

THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE CHURCH

It was primarily of the Old Testament Scripture that Paul said that it was "God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (II Tim. 3:16-17 NIV).

The Old Testament (OT) is important. It is the historical and theological background for understanding the New Testament (NT). The OT raises the issues to which Christ of the New Testament is the solution. "For the Christian, Christ is the key to the central content of the OT but at the same time it is the OT which provides the clue to Christ."¹ The OT offers abundant and concrete illustrations of NT principles (e.g., Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers). In non-Western countries believers find that they can best deal with their own culture and find their identity as Christians as they come to the NT from the OT. Their culture is close to that of the OT. Speaking of Africa, Don Jacobs says, "There is a direct correlation between the availability of the OT in the vernacular and the emergence of independent churches."² To neglect the OT will mean an impoverished, if not imbalanced and therefore untrue grasp of the Christian faith.

Yet pastors admit that they preach too infrequently from the OT. Christians read the OT selectively, finding nurture mostly from the Psalms. Adolf von Harnack, the German scholar, held that the OT forms no essential part of the Church's faith. Through neglect of the OT we confirm with actions that which we deny verbally. Perhaps because of that neglect we too have adopted a "'Reader's Digest' religion" in which God is characterized as a pleasant presence.³

Reasons for the neglect of the OT are understandable. From the time of the first Christians the OT has been a problem. There is to this day debate on how to interpret such OT subjects as the sabbath, ceremonial law, war, polygamy,

capital punishment, the nation Israel and its land. The stress--quite proper--on Christ as the finality of God's revelation has led Anabaptists to regard parts of the OT as sub-Christian or to see the OT as primarily prediction, with the NT recording its fulfillment. If the OT is a shadow of the light that is in the NT, then quite understandably Christians would rather bathe themselves in the light than shiver in the shadows.⁴

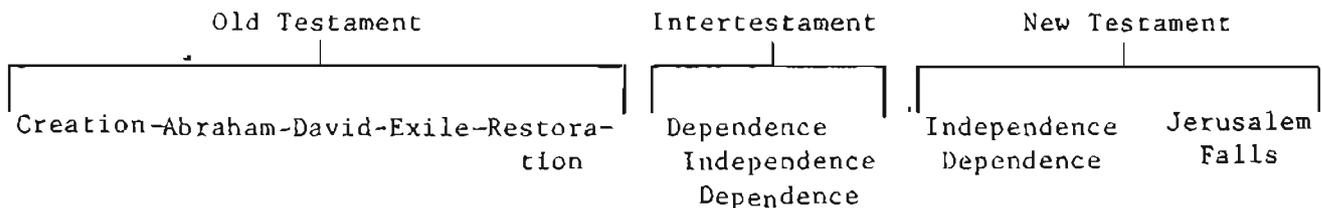
If we want to be biblical and follow the NT Church, then the OT must have a prominent place and we must rightly divide the Word of Truth. We focus on the issue which the OT poses to the Christian first by investigating the relationship of the two testaments. Next, we offer some pointers on the Christian's use of the OT.

I. The Relationship of the Two Testaments

An understanding of the relationship of the NT to the OT will put us in a position to frame guidelines for our use of the OT. Stated broadly, the two testaments are related historically, textually and thematically.

A. Historical Links Between the Testaments

The NT follows the OT chronologically. So also does the Jewish Talmud, it should be remembered. The NT begins with Jews; the subject of the OT is Israel. Geographically, the NT reports Christ's life which centers primarily in the land of Palestine, Israel's promised land. The very first chapter of Matthew with its genealogy sinks its roots deep into the OT. Luke's birth narratives and the hymns are reminiscent of similar OT literature. A distinct break in Jewish history comes only after NT times with the Bar Kochba revolt, 132-3 A.D. We can diagram the historical continuity between the testaments as follows:



At least two conclusions readily follow. First, if it is true as a general principle that it is impossible to understand correctly the present without a knowledge of the past, then it follows that we will not be able to interpret correctly the NT without attention to the OT. The Old compares to the New as a building foundation to its superstructure. Secondly, recognition of the continuity ~~building foundation to its superstructure.~~ Secondly, recognition of the continuity historically raises the question whether OT and NT are distinguished too sharply. It is the Church which has designated one set of books as the "OT" and another as the "NT."⁵ One can at least ask, given that there are stages in human history, ^{in Book of Hebrews} whether it is correct to make these stages two in number. Certainly less severe distinctions might have kept interpreters from such errors as, 1) the OT is law but the NT is gospel; 2) the God of the OT is wrathful but the God of the NT is love.

