

The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament: Did the New Testament Writers "Misquote" Scripture?

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Introduction

One need look no further than the ministry of Jesus Christ to discover the dependence of the New Testament upon the Old Testament. Our Savior based his entire message upon the words of Moses and the prophets, and was always eager to explain the significance of their words to everyone who would listen. When the imprisoned John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus to ask him if he was the one who was to come, Jesus directed their attention to an Old Testament prophecy that was being fulfilled before their very eyes, saying, *"Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor"* (Matthew 11:4,5). In a synagogue at his hometown of Nazareth, toward the beginning of his ministry, he unrolled the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and found the place where it was written: *"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"* (Luke 4:18,19), and then he began by saying to them, *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"* (vs. 21). On one occasion Jesus gently rebuked Nicodemus, because, even though he was well-schooled in the Old Testament Scriptures, he failed to understand how Jesus related to what the prophets had foretold.¹ Similarly, after his resurrection, he admonished the two disciples who were traveling the road to Emmaus for their failure to believe what the Old Testament had predicted concerning the coming Messiah, and then, *"beginning with Moses and the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself"* (Luke 24:27). The Old Testament was the very foundation of Jesus' preaching because he was the one of whom it had spoken.

Nothing less could be expected from Jesus' apostles, whose task it was to further build upon the foundation already laid by the Old Testament prophets.² Christ himself had taught them to understand the New Testament fulfillment of the Old, which culminated with his sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day to teach them all things.³ After the exalted Christ returned to heaven, the apostles preached and wrote as men who were utterly convinced that Moses and the prophets had clearly anticipated the marvelous events which they were to proclaim. When it became necessary for them to show that Jesus was the Savior who had been so long expected by the Jewish people, they quoted the words of the prophets and explained them in the light of how they had been fulfilled.⁴ The Old Testament was the authority to which they appealed repeatedly, and it shows. Of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, only Paul's one chapter letter to Philemon contains no quotations or allusions to the Old Testament.

Just how many quotations and allusions there are in the remaining twenty-six books is difficult to determine. Nestle's Greek text lists about 950. The UBS text lists more than 2,500. Other estimates run as high as 4,100.⁵ The differences in estimates is in direct proportion to the lengths that one is willing to go to in order to identify Old Testament allusions. And, since an allusion to the Old Testament may be a clause, a phrase, or even a single word, we may not always be sure whether in a certain instance a New Testament writer deliberately intended that a connection with the Old Testament should be made in the minds of his readers. Direct quotations, on the other hand, are fairly easy to identify. Many of them are acknowledged by some sort of *introductory formula*, such as *"As it is written"* (Romans 8:26), or *"As he says in Hosea"* (Romans 9:25). Commentators generally agree that there about 300 direct quotations of the Old in the New. Earle Ellis

estimates that approximately one-third of these are found in Saint Paul's letters -- 93 references.⁶ In contrast to Paul's usage of the Old Testament is John's Revelation, which contains more Old Testament imagery and phrases than any other New Testament writing, yet does not contain a single direct quotation.

Although it is not possible -- nor it is necessary -- to come up with an exact count of Old Testament quotations and allusions in the New Testament, it is safe to say that the Old Testament has had an almost immeasurable influence on the language and thought of the New Testament. If every quotation and allusion from the Old were pulled out of the New, it would in many areas consist of little more than meaningless shreds.

It should surprise us little, then, that as part of his constant effort to undermine the true revelation of God, the devil would want to destroy our confidence in the manner in which the New Testament writers used the Old Testament. His weapons of choice in this assault are the many critical Bible scholars who, in their misguided zeal, deny the doctrine of verbal inspiration, because they do not want to hold the Holy Spirit responsible for all the "misquotations" and "mistakes" made by the evangelists and apostles when they cited the Old Testament. These modern scholars would have us believe that the New Testament writers, among other things, were subject to "memory lapses" as they penned God's word, and that they arbitrarily assigned new meanings to Old Testament passages in a way that violated their intended sense. Franklin Johnson gives us the complete list of objections:⁷

