

The Quotations Bible Study: Series I: The Person of Jesus

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He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

-- Luke 24:44-45 (NIV)

Introduction

Description:

The Quotations Bible Study is a seven-lesson, practical study of certain passages in the New Testament that quote a passage in the Old Testament, to be presented in seven consecutive weeks during Lent. In keeping with the spirit of the Christian Quotation of the Day, the study focuses exclusively on quotations and their surrounding context, both in the New Testament and the Old.

Quotations from the Old Testament are sprinkled liberally throughout the New Testament. Though they serve many different purposes, the quotations from the Old Testament may be thought to provide a backbone on which the flesh of the New Testament hangs. The voices of the prophets are clearly audible throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry. Paul, Peter, John, and the other writers of the New Testament rely heavily on the prophecies and theology of the Old Testament.

The purpose of the Quotations Bible Study is to organize an understanding of that organic relationship by examining some important quotations.

On Quotations:

So, what is a quotation?

A quotation satisfies one of the following criteria:

- A phrase, sentence, or passage that reproduces what is written elsewhere with a high degree of correspondence. A lesser degree of correspondence would be better described by the word “paraphrase”.
- A passage introduced by words that convey an intent to quote, such as, “as the prophet said...” or “it is written...”

We will consider some quotations that are closer to paraphrases, but in all cases, the passages in question are more than mere allusions.

Thesis:

The Scriptures are God’s revelation of Himself to us, and He means us to understand what they say. Among the many ways to study Scripture, the Quotations Bible Study offers another approach to apprehending the rich meaning and significance of Scripture, contributing to a comprehensive understanding and life commitment by believers.

The quotations of the Old Testament by the New Testament are part of the literary fabric woven in the Bible. I believe its Author has intentionally placed these markers in His Scriptures as points of particular interest, and possibly, significance, in understanding (1) the connection and relationship of the Testaments, (2) the thinking and intentions of the New Testament speakers and writers, (3) the worldview of the Bible, in general, and (4) the nature of God Himself and His plan for salvation, in particular. In short, He intends for us to understand the New Testament through its grounding in the Old Testament, and to read the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament.

Objectives:

The overall objective of the Quotations Bible Study is to understand the written Word better. In particular, the aim is to appreciate the “connective tissue” that binds the Testaments together. We want to know what it is, its meaning, its purpose, and its significance. Finally, we want to apply that understanding to the remainder of the Scriptures, and apply the Scriptures to our lives. In this effort, we seek first of all the Holy Spirit, who is the One speaking to us in the Scriptures and through the Scriptures.

The Quotations Bible Study—Series I, Introduction

The Bible is a collection of books, penned by many different people at vastly different times. It would be too much to suggest that there is any stylistic unity that binds the Bible together. There is linguistic diversity, topical diversity, cultural diversity, and temporal diversity; diversity of every kind, in fact, defeating even the most concerted efforts to “harmonize” the Scriptures on a human level. Perhaps Scripture was never meant to be harmonized (in the sense of “homogenized”) but to be read for the different, though inspired, points of view they represent, precisely because the Scriptures are as diverse as we are. What binds the Bible together is its Author and its subject. As C. S. Lewis puts it, the Bible is “relentlessly theological.” It is about God, and even in the most protracted narratives, it never drifts far from that subject.

Methods:

The Quotations Bible Study will identify a number of instances in which New Testament writers and speaker quote portions of the Old Testament. Concerning each of these, the study asks,

1. How are the passages related, exactly?
2. What is the meaning of the quoted passage in the Old Testament context?
3. Who is quoting, and is the passage an intentional quotation?
4. What purpose was served by the quoted passage in the Old Testament?
5. What purpose is served by the quoted passage in the New Testament?
6. Has the Old Testament meaning of the quoted passage been changed in its New Testament usage?
7. What is the significance of the quotation in terms of the themes of the Testaments?

The study will pose these and other questions in a way specific to each instance. The questions will not necessarily be answered, but the study will call for a conclusion from the reader. The study may make suggestions as to the shape and substance of those conclusions, but it is deemed important to the study that the reader reach his or her own conclusions.

Aids in study:

The study will present excerpts, synopses, and information based on the following study tools:

- Toy, Crawford Howell, *Quotations in the New Testament*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1884
- Gaebelein, Frank E., general editor, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary, The*, Grand Rapids MI, Zondervan Publishing House, 1979
- Other resources specific to the passages under study, particularly for Psalms (which provides many of the quoted passages):
 - Anderson, A. A., *The New Century Bible Commentary: Psalms*, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1981, 2 v
 - Spurgeon, C. H., *The Treasury of David*
 - Bullock, C. Hassell, *An Introduction to the Poetic Books of the Old Testament*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1979
 - Knight, George A. F. (1909-), *Psalms* (The Daily Study Bible Series), Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1982, 2 v.
 - *Exhaustive Concordance*, Strong
- **Bibles**
 - The Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible [1611] with notes by C. I. Scofield [1917]
 - American Standard Version of the Bible [1901]
 - New International Version of the Bible [1973]
 - Other versions as they are useful to the study.

