

HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURES

(With an emphasis on the NT use of the OT)

I. Biblical Meaning is Single in Nature (1/5/25)

II. Biblical Meaning is Straightforward in Sense (1/12/25)

III. Biblical Meaning is Progressive in Details

1. NT advancement, not alteration

It is undeniable that the NT supplies more details than the OT about certain aspects of God's redemptive plan (Jesus of Nazareth, the atonement of Christ, the Spirit's role, the church, the kingdom, the tribulation, etc.), but that increased supply of information does not and cannot *change* the meaning of OT texts.

Robert Thomas: Progress in divine revelation is quite apparent in tracing through the books of the Old and New Testaments chronologically, but "progress" in the sense only of adding to what has already been revealed, not in any sense of a change of previous revelation. To change the substance of something already written is not "progress"; it is an "alteration" or "change" that raises questions about the credibility of the text's original meaning.¹

Furthermore, the OT does not possess a 'lesser revelatory value'² (2 Tim. 3:16; Ps. 19:7-14), but rather provides essential doctrine, background, prophecies and foreshadowings of what would come in the NT.

Darrell Bock notes that the hermeneutical claim of NT priority [over the OT] is a subversive retrojection of the NT back to the Old that actually loses some of what God had committed himself to doing. No amount of pleading on behalf of a certain type of typology can deny this linguistic canceling effect on the text. The result is not a unifying of scriptural teaching, but a negating and limiting of what God affirmed, resulting in a reductionistic reading of the text and a diminishing of Israel's role down to a mere symbol, something it seems strange God would do in material that forms the bulk of Scripture, not the least national Israel's hope in the prophets. It also diminishes the character of God, as certain approaches deny [God's] promise and its repeated affirmation to original recipients.

¹ Robert L. Thomas, "The Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism," TMSJ 6/2 (Spring 1995): 90, fn47.

² Walter C. Kaiser, "Response to Enns," in *Three Views on the NT use of the OT*, eds. Kenneth Berding, Stanley Gundry, Jonathan Lunde (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 224.

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In this reading, the question becomes whether God means what he says to those he originally addressed. This is not the best option for putting Scripture together.³

2. Interpret forwards, not backwards

The glorious *significance* of the Christ's fulfillment of God's redemptive plan, especially with regards to the establishment of the new covenant, is most clearly seen against the backdrop of OT revelation. Reason being, the OT has a message that is clear (Luke 2:25-38, 24:25-26, 44-47), even if it is lacking the *details* that would be supplied in the NT (1 Pet. 1:10-11 (exact person and time regarding the Messiah)). The NT does not override or rewrite OT *meaning*, but completes the same painting that was begun with OT revelation.

3. The Analogy of Faith is a final check, not an interpretive grid

Analogy of Faith (Scripture interprets Scripture) defined: The meaning of any single biblical statement is not contradictory to any teaching of other Scripture on the subject. God's Word, presumably, does not affirm and deny the same thing at the same time in the same respect.⁴

The *benefits* of utilizing the analogy of faith are that it keeps the interpreter from contradictions and heresy. The *dangers* of utilizing the analogy of faith are that it can smush texts into theological categories or flatten out an emphasis of a particular text with another text, thus silencing something God intended to communicate.

4. The assistance of "Antecedent Theology" and "Intertextuality"

Surely most interpreters will see the wisdom and good sense in limiting our theological observations to conclusions drawn from the text being exegeted and from texts which preceded it in time...we contend that the theology must be objectively derived from the text; it is not to be subjectively imposed on the text by the interpreter.

There are some clues to the **antecedent theology** within a text:

³ Darrell L. Bock, "A Progressive Dispensational Response," in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, eds. Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2022), 222.

⁴ Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology, vol. 1* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986], 30-31.

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1. The use of certain terms which have already acquired a special meaning in the history of salvation and have begun to take on a technical status (e.g. 'seed,' 'servant,' 'rest,' 'inheritance');
2. A direct reference or an indirect allusion to a previous event in the progress of revelation (e.g., the exodus, the epiphany on Sinai) with a view to making a related theological statement;
3. Direct or indirect citation of quotations so as to appropriate them for a similar theological point in the new situation (e.g., "'Be fruitful and multiply..."; 'I am the God of your fathers"');
4. Reference to the covenant(s), its contents of accumulating promises, or its formulae (e.g., 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt'; "'I will be your God; you shall be my people, and I will dwell in the midst of you')...

Subsequent developments in the revelation of theology (subsequent to the passage we have under consideration) may (and should, in fact) be brought into our conclusion or summaries after we have firmly established on exegetical grounds precisely what the passage means.⁵

Intertextuality...refers to how the inspired authors expounded upon previous revelation in their own writings...The OT writers themselves were exegetes and theologians who understood and correlated their texts with previous revelation (every book of the Old Testament refers to previous revelation-p.51). This formed intentional 'networks of texts' in the OT...Individual OT texts are windows into larger contexts because they are intentionally part of a series of passages the prophets have woven together...Thus the apostles are not arbitrary [in their use of the OT]; their thoughts and assumptions are directly tied to interconnected OT texts woven together by the prophets.⁶

(ie. the God of Abraham, rest (Sabbath, promised land, spiritual), seed promise (Gen. 3:15, 22:17-18; 2 Sam. 7:12), God's son (Ex. 4:22; Hos. 11:1; Ps. 80:15), etc.)

⁵ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998/2009), 137, 140.

⁶ Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2018), 21.