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THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

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Old Testament Scripture is foundational for the Synoptic Gospels. Indeed, without Israel's ancient and authoritative Scripture, these Gospels simply could not have presented their respective narratives of Jesus with the meaning they have. Another way of putting it is that the teaching, activities, death, and resurrection of Jesus simply cannot be understood apart from the clarifying context of Scripture. In the paragraphs that follow, I shall review what I think are the most important features related to this topic. I shall begin with the Gospel of Mark.

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

The evangelist Mark does not often quote the OT. The quotations of and allusions to the OT that appear in Mark—and they are ubiquitous¹—may have been part of the tradition that the evangelist received, such as the conflated quotation at the beginning of his Gospel (LXX Exod 23:20// Mal 3:1//LXX Isa 40:3) and various allusions to the Psalter in the Passion Narrative (15:24, 29, 36). Explicit quotations of Scripture are usually found on the lips of Jesus himself (4:12; 7:6–7, 10; 8:18; 11:17; etc.). Nevertheless, whether they were part of the tradition the evangelist received or what the evangelist himself wove into his narrative, the allusions scattered throughout Mark are of great theological significance.²

¹H. C. Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 45: The Gospel of Mark contains “hundreds of allusions to and quotations of” OT Scripture. See also M. D. Hooker, “Mark,” in *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture. Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars*, eds. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 220–30, here 220: “Jesus’ words and activities constantly echo OT scenes and language.”

²R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 15: “Many of the key images in” Mark “are drawn from Israel’s Scripture; indeed, a reader who fails to discern the significance of these images can hardly grasp Mark’s message.”

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1. *Old Testament “horizons” reflected in Markan narrative.* In the early 1970s, NT scholar Paul Achtemeier argued that Mark 4:35–8:26 contained two clusters, or *catenae*, of Jesus stories that may have served didactic and liturgical functions in early Christian gatherings.³ A few years later Robert Meye explored intriguing points of contact between this section of Mark and Psalm 107.⁴ Meye believed it is best to say that Psalm 107 provides a “horizon.” If Meye is correct, then such a horizon would have encouraged early Christians to interpret the Jesus stories through an OT lens, thus strengthening the lines and themes of continuity between Israel’s ancient story and its dramatic and authoritative fulfillment in the life, death, and resurrection of Israel’s Messiah. We shall review what appear to be the most important points of contact.

Psalm 107:4–9 recalls and thanks the Lord for delivering the faithful who wandered in the wilderness, “hungry and thirsty,” whose souls “fainted within them” (v. 5). The Lord satisfied his people, filling them with good things (v. 9). Similarly, in the Markan feeding stories (Mark 6:30–44; 8:1–10), Jesus is reluctant to send away the people, for they are in a lonely place and may “faint” (6:32, 35; 8:2–3). Jesus multiplies the loaves and fish so that all eat and are satisfied (6:42; 8:8). Psalm 107:10–16 recalls those in darkness and gloom imprisoned “in irons,” whose bonds the Lord, the “Most High,” “broke asunder” (v. 14). In Mark’s story of the demonized man (Mark 5:1–12), Jesus, addressed as “Son of the Most High” (v. 5), frees the tormented man, who had been bound with chains and fetters (v. 4).

Psalm 107:17–22 thanks the Lord for healing. In Mark (5:21–43; 6:1–5, 13, 53–56; 7:31–37; 8:22–26) Jesus heals the sick. Psalm 107:23–32 speaks of those at sea threatened by storm, wind, and waves, who in fear cried out to the Lord and were saved when the Lord “made the storm be still” and “the waves of the sea were hushed” (v. 29). One immediately thinks of the stories of Jesus and the sea in Mark (4:35–41; 6:45–52), where Jesus calms the storm that threatens the disciples, who then ask, “Who

³P. J. Achtemeier, “Toward the Isolation of Pre-Markan Miracle Catenae,” *JBL* 89 (1970): 265–91; P. J. Achtemeier, “The Origin and Function of the Pre-Markan Miracle Catenae,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 198–221. Achtemeier speculated that this material was made up of two clusters, each containing five stories, with the respective fifth stories feeding narratives (i.e., the feeding of the five thousand in Mark 6 and the feeding of the four thousand in Mark 8). Achtemeier further speculated that originally each cluster ended with a feeding narrative that then introduced observance of the Lord’s Supper.