B. Textual Connections Between the Testaments

From the literary point of view the two testaments are related by the quotations from the OT in the NT. Even the casual reading of the NT indicates that the writers are well versed in the OT and were most concerned to come to grips with the OT. Unquestionably they saw themselves in some way in the same stream as the OT. "A conservative count discloses some 295 separate explicit references to the OT."⁶ Matthew's narrative is punctuated with allusions to the OT, "Thus it was fulfilled. . . ." Romans, a book of doctrine, contains more quotations from the OT than all other epistles together. The longest quotation from the OT is in Hebrews. One can analyze ways in which each of the NT writers individually used the OT,⁷ but the following summary will serve as a general review.

Linguistic Argument. Paul follows a rabbinical method of argument in Galatians 3:16 when he argues that because the promise was to Abraham and his seed (singular), the reference to seed is properly Christ (singular) rather than alone to descendants (plural). Even the spelling within the OT is used to support an argument.

✓ Figurative Usage. While a distinction is sometimes made between allegorical and typological use, it will be sufficient here merely to cite examples in which the NT uses the OT symbolically. Hagar and Sarah represent different covenants (Gal. 4:21-31). The OT statement, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain" (Deut. 25:4), is used to support the argument for remuneration to the Lord's ministers (I Cor. 9:9; I Tim. 5:18). The tabernacle and the priesthood are types of Christ (Heb. 8, 9). The rock from which Israel drank in the wilderness was Christ (I Cor. 10:3-4).

✓ Illustrative Usage. The OT furnished illustrations of spiritual principles to which the NT speaks. Paul argues about the place of faith and grace contrasted with works and law by citing Abraham's experience in which he was justified before God prior to his act of circumcision. In the same chapter (Rom. 4) a second illustration of justification by faith is taken from David's thirty-second Psalm. Apart from such doctrinal points the NT illustrates moral teaching from the OT. Two such examples are the warning against love of money, as Balaam (Jude 11) and subordination of wives to husbands, as Sarah (I Pet. 3:6).

Fulfillment Terminology. Often the NT writers note that the incident reported is a fulfillment of the OT. Their use of the word fulfillment is broad. Scholars have identified three senses in which the NT writers regard the OT as having been fulfilled: fulfillment as verification, as completion, or as correspondence.⁸

Isa 3: - Old Testament abrogated by the N.

Where fulfillment is used in the sense of verification, the OT passage is cited as predicting the event. In this sense of prediction/fulfillment one can speak of prophecy as history written in advance. The following are examples of such usage: Bethlehem, the place of Christ's birth (Micah 5:2 and Mt. 2:5); Elijah as the forerunner of the Messiah (Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6 and Mt. 11:10; 17:11-12); Christ's healing and saving ministry (Isa. 35:5-6 and Mt. 11:5; Isa. 61:1 and Luke 4:17-21); the Messiah as suffering (Isa. 53 and Luke 23:35, Mark 9:12, 10:45, 14:24; Zech. 13:7 and Matt. 26:31).

Used as completion the word "fulfillment" is used in the sense of "filling out" or "filling full" and thus "making complete." That which was stated initially in the OT in germ form is now brought to full stature in the NT. Jesus said, "I am come not to abolish the law but to fulfill it" (Mt. 5:17). He completes the direction already set in the law. The Sermon on the Mount statements are to be so interpreted. His word, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor . . . ,' But I tell you, love your enemies . . ." is not to be understood as setting the NT principle opposite the OT but as extending the principle in the direction in which it already pointed in the OT. The "but" is not adversative; "but" is used in the sense, "more than this."

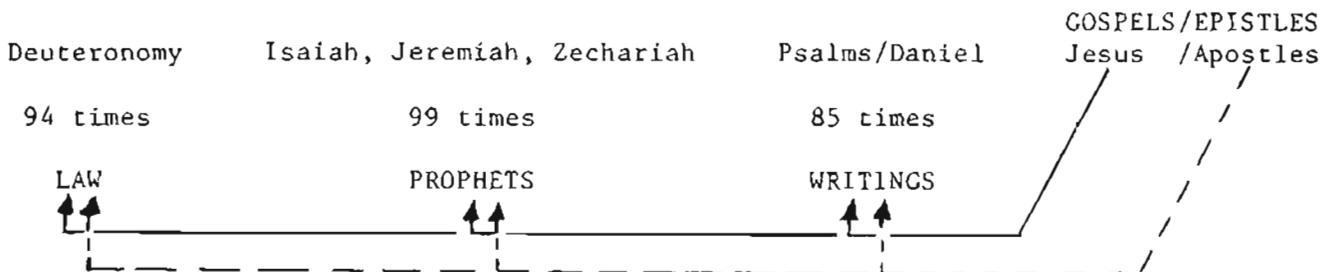
Such a usage of the word "fulfilled" must be meant when Jesus speaks of the lack of response and cites the prediction in Isaiah 6:9 ff, which was itself fulfilled already in Isaiah's time (29:9-11) yet it is fulfilled (filled yet fuller) at the time of Christ (Mt. 13:13).

