Every reader of the New Testament is aware of the frequency of Old Testament quotation in the New Testament writings. There are, in fact, somewhere between two and three hundred actual quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament. Beyond this, of course, there is a great amount of allusive material, some of which is deliberate, and some of which is unconscious, though nonetheless real.

The New Testament writers were thoroughly immersed in the Holy Scriptures which had been handed down to them by their forefathers. They lived and breathed the content of these writings, particularly the recital of God’s saving activity in behalf of Israel and the covenant promises concerning the future of God’s people. When they were confronted with the ministry of Jesus—its proclamation by word and deed of the presence of the Kingdom—they were, as we would say, “programmed” to understand it as the consummation of God’s saving activity and the fulfillment of the covenant promises. Thus, when they came to narrate the story of Christ in the gospels and the meaning of that story in the epistles, these writers continually made use of the Old Testament to show that what had so recently taken place in their midst was in fact the goal of Old Testament anticipation. In perceiving the unity of the Bible thus evidenced, the Christian Church rightly affirms, following St. Augustine, that the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old becomes manifest in the New.

But the way in which the Old Testament is made manifest in the New has often caused difficulty for Christian readers of the Bible. We have all had the experience of encountering an Old Testament quotation in the New Testament which, when we looked it up in the Old Testament, was found to differ in wording quite considerably from its occurrence in the New Testament, or which seemed to violate the sense of the Old Testament passage in its larger context, or which in some other way seemed to be arbitrary and unjustifiable. Our purpose here is to look into the subject of Old Testament quotations in order to suggest lines along which the solutions to these difficulties may lie. This will involve us in questions of text, hermeneutics, and apologetics; and in the process we shall hope to discover more of the mind of the New Testament writers in terms of their perception of the relationship between the two Testaments.

In any attempt to understand the writers of the New Testament (or the Old Testament, for that matter) it must be insisted upon that we make every effort to enter their world, to stand in their shoes, and to perceive, think, and feel as they did. This is true not only as the foundational principle of exegesis, but also with respect to our present concerns.

**Freedom of Quotation**

Exact, verbatim quotation was generally foreign to the spirit of the Graeco-Roman world of the first century A.D. In our modern world, we are constantly confronted not only with the
accuracy of scientific measurement, but also with the exactness of the printed word, and the
precise use of quotation marks delimiting material borrowed verbatim from a writer’s sources. 
These things were either unknown or of no actual consequence in the ancient world. Careful 
and accurate copying of the Scriptures was known, but did not carry over into the use of the 
Scriptures. The copies of Torah were a special matter of sacrosanctity. Direct discourse was 
sometimes indicated by the recitative hōtī, but this served only to point out the beginning of a 
quotation, not its end.¹

Today we attach very great importance to word-for-word accuracy in quotation. It is quite 
evident that this was not a real concern in the New Testament period. One need only 
remember the

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difficulty of passages in the synoptic gospels where the words of Jesus occur in two or three 
parallel accounts but with considerable variations. It is true that some of the variations may be 
explained as alternative translations of the same underlying Aramaic. However, not all the 
variations are thus accountable, and unless one takes the route of harmonizing every such 
instance (i.e., arguing that very similar things were spoken or clone on different occasions), 
one is left with some freedom on the part of the Gospel writers in presenting the words of 
Jesus.

In the gospel of John there is the well-known problem of where the words of Jesus leave off, 
and where the words of John begin (John 3:10ff.). The RSV closes the quotation at the end of 
verse 15; NASB and NEB close it at verse 21. The KJV skirts such problems by simply 
avoiding quotation marks (its usual practice). In 1 Thessalonians 4:15ff., it is not clear 
how—much of Paul’s declaration is to be understood as “the word of the Lord.” Nothing was 
more authoritative in the early Church than the words of Jesus, and yet even in our New 
Testament there is little concern for verbatim reporting of those words. There is a vital 
concern for accurate representation of the message of Jesus, but this was not understood to 
demand the ipsissima verba of Jesus. It is not our purpose to deny that verbatim or very nearly 
verbatim reports of the words of Jesus are ever found in the gospel narratives. Our main point 
is that a verbatim account was not considered necessary to an accurate representation of what 
Jesus said. This is also reflected by the popularity of oral tradition even after written gospels 
were available. Oral tradition containing the sayings of Jesus, although it varied from place to 
place, was reasonably stable and some preferred it over the written gospels. Papias is reported 
as saying (at the beginning of the second century), “I did not suppose that information from 
books would help me so much as the word of a living and surviving voice.”² The early 
apostolic Fathers similarly cited oral tradition rather than the written gospels when they 
quoted the sayings of Jesus.³

If the Church exhibited little concern for the verbatim words of Jesus when it treasured His 
authority above all others, we may expect that the early Christians in their use of the Old 
Testament,

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which they also treasured as the Word of God, may similarly have been unconcerned with 
verbatim quotation. This is in fact what we find as we look at the quotations in the New
Testament. What was regarded as important was not the precise wording of a passage, but rather the sense of the passage. Here too, as with the words of Jesus, citation from memory seems to have been the rule.

Man’s capacity for memory was considerably more practiced in the ancient world than it is today. The unavailability of the written word, because of the high cost of hand-copied manuscripts, made the use of memory a necessity. Even when copies of Old Testament writings were available, they would have consisted of scrolls which had to be unwound and rewound as they were read or consulted, thus making reference a very demanding task. Added to this difficulty was the fact that the text itself was without chapter or verse divisions. All of this contributed to the acceptability, if not desirability, of memory citation.

Now, despite the fact that the memory was more developed in that era, it was by no means flawless in the sense that it could consistently come up with verbatim reproduction of an Old Testament passage. On occasion it may well have been able to do so. But for the most part, memory produced a fair representation of the passage not dissimilar to what our less practiced memories today will provide. Very often when we quote from memory, the sense of the passage is clear enough, but we should not like to be held responsible for its exact wording.