⁴R. P. Meye, “Psalm 107 as ‘Horizon’ for Interpreting the Miracle Stories of Mark 4:35–8:26,” in *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of George E. Ladd*, ed. R. A. Guelich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 1–13.

then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?” (v. 41).⁵ Meye notes that Psalm 107 repeatedly praises God for his “mercy” (*to eleos autou*, in v. 1; *ta eleē autou*, in vv. 15, 21, 31, 43), which corresponds to the command Jesus gives the demonized man who has been healed: “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you [*ēleēsen se*]” (Mark 5:19).⁶

The stories of Moses receiving the law from God on Mount Sinai provide the scriptural horizon against which Mark’s narrative of the Transfiguration should be read.⁷ We observe several parallels: (1) The phrase, “after six days” (v. 2), alludes to Exod 24:16, where after six days God speaks. (2) Just as Moses is accompanied by three companions (Exod 24:9), so Jesus is accompanied by Peter, James, and John (v. 2). (3) In both accounts, epiphany takes place on a mountain (v. 2; Exod 24:12). (4) Moses figures in both accounts (v. 4; Exod 24:1–18). It is interesting to note that on one occasion Joshua (LXX: *Iēsous*, “Jesus”) accompanied Moses on the mountain (Exod 24:13). (5) Jesus’s personal transfiguration (v. 3) probably parallels the transfiguration of Moses’s face (Exod 34:29–30). Matthew and Luke have apparently seen this parallel, for they draw a closer correspondence by noting the alteration of Jesus’s “face” (Matt 17:2; Luke 9:29). (6) In both accounts the divine presence is attended by a cloud (v. 7; Exod 24:15–16). Some believed that the cloud which had appeared to Moses would reappear in the last days (see 2 Macc 2:8). (7) In both accounts the heavenly voice speaks (v. 7; Exod 24:16). (8) Fear is common to both stories (v. 6; Exod 34:30; cf. *Tg. Ps.-J.* Exod 24:17). (9) Mark’s “Hear him” (v. 7), unparalleled in Exodus 24, probably echoes Deut 18:15. Again it is likely that Luke has noticed the parallel, for he makes the word order correspond to that of the LXX (Luke 9:35). These parallels, especially that of the injunction to hear, may suggest that the voice that spoke with authority from Sinai now speaks through Jesus the Son.

2. *Key Old Testament texts in the Jesus of Mark.* Jesus in Mark several times explicitly appeals to Scripture to support important points of teaching. Most of these clarify crucial aspects of Jesus’s self-understanding,

⁵Hays (*Echoes of Scripture*, 66–69) agrees that the parallels with Ps 107 are “striking,” but he also notes the parallels in Job 38:8–11 and Ps 89:9, as well as Ps 44:23 (“Why do you sleep, O Lord?”). As a parallel with Mark 6:45–52, where Jesus walks on the sea, Hays (*Echoes of Scripture*, 71–72) draws our attention to Job 9:4–11, esp. v. 8, which in the LXX reads “he walks upon the sea as upon dry ground.”

⁶Meye, “Psalm 107,” 8.

⁷J. Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 80–93.

which in turn contribute in very important ways to our understanding of Christology.

The first example is the allusion to Psalm 118 as Jesus enters Jerusalem at the beginning of Passover week (Mark 11:1–11). The excited crowd cries out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!” (vv. 9b–10). These words paraphrase some of the latter part of the Psalm: “Save us, we beseech thee, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech thee, give us success! Blessed be he who enters in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord” (Ps 118:25–26). The reference to the “kingdom of our father David” in Mark 11:10 reflects the Davidic interpretive orientation attested in the Targum and in later rabbinic midrash.⁸ Psalm 118 will play an important role in the parable of the Wicked Vineyard Tenants, where again it will add to the Davidic orientation of the text.