The third way in which "fulfillment" is used is as correspondence or as counterpart. A widespread view in the ancient world was that things on earth were counterparts of things in heaven (e.g., the tabernacle was a copy of heavenly things (Heb. 9:23 ff). The NT writers also saw present events as counterparts of past events. Certain incidents were the complement of past incidents, the "other half" of the event, so to speak. It is such an understanding that underlies Matthew's reference to Hosea when he tells of Jesus' coming out of Egypt. The Hosea Scripture is a rehearsal of Israel's history given in the past tense: "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos. 11:1). No one reading the Hosea text would have considered it a prophecy or prediction for the coming Messiah, yet Matthew speaks of "fulfillment" (Mt. 2:15). He can do so because fulfillment is a broad term which, in addition to verification and completion, means correspondence. Matthew sees that Jesus' coming from Egypt was like Israel's coming out of Egypt. A further illustration is the price of the thirty pieces of silver and the

purchase of the potter's field. Matthew speaks of a fulfillment of Zechariah 11:12-13 (Mt. 26:15; 27:9, 10). But Zechariah did not foretell the event at all; he reported his monthly shepherd's wage. Nevertheless Matthew quite correctly speaks of this event by Zechariah as having been fulfilled, namely in the sense that its counterpart has happened.

Expositional Usage. When NT writers refer to the OT they do so sometimes (some scholars would say always) fully recognizing the intention of the OT message originally. The OT was not used only as symbol or prediction, for example, but was appreciated for its message in its own right. The quotation by Jesus of Psalm 110 can be an illustration: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand'" (Ps. 110:1). This passage when exegeted, makes the point that someone greater than David would be given a favored position with God. It is in this sense that Jesus quotes it to stress that someone greater than David is present (Mt. 22:44).⁹

We may chart the textual usage of the OT by the NT as follows:



From this survey several observations should be made. First, the OT is sometimes used in loose quotation, as though in a paraphrase (cf. Mt. 22:44) but at other times a case is argued from the precise way in which a matter is stated (e.g., the spelling of a word Gal. 3:16; cf. Jesus' use of Ps. 82:6 in John 10:34). There is no one way in which the NT uses OT. Secondly, it is quite possible that at a time when Scripture was not divided into chapter and verse, quotations from the OT signalled a reference to an entire passage which was to

serve as proof. The quotation of an opening verse or an identifying sentence was shorthand for reciting the whole passage.¹⁰ The citation of Psalm 22:18 in John 19:24, "They parted my garments" is perhaps meant to refer to the whole psalm with its message of victory through suffering. Thirdly, writers of the NT time assert an organic connection with the OT people and its literature. While it is true that the NT follows the OT historically, the NT writers say much more, namely that there is a unity. Christ serves not only as a link between the testaments (Luke 4:18-21 and Isa. 61:1, 2), but He is Himself the subject of the OT (Luke 24:27). Fourthly, certain NT ways of using the OT are hardly an option for us. The rabbinic methods of arguing from spellings is not for us a respectable method of using Scripture to establish doctrinal points. While typology is legitimate for NT writers since such was their intellectual climate, it is not to be used by us as the main method of Scripture interpretation, mostly because this method offers no control in the interpretation process. I agree with Traina, "The best policy to follow is to limit the exposition of Old Testament symbols to those which are explained within the Scriptures themselves."¹¹

C. A Thematic Sub-structure of the Two Testaments

A third level by which to describe the relationship between the two testaments is in terms of theme. Quite clearly certain themes are found in both: God, His righteousness, His "coming," man's sin, suffering, and the future. It is because of this thematic relationship that Jesus could say to Nicodemus when discussing the new birth, "You are a teacher in Israel and do you not understand these things?" (John 3:10). That theme of the new birth was stated already in Ezekiel (36:26-27).

If one pays attention to those whom God addresses, then one distinguishes three groups: Israel, the Gentiles, and the Church. The relationships between the OT and the NT become clear when one understands God's actions with respect to these three entities. In these actions, a certain pattern emerges.

