

### III. LITERARY KEYS TO THE FOURTH GOSPEL

## **The Old Testament and the Fourth Gospel**

Merrill C. Tenney

BETWEEN the revelations of the Old and New Testaments a strong bond of unity exists. Augustine's little couplet, "The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is by the New revealed," expresses the relationship quite accurately. Apart from the New Testament the Hebrew canon is a truncated cone, solid but incomplete, its lines pointing to an apex yet unrealized. Without the Old Testament the new revelation is devoid of an adequate foundation, for its presuppositions are left unexplained and its place in the total purpose of God is undefined.

According to the record, the Old Testament was the basis for preaching the new message. The earliest sermons of the apostles recorded in Acts are filled with excerpts from the law, the prophets, and the psalms, which, they said, were prophetic of Christ (Acts 2:16-21, 25-31; 3:22; 10:43; 13:32-38). The Gospels substantiate this practice, both by Jesus' own use of Scripture and by the Evangelists' procedure. Mark commences his narrative with a double quotation from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3, but does not thereafter quote directly except when reproducing the discourses of Jesus. Luke and Matthew employ more Scripture in the body of their text. Matthew, being concerned especially with the fulfillment of prophecy, introduces frequently the formula, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet," or some similar expression (Matt. 1:22; 2:5, 15, 17, 23; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 27:9). The epistles and Revelation are

permeated with Old Testament language and teaching. Revelation alone contains nearly three hundred quotations or allusions.

Identification of quotations is not always easy. Seldom did the authors give the exact derivation of the texts that they quoted, and still less often did they quote verbatim. Very frequently they made only a casual allusion, so that one may not always be certain whether the writer intended to recall a specific passage or whether he were simply using general Biblical language that had become part of ordinary parlance. Scriptural references can be generally classified under three heads: *citations*, which are almost exact verbally and which are definitely referred to a given author; *quotations*, which are sufficiently close to the original to leave no doubt concerning their derivation, but which are not attributed explicitly to a definite source; and *allusions*, which are often so loosely constructed that only one or two words out of a sentence parallel the Biblical text.

The exact number of references to the Old Testament in John is debatable, for it is occasionally difficult to determine what is a reference and what is not. Some are direct citations; many are indisputably quotations or clear allusions; but in other instances the language is general, or else is so indefinite that one cannot be sure of the exact source. In at least one case a text is attributed to Scripture which cannot be precisely located (John 7:38). The purpose of this study is not to identify and expound each text presumably taken from the Old Testament, but to discuss the influence of the Hebrew Bible on the teaching of John.

A survey discloses forty-seven references to the Old Testament. Three of these are positive citations, all taken from Isaiah; fifteen are quotations, fourteen of which can be readily identified, and one of which has not been located; eighteen are allusions that can be traced satisfactorily, though the text is not quoted verbatim. In addition there are eleven general references which imply a background that cannot be assigned definitely. The total quantity indicates, however, that Old Testament concepts were basic in the message of the Evangelist, and that his teaching was intended to be an interpretation of them.

The appearance of these references is evenly distributed through the Gospel, except that there seem to be few direct connections with the Old Testament in the farewell discourses of chapters 14 through 17. Five quotations, introduced by the phrase, "that the scripture may be fulfilled," or one similar, occur in the account of the last days of Jesus' life (13:18, 15:25; 19 :24, 28, 29, 36, 37). These emphasize the relation of the suffering of Christ to the prophetic Messianic picture.

The question may legitimately be raised whether these citations, quotations, and allusions are used for the purpose of illustration or of argumentation. Did the Evangelist desire to ornament his narrative with appropriate quotations from sacred literature only to enhance his concept of Jesus? On the other hand, was he attempting to record the completion of a revelation that had been begun in the past, but that had been left unfinished? In the Prologue (1:1-18) he introduced the person of Christ by declaring that He was "in the beginning," eternal and coeval with God at the creation of the world (1:1). When He became flesh He "tabernacled" (Gr. *eskenosen*) among us, as the presence of Jehovah appeared in the cloud of fire over the tabernacle in the wilderness (Ex. 40:34-35). He compared Jesus with Moses as the agent of a fuller revelation: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). When John the Baptist introduced Jesus to his disciples, he proclaimed Him as "The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (1:29). The term that he used (Gr. *amnos*) appears only four times in the New Testament, twice here (1:29, 36), and in two other places where it clearly refers to a sacrificial lamb (Acts 8 :32; 1 Pet. 1:19). "Lamb" is drawn directly from Isaiah 53, and connotes the total background of its source, the suffering "Servant of God." The title, "Son of God," which the Baptist applied to Jesus, is an allusion to Psalm 2:7: "Jehovah said unto me, Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee." The connection between the Testaments is vital, not accidental. The Gospel expands and implements the promises and types of the earlier dispensation.

In comparison with the other Gospels, John uses the Old Testament extensively. Because of the difficulty in establishing a fixed criterion for quotation, it is impossible to estimate

accurately the ratio of usage. Scroggie attributes 63 references to Mark, 129 to Matthew, 90 to Luke, and 124 to John.<sup>1</sup> The latter figure seems high, but it is safe to say that John is second only to Matthew in the frequency of his allusions to the Old Testament. A statistical count, however accurate, does not always afford a complete test of importance; the influence of Old Testament concepts and predictions on the thought of the Gospel provides a more valid standard.

