Old Testament in the New Testament

Categories of How the OT is in the NT: Quotation, Allusion, Echoes

A fourth issue or question that students studying the Old Testament usage in the New Testament have been interested in asking, is the use of rabbinic techniques. In an earlier session, again, we talked about some of the ways that early rabbinic literature interpreted the Old Testament using techniques such as midrash pesher, that is, to take a text and then to unpack and explain it. Sometimes using the language, “this is that.” This is what was spoken in an Old Testament text, seeing the Old Testament fulfilled in their own day or arguing from the lesser to the greater, or connecting texts based on similar wording etc. So, many have asked the question whether New Testament authors are simply following the standard principals of interpretation and interpretive techniques of their day. And if so, what distinguishes the way a New Testament author utilizes the Old Testament as opposed to the way rabbinic interpreters treated the Old Testament as well. And then finally, one question that students have raised is: can we treat the Old Testament in the same way? Are we permitted to treat the Old Testament in the same way that we find New Testament authors treating it?

These are important questions, but other questions have also been raised more recently about how we understand the use of the Old Testament in the New. One of the issues has been how we classify or categorize usages of the Old Testament in the New. Generally, students of the New Testament have isolator classified three possible usages. One is what is known as direct quotation, that is where an author explicitly signals his use of an Old Testament text, that is, he explicitly indicates that he wants his readers to pay attention to an Old Testament text. Usually the direct quotation is indicated by using a quotation formula, something like, “just as it is written in Isaiah the prophet,” or “this took place to
fulfill what was spoken of in Isaiah,” or “just as it is written,” some formula that indicates the author’s intention to quote from or to point the reader to an Old Testament text. Then usually what you find is a quotation of the Old Testament text that is kept in tact usually.

Second is the category of allusion. Some New Testament students have drawn attention to allusions that is, in distinction to number one, where the quotation is explicit being introduced by a formula, it’s usually kept in tacked in the New Testament text itself. In an allusion, the author does not signal his intent to point you to an Old Testament text, but instead he usually takes the wording and the structure and the concepts and weaves them into his own discourse. So that it’s still rather clear that an Old Testament text, especially if one has the requisite knowledge of the Old Testament. It is clear that the Old Testament text is being referred to, but the author does not explicitly signal that with a quotation formula such as “just as it is written,” and the author instead usually weaves the language into his own discourse. That is known as an allusion. Although a little more difficult to identify than a quotation, still the similar structure or the similar vocabulary, similar corresponding meaning suggests that the author intends to point the reader to a prior Old Testament text.

For example, a good example of an allusion is Ephesians 1:20-22. In Ephesians chapter 1:20-22, we find Paul not explicitly quoting from an Old Testament text, but we do find language in this text that is clearly evocative of Old Testament texts. So here’s how he describes Christ. He says referring to God’s power that worked in Christ in verse 20 which God exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him on the right hand in the heavenly realms. That language of seating him at the right hand recalls the vocabulary language of Psalm 110. Then he goes on to say that he’s been seen above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every title that has ever been given not only in the present age but in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet, which reflects vocabulary in Psalm chapter 8. So without quoting the Old
Testament, by taking its language and even its structure and weaving it in his own discourse, the author by way of allusion tends to point us back to key Old Testament texts to understand the person of Jesus Christ in Ephesians chapter 1.

A final and third category is what is often labeled as an echo. Some would say an echo is a more subtle reflection of the Old Testament that may not even be intended by the author. Sometimes it is only a word or two, but the idea is it echoes in the mind. It’s not as clear as an allusion. One could see these three as kind of on a scale from the more explicit to the more subtle. The more explicit being the quotation, the more subtle usage as being echoes. Again, often they’re almost a whisper of an Old Testament text and some would say it’s not clear that the New Testament author is intending to refer to this Old Testament text. To give one example that some others are pointed to and drawing attention to, in Philippians 1:19 the apostle Paul is describing his circumstances in prison. This document is often known as a Prison Epistle. But describing his circumstances in prison in chapter 1 verse 19, Paul says this: “Yes, I will continue to rejoice for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the spirit of Jesus Christ, that what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.”