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God and Israel. We begin with a discussion of Israel because the bulk of biblical literature is concerned with this people. To speak of Israel is to speak of the descendants of Abraham, but it is not to speak narrowly of a race or nation. We do not today, nor does the Bible, classify all the descendants of Abraham (Edom, for example) as Israel. Nor is Israel to be defined narrowly as limited to the physical descendants of Jacob, to whom God gave the name "Israel." That there is not a pure blood stream is evident simply by citing the names of Joseph's wife, Asenath, an Egyptian; Moses' wife, Zipporah, a Midianite (later he married a Cushite); Rahab, a Canaanite; Caleb, a Kenizzite who joins the tribe of Judah; and Ruth, a Moabitess. While the nation and "people of God" were identical entities initially, in later Israelite history, the prophets distinguish between the nation and a remnant (the true Israel).

God's interaction with Israel is characterized by many elements, four of which are redemption, intimacy, blessing, and promise. The redemption/judgment factor is illustrated by the exodus from Egypt, but also by the exile and the restoration. Secondly, the relationship of intimacy is expressed through covenant, law, kingship, etc. Thirdly, Israel is the recipient of blessing such as forgiveness, the ministry of priests and prophets, and the possession of the land. Fourthly, Israel's life begins with promise (Gen. 12:1; Ex. 6:1-8) and continues with promises (Jer. 33:15-26; Ezek. 36-39).

Future of Israel - as a nation?

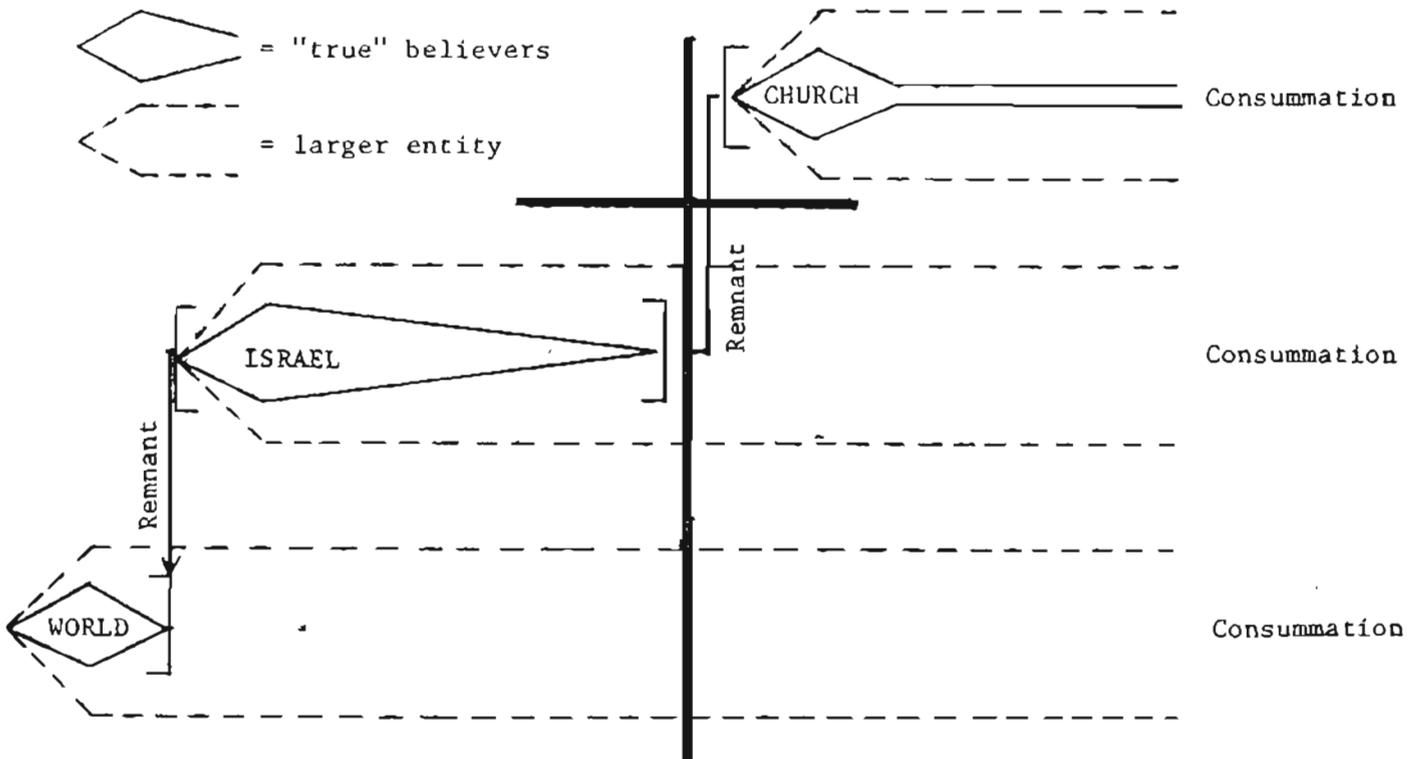
Gentiles--the World. From this paradigm or model of God's dealing with Israel we can do a flashback to the opening chapters of the Bible in which the focus is on the peoples of the world. The same four elements can summarize the relation between God and the world of people. First, judgment/redemption is illustrated by the expulsion of man from the garden. Man is not annihilated. In the flood most are destroyed, but some are saved. Secondly, God's relationship of intimacy can be traced through the God-fearing line of Seth and through such individuals as Enoch who walked with God (Gen. 5:22). God's blessings were