1. The writers of the New Testament, instead of translating their quotations directly from the Hebrew, and thus presenting us with exact transcriptions of the original text, have taken them generally from the Septuagint version, which is not free from faults.
2. Their quotations from the Septuagint are often verbally inexact, and their variations from this version are seldom in the nature of corrections, since they usually seem to have quoted from memory.
3. They sometimes employ quotations so brief and fragmentary that the reader cannot readily determine the degree of support, if any, which the quotation gives to the argument.
4. They sometimes alter the language of the Old Testament with the obvious design of aiding their argument.
5. They sometimes present in the form of a single quotation an assemblage of phrases or sentences drawn from different sources.
6. In a few instances they give us, apparently as quotations from the Old Testament, sentences which it does not contain.
7. They regard some historical passages of the Old Testament as allegories, and thus draw from them inferences of which the original writers knew nothing.
8. They often "quote by sound, without regard to the sense."
9. They habitually treat as relating to the Messiah and his kingdom passages written with reference to persons who lived and events which happened centuries before the Christian era.
10. When they understand the passage which they quote, they often argue from it in an inconclusive and illogical manner, so that the evidence which they adduce does not prove the statement which they seek to support by means of it.
11. They deal with the Old Testament after the manner of the rabbis of their time, which was uncritical and erroneous, rather than as men inspired by the Holy Spirit to perceive and express the exact truth.

The Christian Attitude Toward Holy Scripture

Before we respond to this kind of criticism, it should be emphasized that the Christian who has a proper understanding of what the Holy Scriptures are will not undertake a study of the alleged Old Testament "misquotations" in the New Testament in order to prove that the doctrine of verbal inspiration really is worthy of our trust. The only "proof" needed by the Christian is the testimony offered us by Holy Spirit who speaks to

our hearts through the Bible. Those who wish to evaluate the Bible as one would evaluate a mere human book are quick to condemn such a notion as an illogical *a priori* argument -- an argument that is made before any investigation into the matter. Nevertheless, we plead guilty to the "sin" of apriorism. We believe that God is a God of truth.⁸ We believe that his Word is a Word of truth.⁹ And we believe that when the Holy Spirit leads us to apprehend the message of the Bible through faith, we will know the truth, and the truth will set us free.¹⁰ Furthermore, we believe that the Bible can and will stand up under even the closest of critical scrutiny and never be shown to contain mistakes or misquotations of any sort.¹¹

In other words, before we even begin to evaluate the objections of those who charge the New Testament writers with misquoting the Old Testament, we have already made the judgment that their argument is flawed. When we approach a difficult passage of the Bible, our mind is already made up from the start that this verse, as the inspired writer has recorded it, is one-hundred percent true. There may be questions that need to be answered about the meaning of the passage, but the question "Did the inspired writer make a mistake?" is never even considered. No evidence presented to the contrary is given even the slightest consideration, because we know that there can be no such damning evidence. And when we do study a passage *a posteriori*, that is, on the basis of a critical investigation, we will find that our "blind faith" in God's chosen writers is justified. God's Word is true because God's Word says that it is true. It contains no misquotations because it says that it contains no misquotations.

Nonetheless, it may be disturbing to the simple faith of a humble Christian when he, upon looking up in the Old Testament the quotations cited by the New Testament writers, finds that the apostles quoted the Old Testament in a manner that frequently departs, sometimes considerably, from the original wording of the Old Testament. Martin Luther acknowledges this practice:¹²

You must know, first, that the evangelists are not concerned about citing every last word of the prophets; they are content with retaining the sense and showing the fulfillment...We shall later on see again and again that the evangelist adduces the prophet in a somewhat altered form, but always without prejudice to the sense and meaning.

