn lessons for posterity is abundantly proved by our Lord's references to such examples as that of the Flood, and of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. But it is worthy of remark that no reference is made by our Lord Himself to such signal instances of providential working as the

deliverance from Egypt, the Exile in Babylon or the Return, or to the building of the temple by Solomon, or its rebuilding in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, or to the Maccabean struggle. Of the Kings of Israel and Judah after the disruption of the Kingdom not one is even named. The only historical allusions relating to that period are those concerned with the contemporary prophets, as Elijah, Elisha and Jonah, and Zechariah, the priest.

Of historical personages three are prominent in our Lord's teaching,—Abraham, Moses and Elijah.

The dignity of Abraham as father of the elect people, and as the host of the banquet of the Kingdom, is recognized (Matt. viii. 11; Luke xiii. 28, vi. 22, xix. 9), and, more than that, as in some mysterious way having a vision of the Christ across the centuries (John viii. 56).

The popular exaltation of Moses is accepted, but both corrected and amplified. He is still the authoritative teacher, and the representative of the first Covenant, which Jesus Christ came not to destroy but to fulfil (Matt. v. 17, viii. 4, xvii. 3). He is more than that. He is a witness for Christ (John v. 45), and a prophet of His coming (Luke xxiv. 27). On the other hand, Jesus corrects the Jews when they attribute the gift of the heavenly bread to Moses rather than to God (John vi. 32).

In recognizing the greatness of Elijah Jesus again responds to popular feeling. As Moses was representative of the law, Elijah is representative of the prophets (Matt. xvii. 3), and to him the great task is assigned of preceding the Messiah and restoring all things. And this task John accomplished, coming in the Spirit and power of Elijah (Matt. xvii. 11-22).

There is one trait in our Lord's use of the Old Testament which is not directly stated in the Gospels, but may with some certainty be inferred; namely, the

extension, so to speak, of the quotation to its context. This involves the knowledge of whole passages of Scripture by heart or memory—a thought specially suggestive in reference to these words from the Cross, which are taken from Psalms xxii. and xxxi. The first, read as a whole, is not a Psalm of despair but of hope and final victory: “They (the nations of the future; comp. Isa. lx. 3) shall come and shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that He hath done it” (Ps. xxii. 31). And in Psalm xxxi. the writer, though in the deepest distress, and surrounded by danger and treachery, begins and ends with expressions of perfect trust in Jehovah.

The above remarks by no means present an exhaustive treatment of the great and interesting subject of our Lord’s use and interpretation of the Old Testament, but they will perhaps be found sufficient to illustrate and confirm the conclusions aimed at in this paper.

The use of the Old Testament Scriptures on which the chief stress is laid by the Apostles and disciples of our Lord is indicated by St. Luke’s phrase “shewing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ” (Acts xviii. 8). An early proof of this is found in St. Peter’s speech on the Day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 14–36) and in St. Paul’s discourse in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts xiii. 16–41) already referred to. St. Peter quotes from Joel to show that the signs of the Messianic age had been manifested; and from Psalms xvi. and cx. in order to point to their fulfilment in the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ.

The scope of St. Stephen’s speech (Acts vii.) is not, strictly speaking, Messianic. The line of defence is variously interpreted. But one leading thought at least is that the rejection of a prophet by Israel was by no means decisive against his divine mission or credentials. This he shows by a rapid historical retrospect. The abrupt change in the argu-



ment at verse 51 is sometimes explained by supposing an angry interruption of the speech by the Council. It is, however, equally probable that St. Stephen had reached the point in the history of Israel at which he desired to stop—the commencement, namely, of the divided kingdom. If this be so, the silence of St. Stephen on that period coincides in a remarkable way with what we have seen of our Lord's teaching, and also with the discourse of St. Paul at Antioch, who does not trace the history of Israel beyond David (Acts xiii. 36). It coincides also with the historical notes on the heroes of faith in Hebrews xi., where, after the mention of David, the writer goes on to allude to the martyrs of the Maccabean period.

With St. Paul the revelation through Jesus Christ cast a new and wonderful light on the Scriptures of the Old Testament. In Christ a mystery or divine secret was revealed (Eph. i. 9). All through past ages a divine purpose had been at work, and a Divine Person had been moving and speaking in terms which were only made manifest and clear in the fulness of time by the gospel of Christ. To St. Paul the Scriptures, which from his childhood he had studied in ignorance, became literally a new book, instinct throughout with the living Christ. Words seem to fail the Apostle in his effort to describe the marvel of this new light. The secret of history was revealed at length, and in a special manner, to him: "God having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ" (Eph. i. 10).