The second example says much about what Jesus expects of the high priesthood of his time. Although the texts to which Jesus appeals are not directly concerned with Christology, they do say a lot about Jesus’s understanding of his mission and his authority. In this sense they do contribute to Christology. I refer here to the so-called Cleansing of the Temple:

And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons; and he would not allow any one to carry anything through the temple. And he taught, and said to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a ‘cave of robbers.’” And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and sought a way to destroy him; for they feared him, because all the multitude was astonished at his teaching. (Mark 11:15b–18, RSV, modified)

Having entered Jerusalem’s temple precincts and having “looked round at everything” (Mark 11:11), Jesus returns to the precincts and demonstrates against the sacrificial animal trade.⁹ He appeals to Isa 56:7 (“My

⁸The Aramaic reads: “‘We bless you from the house of the sanctuary of the Lord,’ said David” (Tg. Ps 118:26b). See also the *Midrash on the Psalms*, where it is said, “‘This is the Lord’s doing’ alludes to king David, king of Israel” (Midr. Pss. 118.21 [on Ps 118:23]).

⁹And precisely why Jesus did so is much debated. I review the problem in “From ‘House of Prayer’

house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations”), part of a larger oracle (Isa 56:1–8), in which Solomon’s prayer of dedication of the temple will someday be realized (1 Kgs 41:41–43). It will be a time when “all the peoples of the earth,” says Solomon, “may know thy name and fear thee, as do thy people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by thy name” (v. 43). It will be a time when the temple will be called “a house of prayer for all the nations.” Alas, the ruling priesthood of Jesus’s time have taken steps that work against this grand vision.¹⁰ Instead, the ruling priests have made the house of God into a “cave of robbers,” which is an allusion to Jer 7:11, part of the prophet’s devastating critique of the temple establishment. Jeremiah warns the ruling priests of his time that God will destroy the temple.¹¹ The ruling priests rightly recognized the allusion and what it implied about them and so “sought a way to destroy” Jesus (Mark 11:18).

It is not surprising that ruling priests and their scribal associates accost Jesus and demand to know by what authority he does and says such things (Mark 11:27–33). Although Jesus frustrates their potentially dangerous question with a counter-question about the authority of John the Baptist, he does answer their question indirectly in the parable of the Wicked Vineyard Tenants (Mark 12:1–12). The parable is based on the semi-allegorical song of the Vineyard in Isa 5:1–7, which indicts Israel for its sin.¹² The opening line of the parable, “A man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a pit for the wine press, and built a tower” (v. 1), contains about a dozen words from Isaiah’s song. The purpose of these details, which the parable as a parable does not require, is to call attention the prophet’s old song. Jesus presupposes some of the song’s allegorical features (e.g., the Vineyard represents Israel), but he also adopts the interpretive tradition

to ‘Cave of Robbers’: Jesus’ Prophetic Criticism of the Temple Establishment,” in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders*, eds. C. A. Evans and S. Talmon, *BibInt* 28 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 417–42. Driving vendors out of the temple precincts may have been inspired by Zech 14:21. See Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 26–27.

¹⁰It has been suggested that relocating the sacrificial animal trade within the precincts themselves, within the “court of the Gentiles,” was the immediate cause of Jesus’s protest. Rabbinic tradition asserts that this new policy was inaugurated in the year 30 CE. On this possible explanation, see V. Eppstein, “The Historicity of the Gospel Account of the Cleansing of the Temple.” *ZNW* 55 (1964): 42–58.

¹¹Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 28–29.

¹²The ruling priests of Isaiah’s day were oppressing the poor and the powerless, which made the prophet’s song a good fit for Jesus’s parable, for similar complaints were leveled against the ruling priests of the first century.

that focuses on the temple.¹³ By introducing the wicked tenants, Jesus has indicted the ruling priests, not Israel itself. By introducing the son of the vineyard owner, Jesus answers the questions put to him in Mark 11:28: He is the son of the vineyard owner; that is, he is the Son of God.

The parable of the vineyard ends with a challenging question: “Have you not read this scripture: ‘The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’” (12:10–11). Jesus has quoted Ps 118:22–23. The obvious implication of the citation is that Jesus himself is the “stone” rejected by the “builders.” In Jewish interpretation, the builders of Psalm 118 are the priests, and the rejected stone is none other than David, chosen to be Israel’s new king.¹⁴ Thus, Jesus has taken action in the temple precincts by the authority of his Father in heaven.

