CURRENTS IN BIBLICAL STUDIES

Long-lost Grandparent Texts of the New Testament

Exploring Deeper Contexts in Connections across the Canon

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Those of us who teach Scripture and theology can benefit by greater attention to the connections between the two testaments of the Christian Bible. Much has been accomplished by careful study of New Testament use of Old Testament "parent texts." But stopping with parent texts often leaves dangling disconnections. This is one of the reasons for the deep confusion that surrounds many cases of the New Testament use of scripture.

Why trace back the genealogy of the New Testament only one interpretive generation?

The Old Testament parent texts that New Testament authors use to teach the gospel and righteousness do not appear *ex nihilo*. At least eighty Old Testament parent texts cited in the New Testament feature interpretive allusions to earlier scriptural contexts that can be thought of as "grandparent texts."

The present study invites consideration of the deeper context of the scriptures that New Testament authors turn to when they explain the gospel of Messiah. The next two sections identify and illustrate this deeper and interconnected context. These are followed by a brief conclusion.

LONG-LOST GRANDPARENT TEXTS

The Bible's use of the Bible characterizes both testaments of the Christian Bible. Israel's scriptures house many hundreds of exegetical uses of earlier scriptures as well as thousands of lesser allusions and echoes. It is entirely natural that authors of the New Testament use the scriptures of Israel in accord with its own use of earlier scriptures.

Over the past several years I have researched and written a reference work titled *Old Testament Use of Old Testament*.[1] This book features chapters on the use of earlier scriptures in every scroll of Israel's scriptures. Near the end, one chapter ("Toward the New Testament") shines a light on the tendencies of New Testament authors who use scriptural texts including many that either cite or are cited by other texts within Israel's scriptures. In the present study, attention will be restricted to texts of Israel's scriptures that make exegetical allusion to earlier scriptures and are also cited by New Testament authors. These can be thought of as grandparent, parent, and offspring texts.

grandparent ⟵ **parent** ⟵ **offspring**
OT text   OT text   NT text

Scholarship of New Testament use of scripture has been rightly concerned with the context of Old Testament parent texts. Scholars sharply debate how much of the surrounding context should be considered when trying to figure out what New Testament authors are trying to do. In spite of protracted debate, this scholarship has almost entirely ignored the deeper context of grandparent texts.[2] It simply has not been an area of concern.

The failure of scholars of New Testament use of scripture to attend to deep context in the case of grandparent texts is confirmed by Arthur Keefer's

research. Keefer evaluates the place of "Old Testament context" in three leading methodologies for interpreting New Testament use of scripture—those of Craig Evans, Klyne Snodgrass, and Greg Beale. Keefer identifies eight aspects of context for which these scholars advocate.[3] The importance of this list of contexts cannot be pursued here except for what is missing: the Old Testament use of earlier scriptures is glaringly absent. In fairness, Beale does refer to the importance of the Old Testament use of the Old Testament in three places in the book with which Keefer works, and I gladly affirm Beale's statements to this effect here and elsewhere.[4] In spite of Beale's stated concerns, the use of scripture within Israel's scriptures does not find a place in the method of study he presents (which Keefer summarizes well).

Context cannot be restricted to the passage itself and the surrounding verses.[5] The scriptures of Israel are too interconnected and too dynamic for one-stop investigation.

Here is a tiny fraction of the large number of passages cited by the New Testament that include within them exegetical allusions to still earlier passages of Israel's scriptures:[6]

Blessing of Judah	Gen 49:8–12
Ten Commandments	Exod 20 // Deut 5
Love thy neighbor	Lev 19:18
Song of Moses	Deut 32
Prophet like Moses	Deut 34:10–12
Davidic covenant	2 Sam 7 // 1 Chr 17
New exodus	Isa 40:3–5
Last servant song in Isaiah's new exodus	Isa 53
Temple as house of prayer for all peoples	Isa 56:7
New covenant	Jer 31:31–37
Psalms of the Davidic covenant	Pss 2; 89; 110; 132
Resurrection	Dan 12:2–3

All of these passages are parent texts used in the New Testament. All of these contexts also feature exegetical allusions to still earlier grandparent texts that have not played an adequate role in figuring out what the authors of the New Testament have in mind. But allusions to grandparent texts are part of the parent texts themselves.