The point which must be stressed, however, is that verbatim citation, a procedure so familiar and important to us today, was no matter of concern in the New Testament period. There are instances, to be sure, when a particular single word in an Old Testament passage may be of crucial importance for the argument of a New Testament writer. For example, Paul’s argument in Galatians 3:16 depends not only upon the meaning of the word seed (zera, Heb.; sperma, Gk.) as found in Genesis, but also upon the singular form of the word (despite the fact that the singular is here a collective). Similarly, Matthew’s application of Isaiah 7:14 to the birth of Jesus (1:23) may be said to depend upon the Septuagint’s word parthenos, “virgin.” But these are the exceptions rather than the rule. A precise word or phrase may at times have been of central importance; but much more often than not, the importance lay in the sense of the passage as effectively conveyed by free quotation.

As we shall see, however, the freedom of quotation as it conveyed the sense old the Old Testament passage was neither haphazard nor capricious. It was carefully informed and guided by the Church’s understanding of the events and the significance of the events that on the one hand were the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise, and on the other hand that now constituted the basis of the kerygma which it was the Church’s mission to proclaim.

**The Text of the Quotations**

Although free rather than exact quotation is common in the Old Testament quotations found in the New Testament, it is often possible to discover the underlying text form which served as the writer’s source. Three main possibilities present themselves as sources of these
quotations: (1) a Hebrew text, whether non-Masoretic or proto-Masoretic;* (2) a Greek text from the Septuagint tradition or parallel to that tradition;† and (3) an Aramaic targum text (whether oral or written) reflecting the interpretive, paraphrastic translations in use during the New Testament period.‡ As materials for the comparison of texts, we have (1) the standard Masoretic Hebrew text, and now, thanks to the discoveries beside the Dead Sea at Qumran, portions of the Hebrew Scriptures, both in proto-Masoretic text form and in the text form reflected in the Septuagint; (2) our manuscripts of the Septuagint which in complete form date from the fourth century A.D.; and (3) manuscripts of targums of the Pentateuch and the prophets, which in complete form date from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries A.D., but which in various ways are attested in the Middle Ages and earlier.6

As we seek to understand the writers of our New Testament and their use of the Scriptures, we must remind ourselves of the varied and complex textual traditions that were available to them. The message of the Scriptures was available not only in three different languages, but often in variant forms in each language. Today we are used to a relatively stable textual tradition for both Testaments (i.e., the eclectic, critical texts represented for example by Kittel’s Hebrew edition and Nestle’s Greek edition), and it is difficult to appreciate the situation of the first century. We may, however, catch at least a glimmer of that complex situation by thinking of the diversity reflected in our English translations of the Bible, especially if we consider the more paraphrastic translations of, say, J. B. Phillips, or Kenneth Taylor in the Living Bible, alongside the free New English Bible and the literalistic American Standard Version of 1901. But the parallel is only a partial one since these are all English translations and are all essentially based on the same relatively stable textual substratum. With the consideration of translations in different languages and the lack of a fully stable substratum for any of them, the situation immediately becomes much more complex.

It would be wrong to imagine the New Testament writers at every point carefully reviewing the available Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic sources and then specifically choosing which to make use of in a particular quotation. Quite the contrary. Not only is this out of sympathy with the mood of the times, as we have seen, but it fails to appreciate the importance of a primary datum—that Greek was the lingua franca of the Mediterranean world and the language used in the writing of the New Testament. Now, when one is writing in Greek and

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* Before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947, the earliest manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible dated from the tenth century A.D. They were produced by Jewish scholars (Masoretes) who added the vowel signs to the consonantal text during the seventh century. They were also responsible for the careful transmission of the text into the Middle Ages. The Hebrew text of the first century A.D. is often called the proto-Masoretic text insofar as it resembles the later text. See E. Würthwein, The Text of the Old Testament (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957).
† The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. According to tradition (The Letter of Aristeas), it was begun in the third century B.C. and was completed before the New Testament era. There has been much debate on its early history, and the possibility of Greek translations other than what has come down to us must be reckoned with. See S. Jellicoe, The Septuagint and Modern Study (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968).
‡ Aramaic targums (translations) came into existence in the centuries prior to the New Testament era when the Aramaic-speaking populace began to forget the Hebrew language. The influence of Aramaic began with the settlement of the Northern Kingdom after 721 B.C. and grew during the following centuries. By the first century A.D., Hebrew was apparently used only in liturgy and rabbinic scholarship.

desires to quote the Scriptures in Greek, it is only natural that existing Greek translations currently used

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by the Jews of the Dispersion should come to mind. Thus it does not come as a great surprise to discover that a very high percentage of Old Testament quotations in the New Testament reflect dependence upon the septuagintal tradition. Quotations in Luke-Acts and Hebrews follow the Septuagintal tradition very closely. Other writers, such as Paul and Mark, do not adhere to it quite as faithfully, although they often depend on it. The influence of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Aramaic targums, where it can be detected, is clearly exceptional rather than normal, and we are justified in looking for particular reasons for the preference of such textual traditions over the Septuagintal tradition.

We have already referred to the fact that the Aramaic targums are interpretive translations. This is particularly the case with the Palestinian Targum of the Pentateuch as compared with the more literal Targum of the same material by Onkelos. What we have not yet mentioned is the relationship between our Septuagintal tradition and the Hebrew Masoretic tradition. The relationship is complex for the simple reason that the translations which make up our Septuagint were evidently made by a number of persons of varying ability and over a lengthy period of time.

In comparing the Septuagint translations with the Masoretic Hebrew text (and supposing that something like the Masoretic text constituted the Hebrew text being translated), it has been noted that while the Pentateuch has been translated very carefully (this is probably explained by its preeminence in the Hebrew canon), the translations of certain prophetical and historical books were relatively poor, and the translations of the wisdom writings of Job and Proverbs were markedly free and paraphrastic. Particularly puzzling were those translations which were for the most part carefully literal, yet here and there departed radically from our Masoretic Hebrew text form. The Septuagint translation of Jeremiah, for example, not only drastically differs in the order of the contents of the Masoretic text, but also lacks material to the extent that it is one-eighth shorter than the Masoretic text.