initially given to Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:22), and reconfirmed with mankind after the flood through the covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:1-17). God's promise for the world is found in Gen. 3:15.

The Church. In the NT a new name is given to those upon whom is the focus of God's dealing: the Church. In the Church also the pattern of redemption/judgment, intimacy, blessing and promise are easily discernible. It is through Christ that judgment is passed on sin and redemption becomes a reality. The intimacy is suggested in such figures of speech as vine/branches, body/members, husband/bride, building/stones. The blessings include the gift of the Holy Spirit, forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. Among the promises are those of Christ's return.

The three groups follow one another in this order: world, Israel, Church. Each begins with one individual: World--Adam, Israel--Abraham, Church--Christ. The Church is a sequel to the remnant in Israel just as Israel itself took its beginning with a remnant from the "world." It is a thesis of this paper that God's program with each continues despite the introduction of a new entity.

Schematically, the situation may be diagrammed as follows:



Several conclusions, admittedly of an interpretative nature, are the following: First, while the coming of Christ and the cross clearly divide all events and all biblical literature, there are at least three discernible stages: 1) world 2) Israel 3) Church. One type of dispensationalism distinguishes periods of history in terms of modes of God's operation. But the above presentation makes the distinction in terms of subjects with whom God deals. As to the literary divisions of the Bible, one could then speak of three "testaments": a "world testament (Gen. 1-11), an Israel testament (Gen. 12-Mal.), and a Church testament (Mt.-Rev.). Yet the demarcations are not that absolute for in the Book of Israel the age of the Church is pre-figured and the concern throughout is with the world. Similarly, in the Book of the Church the concern with the world remains; nor is concern for Israel absent.

Second, there is both continuity and discontinuity between the three stages. In each stage one can recognize elements that remain constant, yet new aspects are introduced. It is quite as though one begins with a large river; the canal that diverts from it is the same water and yet it, in turn, is fed by new rivulets. So also another canal goes out from the second canal, which, while still carrying water from the first, is augmented by new waters. Interpretatively speaking, one can recognize the same stream by such elements as the constancy of God's love, His concern for justice and righteousness, and His promises (as a fact, though the details vary).

But there are differences too. In the Book of Israel there is a tabernacle, but not so in the Age of the World. In the Book of the Church it is not, "Thus says the Lord," but "I say unto you." Both Israel and the Church have a mission to the world, but while the nations are to come to learn from Israel, the direction for the Church is reversed: the Church is to go to the world.

Third, God has not terminated His program with the world nor with Israel just because He has begun with a new entity, the Church. God's interest

continues for the world. His program with Israel also is not jettisoned (Jer. 31:36, Rom. 9-11).

Fourth, the relationship between WORLD/ISRAEL/CHURCH can be expressed by analogy. "Each stage is distinct and yet each has aspects that are mirrored in one or both of the other stages. This pattern of analogy can be clarified by noting some specifics.¹² The early writers in the Church period saw their situation mirrored in the events of Israel. Our Lord spoke of the new covenant in His blood, an echo of Exodus 24:6-7; the book of Hebrews expands on the details. In fact, it is analogy that lies at the heart of the major reasoning in Hebrews. The OT worship institutions and offices are seen as "symbolic for the present age," "a shadow of good things to come" (Heb. 9:9; 10:1). The feeding of the 5,000 (Mt. 14:15 ff) is analogous to Elisha's feeding 100 men with 20 loaves (II Kg. 4:42-44). Jesus' temptation is parallel to Israel's; that is the reason for the quotation by Jesus from the section Deuteronomy 6-8. Jesus is the shepherd of His own (Jn. 10), modeled on Ezekiel 34 in which God describes Himself as a shepherd of His people Israel.

