OLD TESTAMENT QUOTATIONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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The impressive number of Old Testament quotations in the New Testament is a forceful reminder that the Old Testament was the Bible of the early Christians. This relationship provides an immediate clue to the place of Christianity in the history of religions and furnishes an indispensable key to the proper interpretation of the Christian message. The proclamation of Christ's person and work as the fulfillment of Scripture made inevitable a constant and intentional reference to the Old Testament, and sets in proper perspective the interesting fact that the appeal to the Old Testament increases rather than diminishes in the early Christian community. As C. H. Dodd says, "Thus the church was committed, by the very terms of its kerygma to a formidable task of biblical research, primarily for the purpose of clarifying its own understanding of the momentous events out of which it had emerged, and also for the purpose of making its Gospel intelligible to the outside public." ¹

The New Testament use of Old Testament quotations, however, introduces one to a series of complexities that are not of easy solution. Only a few of the problems which emerge from this New Testament usage can be noted here, and comment will be restricted to the number, text form and application or interpretation of the quotations.

1. The Number of the Quotations

The determination of what constitutes an Old Testament quotation is not a simple matter since the New Testament abounds not only in explicit, formal citations but also in numerous allusions and reminiscences which appear on almost every page. Using the Westcott and Hort text, H. B. Swete made a rough estimate of 160 direct quotations.² Roger Nicole discovers 250 direct quotations with 45 additional instances of undoubted reference or a total of 295 unquestionable separate references.³ Louis M.

Sweet also counts approximately 300 direct quotations. When scholars include allusions and probable reminiscences the totals tend to run much higher, even into the thousands. A rough count of the references in the tables of Nestle’s Greek Testament show about 950 separate citations, but this total includes both explicit quotations and possible allusions, even single words. In the absence of generally accepted criteria for establishing what constitutes a quotation, we must expect these calculations of the scholars to be diverse and somewhat arbitrary. While all parts of the Old Testament are quoted, the most quoted single books are Deuteronomy, Isaiah and the Psalter. E. Earle Ellis estimates that about one third of all the quotations are used by Paul, who cites 93 Old Testament references together with numerous additional allusions, the majority of which appear in the four Hauptbriefe. While the Book of Revelation contains more Old Testament imagery and phraseology than any other New Testament writing, it does not have a single formal quotation.

A conspicuous feature of the explicit or formal quotations is the accompanying introductory formula. Such formulas were in common use among Jewish and Christian writers and in our New Testament take the following forms: “this took place in order that the saying might be fulfilled” (Matt.) ; “thus/or/just as it is written, it is written” (Matt., Mk., Lk., John, Paul); “the Holy Spirit says, he/it says” (Heb.). The presence of these formulas reflects a conscious, intentional quotation-practice and the basic conviction that there is an inseparable connection between the two testaments. They also reflect unquestionably the conviction that authoritative Scripture is being cited. While Paul may occasionally argue his positions from analogy, custom or propriety, his normal appeal is to the authority of scripture as the Word of God. He makes no distinction between “Scripture says” and “God says,” (Rom. 9:17-Exod. 9:16; Gal. 3:8-Gen. 12:3), inasmuch as Scriptures are “holy writings” (Rom. 1:2), the “oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2). Beyond this not much more can be safely said regarding the bearing of the introductory formulas on the doctrine of scriptural inspiration. While a few scholars hold that such formulas as “Moses/David said,” constitute express attestations of book-

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authorship, others view such formulas as the common and indeed the only available mode of more nearly locating the quotation references. The presence or absence of the formulas, however, cannot be considered a completely adequate datum for determining the number of explicit quotations because some obvious citations are without the formula, and some with the formula reproduce only the general tenor of an Old Testament passage.