It’s interesting that phrase “will turn out for my deliverance” appears to be almost word for word as it is found in Job chapter 13 and verse 16. So there’s been a lot of discussion as to whether Paul intended this allusion, or this echo of Job chapter 13 because he doesn’t appear to be interested in Job anywhere else and doesn’t appear to specifically reflect Old Testament texts in Philippians chapter 1. So some have wondered, was this reference that the author intended to quote Job or is this more of an echo, a subtle usage that the author may not have intended and should we even make a big deal out of this in interpreting the text?

Along with identifying these three usages, quotation, allusion and echo, when it comes to allusions and echoes in particular, students have been interested in asking, “how do we know if there’s an allusion or an echo?” And usually, the question is answered by saying “did the author intend it?” And so, students have
also constructed criteria for determining whether the author has actually alluded to an Old Testament text.

For example, is there similar wording in the text? Does the author of the New Testament, when he appears to be alluding to Old Testament texts, is the wording similar enough between the New and Old Testament to justify an allusion? Is there similar structure between the Old and New Testament texts? Does the author refer to the text elsewhere? If one proposes or thinks that the author might be alluding to something from Isaiah that can certainly be buttressed and justified. Further, if one could demonstrate that the author appears to have been aware of Isaiah or using Isaiah elsewhere in his book. Have others noted a similar reference? Have other New Testament commentaries also noticed a similar Old Testament or the same Old Testament reference? That is, have others also heard an allusion or recognized and allusion? Obviously this last criteria doesn’t allow for new insight for discovering allusions that no one else did, but students have been interested in terms of how to figure out how do we justify it?

Quotations are a little easier, but when the author does not begin with a formula, “just as it was written” or “this took place to fulfill what was spoken by Jeremiah” or something like that, how do we justify it? Well, again things like similar vocabulary, similar structure, similar meaning. Does the author refer to the text elsewhere, or seem to quote it or allude to it elsewhere? Those are the kind of things that have been pointed to.

**Establishing Levels of Certainty**

At the same time, in addition to these criteria, these criteria are usually used to establish the level of confidence that the New Testament student can come up with or the level of confidence that they can achieve, that they have actually identified an Old Testament allusion. So sometimes you’ll see New Testament students talking about whether an allusion is certain, and again this is not so much with quotations, the author clearly signals quotations. But whether an allusion is certain, that is, if there’s enough similarity of wording and structure and function
and there’s evidence that the author has used other Old Testament texts, especially other texts from the same book, then some students say we can be certain that the author intended an Old Testament allusion.

The next category would be probable. That is, we can’t arrive at a level of certainty but there’s a high level of probability that the author is indeed intending to refer back to the Old Testament texts without the author present to tell us, obviously we can only suggest probability. The third category is possible; some have said some allusions should be put in the category of possible. We can’t really be certain, nor can we establish a high level of probability it’s only a possibility that the author really intended this. And then finally there are allusions or echoes that are unlikely. That is some proposals for Old Testament references are really unlikely, there’s just not enough there in either context to justify seeing an Old Testament allusion. So usually these categories mainly appeal to the level of confidence that we can achieve as to whether we have isolated genuine allusion or echo or something.

**Inter-textuality**

To add one more comment, recently studies have also been interested in the kind of recent phenomenon of inter-textuality, and how that affects the way that we read the Old Testament in the New. Just two foci in that regard, number one is the focus in inter-textuality and the focus on inter-textual studies is not so much on the author. Most of the issues I’ve just raised have been focused mainly on authors attempt and historical background, whether the author is intending to point us to New Testament texts. Inter-textuality does not restrict the connections to the Old Testament to only what the author intended. But instead, whether the proposals Old Testament allusion is productive and makes for an insightful or valid reading, or adds fresh insight to the text and makes sense in the context. So the focus isn’t on the author and what the author intends, the focus is primarily on the reader identifying a possible correspondence and whether that produces a productive reading of the text.
A second feature of inter-textuality is that of dialog. That is by the New Testament texts appearing to allude to an Old Testament text, a relationship is set up in which the interpreter is invited to explore a series of correspondences between the two texts, and to ask what difference does it make to read the New Testament texts in light of the Old Testament texts. What meaning does the Old Testament texts carry over in the New texts? And how do the New Testament texts transform the Old Testament texts? And so the goal is to explore possible interactions between the Old and New Testaments in dialogue with each other, and to ask what that does.

