

Systematic Theology for the Local Church

#16—Bibliology—Part VII¹

Jesus' View of the Old Testament

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July 8, 2007

For the studies in Bibliology: Become familiar with Sections 6-12 in House's *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*. Read all of Packer's *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*. Packer's book was written against the background of the debate over Fundamentalism in the late 20th century. However, his presentation of the systems of authority (reason, tradition and Scripture) is timeless. Also, read Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, ch. 1, "The Fact of Divine Revelation," ch. 2, "The Inspired Nature of Holy Scripture," ch. 3, "The Attributes of Holy Scripture," and ch. 5, "The Bible as the $\Pi\omicron\upsilon$ $\Sigma\tau\omega$ for Knowledge and Personal Significance," which deals with the Bible as the basis for life.

So far in our study of inspiration we have looked at *direct* statements about the Bible made by its writers, particularly that Scripture is breathed out and the Spirit carried the writers along. There is another kind of information about the accuracy of the Bible that appears in *indirect* statements. One of the most important types of indirect information is found in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ about his Bible, the Old Testament.

Some Bible students suggest that what is important is not a "rigid" doctrine of inspiration, but simply paying attention to the words of Jesus. Not only does this immediately imply that he could be in conflict with Scripture (which is not borne out by the New Testament), but also that his words might be somehow superior. Examination of his views of the Old Testament is quite revealing and adds a great deal to our understanding of inspiration. What was Jesus' view of Scripture? We will look at only a few of the many places in the Gospels where Jesus used the Old Testament.

Rested on its abiding authority

When we look at Jesus' view of the Old Testament we notice very quickly how well he knew it and often he employed it instead of using his own words. At the most difficult point of the earthly ministry of our Lord—his separation on the Cross from the Father—he expressed himself with the words of Ps. 22:1: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" It's as if he wrapped himself in Scripture. He did this because of his view of its accuracy.

On many occasions he quoted the Old Testament and described the cited material with the phrase 'it stands written,' as in Mt. 4:4, 6 and 10 below (underlining is mine). I have included the NIV cross-reference citations because they are unusually important for studying this passage.

4 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'^{2,5} Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.⁶ "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you

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² Deut. 8:3

up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’³”⁷ Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’⁴”⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.⁹ “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’⁵”¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Four times the same word occurs in the Greek text: γέγραπται (gegraptai; ‘it is written’). Jesus uses it three of the four times it appears here, and Satan uses it once, perhaps mocking Jesus’ view of the Old Testament. The word carries the idea of *enduring inscripturation*. I prefer the translation ‘it stands written.’ Here is a simplified layout of the four occurrences of the word:

Jesus: γέγραπται (‘it stands written’); Dt. 8:3

Satan: γέγραπται γάρ (‘for it stands written’); Ps. 91:11, 12

Jesus: πάλιν γέγραπται (‘again, it stands written’); Dt. 6:16

Jesus: γέγραπται γάρ (‘for it stands written’); Dt. 6:13

Jesus used the Old Testament in these verses to ward off Satan’s temptations, showing that He believed it had permanent authority and was capable—on its own—of defeating the tempter. In Donald Guthrie’s view, “Jesus backed up [spiritual principles] with Scripture, which for Him as for all Jews, would endow it with indisputable authority.”⁶

It is instructive to notice the source of these quotations. Jesus knew exactly which scriptures to use when he faced Satan. And they were effective in defeating him! All of Jesus’ quotations come from the book of Deuteronomy. Each one meets Satan’s temptations with the perfect answer. Scott Grant of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, CA, points out the appropriateness of Jesus’ choice of this passage:

Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy, as he does in the next two temptations. Deuteronomy was given to Israel in the wilderness as it was preparing to enter the land of promise. In responding to the devil from Deuteronomy, Jesus obeys God in a place that Israel did not. Israel failed, not only in the wilderness but in the land of promise. It forgot Deuteronomy. Jesus does not.⁷

Here is the source of Jesus first quotation:

² Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³ He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

To reject Satan’s answer to his hunger, Jesus quotes v. 3, which points to the need for spiritual food in addition to physical food.