The Holy Spirit is the Author of All Scripture

There is only one explanation for the free manner in which the Old Testament is quoted in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit is the author of all Scripture. The same Holy Spirit who spoke through Moses and the prophets also spoke through the evangelists and apostles.¹³ When he through the apostles quotes the prophets, he is quoting himself. The critics, of course, will not admit this. "They forget that in Scripture we are dealing not so much with different authors as with one Divine Author."¹⁴ Who will deny the Holy Spirit the right to "take liberties" with his own word? Who will say that he cannot paraphrase his own words which he spoke at an earlier time, or explain how his Old Testament words have been fulfilled through New Testament events,¹⁵ or use typology?¹⁶ Who will deny the Holy Spirit the right to use his own word to prove,¹⁷ explain by allegory,¹⁸ or illustrate a point¹⁹ as he so chooses? Modern scholars would withhold this privilege from the Holy Spirit, while at the same time freely granting it to any mere human author. Pieper Says:²⁰

The New Testament writers often vary the language of the passages they quote from the Old Testament in order to give an authoritative interpretation of them. It is true they might have given the sacred text as it stood, and then have added their own explanatory comments; but in this, as in other matters, the Apostolic admonition may not be out of place for those who would prescribe rules for men acting under the special guidance of the Holy Spirit: 'For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor?' (Rom. 11:34)...Inspired by the free Spirit...they reveal that freedom wherewith the indwelling Spirit, by the very fullness of his habitation, has made them free, and they quote from the Septuagint where it differs from the

Hebrew, and from the Hebrew where it differs from the Septuagint, and often cite a passage in a form in which it is not found in either the Hebrew or the Greek.

The free manner in which the Old Testament quotations are used in the New Testament surely does not disprove the doctrine of verbal inspiration. Francis Pieper, in fact, argues to the contrary, saying that the free manner in which the New Testament writers cited the Old can be viewed as a great proof of inspiration.²¹

Suppose that the Evangelists and Apostles had not been inspired, but like other writers, had only their own good judgment to fall back on. Would that not have affected the form of their citations? Would they not have carefully refrained from shocking men with their free manner of quoting and have quoted more literally?...The manner in which the Evangelists and Apostles quote the Old Testament is a powerful proof that they have not spoken and written of themselves, not by purely human deliberation, but that they wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Pieper's argument is, of course, a purely rational and worldly type of argument, but he uses it because that is the type of argument used by those who voice objections such as those enumerated in Franklin's list. Finally, if a man refuses to accept the fact that the Holy Spirit is the one author behind the Bible's many writers, how then, will he be able to view the Bible as anything but hopelessly illogical and mistaken? For it is the Divine Author that leads us to believe the divine message he has given us. St. Paul says:

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught us by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: 'For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:12-16).

The Septuagint Version

The majority of the New Testament quotations and allusions from the Old Testament are taken by the evangelists and apostles from the Greek version of the Old Testament called the Septuagint, following its wording where it agrees with the Hebrew, and also where it does not. This close adherence to the Septuagint, often against the Hebrew, disturbs the modern Bible scholar, who feels that the apostles should have always translated directly from the Hebrew text. The fact that they did not is viewed as irrefutable proof that the doctrine of verbal inspiration, as beautiful a concept as it is, simply cannot work.

One of the reasons for the lack of verbal exactness in the New Testament quotations from the Old Testament is that a completely literal translation of the Hebrew does not always make clear sense in the Greek, and therefore some minor adjustments had to be made for the sake of effectively communicating the message. This, of course, is to be expected whenever one language is translated into another, and it is particularly true with the Greek Septuagint, which frequently resorts to paraphrase. For the most part the Septuagint is quite faithful to the Hebrew text, but there are a small number of cases where verbal inaccuracies have caused noticeable deviations in the way a thought is expressed. In other words, the Septuagint is not a perfect translation.

Nor does the account of its origin lend to its credibility. As the story goes, when Ptolemaeus Philadelphus was collecting books for the library at Alexandria, his librarian suggested that he should obtain a Greek translation of the books of Moses. As a result, seventy-two learned men, six from each tribe of Israel,

were sent to the island of Pharos. Each man, working in his own private room, then translated the Hebrew Old Testament Bible into Greek -- and finished in exactly seventy-two days. Later legends have added to the story, saying that, when the seventy-two men had finished their translation, each of their seventy-two versions agreed to the letter, ostensibly, as proof that God had verbally inspired their translating. "Septuagint" means "seventy," the number of translators rounded off. Thus the name itself is a perpetual reminder of its fairy-tale beginnings. The only believable part of this story is that it had its origin in Egypt, probably in Alexandria.