The influence of the Scriptures has numerous facets. Certain books are quoted more than others. Isaiah's prophecy is mentioned at least six times, with a possible seventh allusion. John the Baptist identified himself (John 1:23) as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord" (Isa. 40:3). He connected himself with the Messianic theme of the prophet, and equated the person of Jesus with the Jehovah of the Old Testament, whose way he had come to prepare. His presentation of "the Lamb of God" identified Jesus with the "Servant" of Isaiah, who became the bearer of Israel's sin (Isa. 53:4-7). The main quotation of John 12:15, "Fear not, daughter of Zion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt," is taken from Zechariah 9:9, but the words, "Fear not," seem to be derived from Isaiah 40:9, which announces the coming of Jehovah as the Shepherd of Israel. Two more excerpts from Isaiah appear in close succession in John's final estimate of Jesus' public ministry (2:37-40). The first of these, "Lord, who hath believed our report . . .," taken from Isaiah 53:1, identifies Jesus with the "servant of the Lord," confirming the initial proclamation of John the Baptist. The second excerpt, beginning, "He hath blinded their eyes, and he hardened their hearts . . ." explaining the unbelief of the people, is quoted from Isaiah 6:9, with the comment, "These things said Isaiah, because he saw his glory; and he spake of him" (12:41).

The "glory" mentioned in Isaiah 6 is ascribed to Jehovah of hosts; according to John it is attributed to Jesus. The allusion to Isaiah 66:14 in John 16:22 contains a parallelism in the words, "your heart shall rejoice," but the resemblance is not strong enough to possess interpretative value.

Except for the Psalms, Isaiah seems to have been more

<sup>1</sup> William G. Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels*, pp. 190, 270, 363, 426.

familiar to the writer of the Gospel than any other book. John's use is not exceptional, for the other Gospels also refer to it frequently, and it appears also in the sermons reproduced in Acts. The Evangelist is witness that Isaiah must have been regarded by the early church as prophetic both in its revelation of the nature of Christ, and in its prediction of His mission.

Since the Psalms were the hymnbook of the Hebrew people, it is natural that they should be the best known of the sacred writings. Probably they had saturated the speech of the devout Jews who would remember the lines that they had sung whether they had studied the law and the prophets extensively or not. Out of twelve parallels with the Psalms given (in John), nine (Psalms 69:9; 78:24; 82:6; 118:25; 41:9; 35:19; 22:18; 69:21, 34:20) are either exact quotations or so nearly exact that there can be no doubt about their origin, and the remaining three are somewhat uncertain. Five can be called predictive: the prophecy of Jehovah's messenger coming to Jerusalem (Ps. 118:25), the lament over the treacherous friend (41:10), the division of the garments (22:18), the draught of vinegar (69:22), and the preservation of the bones of the righteous (34:20).

Every book of the Pentateuch is represented in the Fourth Gospel, and the prophets Daniel (12:2), Malachi (4:5), and Zechariah (9:9; 12:10), as well as Isaiah, appear in quotations or allusions. All three divisions of the Old Testament canon, the law, the prophets, and the Psalms, were utilized in interpreting the work of Christ.

Three aspects of the influence of the Old Testament are apparent. The first of these is *predictive prophecy*. Jesus Himself endorsed the predictive use of the Old Testament by His statement that the Scriptures bore witness of Him (John 5:39). Not every event of His career was outlined in advance, but the categorical use of the phrase, "that it might be fulfilled" (13:18; 19:24, 28, 29, 36), and the general statement that Scripture had foretold His resurrection (20:9) are sufficient to warrant the conclusion that the New Testament specifically fulfills the Old. John consciously related his writing to prophecy, and taught that the Messianic element of Jesus' ministry was the logical outcome of the revealed pur-

pose of God.

Allied to predictive prophecy is typology, which finds in the biography or ritual of the Old Testament foreshadowings of the person of Christ. Although the typical significance of the lives of the patriarchs or the kings, or of the structure and worship of the tabernacle can be exaggerated, the study of typology is still a legitimate discipline in Biblical research. There are indications that Jesus recognized the symbolical meaning of Old Testament events, and that He utilized them in His teaching.

In His short conversation with Nathanael He alluded to the experience of Jacob, who dreamed of a ladder reaching unto heaven, over which the messengers of God ascended to Him with their reports and petitions, and returned with His replies (Gen. 28:12). The vision was the means of transmitting to Jacob a renewal of God's promise to his forefathers, and a fresh promise of blessing for him. Jesus informed Nathanael that he would receive a revelation of God through the Son of man, who would be a much more adequate link between heaven and earth than the ministry of angels (John 1:50-51).

The parallel that Jesus drew between the revelation to Jacob through a vision and the revelation to Nathanael through His person can be expanded to include the entire history of the Exodus. When the Jews, forgetful of the Egyptian bondage, told Jesus that they were Abraham's descendants, and had never been in bondage to any man (8:33), He reminded them that He could make them truly free from the more deadly slavery of sin (8:35). He became the sacrificial Lamb of God whose blood brought a greater deliverance than the first Passover.