2. The textual sources of the quotations.

The quotations used in the New Testament appear to be derived from a number of different sources. Some conform both to the Hebrew and Greek such as Matt. 15:4a, b, 19:5, 18, 19; Mk. 12:36; Jn. 10:34, etc. Others conform to the Hebrew alone such as Matt. 9:13; 12:7; 27:46; etc., or to the Greek alone such as Matt. 4:7; 13:14, 15; 19:4; etc. There are quotations which vary both from the Hebrew and the Greek such as Matt. 4:7; 13:14, 15; 19:4; etc. Again there are rather free quotations which vary less from the Hebrew than the Greek, and vice versa. It has been long recognized that the Septuagint is the principal source of the text of the majority of the quotations. Every part of the New Testament shows acquaintance with this version and it evidently was the principal Bible of the early church. Even quotations used by Jesus who knew Hebrew and spoke Aramaic are often reproduced by the Evangelists in conformity with the Septuagint. Examining the form of the quotations, Turpie estimated that they departed far less from the Septuagint than from the Hebrew. Swete was able to show that the Septuagint recension used in the Gospels and Epistles agreed more nearly with Alexandrinus than Vaticanus, although in some instances it tended to support Theodotion against the Septuagint, and he referred to the confirmatory studies of W. Staerk. In our own time, K. Stendahl says, "Swete's statement about the relation between the New Testament and the Septuagint holds good today; indeed, it has become apparent that it has more solid foundations than Swete himself could have known."

This preferential use of the Septuagint together with the variations in the accuracy of its reproduction in the New Testament is a most inter-
esting datum and poses some problems, not the least of which is its bearing upon the doctrine of inspiration. Evangelical scholars have often betrayed a mistaken uneasiness at this point, whereas our New Testament writers evidence no embarrassment whatever in their employment of the Septuagint. Evidently the latter believed that the inspired Word of God was reaching them through the Septuagint despite its defects. And it is significant that in the second Christian century the Old Testament was translated into Latin from the Septuagint rather than from the Hebrew, and that in the fourth century Jerome reversed this procedure over the protests of Augustine because he had become convinced of the superiority of the Hebrew text. Therefore it is difficult to appreciate the uneasiness at this point seemingly felt by Nicole when he says,

The use of the LXX in quoting does not indicate that the New Testament writers have thought of this version as inspired in itself. A fortiori they did not confer inspiration upon the translation of the passages they have used. Samuel Davidson was laboring under a regrettable confusion when he wrote: 'It will ever remain inexplicable by the supporters of verbal inspiration that the words of the LXX became literally inspired as soon as they were taken from that version and transferred to the New Testament pages' (Sacred Hermeneutics, Edinburgh: Clark, 1843, p. 515). This statement misconstrues verbal inspiration. When the New Testament authors appealed to Scripture as the Word of God, it is not claimed that they viewed anything but the original communications as vested with divine inerrancy.

Nicole's recourse to "inspired originals" for the defense of verbal inspiration, inerrancy, etc., is a familiar form of rebuttal which we in the Reformed tradition who confess the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired Word of God should have set aside long ago for a more forthright approach. It is a reactionary defense of the past at the expense of the present. The New Testament data here are quite clear. The New Testament writers wrote under the full inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They were inspired when they quoted and used the Hebrew and/or Septuagint texts. Their use of these texts made them an integral part of our inspired New Testament. While no translation can claim inspiration, nevertheless, an inspiration of original documents which can be vitiated and lost through translation is hardly an inspiration worthy of determined defense. The Word of God can be conveyed and delivered through any careful, scholarly translation, be it the Septuagint, the Latin, the Revised Standard Version or any one of the numerous modern speech translations, despite the admitted imperfection of all of them. To deny or minimize this truth is to jeopardize all translation work and to render superfluous

1A full discussion may be found in W. Schwarz, Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation: Some Reformation Controversies and their Background, Cambridge: University Press, 1955.

the achievement of modern Bible translators who have now placed the Bible or parts of it in some 1151 languages and dialects for the spread of the Gospel throughout the world.