**Analyzing the Old Testament in the New Testament**

So how do we go about in studying the use of the Old Testament in the New, analyzing the use of Old Testament texts by New Testament authors? Let me just very briefly make some suggestions based on our previous discussion and then we’ll move on to consider some explicit examples. First of all, I would suggest that one of the more helpful tools is to survey commentaries and other works who draw attention to allusions. Not in usages of the Old Testament, not that that is the final say but at least it helps us to understand and see what other interpreters of the Old Testament texts have seen and drawn attention to. That should be qualified though, the more I do that it appears that sometimes commentaries simply repeat and rely on what other commentaries before them have said. They may not have done their own work, they may just be assuming what others have said. But a good place to start is with commentaries and tools that will help point your attention to possible Old Testament allusions. Quotations are more easy to identify, but allusions, even echoes, or subtle uses of the Old Testament you’ll find more help sometimes in commentaries.

But further than that, I would say second, simply be aware of and listen to the New Testament text. Have your ears open to hear possible correspondents between the Old Testament and the New Testament. This assumes a knowledge of the Old Testament. The more you know the Old Testament, the more you are
aware of the Old Testament texts and their contexts, the better position you will be to hear resonances in the New Testament text.

Third, identify the type of reference as much as possible whether it’s a quotation, whether you’re dealing with an allusion, or whether more subtly you’re dealing with an echo.

Fourth, consider the form of the text. I think it is valid to ask “is the author drawing primarily in the Septuagint, or is the form of the Old Testament text mainly the Hebrew text, and does there seem to be a difference? Does that seem to make a difference of how you see the Old Testament in the New?”

Next, what is the meaning of the Old Testament text in its original context and setting, historically and literally? What appears to be the original meaning of the intention of the Old Testament text? The next one is: how the Old Testament text was interpreted in early Judaism by early Jewish and Rabbinic interpreters? Ask, for example, in the Dead Sea scrolls, other rabbinic literature, even the pseudepigrapha and apocalyptic literature, and here you have to rely on commentaries and other specialized works on the use of the Old Testament in the New ask: how was this Old Testament text apparently interpreted and utilized in early Jewish and Rabbinic interpretation?

The next is to consider how the New Testament author has utilized the Old Testament texts. How does it function in its New Testament context? What meaning does the Old Testament text bring into the New Testament? That is, I like to ask the question, what meaning would be missing in the New Testament text if I did not read it in light of its Old Testament subtext that the author appears to be drawing on? How has the author utilized it? Again, does it appear to be a straightforward prediction-fulfillment, or is it more of a typical/analogical, or utilized perhaps by way of illustration or something like that? How does the author seem to be using the Old Testament text? What is the functioning of its context? Further explore the insights of inter-textuality understanding the concept of dialogue, explore possible interactions between the two texts.
This may be an example of a phenomenon that we talked about with the author’s intent, when you begin even to find or discover more subtle uses of the New Testament. Even when you start comparing Old and New Testament contexts and see connections, sometimes it’s very difficult to know whether the author intended any of those or not. Sometimes it may simply be an issue of the type of thing we talked about with the author’s intent. Is it the kind of thing where, if the author were present regarding this Old Testament text the author might say, “no I wasn’t but now that you identified that or now that you raise that issue, that certainty makes sense and I would accept that as a valid insight into my work.” Or again the author may intend to allude back to a Old Testament text, but as you explore it you may see certain connections that again, if you were to ask the author, the author might say “no, I did not intend those connections, but now that you observe those, that makes sense and I would accept that as valid insight into my text.”

So, I would agree that although I still think that we have to ask the question of what the author might have intended, as far as alluding to Old Testament texts, that probably we can’t restrict ourselves to that. That has to be our starting point, but we might find subtle allusions or connections between texts, that we can’t be confident that the author intended but still make sense in the texts and are valid. Given what we know about the author, and given what we know about the Old and New Testament texts and their contexts, that may be a valid understanding of the reading of the texts. So, another question is to ask whether the New Testament authors seem to use an Old Testament text consistent with or similar to the way it was used in Rabbinic Judaism and in early Jewish interpretations.