But there is also an analogy between the Church period and the first stage, i.e., the world (Gen. 1-11). Thus Paul can see Christ as the head of a "race" corresponding to Adam who was the head of a race. The book of Hebrews when discussing Christ reaches back, not only to the "Israel" stage, but to Melchizedek, a figure from the "world" period. In fact, Christ is seen at that point as not relating at all to anything Israelite, but distinctly to what is outside Israel. Similarly, the faith principle is illustrated from Abel, Enoch, and Noah--persons from stage I (Heb. 11:4-7).

Sometimes a principle mentioned in one period or stage is described in terms of the two other "stages." Thus the new birth is a "new creation" (II Cor. 5:17), stage I, and also like the exodus (I Cor. 10:1-2), stage II. In

other words, both creation (world) and covenant (Israel) language is used for the Church.

To speak of the relationship between world, Church, and Israel as analogy is to define "a relationship that is distinguished from two commonly held views. It is distinguished from the view that sees the Church as a parenthesis in God's program and so, at its extreme, partitions the Bible in terms of passages relevant to the Church and those relevant to Israel. The view here advocated is also distinguished from the position that regards the Church as the true Israel and so sees the Church in direct continuity with spiritual Israel. The interpretation principle which then generally follows is to spiritualize OT passages that refer to Israel and so make them applicable to the Church. The view advocated here, one of analogy, leads to a different interpretation principle as will be shown in the next section.

II. Pointers Toward the Use of the Old Testament

On the basis of the preceding survey and interpretation, some pointers toward the use of the OT can now be described. There are two principles of a general nature and two which deal more strictly with interpretation.

A. Accept the OT as the Word of God

Paul is our example in treating the OT as the Word of God (II Tim. 3:16). To make this affirmation means that we reject levels of inspiration. The Anabaptists' stress on the NT as the final rule for faith and life can be understood to mean that the OT is less authoritative. To say, as Myron Augsburger does, that "Christ is Lord of the Scriptures and as such, judges and reinterprets sub-Christian elements of the Old Testament,"¹³ sounds orthodox but does it not depreciate the OT? If the OT is to be so judged, are there not elements in the NT that need also to be so judged? If the "New Testament is above the Old Testament in the progress of revelation and is the final rule for faith and life,"¹⁴ one is

still left with questions. For example, Jesus stated His mission as being to the House of Israel (Mt. 15:24) and told His disciples at one point not to go to the Gentiles (Mt. 10:5-6). He told His disciples to take nothing but staff in hand. Since present day clergy go about with pockets stuffed with airline tickets there is obviously some understanding other than the literal about the NT as "final rule for faith and life." New converts today are not given rules about not eating blood (Acts 15:29). In our concern with absolutes we have tended not to admit anything but absolutes. Without question there are absolutes in the Scriptures, but God's will expresses itself differently in different circumstances. We must not stress the excessive differences between the testaments, otherwise we will tend to have a primary (NT) and a secondary (OT) source for faith.

Reading the OT as the Word of God means that we must come to it in a prayerful spirit of dependence upon God. The Holy Spirit needs to be our guide in our interpretation of both Old and New Testaments since it is He who gave them (II Pet. 1:20-21). The OT is a literary document. Every literary document holds meanings the author never thought of. Christians must be open to such meanings.

B. Accept the OT as Focusing on God (Christ)

Our Lord's statement that the Scriptures (OT) are a testimony to Him must be taken at face value (Luke 24:44). Paul, for example, reasoned from the Scriptures that Christ must die (Acts 17:3; cf. I Cor. 15:3-4). Here we may follow Menno who said, "All Scriptures, both the Old and the New Testaments, on every hand point us to Christ Jesus that we are to follow Him. . . . Moses gave the Law, and Israel had to obey it until Christ, who was promised, appeared."¹⁵

This position demands that the OT is not read first for moralisms. It means that Abraham's God is far more the center of attention than the faith of Abraham. Moreover, to read the Scriptures in their witness to Christ does not mean that we use the OT primarily as proof texts for Jesus as Messiah. Matthew's

insight was first that Christ gathered up what the OT stood for; then he resorted to specific texts as proof. The OT must be read as pointing Godward and at the same time as pointing forward to God's coming in Christ.