An even more important problem posed by the text form of the quotations is the variations in the exactness of the New Testament citations. In view of the customary widespread reverence for the text of the Old Testament, how does it happen that the New Testament authors reproduced it with such apparent freedom? While numerous explanations have been put forward, three of the more important ones may be mentioned here: recensional, translational, and exegetical. More important in scholarly consideration than ever before is the recensional factor. While the newer Septuagintal studies of P. Kahle and A. Sperber are still under debate, it can be said with greater confidence now than before that the Greek Bible in New Testament times may have existed in many forms and without any single, uniform text. This means that it is more questionable to follow the older procedure of measuring the accuracy of our New Testament quotations by such standards as Septuagint A or Septuagint B. While the Alexandrian Septuagint may have had the character of an official version in some areas, it is by no means sure that we may regard it as the proper source of all New Testament quotations and proceed to treat all textual differences as variations from the above norm. In view of the present unsatisfactory state of Septuagint studies and their conclusions respecting the pre-Christian text, it is best not to indulge

15These explanations may be found in the well-known studies of C. H. Toy, op. cit., D. M. Turpie, op. cit., F. Johnson, The Quotations of the New Testament from the Old Considered in the Light of General Literature, London: Baptist Tract and Book Society, 1896; H. Gough, The New Testament Quotations, London: Walton & Maberly, 1855; and in the more recent work of Roger Nicole, "The Old Testament Quotations in the New with Special Reference to the Doctrine of the Plenary Inspiration of the Bible," a S.T.M. thesis produced at the Gordon Divinity School in 1940. All of the explanations in the above works suffer from the same grave defect, and that is the supposition that clarification of the problem is the same as its solution.


in unguarded statements respecting the accuracy of our New Testament quotations. If our New Testament writers, however, read and used the Greek Bible in different text forms, we have a problem of a different nature confronting us. Their employment of various forms of the Septuagint becomes an additional datum to be recognized in formulating the meaning, nature and extent of the inspiration which controlled and guided them.

A second explanation for the variation in New Testament quotations may be translational. It is obvious that our New Testament writers frequently employed free or loose quotation and even paraphrase in preference to *verbatim* quotations. This was a common ancient practice irrespective of the text form being used, whether Aramaic, Targum, Hebrew or Greek. Such translational practice is both justifiable and understandable. It is anachronistic to expect in ancient writers our modern practices of careful and precise quotation. Ancient writers did not possess our modern equipment for this precision such as footnote references, punctuation and quotation marks, brackets for indicating editorial deletions or additions. Lack of literality in quotations offers no obstacle to any biblical doctrine of inspiration as long as there is not involved any abandonment of proper meaning or intrusion of false meaning. Translational practice appears to be the more proper explanation for some variations in exactness of quotation than the often alleged lapse of memory.19

The third factor, the exegetical, as a cause of variation in the Old Testament quotations is receiving considerable attention in some contemporary studies.20 Older studies usually confined the exegetical factor to such changes as would naturally occur in adapting Old Testament passages to their New Testament connections, such as changes in the person, tense, number, mode and voice of verbs; change of nouns and substitution of nouns for pronouns, etc. The newer studies reflecting the contributions of the Qumran materials explain the presence of variations as due to the Midrash *pesher* type of interpretation. In the *pesher* method, a writer's own application and interpretation is incorporated into the body of the Old Testament passage under use. The writer incorporates his application or interpretation either by an *ad hoc* rendering of his quotation or by such selection or rejection of known readings as will bear out the meaning of the quotation as he understands it. The presence of this exegetical factor has been convincingly demonstrated by Stendahl in the

19Spee, *op. cit.*, p. 401 and others explain the variations in part as due to quotation from memory, but in view of the rabbinic practice of careful memorization, this has been challenged by J. Bonsirven, *Exegese Rabbinique et Exegese Paulienne*, Paris: Beauchesne ses Fils, 1939, p. 337.
formula quotations of Matthew, and by Ellis in the Pauline quotations. This explanation not only aids materially in accounting for the divergence of quotations from the Hebrew or Greek, but attributes them to the purposeful study and interpretation of the New Testament writers.