The concerns with the Torah everywhere in the letter to the Hebrews corroborates the point at hand, since it almost never cites Torah itself. The author to the Hebrews tends to access Torah as it is refracted through the prophets and psalms. He refers to human creational dominion by citing Psalm 8, to the rebellion in the wilderness by citing Psalm 95, to Melchizedek by citing Psalm 110, to the sacrificial system by citing Psalm 40, and to the Mosaic covenant by citing Jeremiah's new covenant.[7]

The contexts listed above and many others are not peripheral. The importance of these teachings of Israel's scriptures for the New Testament underscores the need to investigate the way grandparent texts bear on the parent texts of New Testament scripture usage.

In sum, scholarship on the New Testament use of scripture has not adequately attended to deep context in many cases. Very frequently, New Testament authors cite parent texts within Israel's scriptures that themselves depend on earlier texts.

CASE STUDIES

The present study argues that those who teach Scripture and theology can benefit by attending to Old Testament use of scripture, since New Testament passages often depend on it. Case studies can illustrate the benefits of focusing on Old Testament grandparent texts of the New Testament.

The following cases illustrate three of the ways New Testament authors use Old Testament grandparent texts: exegetical blending, theological continuity, and exegetical extrapolation and extension.

First, in Mark 11:1–10, the **exegetical blending** of allusions to Zechariah 9:9 and Genesis 49:11 illustrates one way New Testament authors use scripture in accord with the use of scripture within Israel's scriptures. The expression "exegetical blends" refers to biblical texts that interpret one earlier scriptural text in the light of another.[8] Exegetical blends are exceedingly common across both testaments of the Christian Bible.

The distinct donkey language in Genesis 49:11 and Zechariah 9:9 virtually requires an intentional relationship to explain it.[9] If Jacob foretells what the Judah-king does when he rides a donkey into the vineyard, then Zechariah speaks of what happens before. The oracle of the coming of the righteous, delivered, and humble king provides a prequel to the arrival of the Judah-king in the vineyard.[10]

Zechariah's oracle does not replace or diminish the expectational force of the blessing of Judah. Mark goes out of his way to integrate allusion

to the blessing of Judah by the fivefold use of "binding"/"unbinding" of the donkey (Mark 11:2, 4, 5; cf. Gen 49:11 LXX). Messiah's coming into Jerusalem in Mark 11 takes on tremendous irony by means of allusions to both the coming of the Judah-king and the oracle of the coming humble king upon a donkey. These ironic allusions connect to the riddle of the vine growers who kill the vineyard owner's son with the citations of Psalm 118:25–26 and 118:22–23 in Mark 11:9–11 and 12:10–11, respectively.

Zechariah 9:9 as Prequel and Mark 11:1–10 as Set-Up to Ironic Sequel [11]

Prequel	Blessing of Judah
Humble king comes riding on a donkey (Zech 9:9)	Judah-king enters his vineyard with his donkey (Gen 49:11)
Triumphal entry	**Sequel**
Messiah comes riding on a donkey (Mark 11:1–10)	Son of vineyard owner executed as king of the Jews (Mark 12:1–11; 15:26)

When Old Testament prophets advance revelation by exegetical allusion to earlier scriptural traditions, it does not exhaust or replace the expectations of the earlier contexts. Exegetical allusions increase the generative capacities of expectational grandparent contexts, inviting ongoing exegetical allusion. In this way exegetical allusions activate and advance the progressive revelation of God's redemptive will.

Second, the **theological continuity** between the use of scripture in Amos 9:11–12 and Acts 15:16–17 illustrates kindred tendencies of the use of scripture in the Old and New Testaments versus the discontinuity between the use of Amos 9:11 by the sectarian text of Qumran 4QFlorigium (4Q174).

Steve Moyise infers that the use of Amos 9:11 by both James in Acts 15:16 and 4Q174 suggests a shared interpretive outlook.[12] The evidence points in the opposite direction. Zeal for finding connections between New Testament and Second Temple Judaic interpretation may lead to false positives.

In the context where 4Q174 cites Amos 9:11, the sectarian scribes make an extremist move of

enhancing the law of the assembly to exclude even proselytes.