Wherever the Septuagint translation diverged significantly from the proto-Masoretic text, the divergence was in the past attributed to the industry of the translators despite the obscurity of their possible motivations. All this changed suddenly when among the discoveries at Qumran were found fragmentary manuscripts of such books as Samuel and Jeremiah in Hebrew which agreed closely with the Septuagint both in text-type and abridgment or alteration of order. The conclusion which has been drawn from the discovery of these manuscripts is that the Septuagintal text, where it differs from the proto-Masoretic text, is not the result of the caprice of the translators, but depends on an early non-Masoretic Hebrew recension which existed alongside the proto-Masoretic recension. Thus the Septuagint, with the authority of an identifiable Hebrew substratum, has gained a new respectability.

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As already indicated, it was normal for the authors of the New Testament, who were writing in Greek, to employ the Septuagint translation when they quoted the Old Testament. The Septuagint translation was, after all, a Jewish product, having been completed about a century before the time of Christ, and enjoying a widespread popularity among Jews who knew the language of Alexander better than that of Moses. Only after the Christians had made such effective use of the Septuagint in arguing the truth of their faith did the Jews become disillusioned with the Septuagint, ban it from Jewish use,§ and set about producing alternative Greek translations of the proto-Masoretic text which purposely avoided possible Christian interpretations.¶

This use of the Septuagint by New Testament writers will often account for our puzzlement at the lack of agreement in wording between a quotation in the New Testament and its Old Testament source as we study our English Bible. Our Old Testament is invariably an English translation of the Hebrew Masoretic text; in most instances our quotation in the New Testament is an English translation of the Greek of the Septuagint text. This will obviously produce variation in actual wording, although we often find that the sense is substantially the same.

At times, however, the Septuagint will differ more significantly from the Masoretic text, and here our problems are more serious. A classic example of a difference between Septuagint and Masoretic texts which is reflected in a New Testament quotation is the use of Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23. There the Septuagint word parthenos specifically indicates that it is a virgin who is to conceive and bear a son, whereas the Hebrew word 'almah, meaning “young woman” (and not bethulah, meaning “virgin”) is used. But the fact that Jewish translators more than a century before Christ chose parthenos to translate 'almah indicates not only that “virgin” is a legitimate translation, but that it was then regarded as the most appropriate word to use.#

Another example of a Septuagint reading in the New Testament which differs from the Masoretic text is to be found in the citation of James at the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15:16-18. In addition to a few interesting but not very significant variations, there is the clause, “that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord” which in the Masoretic text of our Old Testament reads, “that they may possess the remnant of Edom” (Amos 9:12). There are three key differences: (1) in the Masoretic text, “remnant” is clearly the object of the clause; in the Septuagint it is the subject; (2) in the Masoretic text “Edom” qualifies “remnant”; in the

§ This was a radical departure from the earlier glowing approbation of the Septuagint (referring to the Pentateuch only) in the legend contained in the Letter of Aristeas, according to which the seventy-two translators (six from each tribe of Israel) worked exactly seventy-two days to produce a divinely superintended translation.
¶ The second century A.D. versions thus produced are: (1) Aquila, characterized by extreme literalness; (2) Theodotion, whose work was perhaps more revisional than original (and whose translation of Daniel was accepted by the Church over against the Old Septuagint translation, which was markedly inferior); (3) Symmachus, an Ebionite, who attempted to produce a translation of literary merit of which very little has survived. See B. J. Roberts, The Old Testament Text and Versions (Cardiff: U. of Wales, 1951).
# Although neanis (young woman) does not occur in the Septuagint of Isaiah, there can be no doubt that it was known to the translator(s) and thus they could have used it (cf. their relatively frequent use of neaniskos, “young man”). The later Jewish translations, of course, avoided the word parthenos.
Septuagint the qualifier is “men”; and (3) the verb in the Masoretic text is “may possess”; in the Septuagint it is “may seek.” This is an example of the Septuagint’s dependence on a Hebrew text other than the proto-Masoretic, although in any case the differences that would be required in the Hebrew are very minor: (1) omission of the objectifying particle *eth*; (2) addition of one letter changing *yireshu* (may inherit) to *yidreshu* (may seek); (3) use of different vowel points changing *edom* to *adam* (man). The Septuagint

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reading quoted by James will be seen to be particularly effective in his argument that the conversion of the Gentiles is the fulfillment of Amos’ prophecy.

As a final example we may refer to Hebrews 1:6: “And again, when he brings the first-born into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him’ ” (RSV). The last six words reflect the Septuagint text of Deuteronomy 32:43, which is considerably fuller than the Masoretic text of the same verse. Indeed, upon consulting our English Old Testament (reflecting the Masoretic text) we will be frustrated at finding no material which corresponds to our quotation in the New Testament.

The examples we have given may be regarded as representative of the impact of the Septuagint tradition upon the New Testament. (For further conspicuous examples, see Ac 2:25-28 quoting PS 16:8-11, and 1 Co 15:54-55 quoting Ho 13:14.) Quite frequently a knowledge of that tradition will help us in difficulties posed by Old Testament quotations. The use of the Septuagint is so prevalent throughout the New Testament that we would not be far off the mark in referring to the Septuagint as the Bible of the early Church. In addition to the actual quotations, the influence of the Septuagint upon the New Testament in terms of allusory language, specific vocabulary, and conceptuality is incalculable.10

The importance of the Septuagint in the first century is primarily due to the reality of Greek as the language which united the Mediterranean world. But the linguistic scene was nonetheless a complicated one, and most Jews were bilingual and perhaps even trilingual.11 In this kind of situation one may expect that the quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament would at times reveal the influence of Aramaic targums and the proto-Masoretic Hebrew textual tradition.