C. Read the OT for its own message in its particular setting.

Predominantly God's Word has come to people in specific situations. God's Word has come as an answer to particular questions. While it contains propositions eternally true, the Bible must not be read as a flat book. It is only sensible that an effort be made to understand to whom and in what circumstances the Word of God has come in the past. There must be respect for the context. A passage must be studied for its point or thrust. Justification for this principle lies in the thematic relationship of the two testaments as described above. In addition, for the most part Christ Himself and the apostles so used the Scripture.¹⁶

While it is entirely true that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4), G. Campbell Morgan aptly explains that "The apostle did not suggest that the writers of old times wrote with the men of later ages in their thought. They wrote for their own age, and for the men by whom they were surrounded."¹⁷ The meaning of a passage for its time must be established first.

According to this approach the question of war is not resolved either by a glib endorsement of participation in war always, nor by ignoring the evidence and sidestepping the problem and clinging alone to the NT. One understands instead that these wars had a specific name, the Lord's wars (Num. 21:14) and that they were to teach faith in God. The courage of a soldier in Gideon's army, for example, was the courage not to fight. Moreover, war was not for the purpose of acquisition of property since, by God's instruction, the spoils were destroyed.

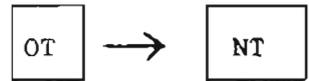
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D. Read the OT (and the NT) "Stereophonically"

Once the thrust of a passage has been determined, that message is compared with the rest of the Bible, which in this discussion means the NT. Since we hold that the Bible is a unity, its parts function much like the parts in a musical composition. Especially through stereo we are conscious that at times a tune or mood may be reinforced, while at other times it is contrasted. There are at least five ways in which the "thrusts" of an OT passage may be evaluated when "heard" in the context of the New.

1. The OT is confirmed by the NT.

The OT message that God loves (Jer. 31:3) is confirmed by the NT (Jn. 3:16). Forgiveness on the basis of a life given is common to both. So also is His design, "I will be their God, they shall be my people" (Ex. 6:7, Rev. 21:3). Many examples could be cited, such as God's saving intention or final judgment.



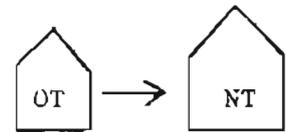
2. The OT is expanded by the NT.

That which appears in germ form such as the teaching of life after death is much expanded in the NT through the resurrection. Other examples of such elaboration are the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the second coming of Christ.



3. The OT has its anti-type in the NT.

The tabernacle especially but also certain wilderness experiences have their figurative value for the NT.



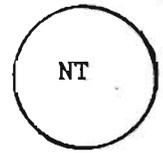
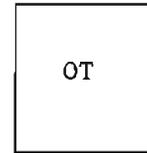
4. The OT is complemented by the New.

The OT has certain emphases which are hardly to be found at all in the NT such as instruction about worship structures, worship liturgy (Psalms), social justice, or human sexuality (Song of Solomon). Similarly, the NT has emphases unique to it but complementary to the OT, such as Christ's incarnation and resurrection, church officers and their qualifications, etc.



5. The OT is modified by the NT.

It may be argued that any changes of principle in the NT are only extrapolations of



what is already found in germ form in the OT. And yet some of the teachings such as love of enemy, place of the sabbath and sacrifice have a ring in the NT so different from that of the OT that it is best to regard these as modifications

Of chief importance is the principle that any particular Scripture is "heard" in the context of all the rest of the Scripture. We can then tell the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac and recognize that its main "point" is the testing of Abraham, which, as we hear it in the NT is echoed in the temptation of Jesus, and about which Paul says in I Corinthians 10:13, "There is no testing but such as you are able to bear. . . ." True, from the NT point of view we might be intrigued with the substitution of a lamb for the son, much as Christ has become the substitute for us. Abraham's story can illustrate the substitute concept, but substitution is not the central meaning of the chapter.

Or, to take another example, the story of the dry bones vision in Ezekiel, while concerned with the restoration of Israel, is a vision given in answer to people who say, "Our hope is lost." To such God's message is that even in the place of death there will come forth life through His power. The message of the text when heard in the context of the Bible leads to meditation upon the resurrection of Christ or to the conversion of an individual (Eph. 2:5). The text then has application for us and yet in no way loses its message to Israel.

Van Ruler is right. We must see the OT as the Word of God--"not merely as background but rather as horizon,"¹⁸ On that landscape we see God dealing with people, and we can both identify with them and appreciate God's work upon them and through them.

As I see it, the NT also must be "heard" stereophonically in terms of the OT. Thus, when Christ says that He has been sent to the lost sheep of Israel

NT people have the word not the sword as weapon of approach

(Mt. 15:24), we can at once, in the light of the OT, know that His mission will embrace much more than Israel.