3 Psalm 91:11, 12

4 Deut. 6:16

5 Deut. 6:13

6 Donald Guthrie, *Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 45.

⁷ For a useful exposition of this passage, see Scott Grant, “Temptation in the wilderness”; online study given February 2, 1998 at Peninsula Bible Church of Palo Alto, Ca. Available at <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/matt02.html>.

Here are some of Grant's comments on the second temptation, showing the appropriateness of Deuteronomy 6 as the source of Jesus' answer:

Once again, the devil begins his temptation with the words, "If you are the Son of God" Again, the devil presents an alternative scenario to the fulfillment of Jesus' vocation. In response to the first temptation, Jesus quoted scripture, beginning with the words, "It is written" Thus the devil follows a similar formula, though he quotes from the Psalms, trying to get Jesus out of Deuteronomy and ultimately out of the wilderness, where he is trusting God.

Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6:16, which reads fully, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah." What happened at Massah? The people tested the Lord there by demanding that he give them water, demanding proof that the Lord was with them (Exodus 17:1-3, 7). The New Testament word translated here "tempt" can also be translated "test." Jesus refuses to force God to prove himself He will go to Jerusalem in God's time and face its fury and trust that God will be with him without throwing up any trial balloons.

The third temptation involves a Satanic invitation to use diabolic power. Here again is Grant's description:

Jesus again quotes from Deuteronomy, and his specific use of Deuteronomy 6:13 is no accident. Israel was called to worship the Lord, but its ultimate failure was that it worshiped other gods. Its idolatry was its failure. The devil is the god behind all the false gods (1 Corinthians 10:19-20). Jesus again is walking in the footsteps of Israel, and he is tempted to fail where Israel failed.

In using the Old Testament against Satan, Jesus added very few words of his own in what is probably, after the Gethsemane temptation to avoid the cross, the second most difficult temptation point in his earthly ministry. Beyond the use of 'it is written and 'again' and 'for,' words that only provide connections, the only non-Scripture words that He used were "Away from me, Satan!" Clearly he saw the words of Scripture as completely sufficient to bring about spiritual victory in the wilderness. Matthew underscores this, for the very next words are "Then the devil left him." Satan retreated because he was defeated by the authority of inspired Scripture.

Lived it out

It is very significant that the God-man put Himself behind the shield of Scripture. We might think that as God He could ignore the Old Testament, since He had created it. But just the opposite is true. We never find Him contradicting Scripture and in fact find Him depending on it for everything. He gives every indication of consciously living out the prophecies that concerned Him. He would not have acted this way if He did not believe that the Bible had absolute authority over Him—authority that comes from its complete accuracy.

Here is the text of Jn. 19:28, where He quotes an Old Testament verse *in order to fulfill prophecy*:

²⁸ Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.

Notice that Jesus said "I am thirsty" in order to fulfill some portion of the O.T. Yet we cannot find any O.T. verse that could be matched to 'I am thirsty' here. But what we do find is that the reference in v. 29 to vinegar clearly reflects Ps. 69:21: "They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst." To me the conclusion is unavoidable and astounding: Jesus spoke the words 'I am thirsty' in order to get people around the cross to do something that would fulfill some words of the O.T. It is also important to remember that this incident occurred just before the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and just before he said "It is finished." I will

leave a description of Jesus' view and use of Scripture in this incident to the pen of Arthur W. Pink and his study entitled *The Seven Sayings of the Saviour on the Cross*:

In order to get the primary force of this fifth cross-utterance of the Saviour we must note its setting: "Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, *that the scripture might be fulfilled*, saith, I thirst" (John 19:28).