Although the influence of the Aramaic targums on New Testament phraseology seems to have been quite extensive,12 the actual impact of the targums in the Old Testament quotations has often been difficult to substantiate owing to the complexity of the whole matter. However, a couple of examples will illustrate that this is a factor which must be given serious consideration.13 The citation of Isaiah 6:9 in Mark 4:12 agrees neither with the Masoretic nor

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the Septuagint text. The citation has the third person pronoun “they may indeed perceive” for the second person “you” and also has the phrase “and it be forgiven them” for “be healed” (active, “I heal them,” in the Septuagint). But the text of Isaiah 6:9 as it is found in the Targum of Jonathan agrees exactly with the text of the quotation as found in Mark.
Another instance where there is evidence of a targumic text supporting a quotation in the New Testament which differs from both the Masoretic and Septuagint traditions is to be found in the quotation of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8. The Targum of the Psalms agrees with the New Testament in that gifts were given to men, whereas the Masoretic and Septuagint traditions have the gifts being received rather than given. These examples suggest that careful scrutiny of the Targums may well solve problems created wherever the Old Testament quotation in the New Testament differs from both the Septuagint and Masoretic traditions.

Many quotations in the New Testament agree exactly with both the Masoretic and Septuagint texts. In these instances, as we look up the Old Testament reference, we find the text in complete accord with our quotation and we encounter no problems. Probably we are to assume that the New Testament writer was dependent on the Septuagint text, which here coincides exactly with the Masoretic. There are, of course, numerous other instances where a quotation in the New Testament will be found to agree with the Masoretic text against that of the Septuagint. Since, as we have stated, we ordinarily expect the quotations in the New Testament to reflect dependence upon the Septuagint, we may here entertain the notion that our writer has used the equivalent of the Hebrew/Masoretic text directly, or at least has had some kind of indirect access to its contents. So far as formal quotations are concerned, only one strand of New Testament material rather consistently reflects what may be called a mixed text form rather than the Septuagintal text form.** This is the group of some twenty formal quotations peculiar to the gospel of Matthew, as contrasted with the Septuagintal nature of the quotations which are borrowed by Matthew from the Marcan tradition.

Among these formal quotations in Matthew, we may cite the following examples of the apparent influence of the Hebrew text on quotations as they exist in the Greek of Matthew: Matthew 2:6, quoting Micah 5:2; Matthew 4:15-16, quoting Isaiah 9:1-2; Matthew 8:17, quoting Isaiah 53:4; Matthew 27:9-10, quoting Zechariah 11:12-13. Examination of these examples will reveal that the text of the quotation does not agree exactly or completely with that of the Masoretic Hebrew text. The text type is a mixed one, yet at significant points it will be seen to agree with the Masoretic text against that of the Septuagint. Agreement with the Masoretic text is, of course, no concern or problem to the average reader, since after all his English Old Testament is a translation of the Masoretic text.

In summary, the have seen that the various text forms in which the Old Testament was available to writers of the New Testament often explains apparent divergences in specific Old Testament quotations. Thus to understand the textual makeup of these quotations we must be aware of the major sources, viz., the proto-Masoretic Hebrew, the Greek Septuagint, the Aramaic Targums (as well as other sources of much less importance which we have not mentioned), while remembering that our English Old Testaments invariably are translations of the Masoretic tradition. This knowledge will take us a good distance toward our goal, but we will still fall somewhat short. The fact is that we must continually reckon with the reality of paraphrase, in keeping with what we argued in the first section, both deliberate and from

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** R. H. Gundry, in calling attention to the mixed text form of the allusive material in Mark, has argued that in the synoptic tradition it is the formal quotations in Mark that are peculiar in having a consistently septuagintal text form. See Gundry, The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

memory. The latter especially will often result in the combination or the conflation of different Old Testament passages thus causing us problems and sometimes making the quest for source next to impossible. For example, the quotation in 1 Corinthians 2:9 looks as though it is a free rendering of Isaiah 64:4 with some conflation of the Septuagint of Isaiah 65:16. A famous example of combination is the quotation of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 in Mark 1:2, with the quoted material being introduced as from Isaiah the prophet. Compare the

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quotation of Zechariah 11:1-3 in Matthew 27:9 ascribed to Jeremiah (but see Jer 18:1-3). It is possible that this phenomenon is to be explained by dependence upon early collections of prophetic passages useful to the Christian apologetic which have been named “testimony books.”

There is one further factor which often has a natural, if at times unpredictable, bearing on the text of a quotation—that is, the interpretation of the Old Testament material by the New Testament writer. Not only would the writer’s interpretative perspective occasionally determine which of the various available text forms he would choose for his quotation, but often the New Testament writer himself did not hesitate to make creative adaptations of the quoted matter in order to heighten the effectiveness of the quotation. R. H. Gundry has convincingly argued that the process of targumizing or paraphrasing the Old Testament text, with which the Jews of the first century were very familiar, carried over into the early Church quite readily, and was used freely by Christian preachers and writers. Thus he states that Matthew’s Old Testament quotations reveal the Targumic activity of Matthew himself. Similarly, E. E. Ellis has shown that many of Paul’s Old Testament quotations contain ad hoc renderings along the lines of what Ellis calls “midrash peshar,” or paraphrastic interpretation governed by the fulfillment motif.

In this type of approach to the Old Testament materials, the New Testament writers reveal that their interests lay not in the letter of the Old Testament text but in its meaning—and more particularly, its meaning as apprehended in the light of the fulfillment which has come in Jesus Christ, and as apprehended by the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit in guiding them into all truth. The interpretation of the Old Testament by New Testament writers as it is revealed in their quotations has in itself often caused problems for readers of the New Testament, and it is to this subject that we must now turn.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The thinking of the authors of our New Testament was dominated by the idea of fulfillment. For them Jesus Christ was the

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goal of the Old Testament: “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him” (2 Co 1:20). The fulfillment had come in their own day, and they therefore saw themselves as the true heirs of the Old Testament promise. Ultimately what the Old Testament had in view was the succession of events that so recently had occurred in their midst. Thus Paul could describe
himself and his contemporaries as those “upon whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Co 10:11).

It follows that these men were alive to the writings of the Old Testament in a new way. Paul and the early Church believed that it was through Christ that the veil which obscured the meaning of the Old Covenant was taken away (2 Co 3:14f.). Working with the theme of promise and fulfillment, the earliest Christians saw signs pointing to the Christ event not only in obviously prophetic passages, but also in passages which to us do not seem oriented to a future expectation at all. To understand and appreciate this interpretation of the Old Testament, we must attempt to move into the mental world of the first-century Jew.