The presence in the New Testament of combined, linked quotations and the problem of their source has engaged the attention of scholars as an independent question for many years. The hypothesis of the Testimony Book, a collection of Old Testament proof-text prophecies fulfilled in Christ and the Church and gathered into books for use as anti-Jewish polemic, was popularized by J. Rendel Harris and soon gained wide currency. It has more recently come under searching criticism, and been directly challenged by C. H. Dodd. After an examination of some fifteen of these combined quotations, Dodd comes to the conclusion that they were intended to serve merely as references to larger and wider Old Testament contexts, and that these larger contexts were really the Bible of the early church:

These sections were understood as wholes, and particular verses or sentences were quoted from them rather as pointers to the whole context than as constituting testimonies in and for themselves. In the main, however, Dodd's position is only a variation of the Harris hypothesis, and since both may possibly outrun the evidence presently available, we may do well to conclude with greater safety that the Greek Bible itself was the testimony book of the early Christians.

The preferential use of the Septuagint and the manner of its use as indicated by this review of the recensional, translational and exegetical factors, constitute another set of data which must be included in any final formulation of a truly biblical doctrine of inspiration.

3. The application and interpretation of the quotations.

It is the application and interpretation of the quotations by the New Testament writers that has occasioned the most criticism and furnished the major problems. Neglect of context, abandoning the plain meaning of the Old Testament or embellishing the meaning in haggadistic fashion are familiar criticisms which have been raised at this point. At Romans 9:25f, two passages from Hosea are quoted by Paul to prove the calling of the Gentiles which originally applied to the scattered tribes of Israel who are to be restored to God's favor. The use of Deut. 25:4 at I Cor.

22 Scholars have objected strongly to the anti-Jewish polemic element in Harris' view of the Testimonies and hold that catechetical and liturgical motives may well account for many of the passages.
9:9 caused Thackeray to say, "St. Paul here comes nearer than he does anywhere else to denying the plain meaning of the Old Testament." Occasionally one finds the same Old Testament passage applied and explained differently by various New Testament writers. As illustrations, A. C. Sundberg, Jr., cites the following:

2 Sam. 7:14 is interpreted at Heb. 1:5 as God speaking to Jesus, but in Rev. 21:7 the saying relates to faithful Christians. In Acts 4:25-27 the quotation from Ps. 2:1 is applied to the events of Jesus' trial and crucifixion, but at Rev. 12:18 the quotation is applied to the final judgment. Isaiah 52:7 is applied at Acts 10:36 to Jesus, but Paul (Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15) applies it to the Christian preaching of the gospel. Isaiah 53:4 is used at Matt. 8:17 in connection with Jesus' miraculous cures, but at I Pet. 2:21-25 in connection with Jesus' death. Isaiah 53:9f. is used at I Pet. 2:22 to describe Jesus, but at Rev. 14:5 to describe Christians. John 19:37 uses Zech. 12:10 as a prediction of the piercing of Jesus' side, but Rev. 1:7 uses the reference as a prediction of Christ's second coming.

It would take us too far afield for present purposes to attempt a solution for these and other applications and interpretations of Old Testament passages that have exercised New Testament commentators. Moreover, convenient discussions are readily available. Each locus vexatus deserves independent exegetical study as well as the proposed solutions. It will be found, however, that many of the difficult New Testament interpretations of Old Testament passages receive illumination when viewed in the light of familiar Jewish and Christian hermeneutical principles.

While Jewish and rabbinic hermeneutical practices have been overused by some scholars as a simple recourse for relieving certain exegetical difficulties (cf. Thackeray), we must not in violent reaction ignore the Jewish heritage in certain New Testament writers if we are ever to understand their use of the Old Testament. Combined or linked quotations, the haraz, were often employed by the rabbis and are not uncommon in the Talmud as well as in Paul (Rom. 9-11, 15). C. H. Toy explained the motivation behind certain quotations appearing in the Gospels as due to the operation of Hillel's seven hermeneutical rules. And recently C. K. Barrett has proposed that we view the use of Ps. 32:1-2 at Rom.