The New Testament Use of the Septuagint

Nonetheless, in spite of the Septuagint's loosely paraphrased style and rather dubious beginnings, the writers of the New Testament chose to draw the majority of their Old Testament quotations from it. This should not surprise us in the least. At the time of the apostles, the Greek language had found its way into almost every part of the Roman Empire, the result of the victorious campaign of Alexander the Great. Everyone in Palestine understood it perfectly well. At that time the Septuagint was also very widely known and was valued so highly by the Jews that they readily accepted the above-mentioned legend surrounding its origin.²² Thus the apostles' choice of the Septuagint as the source for their quoting was a logical one. The message they were preaching and teaching to both Jews and Gentiles was that Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament Messianic promises, and they wanted their audiences to search the Old Testament Scriptures to see that what they were saying was true. Had the apostles drawn their Old Testament quotations from any other source, they would have run the risk of causing doubt and confusion among those who turned to the common version to verify their claims.

The same thing is commonly done today, is it not? When a pastor writes his Sunday sermon, he substantiates the claims he is making with quotes from whatever version of the Bible his people are familiar with, even though that version is certainly not free from all human error. The fact that he uses an imperfect translation of the original does not mean that he has abandoned his belief in verbal inspiration and scriptural inerrancy. He confidently maintains that he is preaching and teaching God's inspired word. But he will be quick to point out that the only final authority as to the meaning of Scripture is the wording of the original languages themselves.

How does this affect the way he uses quotes in his sermon? He does not reject any text because its language seems to him to be a little less exact than some other form of words, if the truth which God intended to convey is preserved intact. On the other hand, if the inaccuracy stands in his way of presenting the truth that God wishes to convey through the original languages, he will correct the mistake and reveal the intended meaning.

The writers of the New Testament quoted from the Septuagint version much in the same way. In no way should their use of the imperfect Septuagint be seen as evidence that they viewed or treated the Holy Scriptures they were dealing with as anything less than the verbally inspired and inerrant word of God. St. Paul, who directly quoted the Old Testament more than 90 times -- the majority of those quotations from the Septuagint version -- still reassured his readers that "all Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). Yet, when the New Testament writers inserted quotes from the Septuagint version, very seldom did they correct its verbal inaccuracies unless the inaccuracy violated the sense and meaning of the Old Testament passage, in which case they corrected it.

Sometimes, it seems as if the New Testament writer carefully steered around verbally inaccurate phrases drawn from the Septuagint, as if to avoid any possible confusion on the part of his readers. Hebrew 10:5-9 is an example:

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, Here I am, I have come -- it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God (Psalm 40:6-8 BHS).

Sacrifice and offering you would not; but a body you have prepared me: whole burnt offering and sacrifice for sin you did not require. Then I said, Behold, I come: in the volume of the book it is written about me, I desire to do your will, O my God (Psalm 40:6-8 LXX).

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased." Then I said, "Here I am -- it is written about me in the scroll -- I have come to do your will, O God." First he said, "Sacrifice and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second (Hebrews 10:5-9 GNT).

In this Hebrews passage the Holy Spirit fully explains what he said many years prior through the Messianic words of Psalm 40:6-8. The fact that the writer to the Hebrews follows the Septuagint wording is seen in verse five, where he says, "*a body you prepared for me*," instead of using the Hebrew wording, "*my ears you have pierced*." Verbally, this is a significant difference. Essentially, however, there is no difference at all, as we shall see. In verses eight and nine, where he applies the Old Testament quotation in his argument, he makes no use whatsoever of this verbally inexact phrase. The force of his argument depends only on "*Sacrifice and offerings you did not desire*," and "*Here I am...I have come to do your will, O God*." The obedience of Christ, his complete subjection to the Father's will, his obedience even to the point of death, is presented to the reader as the substitute for the sacrifices of the Old Covenant.