A few paragraphs later Jesus goes on the offensive and asks, “How can the scribes say that the Christ is the ‘son of David?’” (Mark 12:35). I have placed quotation marks around the epithet, “son of David,” because this is the point of the question. It is the language, not the long-held belief that the Messiah (or Christ) will descend from king David. Jesus objects to the language because in the culture of his day a son was viewed as in some sense inferior to his father. To speak of the Messiah as *son of David* implies that he will be no greater than David himself—and perhaps that was what some of Jesus’s contemporaries hoped for, someone on David’s level. Jesus challenges this assumption by appeal to Ps 110:1, saying, “David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, till I put thy enemies under thy feet.’ David himself calls him Lord; so how is he his son?” (Mark 12:36–37). In uttering this psalm, says Jesus, King David declared that Yahweh (the Lord) spoke the following words to his Lord, that is, *David’s* lord, the Messiah. Consequently, if David himself regards his messianic descendant as his “lord,” that is, a figure greater than himself, how can the scribes hold to such a low view of the Messiah, as though he will be a lesser David?

¹³As in 4Q500; *t. Me’ilah* 1.16; *t. Sukkah* 3.15; *Tg. Isa* 5:1–7. For a helpful assessment of the rabbinic tradition, see J. M. Baumgarten, “4Q500 and the Ancient Conception of the Lord’s Vineyard,” *JJS* 40 (1989): 1–6; *Marcus, Way of the Lord*, 124–25. For assessment of 4Q500, see G. J. Brooke, “4Q500 1 and the Use of Scripture,” in Brooke’s collection of essays, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 235–60.

¹⁴The Aramaic version of Ps 118:22 reads: “The builders abandoned the youth among the sons of Jesse, but he was worthy to be appointed king and ruler.” The rabbinic midrash on Psalm 118 explains that one moment David was tending sheep, the next moment “he is king” (*Midr. Ps. 118.21* [on Ps 118:23]). The midrash adds that it was David who said, “Open to me the gates of righteousness” (118.17 [on Ps 118:19]).

After the Words of Institution (Mark 14:22–25), in which Jesus compares his blood to the blood that established Israel’s original covenant (cf. Exod 24:8), he warns his disciples: “You will all fall away; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered’” (Mark 14:27; cf. Zech 13:7). The implication is that it is God who will strike Israel’s shepherd and that his death, with sacrificial and atoning significance, plays a part in God’s eschatological, redemptive plan for Israel.¹⁵

And finally, when confronted by the high priest who asks Jesus if he is the Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus replies, “I am; and you will see the ‘Son of Man’ seated ‘at the right hand’ of Power, and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven’” (Mark 14:61–62). Jesus has affirmed that he is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God. He defines his identity to the shocked and outraged high priest by a conflated appeal to Dan 7:13–14 and Ps 110:1. In the first passage, we have a vision of “one like a son of man” who “came with the clouds” and is presented to God (or “Ancient of Days”). The expression “son of man” in Daniel means no more than a figure who appears to be human (in contrast to beasts or angelic beings). It is not a technical expression, nor is it necessarily a reference to the awaited Messiah. Throughout the Gospels Jesus refers to himself as “*the* Son of Man,” which again is not technical language. Rather, the consistent articular usage of this epithet directs hearers to the eschatological passage in which the mysterious humanlike figure makes his appearance: Daniel 7.

Earlier in Mark Jesus referred to himself as “*the* Son of Man” who “has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2:10). At first blush, the modifier “on earth” seems both strange and unnecessary. After all, where else would a charismatic Jewish healer conduct his ministry but on earth? The modifier, however, is not unnecessary. The Son of Man received his authority from God *in heaven* and now exercises it *on earth*. Proof that he possesses divine authority is seen in the dramatic healing of the paralyzed man.

The appeal to Ps 110:1 further clarifies Jesus’s identity. As the human, or “son of man,” in Daniel’s vision, Jesus not only approaches the throne of God (cf. Dan 7:9 “thrones were set up and the Ancient of Days took his seat”) and receives authority and kingdom (Dan 7:14 “to him was given authority and glory and kingdom”), he takes his seat on the divine throne at the right hand of Almighty God himself,¹⁶ even as Yahweh in Ps 110:1

¹⁵Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 81–82. For helpful discussion of Zechariah 9–14 and Mark’s Christology, see Marcus, *Way of the Lord*, 161–64.