But then again, ultimately I think the sixth question to ask or the sixth principal is to explain how an understanding ultimately of how the Old Testament text makes a difference in the way you interpret the New Testament text. So again, it’s not enough just to recognize possible connections and allusions and echoes and quotations, but ultimately one wants to ask, what difference does this actually
make in interpreting the New Testament texts?

So those are just kind of a collection of issues or questions that I think are valid and important to raise in understanding the New Testament use of the Old. Again the Old Testament is significant because New Testament writers, as they conceptualize how Christ brought fulfillment, they utilized examples from Old Testament. They utilized Old Testament texts and understood how ultimately the Old Testament was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. As I said, there are a number of works to help you in the form of commentaries. One recent compendium of research of the Old Testament research as to the New is a book edited by Don Carson and Greg Beale, called *A commentary on the Old Testament use in the New Testament*. It is a series of essays that covers each book of the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation, and discusses works from chapter to chapter and discusses quotations but also allusions and sometimes echoes to Old Testament texts and how theologically and Hermeneutically that makes a difference in the way one interprets a New Testament text or that passage that is being dealt with.

**Examples of the Old Testament in the New Testament**

So, what I want to do now is examine a couple of New Testament passages that clearly utilize the Old Testament in their own composition. My focus is primarily going to be on allusion, though I’ll deal with a couple of quotations. But I primarily want to focus on allusions or echoes, as examples of the use of the Old Testament. The texts will be taken up and its wording and structure that were woven into the composition where the author does not necessarily signal his use of an Old Testament by a quotation formula. I want to look at an example from the Gospels, and then we’ll look at a couple of examples from the Epistles, both Paul and those that are known as the General Epistles. We’ll look at an example from Hebrews and then look at a couple of examples from the book of Revelation that probably more extensively than any other book that alludes to the Old Testament, although it never signals it by a quotation formula. Another reason I’ve done this
too, is in the past most studies of the Old Testament in the New have focused primarily on direct quotations where the author signals his intent to point to an Old Testament text with a quotation formula. But recently in the last 20 years or so, there has been more of a resurgence of drawing attention to allusions and echoes, which are more subtle usages of the Old Testament.

**OT in the NT: Gospels--Matthew 2**

Let me start with the Gospels, and I want to turn back to Matthew Chapter 2. We’ve already noted that in Matthew chapter 2, the author quotes extensively from the Old Testament. This functions to explain the movement of Jesus in his early childhood. You find the Old Testament used to justify the different geographical movements of Jesus, in chapter 2 starting with the fact that he’s born in Bethlehem. Then when he goes to Egypt and back, you find Old Testament quotes in Matthew used to explain the geographical movements of Jesus and to justify the early childhood of Jesus, to show that early events were nothing less than a fulfillment of Old Testament texts.

One of those that we looked at, in chapter 2 in verse 5, were the author quotes or has the Jewish leaders quote from Micah chapter 5 verse 2, that is, that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. This appears to be as close as anything for a rather straight forward prediction-fulfillment. But another text that we raised in chapter 2 verse 15 of Matthew, the author quotes from Hosea chapter 11 verse one: “Out of Egypt I have called my son” when which you go back to Hosea chapter 11 verse 1 doesn’t appear to be a prophecy at all of the life of Jesus Christ. In fact, it simply seems to be just a historical report of how God preserved and dealt with his people and how he loved his people Israel. So chapter 11 and verse 1 of Hosea seems to be a reference to the nation of Israel, and there’s really no hint in that verse that this is a prophecy of a coming Messiah or anything like that.