Let us begin with some examples of the more literal prophecies that are quoted in the New Testament. Often these prophecies are self-explanatory and present us with no serious problems. In Matthew 2:6 the straightforward prophecy of Micah 5:2 about the birth of a Messianic ruler in Bethlehem of Judah is quoted. Matthew’s formula quotation in 4:15-16 presents a prophecy from Isaiah 9:1-2, which involves simple prediction and fulfillment. That the words of the prophecy are in the past tense is no difficulty. Mien it is remembered that often the prophets used the Hebrew perfect (past) tense when describing future events (thus the so-called prophetic perfect). The prophecy and fulfillment relating to the entry of the King of Israel into Jerusalem as recorded in Matthew 21:5 (cf. Zec 9:9) cause no difficulty to our mind.† † In Acts 2:17-21 ‘Peter describes the Pentecost event as a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (2:28-32) about the pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh. The prediction and fulfillment here is manifestly plain, although the latter section of the passage quoted from Joel (referring to astronomical phenomena accompanying the Day of the Lord) is, as we shall see, subject to different interpretations. These prophecies and others involving this same kind of straight line prediction and fulfillment are the easiest for us to grasp. The prophet clearly had a future event in view which can be easily identified as having happened in the New Testament and only there.

This is not the case, however, with the majority of Old Testament quotations in the New Testament. Very often fulfillment involves a new complexity in that it is ascribed to prophetic passages which must also have had some kind of fulfillment for the prophet’s contemporaries. Beyond this, fulfillment is often ascribed to Old Testament passages which have no semblance of predictive intention, such as historical narrative, devotional utterances of a psalmist, or descriptive assertions of the prophets.

All of this leads us to the recognition of what has been called the sensus plenior, or “fuller sense,” of Old Testament Scripture. To be aware of sensus plenior is to realize that there is the possibility of more significance to an Old Testament passage than was consciously apparent to the original author, and more than can be gained by strict grammmatico-historical exegesis. Such is the nature of divine inspiration that the authors of Scripture were themselves often not conscious of the fullest significance and final application of what they wrote. This

† † The question concerning the number of animals has caused considerable discussion, since Zec 9:9 should be understood as referring to a single animal (in accordance with synonymous parallelism). See Gundry, The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel, pp. 197ff.
fuller sense of the Old Testament can be seen only in retrospect and in the light of the New Testament fulfillment.

Sensus Plenior is thus based upon and presupposes the unity of the Bible. The events recorded in the New Testament constitute the goal of the entire Old Testament. The result of this viewpoint is that the Old Testament has an immediate relevance to the message of the New Testament. God is one; there is one people of God and one plan of salvation, and thus the whole of Scripture is interrelated. This can readily be seen in the large amount of Old Testament material that is applied by the New Testament writers to the Church quite directly, whether in terms of exhortation,

example, or explanation.‡‡ It is this kind of application that was in Paul’s thinking when, having described the experiences of Israel in the wilderness, he wrote, “Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Co 10:11). The Old Testament is written for the instruction of the Church, and the interrelation is such that the large body of nonpredictive matter in the Old Testament is capable of direct application to the Church.

We must tie in with this concept of the unity of God, His people, and His work, the Jewish (and biblical) insistence on the sovereignty of God in all the affairs of history. This overarching sovereignty of God guarantees that recurring patterns in the history of salvation (God’s work with Israel and the Church) are not simply fortuitous but are carefully designed according to His will. Thus events, patterns of thought, and lessons in the experience of Israel serve the purpose of anticipating God’s fuller work for His people in the end-time in Jesus Christ. In this way our attention is directed to the unity of God’s plan and the consistency of His saving activity on behalf of His people to the present era of fulfillment.

This view of history and the sovereignty of God so controlled the minds of our New Testament writers that they not only were aware of the perfect applicability of Old Testament exhortation and example to the New Testament Church, but were also particularly alert to correspondences between Old Testament material and the salvation they witnessed to in Jesus Christ. The study of such correspondences has taken the name typology, since the Old Testament elements are referred to as types and the New Testament counterparts antitypes. The word type is a biblical word (typos, meaning “mark,” “figure,” or “model”). For example, in Romans 5:14 Adam is referred to as a “type of the one who was to come.” In 1 Corinthians 10:6 the word occurs again (RSV translates “warnings”) when referring to the experiences of Israel in the wilderness. Note also the occurrence of the adverb typikos (typologically) in 1 Corinthians 10:11.

The question of the extent to which such correspondences are to be detected in the Old Testament and the fulfillment of the New Testament has been much discussed with the matter of proper controls being a major concern.¹⁹ This question is asked at two levels. First, what

‡‡ For exhortation, see Heb 12:5-6 and 1 Pe 3:10-12; for example, see 1 Co 10:7 and Heb 3:7-11; for explanation, see Ro 4:3, 7 and Paul’s use of the Old Testament in Ro 9-11.
typology did our New Testament writers make use of? Second, to what extent can we go beyond them in the tracing of types and antitypes? Although at the second level the question is very interesting, our concern here is with actual use of typological correspondences by our New Testament writers.

Given their basic understanding of salvation history, the New Testament writers freely engaged in typological thinking about the relationship between old and new. For these men typological relationships were the result of God’s design so that in some sense the type “prophesied” the antitype, and the latter “fulfilled” the former. This terminology, which we tend to automatically associate with prediction and prediction alone, is applied to correspondences in the patterns of events in view. The tracing of typological correspondences is a special instance of detecting the sensus plenior of Old Testament material. That is, the Old Testament is seen to contain a fuller sense than immediately meets the eye and, indeed, which is discernible only in the light of its New Testament counterpart.