In this case the translators of the Septuagint really did not change the meaning of the Hebrew original, even though the language is very different. The Hebrew קָרַיִת, translated "pierced" in the NIV, might be an allusion to the custom of pinning a slave to the doorpost of his master's house with an awl that was driven through his ear, which apparently was done as a way of showing his complete subjection to the master. It can also be translated "opened" or "bored," as Lenski suggests. Whatever the case, "To do your will, O God," remains the contrast to the earthly sacrifices, whether we have the Hebrew's ears "opened" to hear God's will or "pierced" to show complete subjection to God's will, or the Septuagint's "body" to respond wholeheartedly to the will. In all likelihood, the Septuagint sought to make the Hebrew "*my ears you have pierced*," more understandable to its Greek readers by translating in this way. The writer to the Hebrews could have corrected this verbal inaccuracy, or he could have employed it in his argument with a great deal of force. Yet, he chose to do neither.

On other occasions, the writers of the New Testament actually do make use of verbally inaccurate Septuagint quotations in their argument. The accusation raised by the critics is that the New Testament writers employed these inaccurate passages unfairly, to gain an advantage for their argument that ordinarily would have been unavailable to them had they used the original Hebrew. Even if they did do this and gain an "unfair advantage," it should not concern us in the least. If the Holy Spirit chooses to use a verbally inaccurate form of words from the Septuagint, he is showing it to be true. Yet also in this regard, it seems that the New Testament writers frequently go to great length to avoid gaining such an "unfair advantage." Among the dozen or so passages mostly frequently cited by the critics in this regard are Acts 15:16,17 and Hebrews 12:5-13.

In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all nations that bear my name, declares the Lord, who will do these things (Amos 9:11,12, BHS).

In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and will rebuild its ruins, and will set up the parts that have been broken down, and will build it up as in the ancient days: that the

remnant of men, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, may earnestly seek me, says the Lord who does all these things (Amos 9:11,12 LXX).

The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: "After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruin I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name," says the Lord, who does these things (Acts 15:16,17 GNT).

St. James spoke these words from Acts during the Council at Jerusalem to show that in the Old Testament God had prophesied the spread of the Christian church among the Gentiles. He uses the Septuagint phrase, "*the remnant of men*," instead of the Hebrew, "*the remnant of Edom*." If this phrase were the only reference to nations other than Israel, then the critics would be right -- it would unduly favor James' argument. The next line of his quotation from Amos, however, "*and all who are Gentiles (BHS "all nations")*," should render the question mute. Whether it is the "remnant of Edom and all nations," or the "remnant of men and all Gentiles" that are to be brought into the kingdom of David, it certainly does not affect his point in any way, because the sense of the Old Testament passage is not changed by the verbal inaccuracy.

The second example is Hebrews 12:5-13:

My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in (Proverbs 3:11,12 BHS).

My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, nor faint when he rebukes you, for the Lord disciplines those he loves, and punishes every son whom he receives (Proverbs 3:11,12 LXX).

My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons (Hebrews 12:5-7 GNT).

Here the writer is encouraging his readers not to be discouraged by suffering, since it is evidence that God is dealing with them as sons. To prove his point, he quotes the Septuagint version of Proverbs 3:11,12. The last line of this verse from the Hebrew reads, "*because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in*." It doesn't take more than a moment to figure out that the argument of the writer is proven by the quotation in either form, and that not the slightest advantage is gained or lost by the use of the Septuagint version. It surely doesn't require an intellectual giant to figure this out, but these are the kinds of things the critics often object to.

There are other occasions when the writers of the New Testament show their knowledge of the Hebrew text and quote from it when the force of their argument depends on complete faithfulness to the original. Matthew 2:14, 15:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son (Hosea 11:1 BHS).

For Israel is a child, and I loved him, and out of Egypt I have called his children (Hosea 11:1 LXX).