¹⁶Jesus refers to God with the circumlocution, “the Power.” This circumlocution appears in rabbinic and targumic texts (cf. *Sipre Num.* §112 [on Num 15:31]; *Sipre Deut.* §319 [on Deut 32:18];

invites David's messianic descendant. Jesus has identified himself as the Messiah, Son of God, who will sit on the very throne of God. Because both passages—Daniel 7 and Psalm 110—speak of divine judgment upon God's enemies, the implication of Jesus's statement, "You will see . . .," is that the next time the high priest and his colleagues see Jesus, they will stand before him even as the wicked who face judgment stand before God, who is seated on his throne. It is no wonder that the high priest tears his clothes and speaks of blasphemy (Mark 14:63–64).¹⁷

II. THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Matthew brings into his Gospel the OT quotations found in Mark and in the source the evangelist shares with Luke (i.e., Q). In addition to these quotations, the Matthean evangelist introduces some twenty more. These quotations and allusions, moreover, reflect Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic text-types.¹⁸ However, the OT also functions in Matthew the way it does in Mark, in that it provides in some places a "horizon" or "backdrop" that lends meaning to the Gospel narrative. We see this in Matthew's incipit and in the genealogy that immediately follows.

As observed in Mark, we also find in Matthew subtle allusions or "horizons" that will bring to mind biblical stories and personalities. In Matthew's incipit (Matt 1:1) Jesus is identified as "the son of David, the son of Abraham." Reference to David links Jesus to the founder of the great dynasty from which the messianic king is to spring, while reference to Abraham links Jesus to the great patriarch from which the people of Israel sprang. In Jesus, Israel will find the fulfillment of messianic prophecies and fulfillment of patriarchal promises. The first two words of Matthew's incipit, *biblos geneseōs* ("the book of the genesis"), would have brought to the minds of biblically literate readers and auditors the opening words of Genesis 5: "This is the book of the genesis of humans [*hautē hē biblos geneseōs anthrōpōn*]" (Gen 5:1 LXX). What follows in Genesis 5 is a genealogy beginning with Adam. What follows Matt 1:1 is a genealogy.

The Matthean genealogy is no conventional Jewish genealogy. It

b. Yebam. 105b; *Tg. Job* 5:8: "from the Power").

¹⁷On the implications this passage has for understanding the divinity of Jesus, see the nuanced discussion in Marcus, *Way of the Lord*, 164–71; Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 61–78. On tearing one's clothes as an expression of grief or horror, see Gen 37:29; 2 Kgs 18:37; Job 1:20; Bar 6:31; Jdt 14:19.

¹⁸R. H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel with Special Reference to the Messianic Hope*, NovTSup 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 147–50.

provides attentive readers and auditors a “horizon” of matriarchal history that has puzzled and troubled interpreters down through the centuries. Four women—five if we include Mary, and we should—make surprising appearances in the genealogy of Jesus. Their appearance is surprising, for genealogies are usually comprised of male names. But the appearance of the women is especially surprising because they are hardly the kind of women one would expect to make their appearance if it really isn’t necessary. It is as though the Matthean evangelist has gone out of his way to embarrass and scandalize.

Who are these women and why has the evangelist inserted them into the genealogy of Jesus? The first woman is Tamar (Matt 1:3). She gave birth to the twins Perez and Zerah, having seduced her father-in-law, Judah (Genesis 38). Rahab (Matt 1:5a) was the harlot who hid the Israelite spies (Joshua 2, 6). Ruth (Matt 1:5b) was the Moabite widow who accompanied her mother-in-law to Bethlehem, where she married Boaz and gave birth to Obed, grandfather of David (Ruth 4). The fourth woman is Bathsheba, but she is not named. Rather, she is referred to as “the wife of Uriah” (Matt 1:7). The evangelist does this to remind readers of David’s adultery and his murder of Uriah (2 Samuel 11). Finally, Mary, the fifth woman, gives birth to Jesus (Matt 1:16).

What these five women have in common is crisis. Tamar faced an uncertain future as a childless widow. Rahab was a harlot who could have perished when Jericho was captured. Ruth was a childless Moabite widow with limited prospects. Bathsheba’s husband was murdered and her firstborn child died. Mary’s premature and very unexpected pregnancy could have resulted in her being “quietly divorced” and almost certainly thereafter living out the rest of her days as an unwanted woman. Instead, all five women are rescued; all five find security; and all five contribute a son to the messianic line that will result in Israel’s salvation and the accomplishment of God’s purposes. In the conception and birth of Jesus, strange and unexpected happenings recorded in Israel’s ancient scriptural story have come together in a way that point unmistakably to God’s providence.