We must now turn to some illustrations of what we have been discussing theoretically. It is best to begin with some of the more difficult quotations in the gospel of Matthew. The key to understanding these quotations is the concept of sensus plenior. In Matthew 1:23 the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 is rightly quoted as finding its fulfillment in the birth of Jesus. This is the fullest significance of the prophecy. In its context, however, the fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy was to serve as a sign to Ahaz concerning contemporary events. Since the child’s name was to be Immanuel (God with us), it was natural to associate him with the great promises of Isaiah 9:6-7 and 11:1-5, and thus to see the prophecy of his birth to be ultimately fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. Thus we may well speak of “multiple fulfillment,” provided we stress the continuity of promise and the underlying unity of sense or meaning that ties together the separate fulfillments.

In the quotations in Matthew 2:15 and 2:18, we see sensus plenior in terms of typological correspondence. In both instances a historical event of the past is likened to a corresponding event in the infancy of Jesus. These events are accordingly spoken of in the language of fulfillment. Thus when Hosea 11:1 says “out of Egypt I called my son,” Matthew could see in this literal reference to the Exodus of Israel from Egypt a pattern corresponding to the departure from Egypt of the Son of God, Jesus. In the same manner, Matthew was alive to the correspondences between the wailing of the Bethlehemites at the slaughter of their male infants and the wailing of Rachel (whose tomb is on the outskirts of Bethlehem) for the exiled captives (Jer 31:15), and thus describes the former as the fulfillment of the latter. These correspondences, to repeat, were not regarded as coincidental but were seen as divinely intended. There is not only interconnection, then, but also foreshadowing and fulfillment.

One of the notoriously difficult quotations in Matthew is where it is said that Jesus dwelt in Nazareth, “that what was spoken of by the prophets might be fulfilled. ‘He shall be called a Nazarene’” (Mt 9:23). No such quotation can be found in the prophets, in the remainder of the Old Testament, or in the extracanonical literature. The quotation is evidently a creation of Matthew, again on the principle of analogy. The name Nazareth immediately suggested the Hebrew word for branch, nezer, and the passage in Isaiah 11:1 referring to the righteous branch of the line of David who was to come. (Compare the references to the branch in Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12. The Hebrew word for “branch” in each passage is,
however, from the Hebrew root $šmh\$) Matthew argued that this agreement was divinely intended and that Jesus of Nazareth is Jesus the promised nezer. Thus we have promise and fulfillment in this unfolding of God’s plan under His sovereignty.

The quotation of Jonah 1:17 in Matthew 12:40, although not preceded by a formula of introduction as are the other quotations in Matthew which we have discussed, nonetheless reflects the same tracing of correspondences—this time by Jesus as He related the three days and nights Jonah was in the belly of the whale to His own future burial in the heart of the earth for the same period of time. The language of fulfillment could have been as appropriately used here as in the previous quotations. Indeed, that the similarity is not coincidental is indicated by the somewhat emphatic reference to the “sign” of Jonah which Jesus gave to the scribes and Pharisees. What was about to befall Jesus was the counterpart of that sign, which was simply another way of saying its fulfillment.

A further difficult quotation occurs in Matthew 27:9-10, where Zechariah 11:13 is combined with material from Jeremiah (18:2-3; 19:2-6; cf. 32:6-9). The latter material explains the attribution of the quotation to Jeremiah in the introductory formula. The combination may be Matthew’s own or a combination that came to him from the apologetic tradition of the church. The same kind of problem can be seen in Mark 1:2-3, where a combination of words from Malachi and Isaiah are simply ascribed to Isaiah. Inasmuch as Zechariah was a rich source of prophetic anticipations of the events relating to the death of Jesus, it was only natural that the reference to the thirty shekels of silver in 11:13 be understood as foreshadowing the blood money that Judas, having repented of his betrayal, cast down in the Temple. Since this money, in turn, was associated with the purchase of a field, it was easy using the pivot word “potter” in Zechariah 11:13 (the RSV takes the reading “treasury” instead of “potter,” following the Syriac rather than the Hebrew) to bridge to the potter of Jeremiah 18 and 19, and thence to the purchase of the field in Jeremiah 32:6-9. While the interconnection of this material may appear at best rather tenuous to us, we may remind ourselves of the far-reaching conviction of these early Jewish Christians concerning the singleness of direction of the Old Testament and thus its unity of purpose (in always pointing to the New Testament fulfillment) as well as their ever present appreciation of the overarching sovereignty of God in the writing of Scripture and in the ordering of events. Thus, correspondence perceived by the illumination of the Spirit was justly understood in the framework of foreshadowing and fulfillment—by sensus plenior the latter was alluded to by the former.

In the twenty-seventh chapter of Matthew material from Psalm 69 and especially Psalm 22 is applied to the crucifixion narrative.

The offering to Jesus of wine mixed with gall to drink (27:34; cf. 27:48) corresponds to, and thus echoes the language of Psalm 69:21. When Jesus cried out from the cross “My God, my God, why past Thou forsaken me?” (27:46) He was quoting the opening words of Psalm 22. At several points in the remainder of Psalm 22, striking similarities to specific items of the crucifixion narrative are to be found, and Matthew understandably made use of these. In Matthew 27:35 the casting of lots and the dividing up of the garments is expressed in the

language of Psalm 22:18; in verse 39 the derision and wagging of heads echoes Psalm 22:7; and in verse 43 the words “He trusts in God; let God deliver him now if he delights in him” are drawn from Psalm 22:8.

This material in Psalm 22, as well as in Psalm 69, must be understood to have its own historical context and referent. That is, in the first instance it describes the experience of an Israelite centuries before Christ. However, with sensus plenior in view, God superintended the writing of these words in such a way that they would find a vivid application and their fullest realization in the narrative of the crucifixion. Here too, in keeping with Matthew’s use of the Old Testament, the language of fulfillment could have been used in introducing these references.

This approach to the Old Testament is by no means limited to the gospel of Matthew; it is found in virtually all the New Testament writers. In John 12:38 the unbelief of the multitude in the face of the many signs performed by Jesus is described as the fulfilling of Isaiah’s words (53:1): “Lord, who has believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” Isaiah’s words refer to the unbelief of his own day, but in a fuller way—especially when the total context of chapter 53 is considered—to the unbelief of the Jews as far as Jesus Himself was concerned.