> No one born of an illegitimate birth shall enter the assembly of Yahweh. ... No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of Yahweh ... forever. (Deut 23:2–3 lit.)[13]

> [T]hey shall not enter ever: Ammonite, Moabite, one born of illegitimate birth, foreigner, or *proselyte*, forever. (4Q174 1:3b–4a lit., emphasis added)[14]

Meanwhile, James cites Amos 9:11–12 as part of his ruling that converted uncircumcised gentiles are welcome into the assembly (Acts 15:16–18a).[15]

The use of scriptural traditions in Amos 9:11–12 offers help. Amos interprets that the Davidic promise includes "all the nations that bear my name" (Amos 9:12b lit.).[16] The ethnically inclusive expectations of the exegetical allusions to scriptural traditions by Amos and James stand in continuity. The exegetical outcomes of Amos and James oppose the kind of exclusionist ethnocentricity undergirding the radical sectarian exegesis in 4Q174. In this case the use of the same scriptural context by 4Q174 and James underlines diametrically opposed exegetical programs.

Third, Old Testament texts cited by the New Testament sometimes **exegetically extrapolate and extend** earlier biblical teachings. Interconnections between Old Testament parent, grandparent, and great-grandparent texts show how a series of exegetical advances culminate in the command to love thy neighbor in Leviticus 19:18b. Messiah extends the exegetical advancements by asking who acted as a neighbor in Luke 10:36. This example shows how the New Testament further extends exegetical use of scripture already appearing within Israel's scriptures.

In spite of intense study, the deep context within Leviticus 19:18b has been widely neglected. A series of unique constructions show that the law to love the residing foreigner (Lev 19:33–34) features an exegetical blend of the legal standards for circumcised residing foreigners to participate in Passover like any Israelite (Exod 12:48) combined with the protections of residing foreigners (22:21).[17] Step 1, extrapolation: If Israel has been redeemed from their mistreatment when they were residing foreigners in Egypt, and if residing foreigners participate in Passover like any Israelite, then positively Israel shall love the residing foreigners like any fellow citizen.

Step 2, extension: If Israel shall love them, then they must certainly love thy neighbor. The logic of step 1 extrapolates the positive admonition from the prohibition, while step 2 extends from the lesser to the greater. Notice the interpretive progression (underlining and bold text signify verbal parallels in Hebrew).

> <u>When a residing foreigner residing among you</u> wants to celebrate Passover to Yahweh, he must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part <u>as a native-born</u> of the land. No uncircumcised male may eat it. (Exod 12:48 lit.)

> **Do not mistreat** or oppress **a residing foreigner, for you were residing foreigners in** the land of **Egypt**. (22:21 lit.)

> <u>When a **residing foreigner** resides among you</u> in your land, **do not mistreat** them. The residing foreigner residing among you must be treated <u>as</u> your <u>native-born</u>. *Love* them *as yourself*, **for you were residing foreigners in Egypt**. I am Yahweh your God. (Lev 19:33–34 lit.)

> *Love* your neighbor *as yourself*. I am Yahweh. (19:18b lit.)

The command to love thy neighbor does not drop from the heavens all at once. "Love thy neighbor" represents a penultimate culmination of a series of exegetical advances of revelation within Israel's scriptures. For the moment, it is enough to observe that the deep context of love thy neighbor demonstrates that love of neighbor grows out of the redemptive work of Yahweh. Redemption gives rise to command—not the other way around.

Messiah advances "love thy neighbor" to a new exegetical culmination by the riddle of the good Samaritan and its question: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor?" (Luke 10:36 NIV). Messiah's torah further extrapolates and further extends "love thy neighbor" based on the deep context of the grandparent and great-grandparent contexts of "love thy neighbor."

CONCLUSION

Greater attention to connections between the testaments of the Christian Bible and their deep contexts can benefit Scripture and theology professors. The present study is not exhaustive. Instead, it scratches the surface of a long-neglected resource

for interpreting the New Testament use of scripture—the Old Testament.

The illustrations above show how the Old Testament use of scripture offers insight for studying the New Testament, including exegetical blends, theological continuity, and extrapolation and extension. The Old Testament use of scripture also sets the course for the New Testament use of scripture in many other ways, like synoptic contexts, extended echo effect, backward-looking and forward-looking typological/figural patterns, fulfillment formulas, overt citation marking, unmarked quotation, marked and unmarked interpretive paraphrase, legal adjustments, homiletical exegesis, ironic expansions, interpretive networks, and more.

The evidence favors that New Testament authors cherished and carefully studied the scriptures of Israel. They pored over the scriptures and frequently built their own teachings on scriptural parent texts that exegetically allude to grandparent texts.