Another example of typology was the manner with which God fed the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings. Jesus accepted the historical fact, but assured the people that Moses did not provide the real bread from heaven (6:32-33) which afforded spiritual nourishment. "Your fathers," He said, "ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the true bread which cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die" (6:49-50).

Jesus drew a comparison between Himself and the brazen

serpent that Moses erected in the wilderness (Num. 21:5-9). The point of analogy centered in the act of faith. Just as looking upon the serpent in response to the divine command brought healing, so trust in the uplifted Christ will result in eternal life. The verb "lifted up" (Gd. *hypsoo*) is used in this Gospel only of the cross (3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34), and implies that as the deadly serpents were representatively judged in the bronze image transfixed on a pole or banner-staff, so the Son of man must be publicly exhibited in death, bearing the judgment of sin. The bronze serpent was an antidote to the poisonous death that rebellion had caused; Jesus became the antidote to the sin of a world.

Throughout the wilderness journey the Israelites were led by the pillar of cloud and fire that settled over the tabernacle wherever they camped. John says that the Word "tabernacled" among us, and manifested His glory to the disciples (1:14). In Christ God found a more perfect medium for contact with men than in the material structure of the Old Testament tabernacle, and in the nature of the living person He embodied both the perfection of revelation and the essence of true worship. The entire Exodus was the expression of God's condescension and intervention on behalf of the chosen nation (Ex. 3:7-8); the salvation of men depends on the fact that the Son of man descended from heaven to dwell with humanity (John 1:14; 3:13; 6:38). Christ is the epitome of God's revelation, manifested in personal relationship rather than in historical experience.

The spiritual significance of the Hebrew ritual is perfected in Christ. In His person the various elements of ceremonial worship are unified and integrated. He is the Lamb of God, or the sacrifice on the altar (1:29), the bread of life that excels the shewbread (6:51), the light of the world that outshines the golden candelabrum (8:12), the medium of intercession through whom more effectual prayer can be offered than at the golden altar (16:23-24), and the final revelation of God, in whom divine law and divine life become more accessible to men than they were through the ark of the covenant (1:18). Christ is the antitype of the symbolism and progress of the tabernacle worship.

The chronological scheme of John's Gospel is organized by

*the sequence of the Jewish ritual year.* Each of the major sections is related to some religious feast celebrated by the Jews at Jerusalem, and the development of the plot grows with the appearance of Christ at these feasts. His initial presentation to the people of Jerusalem occurred at a Passover (2:13), and was accompanied by "signs" and numerous confessions of belief (2:23). The controversy over His claims that evoked His declaration of divine origin and prerogatives followed at an unnamed feast, which may have been a second Passover (5:1). The feeding of the five thousand and the disclosure in the synagogue at Capernaum, which proved to be the watershed of His public ministry, occurred at the Passover season (6:4). Within the following year the Feast of Tabernacles was the occasion of His last great popular appeal and His rejection by the national leaders (7:2, 37, 38, 43, 44). At the Feast of the Dedication in the winter His enemies attempted to stone Him (10:31-39), and drove Him into retirement (10:40).

Jesus' death and resurrection took place at the Passover (11:55; 13:1; 18:28). The long conference with the disciples in the upper room was directly preparatory for the events which would enable them to understand, as Paul did later, that "our passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ" (1 Cor. 5:7). The Evangelist himself asserts this truth by writing in his record that "these things were done that the scripture might be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken" (19:36). The quotation finds a counterpart in the regulation for the Passover sacrifice: "neither shall ye break a bone thereof" (Ex. 12:46). John recognized the prophetic meaning of the Old Testament ritual, and consequently drew the comparison between the slain lamb and Christ.

The connection of the trends and teachings of the law and the prophets with the incarnation of Christ does not depend upon casual deductions, but is confirmed by His explicit testimony. He accepted the title of Messiah from others (1:49-50) and applied it to Himself (4:25-26). In the early controversy between Himself and the Jews He declared that the Scripture was a witness to Him, and that Moses wrote of Him (5:39, 46). In the light of this statement it is legitimate to conclude that the apostolic affirmations concerning His fulfillment of

prophecy are founded on His authority.

The Fourth Gospel draws its organization, some of its imagery, and its fundamental theological concepts from the Old Testament. On the other hand, the revelation of Christ, the living Word, transcends the symbols and ordinances of the law. "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (1:17). The God who descended in clouds and thunder on Sinai, who spoke to Elijah in the still small voice, and who uttered His counsel through the mouths of the prophets had remained personally inaccessible. He was real, but external to His people. In Christ God has made personal contact with man. His grace and truth have been exemplified, and His redemptive purpose has been accomplished. The symbolic ritual and regulative ethic have found their ultimate fulfillment.

This material is cited with gracious permission from:

Dallas Theological Seminary

3909 Swiss Ave.

Dallas, TX 75204

[www.dts.edu](http://www.dts.edu)

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: [thildebrandt@gordon.edu](mailto:thildebrandt@gordon.edu)