John had several of his own contributions to the application of Old Testament passages to the crucifixion narrative. Recording that the soldiers did not break Jesus’ legs because He was already dead, John says in 19:36 that this happened “that the scripture might be fulfilled, ‘Not a bone of him shall be broken.’” The words are from Exodus 12:46 (with possible allusion to Ps 34:20, referring to the deliverance of the righteous) where they refer to the preparation of the Passover lamb. Thus there is not only the correspondence of the unbroken legs but, much more significant for John’s Christology, the correspondence of the Passover lamb and the sacrifice of Jesus (cf. 19:14, where John indicates that Jesus was put to death at the time of the preparation of the Passover). The fuller meaning of the Passover lamb in the Old Testament points to the fulfillment in the death of Jesus. (Note Paul’s words, “Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed,” 1 Co 5:7 and 1 Pe 1:19.) In the next verse (19:37) John quotes from Zechariah 12:10, “They shall look on him whom they have pierced,” arguing that these words were fulfilled in the soldier’s spear thrust into the side of Jesus. However, in this instance, because of a number of complicated questions, it is difficult to ascertain what, if any, historical referent was originally in Zechariah’s mind. It is just possible that here we confront not sensus plenior, but rather a matter of straightforward predictive prophecy pointing from the beginning, as does Isaiah 53, to the death of Jesus.

The use of the Old Testament in Luke-Acts is both extensive and interesting. That Luke regarded it as highly significant is also underlined by his repeated reference to the teaching of Jesus concerning the true meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures (Lk 24:27, 32, 44-47). There is an insistent emphasis on the fulfillment that has occurred in Christ. This emphasis can be seen in Peter’s Pentecost discourse in Acts 2:14-39, where he cited Joel 2:28-32 as prophetic anticipation of what had occurred. It is possible that the second part of the quotation, referring to “wonders in the heaven above” (2:19), was understood as in some sense already fulfilled, whether by the supernatural darkness at the time of the crucifixion or
in a nonliteral manner (i.e., viewing the language as hyperbolical). More probably, however, the latter part of the quotation was understood as not yet fulfilled but as nonetheless properly belonging to this eschatological perspective. Eschatology has been inaugurated yet not completed; the blessings of the Kingdom are presently enjoyed, while the accompanying judgment is delayed. Thus, theologically the two parts of the quotation stand together; chronologically they do not.

A little further in Peter’s discourse, Psalm 16:8-11 is quoted, and

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the key assertion, “thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let thy Holy One see corruption,” is referred to the resurrection of Christ. The Psalm can be understood historically as referring to David’s confidence that God would deliver him from death at the hands of his enemies. There is, however, a much fuller sense to these words than can be satisfied by the deliverances that David enjoyed; after all, David did eventually die, as the presence of his tomb testified. Such is the nature of Scripture that David, here referred to as a prophet, “looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ” (2:31, NASB). We have here not direct prophecy but sensus plenior. For although David certainly knew that God had promised him a never ending dynasty (cf. 2:30), and may have alluded to some such deeper meaning in the words of Psalm 16:10, that he was conscious of the fullest meaning of the words and their specific fulfillment in the resurrection of Jesus is very improbable. §§

This same passage (Ps 16:10) was used in Acts 13:35 by Paul, who similarly finds in it the fuller meaning of the resurrection of Christ. In the preceding verse Paul cited Isaiah 53:3, “I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David” (following the Septuagint against the Masoretic text). Here the giving of “the holy and sure blessings of David” is associated with the resurrection of Christ. Whereas in the popular mind these blessings were equated with national-political aspirations, Paul pointed to the true fulfillment of this hope in the resurrection of Christ: “And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus” (13:32-33). A fuller meaning in this connection is also found in the quotation of Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:33.

One of the most interesting quotations in Acts, so far as interpretation is concerned, is the quotation of Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:16-18. In Amos the passage refers to the rebuilding of the Davidic

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kingdom, the eschatological restoration of Israel. James, presiding at the council of Jerusalem, suggests that the deeper meaning of the passage is to be found in the establishment of the Church. The recent conversion of large numbers of Gentiles was what Amos was referring to, and thus the Church was to be understood as the process of the rebuilding of the fallen house

§§ One may compare Jesus’ reference to Abraham who rejoiced at the prospect of seeing Jesus’ day and who “saw it and was glad” (Jn 8:56). What Abraham rejoiced in was the promise that God had given him and his knowledge that God would be faithful to this promise. The ultimate meaning of that promise is what has come in Jesus Christ. Thus in the fullest sense Abraham’s rejoicing was in the day of Jesus, though his specific knowledge of that day was limited by his early position in the history of salvation.
of David\textsuperscript{11} (which ultimately would come to its climax in the conversion of Israel to the church and the full establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth). There is therefore a \textit{sensus plenior} involved here. Amos was not aware that he was speaking prophetically of the church and the conversion of the Gentiles begun by Peter. This was, however, the thing in view, as James and the apostles were able to see in retrospect.

In the letters of Paul, the Old Testament citations often depend upon the understanding of \textit{sensus plenior}. By way of example, we may consider the quotation of Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 in Romans 9: 25-26. In Hosea, those who are described as “not my people” and not pitied” are not Gentiles, but rather the unfaithful Israelites of Hosea’s day. Yet the passage as used by Paul (and also in 1 Pe 2:10) is understood to refer to the Gentiles and their being made a part of the people of God. The words thus find their fullest significance not in the repentance of unfaithful Jews but in the events of the New Testament period, wherein Gentiles responded to the proclamation of the Good News. We may compare the ascription to the Christian Church of such titles as “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pe 2:9), language which is here understood in its fullest sense and so in a far deeper way than had previously been true.

In Romans 10:18 Paul cited Psalm 19:4, “Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.” The words are an answer to the question, “Have they not heard?” and

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are meant to underline an affirmative answer. In Psalm 19 the words refer to the ubiquitous witness of nature to the glory of God. The influence of general revelation referred to here had now been matched by extensive proclamation of special revelation, i.e., in the evangelistic activity of Paul and others. The patterns are quite similar and thus the latter may be described in terms of the former. Here again is \textit{sensus plenior} expressed by typological correspondence.