In the Infancy Narrative, the evangelist Matthew cites five prophecies as “fulfilled.” At most, only one of these can be said to be fulfilled in the usual predictive sense. Micah prophecies that the anointed ruler of the Lord will come from Bethlehem (Mic 5:2), and so it happened; Jesus is born in Bethlehem (Matt 2:1–6), the home of his ancestors. But the other prophecies said to be “fulfilled” are typologies, where patterns of past redemptive

moments shed light on God's redemptive work in the life of Jesus. It was in the birth of a child that God provided the king of Judah with a sign of salvation (Isa 7:14); so also in the birth of Jesus (Matt 1:20–25). To save Israel, God called his “son” (i.e., Israel) out of Egypt (Hos 11:1); so also in the divine summons that the holy family, in hiding, depart from Egypt and return to Israel (Matt 2:13–15). Herod's massacre of the innocents (Matt 2:16–18) should be compared to the massacre of the northern tribes, especially the descendants of Joseph and Benjamin, whose mother, the matriarch Rachel, would grieve to see it if she could (Jer 31:15; cf. Gen 30:22; 35:16–20). And it is in the return to Nazareth, “Branch,” where Jesus will be raised (Matt 2:19–23), that the prophecies will be fulfilled (cf. Isa 11:1 *netser*, “branch”; Judg 13:5 *nazir*, “consecrated”).

We also find five citations of the Law of Moses followed by dominical corrections (a.k.a. “antitheses”) of faulty scribal interpretation. Five times Jesus quotes or paraphrases Mosaic Law and then says, “But I say to you” (Matt 5:21–26, 27–32, 33–37, 38–42, 43–48).¹⁹ It is important to emphasize that Jesus is not contradicting Moses, nor is he claiming to be above the Law.²⁰ This would hardly do justice to the context, where Jesus has already said, “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them” (5:17). Indeed, Jesus asserts that “not an iota, not a dot” of the law will pass away until “all is accomplished” (5:18). If Jesus thought of his teaching as setting aside the Law of Moses, then it is hard to see how his or his disciples' righteousness could *exceed* that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20). Jesus's teaching, as expressed in what we call the “antitheses,” illustrates how the law is to be *fulfilled*, not abrogated.

We again have an example of OT pattern or horizon in Matthew when we appreciate the evangelist's presentation of Jesus's major teaching in five discourses. These discourses are found in chapters 5–7, 10, 13, 18, and 24–25.²¹ By arranging the teaching of Jesus into five discourses,

¹⁹A few scholars have claimed that there are six antitheses. This number is arrived at by splitting the second antithesis into two: vv. 27–30 and 31–32. But vv. 31–32, introduced with the words, “It was also said” (and not the longer formula, “You have heard that it was said”), is the second half of the teaching against divorce.

²⁰Hans von Campenhausen asserts that Jesus “has pushed aside the commandments” of Moses. See H. von Campenhausen, *Die Entstehung der christlichen Bibel*, BHT 39 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968), 18–19. Jesus has done no such thing. He has pushed aside the faulty and self-serving interpretation of Israel's teachers.

²¹Again, a few scholars have claimed that there are six major discourses. This number is arrived at by counting ch. 23, the diatribe leveled against the scribes and Pharisees. This diatribe is not one of Jesus's major discourses. The latter are directed to the followers of Jesus. Also, the five major

the evangelist Matthew has mimicked the five-book arrangement of the teaching of Moses. Besides the five-fold arrangement, evidence for this interpretation is seen in what the evangelist says at the conclusion of each discourse:

“And when Jesus finished these sayings [*kai egeneto hote etelesen ho Iēsous tous logous toutous*] ...” (7:28).

“And when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples [*kai egeneto hote etelesen ho Iēsous diatassōn tois dōdeka mathētais autou*] ...” (11:1).

“And when Jesus had finished these parables [*kai egeneto hote etelesen ho Iēsous tas parabolās tautas*] ...” (13:53).

“And when Jesus had finished these sayings [*kai egeneto hote etelesen ho Iēsous tous logous toutous*] ...” (19:1).

“And when Jesus had finished these parables [*kai egeneto hote etelesen ho Iēsous pantas tous logous toutous*] ...” (26:1).

These formulaic endings echo similar endings we find in Deuteronomy, the fifth and final book of Moses:

“And Moses finished speaking all these words [*kai synetelesen Mōysēs lalōn pantas tous logous toutous*] to all the sons of Israel” (31:1).