26These illustrations of deviation in meaning are cited by A. C. Sundberg, Jr., "On Testimonies," Novum Testamentum, III, 1959, pp. 278f.
27See op. cit., in Ellis, Johnson, Toy, Turpie, Gough and Sundberg.
28B. B. Warfield laid down this caution when he said, "There is probably not a single mode of alluding to or citing Scripture in all the New Testament which does not find its exact parallel among the Rabbis. The New Testament so far evinces itself a thoroughly Jewish book," Revelation and Inspiration, New York: Oxford University Press, 1927, pp. 118ff. In the light of the Qumran studies, it appears that Warfield overstated the case for the rabbis, for we must now reckon with the pertinent eschatologizing interpretation of the sectaries.
4:6-8 as an instance of the rabbinic principle of *gezerah shawa*.  

Far more impressive and important, however, are the early Christian hermeneutical principles, which derive in the main from their fundamental category of eschatology. Recent Qumran studies have revealed a biblical exegesis which shows some interesting similarities and contrasts to that found in our New Testament. F. F. Bruce has worked out the following summary of the methods by which the Qumran people carried into effect their eschatological interpretation:

1. The biblical text is atomized so as to bring out its relevance to the situation of the commentator's day; it is in this situation, and not in the text, that logical coherence is to be looked for.

2. Variant readings are selected in such a way as will best serve the commentator's purpose.

3. Where a relation cannot otherwise be established between the text and the new situation, allegorization may be used to this end.

4. Biblical prophecies of varying date and reference are reinterpreted so as to apply to the end-time introduced by the ministry of the Teacher of Righteousness, and not least to the career of the Teacher himself.

The reader is struck at once with the almost remarkable similarity of the above methods to those found in our New Testament. There are differences to be sure, and Bruce points them out. Our New Testament use of the Old Testament is likewise eschatological, but in addition, Christological. While the New Testament writers used the Old Testament in a noticeably free manner, yet their exegesis is not as atomistic as that of the Qumran people. And our New Testament writers clearly excel those of Qumran in their greater attention to historical context and to the historical intention of Scripture. In other respects, however, the parallels are most relevant. The New Testament writers use the Old Testament eschatologically, their primary interest is often in their own situation of divine fulfillment and not in the text being used. They establish a connection between the text and their new situation by a generous use of allusion, analogy and typology, and some allegory. Old Testament events were regarded as "shadows" (Heb. 8:5; 10:1), "types" (Rom. 5:14), a sequence of events which obtained their perfect expression in the events unfolded in the New Testament. They chose at times a form of the text which best suited their interpretation, in a fashion

29By the *gezerah shawa* is meant "the principle that when the same word occurs in two biblical passages, each can be used to illuminate the other. The word in Gen. xv.6 that most requires elucidation is 'counted'; Paul proceeds to quote another passage in which the same word occurs." The Epistle to the Romans, London: A. & C. Black, 1937, p. 89f. Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 50 points out that the connection between the texts is significant beyond the presence of the *Stichwort*, a contention fully supported by the commentators.

similar to that of Qumran. No doubt the Septuagint of Ps. 40:6 was used at Heb. 10:5ff "a body thou hast prepared for me," because it better suited the thought of our Lord's incarnation than the Hebrew text "ears hast thou dug (opened) for me." Ellis estimates that there are some twenty quotations in which the Hebrew and Septuagint agree, but in which Paul's text varies according to this pesher principle whereby he adapts the text to its New Testament context.31