In two places Paul appears to have employed an approach to the Old Testament that comes close to allegorizing. The first is in Galatians 4:22-31, where he referred to Sarah and Hagar as two covenants and actually used the Greek verb \textit{allegorein}, to speak allegorically” (4:24). This, however, is not true allegory. Paul did not mean that the two women were two covenants—i.e., that the real meaning of the women is only what they symbolize. What he was really doing was drawing an extended analogy between the women and their children on the one hand, and the covenants and their “children” on the other. In both instances children are born either to slavery or freedom. There is thus a continuity in the analogy of the women and the covenants, a meaning common to both, which distinguishes it from true allegory, which on the basis of superficial similarities imports an alien meaning into the interpreted materials. Here \textit{sensus plenior} is found in strong typological correspondence.

\textsuperscript{11} It is not accurate to interpret the prophecy of Amos as referring to the future on the basis of the beginning words, “after these things” (\textit{meta tauta}). \textit{Meta tauta} is merely another way of saying “in that day” (\textit{en tē hemēra ekeinē}, the reading of the Septuagint and Masoretic text). The quotation loses its significance if it does not refer to the events of the apostles’ day. The conversion of the Gentiles, moreover, is associated with the rebuilding of the house of David. Therefore it must be understood to be occurring in the church. For further discussion of the text of the quotation, see p. 86.

The second place where Paul came close to allegorizing, is in 1 Corinthians 10:4, where, describing Israel’s wilderness experience, he wrote, “they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.” Paul does not mean to deny that the Israelites drank water from a rock in the wilderness. Here we may well have the statement of a typological correspondence between the supernatural provision afforded by the literal rock and the ultimate source of supernatural provision, Jesus Christ. Since Christ is the incarnation and thus the ultimate expression of God’s provision for man, He is implicitly present in all supernatural provision. This idea is strengthened and extended, however, by the belief that the preincarnate Christ is to be found throughout the Old Testament (the name of Jesus Christ is virtually interchangeable with the name Yahweh in the Old Testament, cf. Ac 2:21; Ro 10:9, 13), and especially in contexts of God’s gracious provision for His people. Thus Paul argued that in the case of this supernatural provision of water in the wilderness, one is quite right in understanding that Christ, the ultimate Provider, was the underlying reality in the provision. Thus in the deepest sense, Christ is the Rock from which they drank.

For a final illustration of the interpretation of the Old Testament in the New Testament, we may look at Hebrews 2:6-8, where Psalm 8:4-6 is quoted and referred to the superiority of Jesus over the angels. In Psalm 8 the words refer to man as the handiwork of God. In 8:4 the question is asked, “What is man that thou art mindful of him and the son of man that thou dost care for him?” The words “son of man” are in synonymous parallelism with “man” in the first clause. In both clauses the question is: What is man? The words which follow provide the answer. The author of Hebrews found, of course, a fuller content in the passage by immediately associating it with the Son of Man, Jesus. If the words of the psalm are true with respect to man, then they are supremely true in the archetypal, or representative Man. The incarnation made Jesus “for a little while lower than the angels,” (2:9) but now, following His death, He has been “crowned with glory and honor” (2:9), though for the moment “we do not yet see everything in subjection to him” (2:8). Thus the author was sensitive to the sensus plenior of the psalm and of its applicability to, and perfect realization in, Christ.

We have described the interpretive approach of the New Testament writers to the Scriptures which we call the Old Testament, and we have given a number of illustrations which reflect that approach. What remains is only to comment on the effectiveness of this approach in arguing for the truthfulness of Christianity. That is, what is the apologetic value of the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament?

The fulfillment of prophecy has long been regarded as an effective “proof” of Christianity. One occasionally encounters long lists of “prophecies” and their “fulfillments” produced for apologetic purposes by well-meaning individuals. Straight-line predic-

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plenior. In so doing, they found varied correspondences, analogies, and suggestive similarities—some more substantial, some less substantial—but all based on the underlying presuppositions of the sovereignty of God in the affairs of history; the unique character of the Scriptures as divinely inspired; and the identity of Jesus as the telos, or goal, of the history of salvation.

Where these presuppositions are shared, such arguments concerning Old Testament fulfillment are cogent. Where they are not shared, such arguments are less than convincing. One may indeed argue that the patterns of promise and fulfillment discerned through sensus plenior make an impressive mosaic of confirmatory evidence once Jesus is regarded as these writers regarded Him. But our argument concerning the identity of Jesus does not rest primarily on these patterns of promise and fulfillment, but rather upon the objective events of His ministry, His death and His resurrection.

Thus the true value of the arguments from the sensus plenior of the Old Testament is for those who are already in the household of faith. These patterns of fulfillment underline for them the continuity of the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament is their book as much as the New Testament, for the entirety of the Old Testament points as one great arrow to the fulfillment which the New Testament records. And with this new sense of the continuity of God’s purposes will come an increased appreciation of Jesus as the consummation of God’s plan for the universe.

If the frequent quotation of the Old Testament in the New Testament has anything to teach us, it is that our New Testament writers were utterly filled with excitement about Jesus and what He had brought. Jesus encouraged their excitement: “Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Mt 13:17). The Kingdom had come! Eschatology was beginning! The Scriptures were being fulfilled! Christianity rightly understood is the celebration of fulfillment. It may also be described as “fulfillment on the way to fulfillment,” for the consummation of eschatology, the full experience of the Kingdom of God on earth, remains a future expectation of the Church. During the interim period she looks for the return of her Lord. But the focus of attention in the New Testament is on the fulfillment already experienced, and if we are to begin to understand the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament we must recapture this excitement of the early Christians. When we do recapture this excitement we will better represent the Good News of Jesus Christ here and now.

2 Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3. 39. 4.
5 See especially B. Gerhardsson, Memory and Manuscript (Lund: Gleerup, 1961).
10 Ibid., pp. 462-77.
12 See McNamara, pp. 91-169.