The reference is to Psalm 69—another of the Messianic psalms which describes so graphically his passion. In it the spirit of prophecy had declared, "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (v. 21). This remained yet unaccomplished. The predictions of the previous verses had already received fulfillment. He had sunk in the "deep mire" (v. 2); he had been "hated without a cause" (v. 4); he had "borne reproach and shame" (v. 7); he had "become a stranger unto his brethren" (v. 8); he had become "a proverb" to his revilers, and "the song of the drunkards" (vv. 11, 12); he had "cried unto God" in his distress (vv. 17-20) - and now there remained nothing more than the offering him the drink of vinegar and gall, *and in order to fulfill this* he cried "I thirst". "*Jesus knowing that ALL things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.*" How completely self-possessed the Saviour was! He had hung on that cross for six hours and had passed through unparalleled suffering, yet is his mind clear and his memory unimpaired. He had before him, with perfect distinctness, the whole truth of God. He reviewed the entire scope of Messianic prediction. He remembers there is one prophetic scripture unaccomplished. He overlooked nothing. What a proof is this that he was divinely superior to all circumstances!

Ere passing on we would briefly point an application to ourselves. We have remarked how the Saviour bowed to the authority of scripture both in life and death; Christian reader, how is it with thee? Is the book divine the final court of appeal with you? Do you discover in it a revelation of God's mind and will concerning *you*? Is it a lamp unto your feet? That is, are you walking in its light? Are its commands binding on you?

Are you really *obeying* it? Can you say with David, "I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me. I have stuck unto thy testimonies . . . I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments" (Psalm 119:30, 31, 59, 60)?

Are you, like the Saviour, anxious to fulfill *the scriptures*? O may writer and reader seek grace to pray from the heart, "Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies. . . . Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me" (Psalm 119:35, 36, 133). Here we see the Saviour's submission to the Father's will.

The Saviour thirsted, and he who thirsted thus, remember, possessed all power in heaven and earth. Had he chosen to exercise his omnipotency, he could have readily satisfied his need. He that of old had caused the water to flow from the smitten rock for the refreshment of Israel in the wilderness, had the same infinite resources at his disposal now. He who turned the water into wine at a word, could have spoken the word of power here, and met his own need. But he never once performed a miracle for his own benefit or comfort. When tempted by Satan to do this he refused. Why did he now decline to satisfy his pressing need? Why hang there on the cross with parched lips? Because in the volume of the book which expressed God's will, it was written that he *should* thirst, and that thirsting he should be "given" vinegar to drink. And he came here to do God's will, and therefore did he submit. In death, as in life, scripture was for the Lord Jesus the authoritative word of the living God. In the temptation he had refused to minister to his need apart from that word by which he lived, and so now he makes known his need, not that it might be ministered unto, but *that scripture might be fulfilled*.

Mark he does not himself fulfill it, God can be trusted to take care of that; but he gives utterance to his distress so as to provide occasion for the fulfillment. As another has said, “The terrible thirst of crucifixion is upon him, but that is not enough to force those parched lips to speak; but it is written: In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink—this opens them” (F W Grant).

Here then, as ever, he shows himself in active obedience to the will of God, which he came to accomplish. He simply says, “I thirst”; the vinegar is tendered, and the prophecy is fulfilled. What perfect absorption in his Father’s will!

Proclaimed its accuracy

We see Jesus’ view of the accuracy of detail in Scripture exemplified in a significant passage, Mt. 5:17-20.

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Here Jesus declares that His purpose is to fulfill the Old Testament Scriptures, i.e. to act in such a way that He furthers their prophecies and other prefigurations. He must do this because every portion is binding (vv. 18-19), and also will find fulfillment. In other words, no one can thwart the ongoing purpose of God as carried in Scripture. As we read Mt. 5:18, we might at first think it is a promise that the original writings of the Old Testament will not perish. A jot is the smallest letter of handwritten script in the Hebrew text, equivalent to English *i* in some respects. A tittle is a small portion of a written letter that serves to distinguish it from other similar letters. A moment’s reflection will lead us to conclude that every portion of the autographs had by that time indeed disappeared, yet the law, which included predictive elements, had not yet seen complete fulfillment. Either Jesus was wrong, or there must be something else involved.