This raises the question, why does Matthew use it here in chapter 2 in verse 15 of Matthew? Why does he use Hosea 11:1 to refer to an early event in the life of Jesus Christ? Most likely, it is because Matthew is using it more typologically
or analogically, that is, he sees an event in the old covenant where God deals with his people and preserves and loves his people now being repeated in a greater way in light of fulfillment in Christ. So Matthew doesn’t seem to be claiming that Hosea 11:1 was actually a prediction, or there’s a second level of meaning or that there’s a prediction in there of a coming Messiah that now Matthew has discovered. Instead, Matthew seems to be saying that God’s preserving his son, his greater son Jesus Christ in Egypt in Matthew chapter 2. Jesus seems to fill up or repeat a pattern that is established in the Old Testament when God preserved and kept his greater son or his son which is the nation of Israel.

Furthermore, when you read Matthew carefully it becomes clear that Jesus is seen as recapitulating and actually fulfilling the true destiny of the nation of Israel. Israel was God’s son in the Old Testament, but now Jesus Christ as God’s greater son, recapitulates the story of Israel but now brings it to conclusion. He fulfills and accomplishes what Israel failed to do. So, because of that assumption, the author can take an Old Testament text, as referred to Israel, God’s son, and now apply it to his son Jesus Christ to show that in the same way that God preserved the son in the Old Testament, in the age of fulfillment God once again is acting to preserve his son, the new Israel, and the fulfillment of Israel’s destiny which is the person of Jesus Christ.

But beyond that, to draw your attention to more subtle or allusive uses of the Old Testament, I’m convinced virtually everything going on in Matthew chapter 2, especially the early verses, has an underlying Old Testament story or subtext going on. So for example just to highlight, to start with the easiest one, when you read this story about a baby who was born and who’s life was threatened by an oppressive, evil king who wants to kill him, who makes an order to kill all the baby boys in the kingdom, and then the baby boy is preserved and kept in Egypt, and even the mentions Egypt, what does that recall? It doesn’t take a whole lot of reflection to recall the original Exodus story where Moses, Israel’s deliverer, is born as a baby and the Pharaoh tries to kill him and issues an order for
all the baby boys to be put to death; yet this one is preserved. This one is preserved in Egypt, and so it’s difficult not to see the correspondences so that, I think Matthew intentionally is crafting this story, though it is historical and I take it as a reflection of what actually happened, Matthew is simply making clear the correspondences of that story to the original Exodus. To demonstrate that now, once again, God is raising up a deliverer in a new Exodus to rescue and deliver his people.

In fact, in verse 20, remember when Jesus goes to Egypt because Herod’s trying to kill him, after Herod dies an angel appears to Joseph in verse 20 of chapter 2 of Matthew and says, “those who are seeking his life are dead.” Interestingly, that is almost verbatim of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of Exodus chapter 4 verse 19, those who are seeking Moses’ life to kill him. Now they’re dead, so Moses doesn’t have to fear for his life. So again, Jesus is being portrayed as a new Moses, who as Moses in the Old Testament, was their savior, deliverer and rescuer of his people. Once again God in a new Exodus is raising up Jesus as the deliverer and savior of his people.

Just very quickly to mention, the notion of the star over Bethlehem in association with a Messianic king, a Davidic king, probably recalls Balaam’s oracle in Numbers chapter 24 and verse 17. It says that a star will rise, even though Matthew doesn’t quote that text, he seems to be alluding to it and weaving it into his own story.

Another interesting part of the story is the account of the Magi, the so-called “wise men.” “Wise men” probably is not as good a term as magi. In other words, these are foreign astrologers most likely who come to visit Jesus in Matthew chapter 2. What is intriguing about this is to ask, what might be significant about Matthew having the magi coming to visit Jesus? We saw that in contrast to Luke, who has shepherds come now Matthew has these magi, these astrologers, now coming to visit Jesus and they give him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. What is the significance of that? In my opinion, Matthew
is still working with Old Testament texts. That is the Old Testament still forms kind of the underlying subtext that is informing Matthew’s own story. The text I want to draw your attention to is Isaiah chapter 60. Isaiah chapter 60 is part of Isaiah’s vision or prophecy of future restoration of Israel and God’s people. Remember, they have been carted off into exile. God will restore his people God will restore the people to their city, to their land. Chapter 60 of Isaiah is an anticipation or prophecy of that. As I read it I want you to keep your ears open to possible echoes or resonances with the Matthew text.