Proper use of the OT will come when we give attention to the intention of a text. What does it say must be our first question. The first concern is not to construct a sermon outline. The second question is, What does the text say when placed against the total Scripture? Third, what does it say to me. The approach presented here is an approach with some control. That is, it will not then be the case that we can make the Scripture mean what we want it to mean. Without such control, individual prejudices are likely to dominate.

The stereophonic approach differs from the progressive revelation approach as an exegetical methodology. There can be no question but that God's revelation has been progressively more articulate (Heb. 1:1-3). But if this term "progressive revelation" means that we have an interpretative key, namely Christ, through whom we read back into the OT meanings found in the NT, meanings which are then said to be "true meanings" for the OT, we have placed ourselves on difficult grounds. First, only those passages to which Jesus (or other NT writers) referred will be illumined for us. The vast majority of the OT will remain inapplicable. Second, we are virtually saying that a Scripture becomes the Word of God (authoritative) only from the position of Christ, a point not unlike that made by the neo-orthodox. Third, we tend to depreciate the OT about which Paul said that it was God-breathed and profitable. From a morally superior position we tend also to look down on the primitive Hebrews. Thus, while there is truth in progressive revelation, that concept cannot be the key to a Christian use of the OT.

Conclusion

To the degree that we recover an emphasis on the total Bible, we are likely to experience the Christian life in its totality. The concern of a

Christian is to do God's will, but how can he do it unless he understands it, and how can he understand it unless he includes the whole of the Scripture and knows how to use it. Our discussion of the use of the OT is preliminary to an appreciation of our Savior and our God, and of an understanding of His will and, hence, the meaning of His Lordship in our lives. Quite certainly we will discover a freshness.

Turning to preaching, we may well ponder the words of one enthusiast in preaching: "But the real preaching need is a first hand knowledge of, and affection for the Old Testament, a consciousness that it contains a homiletic richness that is rarely presented from the pulpit, and a willingness to work at Old Testament study in order to bring this latent wealth to light."¹⁹

Elmer A. Martens
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FOOTNOTES

¹G. E. Wright, God Who Acts (London: SCM, 1952), p. 29.

²Don Jacobs, in a lecture at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, February 24, 1972.

³The phrase is from chapter title III in Elizabeth Achtemeier's The Old Testament and the Proclamation of the Gospel (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973).

⁴"By subordinating the Old Testament to the New Testament, interpreting the former exclusively under the authority of the latter (e.g., in terms of fulfillment and completion), and by making christology the touchstone of exegetical truth, the Church has diminished rather than enhanced the stature of the Old Testament, falsified rather than clarified its message." D. N. Freedman in a book review, JBL 92 (March 1973), p. 122.

⁵"Perhaps the earliest reference to the Hebrew Scriptures as 'Old Testament' is found in Melito of Sardis (ca. 180 AD). . . ." D. Moody Smith, Jr., "The Use of the Old Testament in the New" in The Use of the Old Testament and the New and Other Essays, J. M. Efird (ed.) (Duke University Press, 1972), p. 4, fn. 2.

⁶Roger Nicole, "Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament," Hermeneutics by Bernard Ramm (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), p. 43.

⁷D. Moody Smith, Jr., p. 4, fn. 2.

⁸C. F. D. Moule, "Fulfillment Words in the New Testament: Use or Abuse?" NTS 14 (April 1968), pp. 293-320.

⁹That Jesus was faithful to the intention of the OT texts is one contention of R. T. France, Jesus and the Old Testament (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971), Chapter V and especially pp. 201, 223.

¹⁰C. H. Dodd, According to the Scriptures (London: Nisbet, 1952).

¹¹Robert A. Traina, Methodical Bible Study (Published by author, 1952), p. 176.

¹²For a good discussion of analogy, though the author uses the term "typology," see R. T. France, Jesus and the Old Testament, pp. 38-80. His conclusions differ from those given here.

¹³M. S. Augsburger, Principles of Biblical Interpretation (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1967), p. 15.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Menno Simons, Complete Writings of Menno Simons (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1955), p. 749.

¹⁶"In general . . . the writers of the New Testament in making use of passages from the Old Testament, remain true to the main intention of their writers," C. H. Dodd, According to the Scriptures, p. 130.

¹⁷G. Campbell Morgan, Living Messages of the Books of the Bible (London: Fleming Revell, 1912), p. 1.

¹⁸A. A. van Ruler, The Christian Church and the Old Testament, translated by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 57.

¹⁹L. E. Toombs, The Old Testament in Christian Preaching (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), p. 9.