“Now when Moses had finished writing down in a book all the words of this law [*hēnika de synetelesen Mōysēs graphōn pantas tous logous tou nomou toutou eis biblion*]...” (31:24).²²

“And Moses finished speaking to all Israel [*kai synetelesen Mōysēs lalōn panti Israēl*]...” (32:45).

discourses end in a distinctive fashion that is not seen at the conclusion of ch. 23.

²²Note that Deuteronomy says that Moses wrote his words *eis biblion*, “in a book.” It is perhaps not a coincidence that the evangelist Matthew chose to introduce his Gospel as a *biblos*, “book.”

So what does the five-fold discourse structure of Matthew mean? It is intended to underscore the Moses-Jesus typology: each was a great law-giver, and each gave his law in five books.²³ The recurring “five” pattern is part of a Moses motif, in which we have five women, five prophecies fulfilled in the infancy narrative, five major discourses, and five examples of how the Law of Moses is to be fulfilled. The Moses motif is also seen in how Jesus is often portrayed praying or giving his teaching on a mountain (e.g., Matt 5:1; 8:1; 14:23; 15:29; 28:16).²⁴

The Gospel of Matthew concludes with the dramatic scene of the Great Commission, in which the risen Jesus sends his apostles into the world to make disciples. What is striking is his preface to this commission: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ...” (Matt 28:18–19). Jesus’s claim to have received “all authority in heaven and on earth” (*pasa exousia en ouranō kai epi gēs*) takes readers and auditors back to his claim, as “the Son of Man,” to possess the authority to forgive sin: “the Son of man has authority on earth [*exousian echei ho huioi tou anthrōpou epi tēs gēs*] to forgive sins” (Matt 9:6). As the human figure of Dan 7:13–14, to whom God gave authority, Jesus now charges his apostles, or ambassadors, to go forth into the world to make disciples and to teach all that he has taught them.

III. THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Of the three Synoptic evangelists Luke is the true master of weaving biblical language and themes into the fabric of his narrative. Although the evangelist does not punctuate his Gospel with OT texts cited as fulfilled, as do Matthew and John, he does draw upon key texts to advance his understanding of Jesus and the mission of the church.²⁵

The evangelist Luke’s Infancy Narrative is characterized by beautiful poetic canticles that incorporate patristic promises and prophecies that foretell Israel’s coming redemption (Luke 1:14–17, 32–35, 46–55, 68–79; 2:29–35). The birth and temple dedication of Samuel provides the OT

²³However, the *content* of the five discourses does not correspond with the content of the books of the Pentateuch.

²⁴For Moses on the mountain, see Exod 3:1, 12; 4:27; 18:5; 19:2–3, 12, 16–18, 20, 23; 20:18; 24:12; etc. One should compare Matt 4:8, where Satan takes Jesus to a high mountain and shows him the kingdoms of the world, with Deut 32:9, where Moses ascends the mountain and is shown the land of Canaan.

²⁵C. K. Barrett, “Luke/Acts,” in *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture. Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars*, eds. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 231–44.

horizon against which the birth and temple dedication of Jesus may be viewed. In gratitude to God for the birth of her son, Hannah sings, “My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in thy salvation...” (1 Sam 2:1; cf. vv. 1–10).²⁶ Her ten-verse song of praise is matched by Mary’s well known Magnificat, also ten verses in length, sung in response to the angelic annunciation that she would give birth to one who be called “Son of the Most High” and “Son of God” (Luke 1:32, 35): “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...” (1:46; cf. vv. 46–55). Even as Samuel is taken to the house of God as a young lad (1 Sam 1:24–28), so is Jesus (Luke 2:22–40), who also at the age of twelve spends time in the precincts with Israel’s scholars (2:41–51). Luke also deliberately mimics the summary of Samuel’s progress. Of Samuel it is said, “Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men” (1 Sam 2:26). Of Jesus it is said, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52).