   So Isaiah chapter 60, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.” Sounds like the rising star shining over Bethlehem, indicating the arrival of the Messianic king. “See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.” Verse 3, “nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” This reflects the magi coming to the star, the light of the star, to Bethlehem. “Lift up your eyes and look about you; all assemble and come to you; your sons will come from afar, your daughters are carried on the arm. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth of the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah.”

   Let me skip down a little bit. Verse 8, “Who are those that fly along the clouds, like doves to their nests? Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish.” All these are images of the glory that will surround the restoration of Israel. Verse 10, “Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. Though in anger I struck you, in favor I will show you compassion. Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut day or night, so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations, their kings led in triumphal procession. For the nation or kingdom will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined. Now the glory of Lebanon will come to you, the pine, the fir and
cypress together, to adorn the place of the sanctuary; and I will glorify the place of my feet.”

One other text I wanted to read. Kind of skipping ahead to verse 16, “You will drink the milk of the nations and be nursed at royal breasts. Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer and Mighty One of Jacob. Instead of bronze, I will bring gold and silver in place of iron…” So notice this imagery of the kings and nations bringing wealth to Jerusalem as it is restored. In my opinion, Matthew is picking up that story from Isaiah chapter 60 that he is clearly alluding to Isaiah 60 by having four dignitaries bring their wealth, gold and frankincense and myrrh. By bringing that wealth to Bethlehem as they come and visit the Messianic king, the deliverer, it’s as if Matthew is saying that Isaiah’s promise of restoration, the restoration of God’s people, the coming age of salvation, the coming kingdom of God, the new creation, has already been inaugurated in the person of Jesus Christ. That is demonstrated by foreign dignitaries; these wise men bringing their wealth to worship Jesus in response to a light, the rising light of the rising star.

So without quoting Isaiah chapter 60, I think Matthew has clearly indicated his intent to allude to other Old Testament texts such as Isaiah 60 to demonstrate how they are now being fulfilled in the coming of the person of Jesus Christ. So Isaiah 60, as well as the whole Exodus motif are important subtexts for Matthew’s own story of Jesus, as he weaves a number of texts together to demonstrate how Jesus, his life, especially his early childhood in chapter 2, brings to fulfillment and brings to a climax a number of these texts.

**OT in the NT: Epistles—Gal. 1**

To move on to some examples of epistolary literature, especially Paul’s letters, I’ll give one very brief example in Galatians chapter 1 then look at a slightly more extensive example in Ephesians chapter 2.

Galatians chapter 1 and verse 15, we’ve already looked at this text in relationship to its literary context and how in chapters 1 and 2, Paul is arguing that
his apostleship and the gospel that he preaches is not something that comes through human appointment or human teaching, but is solely dependent on a revelation through Jesus Christ. One of the things Paul says in that context in chapter 1 verse 15 is: “but when God who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his son in me.” Now the question is, why would he mention being set apart at birth? That seems to be an interesting thing to say here. Why didn’t he just say, “God called me, God appointed me to be an apostle”? Why does he mention that he was set apart at birth? Is this simply Paul’s pro-life perspective coming out? Is Paul simply emphasizing the dignity of human life, even at conception, that therefore this is an important text for supporting anti-abortion or pro-life? I certainly don’t want to deny this text could have a bearing on that. But the significance of this passage, I think, is not so much Paul’s judgment on when human life begins, but instead this statement is actually one that Paul finds in the Old Testament.

I want to just look briefly at two texts that Paul may have been thinking of. Chapter 1 and verse 5 of Jeremiah is the first one. In Jeremiah chapter 1 verse 5, at the very beginning of the book, Jeremiah is establishing his credentials as a prophet and discussing his call as a prophet which will justify and provide justification and authenticity for what he is about to say in the rest of the book. In verse 5 he says, I’ll back it up to verse 4, “The word of the Lord came to me, Jeremiah, saying ‘before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born I set you apart. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.’” Another interesting text to back up a book is in Isaiah chapter 49 verse 1. We see similar language in reference to the servant. Several of these chapters, the most well known one being chapter 53 in Isaiah, are addressing the servant. Chapter 49 verse 1, “listen to me, you islands. Hear me, you distant nations, before I was born the Lord called me. From my birth, he has made mention of my name.” Especially in light of the verse 5 text, this language in Galatians 1:15, is primarily an Old
Testament allusion, meant to portray Paul as conceiving of his own commission in line with the Old Testament prophets.