Jesus must have meant that the smallest details of *meaning* would eventually find fulfillment, even though the physical letters might disappear. No part of the message would fail to find its place in the outworking of history. But for this to happen, the small parts must be from God as much as the larger parts. In fact, everything forms a web of meaning. Nothing is dispensable. Now if this is so, what Jesus is really saying is that all of the law, in this case, has its origin in God. Otherwise the little parts could not be so important. Every part is significant to God, and so He insured that every part was exactly the way He wanted it. This is then an implicit argument for the inspiration of the Old Testament.

We should draw a similar conclusion from Jn. 10:35, where Jesus proclaims the solidity of Scripture:

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are gods’?⁸ ³⁵ If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken—³⁶ what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? ³⁷ Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. ³⁸ But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.” ³⁹ Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.

⁸ Psalm 82:6

Here are Warfield's words about this passage:

The word "broken" here is the common one for breaking the law, or the Sabbath, or the like (Jn. v. 18; vii. 23; Mt. v. 19), and the meaning of the declaration is that it is impossible for the Scripture to be annulled, its authority to be withstood, or denied.⁹

Leon Morris adds:

The term 'broken' is not defined, and it is a word which is not often used of Scripture and the like but it is perfectly intelligible. It means that Scripture cannot be emptied of its force by being shown to be erroneous.¹⁰

There must be some quality in Scripture that gives it this integrity and solidity. According to the New Testament, the quality is that it is breathed out by God.

Provided our example

Those who appeal to the authority of Jesus as opposed to that of Scripture have entirely missed the point. Jesus continually supported the highest view of the Old Testament. Those who choose to reject His outlook on the Old Testament, or to pit Him against the Old Testament, have misread the Bible.

Jesus' view of the Old Testament is very instructive to the Bible student, forming a whole area of study. Among other things, it shows that He always put Himself under the authority of Scripture, viewing it as having all the answers for His life. This is nowhere more evident than at the crucial points of His life and ministry, e.g., the temptation in the wilderness and His passion (see Mt. 4:1). He knew the Old Testament well, quoting relevant portions from memory at just the right time, with perfect application. As in all things, He provides an example for us in this. Believers in every age should likewise put themselves completely under the Word of God. This is both possible and rewarding because of the inspiration of Scripture.

⁹ Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Inspiration" in *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), 139.

¹⁰ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 527.

Study questions

1. Can you suggest some other reasons why Jesus chose the passages he did in confronting the temptation in the wilderness?
2. What do the following scriptures tell us about Jesus' view of the O.T.?
 - a. Mt. 19:4-5
 - b. Mt. 24:37
 - c. Mt. 10:15; 11:23-24
 - d. Mt. 12:40
 - e. Mt. 11:10
 - f. Lk. 16:31
 - g. Mt. 22:29
 - h. Mt. 24:15
 - i. Lk. 24:44

Running compilation of key definitions

1. Systematic theology: The organized presentation of all that the Bible teaches about God and His works.
2. Exegesis: The actual practice of studying or interpreting a document or other message to determine its meaning.
3. Context: Context in a document or utterance is the surroundings of a portion of a word, a word, or a group of words.
4. Bibliology: The doctrinal study of the nature of the Bible.
5. Biblical authority: The quality inherent in Scripture by virtue of which human beings are completely answerable to its content.
6. Revelation: The information about Himself given by God to human beings.
7. General revelation: God's disclosure of Himself, available directly to everyone, given through means other than dreams, visions, direct words and Christ Himself.
8. Special revelation: The disclosure of information from God that is not available directly to all human beings.
9. Inspiration: A term applied to the Bible denoting that it is the product of God's creative activity, figuratively breathed out from Him (2 Tim. 3:16); applies to the process of recording Scripture, not specifically to the people involved; actually, *expiriation* would be a better term to reflect the concept of 2 Tim. 3:16; the result is *inerrancy*.