Another example of what appears to be an OT horizon in Luke—though it is debated—is the theme and order of material in Luke’s so-called Central Section (Luke 10:1–18:14). The contents and order of this part of the Gospel have been described as amorphous and it is not hard to see why. The content jumps from topic to topic. More than sixty years ago, C. F. Evans showed how this Lukan material—some of it unique to Luke—seems to follow the order of Deuteronomy 1–26 and much of its contents.²⁷ What makes the proposal difficult to ignore is how much explanatory power it has. After hearing the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–35), the Scripture scholar concedes that the man who proved to be a neighbor and thus fulfilled the command to love one’s neighbor (Lev 19:18) is “the one who showed mercy” (Luke 10:36–37). This utterance echoes the Mosaic warning not to show mercy to the foreigners in the land of Canaan who

²⁶In the Aramaic paraphrase Hannah’s Magnificat takes on an eschatological orientation (esp. vv. 8–10). In *Tg. 1 Sam 2:10* the *mesihio*, “his anointed,” of the Hebrew text should probably be understood as the eschatological Messiah. The messianic interpretation of 1 Sam 2:10 in the *Midrash on Samuel* is explicit: “And when will the Holy One, blessed be he, make them return to their place? When he lifts up the horn of the King Messiah [*melek hamashiah*], as it is said: ‘And he will give strength to his king, and exalt the horn of his Anointed’” (*Midr. Sam.* 5.17 [on 1 Sam 2:10]).

²⁷C. F. Evans, “The Central Section of St. Luke’s Gospel,” in *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot*, ed. D. E. Nineham (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), 37–53. There is of course much in Deuteronomy 1–26 that is unparalleled in Luke, for the former addresses topics (e.g., cities of refuge, women taken captive in war) that nowhere finds a counterpart in the dominical teaching recorded in the latter.

will try to lure Israel into idolatry (Deut 7:2). In later Jewish interpretation, in a grossly unfair way, the idolatrous foreigners were understood to include Samaritans (*t. Avodah Zarah* 3.11–15). The point of the parable, whose truth the Scripture scholar has conceded, warns against unwarranted assumptions about who really is just in the sight of God.

Mary's choice (Luke 10:38–42) illustrates the truth that “man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord” (Deut 8:3). The teaching regarding the stronger man who distributes spoils (Luke 11:22) is better understood against the backdrop of Deut 9:1–10:11, where Moses assures Israel that God will conquer “stronger” peoples in order that Israel may inherit the land. The parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15–24) is clarified by the three excuses in Deut 20:5–7 and how they were applied in later texts. The well-known parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32) is clarified by Deut 21:15–17, which articulates law regarding the rights of inheritance for the firstborn, even if the second-born is by a second, more loved wife, and by Deut 21:18–21, which spells out harsh punishment for a foolish son who disobeys his parents. The parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1–9) is clarified by the command to have compassion for a runaway servant in Deut 23:15–16 and the laws against usury in Deut 23:19–20. Many more examples could be discussed.

Finally, it is necessary to comment on how the evangelist Luke brings his Gospel to a conclusion. The risen Jesus says to his disciples:

“These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:44–47)

The risen Jesus of Luke does not explicitly identify where these things are “written” in Scripture, but hearers and readers of Acts, the second volume of Luke's two-volume work, will find out in due course. The necessity that the Messiah suffer is found in Isaiah 53, parts of which are cited in

Luke 22:37 and Acts 8:32–33. That the Messiah will “rise from the dead” is foretold in Ps 16:8–11, to which Peter will make appeal on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:27 and which Paul also will cite in Acts 13:35. That the Messiah will be raised up “on the third day” is foretold in Hos 6:2 (esp. as paraphrased in the Aramaic) and alluded to in one of the Passion Predictions (Luke 18:33) and in Peter’s proclamation of the gospel to the centurion (Acts 10:40). That “repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached” is foretold in Joel 2:32, to which Peter makes appeal in Acts 2:21, and in Isa 49:6, to which Paul makes appeal in Acts 13:47 (cf. Luke 2:32). Finally, the words “beginning from Jerusalem” probably allude to Isa 2:2–3, a prophecy that someday the “word of the Lord” shall go forth “from Jerusalem” and draw all peoples and all nations to faith in the Lord. This prophecy is presupposed in Acts 1:8 and 13:47.

IV. CONCLUSION

This brief survey hopefully has illustrated how deeply the Synoptic evangelists are engaged with Israel’s ancient Scripture and how in every way this sacred tradition clarifies and defines the theology and mission of Jesus. The function of the OT in the Synoptic Gospels ranges from the formal to the allusive, from the prosaic to the poetic, and from the literal to the metaphorical. The Synoptic Gospels cannot be understood apart from the OT.

