

Dabney Center

Spring 2004

Biblical Theology

Lectures #7-8

Biblical theology reads the Bible as a unified narrative. One aspect of biblical theology, then, is looking at how texts within the Scriptures interface with one another. The technical name for this is “intertextuality.” Understanding how intertextuality works gives the biblical theologian an important hermeneutical tool. Here, we are looking for more than conceptual and doctrinal coherence in the Scriptures; we are actually looking for fragments of earlier texts buried in later ones.

Intertextuality uses Scripture to interpret Scripture by listening for quotations, echoes, and allusions to other inter-canonical texts. It is a form of inner-biblical exegesis. Intertextuality includes explicit quotations (e.g., quotations of the OT in the NT), as well as more subtle uses of texts.

All of us are familiar with intertextuality in a general kind of way. For example, snippets from of the Bible appear in Shakespeare, and snippets of Shakespeare appear in later texts. Intertextuality is an everyday phenomenon. But we often underestimate it’s interpretive value.

Intertextuality presupposes a “cultural canon” of sorts. It presupposes that the community is familiar with the relevant texts, and will detect the echoes and allusions. In other words, intertextuality requires a literary tradition.

In dealing with biblical intertextuality, there are several problems. Obviously one is translational. An echo or allusion may be obscured by inconsistent translations. For example, the NT writers often use the LXX, which can be quite different from the Masoretic text on which our English OT is based. Another problem is that we simply don’t know the biblical texts very well.

Intertextual connections come in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes, a single word or phrase is allusive. In other cases, an entire stretch of text is patterned after some previous text. The apostles, of course, are never using OT texts out of context, so their use of the OT is instructive for us. But their uses of the OT not only unfold the meaning of the original text; they transform that meaning in light of New Covenant realities. The old texts must now be read in a new context.

We must keep in mind that allusions to the OT in the NT are not merely isolated prooftexts. Rather, when an OT text is invoked, it drags with it its entire setting in its original usage. Thus, identifying intertextual fragments not only enriches our understanding of the later text; it also allows us to reread the old text in a new light. The old text has shaped the formation of the new, even as the new reshapes the interpretation of the old.

How do we know when we have a solid example of intertextuality? How much does authorial intent play into intertextuality? For answers to these sorts of questions, see Richard Hays' now classic study of intertextuality in Paul's epistles, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, especially 29ff. Hays gives seven tests:

1. Availability
2. Volume
3. Recurrence
4. Thematic coherence
5. Historical plausibility
6. History of interpretation
7. Satisfaction

No test can remove the element of subjectivity, of course, nor should that be our aim. But Hays' guidelines do help us ensure that the echoes we hear are actually in the text and not just in our imagination.

The best way to get a handle on how intertextuality works is through examples. Let's take up several case studies. Our goal is to better understand how to interpret Scripture intertextually.

1. Phil. 1:19 cites Job 13:16
2. Mk. 1:1-3 gives a composite quotation from several OT texts
3. Mk. 6
4. The baptism of Jesus

5. Mk. 10:45
6. Mk. 4:39
7. The words of institution
8. The "I am" statements in John
9. 1 Pt. 2:9-10
10. 1 Cor. 15:57-58 (an intertextual reversal)
11. Rom. 8:32
12. Rom. 6-8 (macro-intertextuality)
13. Revelation
14. Acts 17
15. Rom 1:18ff and Gen. 3
16. Phil. 2:5-11 and Gen. 3, Isa.
17. 1 Cor. 11:7-10
18. Luke 1 modeled after 1 Sam. 1-2
19. The early chapters of Acts parallel the early chapters of Joshua
20. Acts 20 and Achan

Intertextuality is simply a rigorous application of the familiar principle, "Scripture interprets Scripture." Luther had a good understanding of how pervasively intertextual the Bible is: "There is no word in the NT which does not look back to the old wherein it was already declared." Everything in the NT has an OT background to it. The NT is like a giant echo chamber, reverberating with the voices of the Old Covenant. Seeing these connections stabilizes and deepens our reading of the Bible.

Selected Intertextuality Bibliography

Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Epistles of Paul*
Rikki Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark*
Tom Yoder Neufeld, *Put on the Armor of God*
Willard Swartley, *Israel's Scripture Traditions and the Synoptic Gospels: Story Shaping Story*
David P. Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet*
Paul Hinnebusch, *Jesus the New Elijah*
Joel Green, *NICNT: Luke*
John Paul Heil, *Mark's Gospel as a Model for Action*
Sylvia Keesmaat, *Paul and His Story*
Ben Witherington, *Paul's Narrative Thought World*
J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul in Concert*
Don Garlington, *Exegetical Essays*
Craig Evans and James Sanders, *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*
Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament*
David Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*
Sydney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*
N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*
N. T. Wright, *NIB: Romans*