One particular resource we will mention fairly often is the Septuagint, sometimes designated LXX for the 70 Jewish scholars (actually 72) who supposedly translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in 72 days (legend) in Alexandria in the period 280-150 B.C. The Septuagint is important to us because many of the quotations in the New Testament match closely or exactly the wording of the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew Bible. The reason we can make this distinction is that the Hebrew Scriptures and the

Septuagint are often different, sometimes markedly so. There is no single reason that explains all these differences.

Study principles:

1. The Scriptures are presumed to be inspired by God.
2. There is nothing accidental or adventitious in the Scriptures. The meaning of a passage may not be clear, but it is purposeful.
3. God has intended for us to be instructed by the Scriptures.
4. The Scriptures have a definite and specific meaning.
5. Though the presence of a quotation may be seen to have great significance to the understanding of a given passage, no inference will be made based on the absence of a quotation (*e.g.*, lack of authority).
6. We let the Scriptures speak before we speak.

One particular principle that I have tried to use in the application of Scripture is this: rather than interpreting Scripture in the light of the world as we see it, we should, as much as possible, apply the point of view of Scripture to our understanding of the world. Theologian/apologist Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) asserted that there are no “brute facts,” that is, no factual propositions that stand alone, that can be apprehended without the need for an interpretive rule. *All* understanding is shaped and determined by the presuppositions we bring to the inquiry. To the extent that we come to see the world the way that God sees it, we apprehend its true nature, and only so. Otherwise, we are subject to the whims of culture. We are, in Paul’s phrase, slaves to sin, incapable of seeing truth.

Jesus cried out, “Let him who has ears, hear!” We seek the Spirit of God to give us those ears, without which, we will understand nothing.

There is a further point to be made:

7. Where an explanation or interpretation is provided, the New Testament gives an authoritative and inspired understanding of the Old Testament.

While such hermeneutics (a big word for guides or rules for interpretation) are sometimes hard to generalize, their existence and authority in given instances cannot be ignored. For instance, Jesus explained the meaning of the parable of the sower in considerable detail. Our own understanding of the parable must be grounded in Jesus’ explanation.

Of course, the reliability of the interpretation depends on who is talking. Satan quotes Ps. 91:11 to Jesus during the temptation in the wilderness. We are certainly obliged to object to Satan’s application of this passage to Jesus’ case, though there may be, as with all the most effective of the enemy’s lies, at least a grain of truth in it (and sometimes far more).

Nevertheless, the inspiration with which the New Testament writers expound the Old Testament is one of the most important lighthouses for our task of navigating the Scriptures. We will try always to keep it in sight.

Recommendations for study:

Though the Quotations Bible Study comes from a series of studies originally written for individual devotional use, it is suitable for use with small groups or Sunday School classes. Series 1 was originally intended for weekly use during Lent, series 2 for Easter through Pentecost, and series 3 for the seven weeks following Pentecost, though there is certainly no requirement for using them in that way.

Each lesson begins and ends with a suggested prayer. Sections within the lesson contain the text of one or more focus passages and references to background passages. Questions under these headings refer both to the focus passages and selections from the background. All quoted Bible passages are taken from the New International Version, except where indicated. The questions in each lesson have the purpose of exploring the text critically as well as elevating certain ideas. The questions by no means represent all the inquiries that could be posed to the text. Suggested answers to the study questions are provided on subsequent weeks. They are not the only answers, nor are they necessarily complete.

Supplementary material not essential to the study objectives, or representing the author’s opinion and comments, is marked off in brackets ([]) and titled “Enrichment.”

Syllabus for Series I: the Person of Jesus

The first series addresses the following topic areas:

Week 1. Beginnings: the origins of Jesus' earthly life—examining four quotations from the second chapter of Matthew.

Week 2. Unto Generations: the *Magnificat* of Mary—examining the Song of Hannah and its similarities to the Song of Mary.

Week 3. Temptations: Jesus in the Wilderness—examining three quotations from Deuteronomy used by Jesus during the temptation.

Week 4. Messenger: Jesus on John the Baptist—examining prophecy concerning John the Baptist.

Week 5. Who is Jesus: The Evangelists on Jesus—examining Jesus' baptism.

Week 6. Procession: Jesus the King—examining Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

Week 7. The Atonement: Jesus on the Cross—examining Jesus' use of Psalm 22 on the cross.