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Matthew 2:14,15 GNT)

Matthew favors the original Hebrew wording, "*Out of Egypt I called my son*," instead of relying on the verbally inexact Septuagint wording, "*Out of Egypt I have called his children*." Matthew intends to show us that

there is a divinely intended connection between Israel's stay in Egypt and Jesus' stay in Egypt. When the Septuagint translator rendered the original Hebrew into Greek, he took the liberty of paraphrasing Hosea 11:1 in a way that was fairly true to its sense, at least, insofar as he understood it. He had no way of knowing that many years down the line God the Holy Spirit would reveal a fuller meaning -- one that could be brought out only when the translation remained completely faithful to the original. Therefore, Matthew has to discard the plural τὰ τέκνα, which is not nearly exact enough for what the Old Testament prophet really says and for the manner in which he intends to use it.

The relatively few passages cited in this section on the Septuagint are representative of the responsible manner in which the New Testament writers employed their Old Testament quotations from it. Franklin Johnson summarizes:²³

It is a remarkable fact that, although all the authors of the New Testament seem to have used the Septuagint translation, yet where that translation -- at least as it lies before us -- wholly wanders away from the sense of the original, or becomes entirely destitute of meaning, they either resort to another translation, or themselves translate the text independently. We do not recall a single place, either in the Gospels or in the epistles of Paul, where a text of the Old Testament, as to its essential contents, has been disguised by the use of the Septuagint version.

Is it a Quotation?

It should be emphasized over and over again that the New Testament writers quoted the Old Testament according to its intended sense. If it seems to us that they perhaps drew a little more meaning out of a certain quotation than seems proper, or made an inappropriate application of a passage, then we need to beat down the critical Old Adam that lives in us and trust that the Holy Spirit, who knew what he meant when he inspired those words through the prophets, is revealing the true and full meaning through the apostles.

Perhaps, then, our ears perk up just a little when we hear words such as these quoted by A. Berkeley Mickelson: "Occasionally (but not often) the New Testament writers use an Old Testament passage in a way that differs radically from the meaning it had in its Old Testament Hebrew setting. In these instances the main thrust of the passage is changed."²⁴ His main passage to prove this assertion is Romans 10:6-8:

Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, 'Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, 'Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so that we may obey it?' No, the word of God is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it (Deut. 30:11-14).

But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) or 'Who will descend into the deep?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming (Romans 10:6-8).

Mickelson notices that what's in the heart and in the mouth for Paul is the word of faith which the apostles were proclaiming, while in Deuteronomy it is the commandments of God that are in the heart and in the mouth. Yet, as Lenski notes, there is nothing here to indicate that Paul even intends that these words from Deuteronomy should be viewed as a quotation. He simply uses a form of words which follow that of Deuteronomy 30:11-14 and lets the "*righteousness that is by faith*" express its message in a language similar to that used by God with respect to his commands. One need not climb up to heaven or cross the sea to get God's commands, for they are here in God's Word and in our heart. The righteousness that is by faith says the same thing about itself. The language of the Old Testament is borrowed -- not quoted.

On the other hand, sometimes the New Testament writers give us, apparently as quotations from the Old Testament, sentences which it does not contain. Matthew 2:23 is an example of this, where, speaking of Jesus, the writer says, "*and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was written through the prophets: 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'*"

Even though the writer credits this statement to the προφητῶν -- more than one Old Testament prophet -- a careful survey of the Old Testament reveals that it contains no predictions that are verbally like this, that Jesus will be called a "Nazarene." Quotations such as these have aptly been called "quotations of substance," for they are a summary statement of something that is widely taught throughout the Old Testament. Matthew is summarizing all the Old Testament predictions which represent the coming Messiah as lowly, despised, and suffering.²⁵ Matthew's readers undoubtedly caught the meaning right away. Among the people of Jerusalem, the people of Galilee were held in low esteem, and Nazareth would share in this general contempt. The Pharisees were quite certain that no prophet could possibly come from such a place.²⁶ And, Nathaniel, when first told by Philip that Jesus of Nazareth was the one of whom all the Old Testament prophets had spoken, exclaimed, "*Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?*" (John 1:46).