The presentation of the teaching, death, and resurrection of Messiah in the New Testament overflows with exegetical allusions to Israel's scriptures. This situation invites teachers and scholars to take the next step in cases where parent texts feature interpretive allusions to earlier contexts within Israel's scriptures. It is not adequate to merely work back to the parent texts within Israel's scriptures and stop.

Grandparent texts need to be taken seriously. Rediscovering the grandparent texts of the New Testament offers one means of recovering a sense of the coherence and deep continuity of God's redemptive will that interconnects the entire Christian Bible. Commitment to uncovering biblical continuity offers one part of an antidote to the widespread tendency today to view Scripture as fragmented and disjointed. Attending to the scriptural grandparent texts of the New Testament can offer renewed insight into the spectacular exegetical moves that proclaim the gospel of Messiah in the New Testament. **D**

[1] Gary Edward Schnittjer, *Old Testament Use of Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021). Also see Beth M. Stovell, review of *Old Testament Use of Old Testament* by Gary Edward Schnittjer, *Didaktikos 2021 Fall Books Preview* (2021): 14, 16–17.

[2] See Schnittjer, *Old Testament Use*, 851n27.

[3] See Arthur Keefer, "The Meaning and Place of Old Testament Context in OT/NT Methodology," in *Methodology in the Use of the Old Testament in the New: Context and Criteria*, ed. David Allen and Steve Smith (New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 73–85, esp. list on 84.

[4] See G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 47, 97, 98. Also see G. K. Beale and

D. A. Carson, "Introduction," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), xxiv.

[5] The long debate on how much surrounding context of cited passages New Testament authors had in mind is very important but cannot be taken up here. See, e.g., C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Substructure of New Testament Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 126; Beale, *Handbook*, 1–5; G. K. Beale, "The Cognitive Peripheral Vision of Biblical Authors," *WTJ* 76 (2014): 263–93; Ian Turner, "Going Beyond What Is Written or Learning to Read?: Discovering OT/NT Broad Reference," *JETS* 61.3 (2018): 577–94.

[6] For these and other Old Testament contexts that both use earlier scriptures and are used by New Testament authors, see Schnittjer, *OT Use of OT*, 866–67; cf. lists at the beginning of the main chapters. Eighty of these have been collated in "Instructor Resources for *Old Testament Use of Old Testament*," 30–32, posted in TextbookPlus, ZondervanAcademic.com (available exclusively to professors).

[7] See Heb 2:6–8; 3:7–11, 15; 4:3, 5, 7, 8; 7:17, 21; 8:8–12; 10:5–7, 16–17; and see Gary Edward Schnittjer, "Blessing of Judah as Generative Expectation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 177 (2020): 36 [15–39].

[8] The expression "exegetical blends" is based on—but broader than—Fishbane's expression "legal blends." See Michael Fishbane, *Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 110–19, 134–36. Legal blends are actually a subset of the commonplace phenomenon of biblical texts that interpret one earlier context in the light of another. Such texts appear in every genre of the Christian Bible.

[9] See Kenneth C. Way, "Donkey Domain: Zechariah 9:9 and Lexical Semantics," *JBL* 129.1 (2010): 105–14.

[10] For a detailed evaluation of Zechariah's use of the blessing of Judah, see Schnittjer, "Blessing of Judah," 27–30.

[11] Table adapted from Schnittjer, "Blessing of Judah," 29–30; Schnittjer, *Old Testament Use*, 453. These are based on Schnittjer, *Torah Story Video Lectures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2017), DVD, 10.3.

[12] See Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the New: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 205.

[13] All literal (lit.) translations mine. Only English Bible verse references are provided.

[14] See Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 1:352. The term *ben nechar* (בן נכר) is rendered as "foreigner" and *ger* (גר) as "proselyte," as was commonplace already in the LXX.

[15] The broad point being made here stands, however the difficult textual issues of Amos 9:11–12 MT and LXX are worked out in relation to Acts 15:16–18.

[16] See detailed analysis in Schnittjer, *Old Testament Use*, 391–94; and see 858–59.

[17] See Schnittjer, *Old Testament Use*, 42–44. Also see Gary Edward Schnittjer, "Surprises of Old Testament Use of Old Testament: Part 5," *Credo*, 22 July 2020, https://credomag.com/2020/07/surprises-of-old-testament-use-of-old-testament-part-5/.

GARY EDWARD SCHNITTJER recently submitted the revised and updated second edition of *Torah Story*, and he is researching projects under contract with Baker Academic, B&H Academic, and Zondervan Academic.