This, then, is the Christian view both of the Old Testament and of history as St. Paul teaches. And it is interesting to note that, to judge by the number and weight of quotations from the Old Testament, St. Paul founds or illustrates his thesis chiefly by reference to the Pentateuch,

the Psalter and the book of Isaiah, the same parts of the Old Testament which are cited so largely by our Lord.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, as would naturally be inferred from its subject and aims, is full of references to the Old Testament. It is, as Professor Swete remarks, "in great part a catena of quotations from the LXX." The argument of the first portion of this great Epistle is directed to show the pre-eminence of Christ in comparison with the greatest of the Old Testament characters. Without going further into that argument it is enough to point out here how true to Christ's teaching the argument is, and therefore how legitimate is the use thus made of the Old Testament Scriptures. For, like the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Christ shows of Himself that He is greater than the angels, for they ministered unto Him (Matt. iv. 11; Heb. i. 6); greater than Abraham, before whom He was (John viii. 58; comp. Matt. iii. 9 and Heb. xiii. 4); He was greater than Moses, whose law He came to fulfil and enrich (John i. 17; Heb. iii. 3-6); greater than Aaron, as being the mediator of a better Covenant, and a Priest of a higher order (comp. John xvii. 19 with Heb. v. 5, 6, 10); greater than David, who called Him Lord (Matt. xxii. 43); greater than Solomon (Matt. xii. 42) and the prophets, who spake of Him (Matt. xxi. 37).

The later chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews exhibit the spiritual teaching of all history. It is faith, or the clear intuition and grasp of the unseen divine reality, that gives the key to the interpretation of all that was noblest and most inspiring in the annals of the chosen people.

As every Christian will desire to study the Scriptures as Christ studied them, the first question to be solved is whether this is possible. Have the extended investigations and deeper knowledge of history and of nature precluded the possibility of deriving the same spiritual instruction

from the Bible, which Christ and His Apostles taught us to find in it ?

To the present writer one answer only seems possible to this question. The spiritual teaching founded on history or tradition or on science as apprehended at the time is strengthened instead of being weakened by the deeper knowledge of both, which is indeed, the revelation divinely made to the present day. It is impossible to state here even in outline the grounds of his conclusion. But a moment's reflection will show both the inconceivability and, for spiritual teaching, the needlessness of the revelation to a primitive people of the last results of historical and scientific research.

What was needed for Israel was such a revelation of the being of God, of the creation of the world and of man, as would enable the chosen people to avoid the idolatry and the vices of surrounding nations.

It follows, then, that all through the ages, and not least in the present day, the spiritual side of the Old Testament is of paramount importance, and that, deeply interesting as are investigations into the external history and the antiquities and geography of the Bible, neither the inquiries themselves nor the instruction founded on them are, strictly speaking, either spiritual or even theological. This conclusion seems justified by the comparative silence with which the history of the kings of Israel and Judah is passed over in the New Testament. The point is not unimportant in view of the disproportionate educational value attached, from the Universities downwards, to an exact knowledge of the historical books of the Old Testament. "What is valuable in history," writes Bishop Creighton, speaking of history in general, "is a general idea of the progress of society and intelligence." Applied to Biblical study the meaning of this is that, as distinct from names and dates, the value of Holy Scripture is to be found in its divine guidance of life and in its revelation of the meaning and

purpose of history culminating in Christ. (Eph. i. 10; comp. Ps. xxxiii. 10).

The results, then, of the investigation which we have lightly sketched point to a change in the educational use of the Old Testament. If we search the Scriptures of the Old Testament as Christ has taught us to search them, we shall find that they testify of Him, and that the passages in them which treat of the majesty, the love and the power of Jehovah are reflected in the life and acts and character of the Incarnate Word as revealed in the New Testament.

And, if the true value and inspiration of the Old Testament are seen to lie in its divine teaching and revelation rather than in its narrative and description, the survey which we have taken also proves incontestably that certain books are more calculated than others to convey the inspired message from God to man. Of the 160 passages directly quoted from the Old Testament by writers in the New Testament, as we have already seen, nearly half come from the Psalter and the Book of Isaiah, and to these should be added many portions of the Pentateuch.

From these facts the inference is irresistible, that the teaching of the New Testament rests more on those passages of the Old Testament than on other parts; and that in these books inspiration has risen to its highest point. On the whole this pre-eminence has been recognized by the Church in the liturgical use of the Old Testament, and by the religious consciousness of Christians.

But a failure to distinguish the comparative wealth of inspiration in the "divers portions" of the Bible has led sometimes to a perverted conception of Biblical study; and sometimes—a far more serious matter—to a perversion of national religion. An example of the first is the pious but mistaken habit of reading the Bible through from

beginning to end without due regard to the relative value of the different parts. But a wider and graver mischief, arising from the same cause, has been the tendency, at certain epochs of history, to accept, as principles of thought and action, the wild justice of the period of the Judges, or the zeal of Elijah, rather than the peaceful visions of Isaiah, or those Psalms which anticipate the precepts of the gospel.

ARTHUR CARR.

“ A priest? ay, a priest of Baal to be bound and slain as at the brook Kishon.”—*Old Mortality*, chap. vi.