But Paul sees his apostolic calling as having the same authority as an Old Testament prophet. In trying to argue his case here; that his apostolic commission and his gospel did not come about by human beings he alludes to an Old Testament concept of a call narrative. We’ve found in Isaiah 49, this idea of God setting him apart at birth, or setting him apart while he was still in the womb it is the language of prophetic commission so that Paul conceives of himself in line with Old Testament prophets, or in light of Isaiah 49 perhaps, and the functioning of the servant himself. So this is one part of Paul’s argument I think that would be missed if we were not aware of the Old Testament background. Paul appears, not through a direct quotation, but by alluding to an Old Testament text to establish.

**OT in the NT: Eph. 2 and Circumcision**

Another example of slightly more extensive is how Paul appeals to Old Testament texts through allusion, through weaving its wording and structures into his own discourse. It is found in Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 11 through 22. I’ll just read part of this, because again, it is important to hear what’s going on in order to open our ears to hear resonances with Old Testament texts. So in chapter 2, starting with verse11: “Therefore, remember that formerly, you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who are ‘the circumcision.’” Immediately, we notice an Old Testament allusion, not to a specific text, but to the notion of circumcision, which is a very important feature of the covenant back in the Old Testament.

So the idea of circumcision already evokes an Old Testament idea and concept, if not a specific text. Then he goes on and says, “remember that at that time you were separated from Christ, excluded from the citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise.” There’s another term, “covenant.” Notice it’s plural as well. It probably clearly recalls the major covenant made between God and Abraham.
God and David, the Mosaic covenant, so again by just the word “covenant” the author evokes an entire section of Israel’s history and the covenant that God made with them. “Without hope, and without God in this world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law.” This is a clearer allusion back to the Mosaic law with its commandments and regulations. “His purpose was to create in himself one new man, [one new humanity] out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross.” Skip down to verse 17, “He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him, we both have the access,” another Old Testament term of “access” in the temple, “access to the father by one Spirit.”

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” I’ll stop there. But let me draw attention to a couple of other things besides circumcision and the law and covenants is clear and refers back to Old Testament concepts, if not specific texts. But, for example, notice the repeated reference to preaching peace to those who are far and those who are near. That language, in Paul, “those who are far off” seem to be Gentiles who are now included within the new people of God. But this language of peace, Christ being our peace, preaching peace to those who are far and those who are near, evokes language from the prophet Isaiah.

For example, in Isaiah chapter 52 and verse 7, a text that many of us have heard, notice in 52 verse 7 the author says, “How beautiful on mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaims peace. Who bring good tidings and proclaim salvation.” But even more significant is chapter 57 and verse 19 of Isaiah. He says, “creating peace on the lips of the mourners in Israel. Peace, peace
to those far and those near.” Now Paul picks up this language of “preaching peace,” or “peace to those far and those near,” and weaves this into his own context. But furthermore, notice this reference to creating one new humanity. This probably reflects the new creation language found throughout the book of Isaiah. Especially in 43 verse 19, we find God creating new things. It is in Isaiah chapter 62 verse 2 as well, and chapter 65 and verse 17 would be another one where the author indicates a new creation, “I will create a new heaven and a new earth.”

So you have this new creation language in chapter 62 and verse 2, “the nations will see your righteousness and all will praise your glory, and you will be called by a new name.” So this language of newness and new creation are probably now reflected in Paul’s creation of a new humanity. The idea of foreigners being excluded, Isaiah chapter 56 and the first part of verse 3 refers to the exclusion of foreigners or the inclusion of foreigners in Isaiah chapter 56 and verse 3. Again all of this is in the context of Israel’s restoration and their future act of God’s restoration. He says in 56:3, “Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the Lord’s say, ‘The Lord will surely exclude me from his people.”’ So Isaiah 56 anticipates that at the time of restoration, even foreigners will not be excluded. So now Paul indicates a time for those who were formally foreigners and aliens, who are now included in the people of God.