Such is also the case for John 7:37, 38: "*On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If any man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'streams of living water will flow from within him.'*" We may consider, among others, passages such as Isaiah 58:11²⁷ and Zechariah 14:8²⁸ as providing the substance for this quotation. Quoting by substance certainly is a prerogative of the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 5:14 is considered a quotation of substance by some: "*That is why it is said, 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'*" Yet the introductory formula, "*That is why it is said,*" doesn't necessarily indicate a quotation from the Old Testament. Lenski is probably correct when he says that these words are evidently a couplet taken from a Christian hymn that was used in Ephesus in Paul's time.²⁹ In leading Paul to use these words in his letter to the Ephesians, the Holy Spirit made those words his own words.

Memory Quotations

Many commentators like to suggest that quotations of substance, variations, and "misquotations," in the New Testament were the result of the evangelists and apostles quoting the Old Testament Scriptures from memory. It certainly may be true that they did, at times, insert quotes without looking them up to get an exact wording. After all, they didn't have small, compact Bibles such as ours to carry with them on their journeys, and it simply cannot be proven with any certainty that they always had in their possession the necessary collection of Old Testament scrolls to refer to when they were doing their writing. But if they did quote from memory, it was always according to the Holy Spirit's intended sense of the Old Testament passage or passages, even though a different set of words may have been used to express that truth. Never should memory quotations, however, -- if in fact this was their practice -- be viewed as "memory lapses," as so many critics claim today. Henry Shires, for example, says:

"It can be assumed that generally quotations were made by memory, which was often faulty. This fact helps us to understand why some of the quotations are reproduced with exactness, whereas others depart considerably from the original. In both cases the intent may have been to make an exact quotation...Faulty memory is to blame for some wrong ascriptions of quoted verses to named authors."

Not only does the doctrine of verbal inspiration rule out the notion that the apostles suffered "lapses of memory," but we would also have to assume that these men, who were instructed by Jesus himself and taught "all things" by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day, were rather ignorant theologians who would just as soon take a stab in the dark as opposed to looking up the passage in the Old Testament when the opportunity presented

itself. No, instructed by Christ and verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit, they did not fall victim to "lapses of memory."

So also the "Testimony Book" theory has been advanced by J. Rendall Harris and accepted by others, in part, to explain why the New Testament writers sometimes "mistakenly" credited their quotations to the wrong Old Testament authors. The theory of the "Testimony Book" is that there came into existence a collection of Old Testament prooftexts that predated the New Testament Scriptures and served as a source for its writers. Among the "problem passages" that Harris cites as evidence for the "Testimony Book" are Mark 1:2,3 and Matthew 27:9,10.

See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come, says the Lord Almighty (Malachi 3:1).

A voice of one calling: In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God (Isaiah 40:3).

It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" – "a voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him" (Mark 1:2,3).

Mark mentions only the prophet Isaiah as the source of his quotation, yet the first half is clearly from Malachi. Some commentators say that Mark is at fault; failing to open his Old Testament, he thought that all the words were from Isaiah. But go easy on the poor evangelist! There is no law in literature which says that he must name all his sources. Even if there was a "Testimony Book" from which Mark drew this mistake, would not the Holy Spirit have corrected it? Assuming the impossible were true and he did make a mistake, would he not have corrected it after his readers pointed it out to him?

In the same way, Matthew is frequently accused of demonstrating his poor memory in chapter 27, verse 9 and 10 of his gospel, where he combines quotations from Jeremiah 32:6ff and Zechariah 11:12-13:

Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me: Hanamel son of Shallum your uncle is going to come to you and say, Buy my field at Anathoth, because as nearest relative it is your right and duty to buy it...I knew that this was the word of the Lord, so I bought the field at Anathoth (Jeremiah 32:6, 8b, 9a).

I told them, If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it. So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, Throw it to the potter -- the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter (Zechariah 11:12,13).

Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me" (Matthew 27:9,10)

Most commentators are unwilling to admit that this quotation comes from the book of Jeremiah. Lenski, Franzmann, Ylvisaker, and others, leave the matter in God's hands, which isn't all bad when the passage is a difficult one. Nonetheless, is it beyond the realm of possibility that Matthew got the phrase "*and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded*" (vs. 10) from Jeremiah? Does it not follow the thought pattern of Jeremiah 32:6ff, in which the Lord commands Jeremiah to buy a field? Could not the Holy Spirit, who authored these words in the first place, have intended from the very outset that there be a divinely intended

connection between Jeremiah's symbolic purchase of land and the purchase of the potter's field that took place at the time of Christ's passion? Is it really that far-fetched? Perhaps Jeremiah had no idea that the Holy Spirit intended to one day use his words in this way. Certainly Matthew would not have written such a thing had he not been directed to do. But the Holy Spirit knew it all along, and revealed it through Matthew at the proper time.

It has also been proposed that Jeremiah is mentioned instead of Zechariah in the Matthew passage, because Jeremiah was the more prominent of the prophets. Likewise, in Mark 1:2,3, Isaiah is regarded as more prominent than Malachi. Such may be the case, but we simply don't know. Engelder also concedes this: "We are willing to confess that we cannot explain why Matthew did not name both prophets. But go easy! Do not be guilty of unscientific haste. Your lack of information does not prove Matthew wrong."³¹

Conclusion

There are many more passages that could be examined and a host of related issues that could be discussed regarding the manner in which the evangelists and apostles quoted the Old Testament Scripture in their writing. If this topic were exhausted, it would result in an essay many hundreds of pages in length. Yet, that is not necessary. The basic assertion made by those who would accuse the New Testament writers of misquoting the Old Testament is that they penned Scripture as men who were not inspired by the Holy Spirit. This is the basic issue which this essayist has endeavored to address.

Finally, St. Paul's says it all in his prayer of thanksgiving on behalf of the Thessalonian Christians: "*We also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe*" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Endnotes

¹ John 3:9 "*How can this be?*" Nicodemus asked. "*You are Israel's teacher,*" said Jesus, "*and you do not understand these things?*"

² Ephesians 2:19, 20 *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.*

³ John 14:26 *But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*

⁴ Acts 17:2, 3 *As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.*

⁵ Walter C. Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), p. 2

⁶ E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1957), p. 11

⁷ Franklin Johnson, *The Quotations of the New Testament from the Old* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Press, 1895), p. ix, x

⁸ John 16:13 *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.*

⁹ Psalm 119:160 *All your words are true; all your righteous decrees are eternal.*

¹⁰ John 8:31 *To the Jews who had believed in him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

¹¹ John 10:35 *The Scripture cannot be broken.*

¹² Luther's Works, Vol. 11. p. 12

¹³ 1 Peter 1:10-12 *Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the suffering of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.*

¹⁴ T. H. Engelder, *Scripture Cannot be Broken* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944), p. 94

¹⁵ John 12:14, 15 *Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, "Do not be afraid, O daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."*

¹⁶ John 3:14, 15 *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.*

¹⁷ Romans 12:19 *Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay" (Deut. 32:35), says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head" (Prov. 25:21,22).*

¹⁸ Galatians 4:21-26 *Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above her is free, and she is our mother.*

¹⁹ Romans 15:20, 21 *It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."*

²⁰ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), vol. 1, p. 250.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 250, 251

²² John Schaller, *The Book of Books* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1990), p. 139

²³ Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

²⁴ A. Berkeley Mickelson, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 260

²⁵ Psalm 22:6 *But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people.*

Isaiah 49:7 *This is what the Lord says -- the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel -- to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers.*

Daniel 9:25,26 *Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the Ruler, comes, there will be seven "sevens," and sixty-two "sevens." It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two "sevens," the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing.*

²⁶ John 7:52 *They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee."*

²⁷ Isaiah 58:11 *The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.*

²⁸ Zechariah 14:8 *On that day living water will flow out of Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter.*

²⁹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians and Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937), p. 611

³⁰ Henry Shires, *Finding the Old Testament in the New* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), p. 17

³¹ Engelder, *op. cit.*, p. 96

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