The main point to be observed in these newer studies is that we must no longer ignore the conscious functioning of certain hermeneutical principles in the New Testament use of Old Testament quotations. The early Christian realization that God had fulfilled his saving purposes in Christ, prompted the employment of the Old Testament in the light of the arrival of the "fulness of time," "the end of the age." We encounter constantly in the New Testament such presuppositions as the unity of the two Testaments, the continuity of God's covenant of grace with his people and the consequent continuity of Israel and the Church. In fact, not merely parts but the whole salvation history of the Old Testament is viewed by the New Testament as fulfilled in the Messiah and his people. It is a fulfillment which realizes the ancient promises, but in so doing exceeds without setting aside their original meaning. Therefore in the New Testament, the Church is not only Israel, but the new and true Israel, God's final people of the end-time. Christ's self sacrifice is a sin-offering, a putting an end to the dominion of sin, a bringing in of the kingdom of everlasting righteousness, but "once and for all time." In the New Testament, the fulfillment is a larger reality, a more comprehensive and profound actuality than was envisioned by the Old Testament authors. In such fashion the category of fulfillment brought into being in the very early history of the Church what C. H. Dodd designates as "the rudiments of an original, coherent and flexible method of biblical exegesis," a method which represents such "a piece of genuinely creative thinking" that it must be referred to Jesus Christ himself.32 In other words, Old Testament events, persons and institutions are not discounted as divine events in a real history, but are given a meaning which raises them above their factual reality. In this exegetical method it must not be supposed that all Old Testament quotations or references in the New Testament are to be regarded as specific predictions. Even in Matthew's Gospel where the argument from predictive prophecy is prominent, the formula "in order that it might be fulfilled" often introduces only convenient analogies, illustrations and interesting parallels. Oftentimes Old Testament language is employed without implying the

existence of any specific connection. And needless to say, any particular application or interpretation of an Old Testament passage does not require that we regard the New Testament usage as completely inclusive or exhaustive of the full original meaning. While the pesher method or Targumizing procedure of the New Testament writers does not provide easy solutions to all the problems in this area, it does assist materially in understanding the "how" and "why" of many New Testament uses of Old Testament material.

4. The bearing of the above data on the doctrine of inspiration.

The New Testament writers used and quoted the Old Testament Scriptures because they viewed them as the authoritative, inspired Word of God, and because these Scriptures unfolded before them a sequence of divine events which prepared for and interpreted the events of their New Testament time. The New Testament writers were fully inspired when, in turn, they used the Old Testament as indicated in the data reviewed above. It is from this data of their usage that we must gather, in part at least, what they intend to teach regarding the truth of scriptural inspiration. The data reveal that the New Testament writers used the Old Testament in text forms, according to translational practices and hermeneutical methods available to them, and which were congruent with their time and situation. Inspiration must be compatible, therefore, with the use of various text forms, Hebrew, Aramaic Targum and Septuagint recensions. Inspiration must be compatible with the practice of selecting such forms of the text for quotation as best suited their purpose. Inspiration must be compatible with the pesher type of interpretation which moulds the text or draws from the text a meaning which is congruent with the New Testament's understanding of itself and the passage under interpretation. Lack of uniformity of text, lack of literality in the quotation of the text may afford some embarrassment to the modern scholar, but not to the New Testament writers. Their methods and principles of using the Old Testament may appear to us exceedingly free and by modern standards quite loose and inadequate, but these methods and principles are part and parcel of the inspired New Testament. According to the data we have reviewed, the Holy Spirit used the text forms, translational practices and hermeneutical methods consonant with the individuality of the human authors and their time and place in history. This historical character of the New Testament use of the Old Testament quotations is fully consonant with the divine origin and nature of Scrip-

88T. W. Manson made this point when he said, "Odd as it may seem to us, the freedom with which they handled the Biblical text is a direct result of the supreme importance which they attached to it," "The Argument From Prophecy," Journal of Theological Studies, 46, 1945, p. 135.
ture, and constitutes the inpenetrable miracle and mystery of Scripture's inspiration. From one point of view, it would appear that these data increase the complexity of what we term the "inspiration of Scripture," and increase the number of questions which need to be answered. From another viewpoint, it would appear that these data throw considerable light on the process whereby the Scriptures were produced. These data appear in no way incongruent with the scriptural doctrine of inspiration, but do suggest certain limitations within which the doctrine and its proper formulation must be expressed.