Even the reference to Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone in verse 20 is a reflection of Isaiah chapter 28 and verse 16, the founding one of the chief cornerstone of the restoration of Jerusalem. Furthermore, is it also possible having heard all of these resonances from Isaiah in all of these illusions and echoes, is it possible that the reference in verse 20 to the foundation of this household being the apostles and prophets, might be an allusion to Isaiah 54? In verses 11 and 12, I believe, or 11 and 13, the restoration of Jerusalem is seen in terms of foundation of the different building blocks and stones, where the foundation has been identified as a very precious stone. We saw earlier, interestingly, the Qumran community
interpreted this section of Isaiah 54, as referring to foundational Qumran community.

Is it possible that with all these other allusions to Isaiah that maybe Paul is alluding to Isaiah 54 and the restoration of Jerusalem with its foundations? Now he sees this being fulfilled in the establishment of God’s household and church built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. So, Isaiah’s program of restoration, then; the new creation, and the restoration of God’s people, includes Gentiles. Now this is fulfilled in the death of Jesus Christ and the creating of a new humanity, and a new people of God consisting of Jew and Gentile, the church. The reconciliation of Jew and Gentile hostility is removed, and there is peace and reconciliation. All of this Paul conceives as nothing less than the fulfillment of what Isaiah was already prophesying. The promise restoration is now being fulfilled in Jesus Christ, in creating this one new humanity.

So once again, by reading a New Testament text in light of the possible Old Testament background, the possible Old Testament subtext in the case of Ephesians in chapter 2, although Paul never quotes from the book of Isaiah, he seems to take up its language, its images, its structures and weaves them into his own discourse to demonstrate how the death of Jesus Christ and the new humanity, the people of God, the church made of Jew and Gentile, is the fulfillment and the climax of the restoration that Isaiah anticipated throughout the chapters of his prophecy.

**Hebrews 6 and the OT**

A final text in the letters that epistolary sections of the New Testament that I want to talk about briefly, is Hebrews chapter 6:4-6. And I’ll read that again because one needs to hear the New Testament text in order to be able to hear the resonances with the Old Testament. And likewise you need to hear and be aware of the New Testament text to hear echoes and resonances in the New Testament text that one reads. But Hebrews chapter 6:4-6 is actually probably a more well known of a series of five rather severe warnings that occur throughout the book of
Hebrews. We find one in chapter 2, in chapters 3 and 4 and in chapter 6, then there’s a couple more in 10 and 12. But sprinkled throughout the book of Hebrews are these rather severe warnings and I don’t want to discuss in a lot of detail why the author does that, it’s basically related to the situation that he’s addressing.

But we find these series of warnings and perhaps the most well known warning is found in Hebrews chapter 6:4-6. So I want to read it and then we will kind of introduce it and then we will begin to explore how might the Old Testament background help us to understand this text? Because as we read it, it will be clear that the author does not quote from the Old Testament and in fact there have been very few who have acknowledged or found in it the Old Testament references in this passage. So there’s a lot to explore. Does this text seem to reflect Old Testament passages? How might that make a difference in the meaning of this text and the way we read it? Hebrews chapter 6:4-6 is the third one of warning passages where the author basically warns readers “don’t turn back from the gospel, don’t turn your backs on the new covenant salvation that Jesus Christ has brought. But embrace Him in faith no matter what the consequences.”

So he is trying to get the readers not to walk away from Christ or the gospel. They have apparently believed in him and are presented with “don’t turn your backs, and go back to Judaism. But embrace Jesus Christ in faith no matter what the consequences.” Here’s the warning in chapter 6:4-6, “It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they then fall away, [or better, who then fall away], it’s impossible for them to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.”

What I want to focus on in the next session, are the list of descriptions of that are being depicted. That is, these persons are being described in 4 through 6 as tasting the heavenly gift, they’ve shared in the Holy Spirit, they’ve tasted the
powers of God’s word, they’ve tasted the powers of the coming age and then they have fallen away. Those are the parts or elements of these texts that I want to focus on, and ask how the Old Testament might help us to understand that. So in the next session, we’ll try to explore the Old Testament’s possible background in this description of Hebrews 6:4-6.

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