Text: Various
Title: How Does God Connect the Testaments?
Truth: The NT uses the Old Testament in a rich variety of ways.
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Introduction

Christians traditionally divide the Bible into the Old and New Testaments because the Old is a lot about Israel and her Law, and the New is about Jesus and the Church. With that two-part division, we get phrases like "the new is in the old concealed; the old is in the new revealed."

I am convinced that this division between Testaments is over-simplified. For one thing, the New Testament offers brand new revelation and a new church-focus not before given in the Old Testament, so the NT does not exactly contain the Old. Nor does the OT explain the NT because it cannot. It informs but does not explain fully—the NT has to do that. The Testaments are different. But they are also closely related, and the boundary is not cut-and-dry between Malachi and Matthew. Three observations support this conviction:

1. John the Baptist was basically a prophet in the Old Testament mold. He dressed like a prophet of old. He inveighed against evil like those prophets. Jesus said, "The law and the prophets were until John" (Luke 16:16). John is the transitional figure between the old era and the new. Jesus then added, "Since that time, the kingdom of God has been preached…" Much of the four gospels are situated in an Old Testament context as they record how the transition was made into the New Testament era.

2. The kingdom which Jesus preached was the subject of much prophecy in the Old Testament. God promised the Messiah would come, and restore the fortunes of Israel, and reign over the nations of the world. Jesus is telling us that this message was ready to come to pass, if they would have him as their king. We know that they rejected Jesus as their king and wanted Caesar instead (John 19:15). But the point is that this commonality of teaching binds together the Old and New.

3. Jesus lived under the law of Moses, as did all of his fellow Jews. He attended the feasts, and worshipped at the Temple, just as prescribed in the Law of Moses. Thus, the "Old Testament" really did not end until Christ's death and resurrection.

Picture these features of the Bible as rubber bands or ties that connect the Testaments together into a unified whole. In sum, I approach the Bible as one divine revelation given in 66 books, with as much similarity and continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament as there is dis-similarity. Certainly, there is a lot new in the New Testament; it grows organically out of the Old as a tree from a root, not as a separate plant altogether.

Despite all of this, we are stuck with the OT/NT division as a matter of tradition. Given that, then, a common way of looking at the topic of how God has connected the Bible together is to look at how the New Testament uses the Old Testament.

We could also consider how *any* later book uses any earlier text—how does the later Old Testament use the earlier Old Testament and how does the later New Testament use the earlier New Testament? But for now, let us consider how God used the eight or nine[1] authors of the New Testament: in what ways did He move them to refer to and use the OT?

One of the things I am trying to do in this message is to immerse you into the Bible and show you the surpassing wonder of the Word of God; how it is rich beyond measure; how it is worth every effort at digging into its truth; how it is a powerful piece of literature, interconnected in hundreds of ways. It speaks to all of life's issues even though it does not directly speak about all of them. It does so throughout both the New Testament *and* the Old Testament. When you are swept into it—the Word of God—you will be able to live so much better for God.

One practical thing you can do when you read the New Testament and run into an OT reference is to pause, turn your Bible to that reference, and read around it and think about how it fits.

[1] Can you name them? Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, and Jude. The author of Hebrews is unknown, but it could be Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, or Luke.

I. One Way to Look at This Question

A. When you analyze a passage that refers to the Old Testament, it is helpful to think about how to "categorize" it with other similar passages. Different Bible teachers have various ways to do this. Here is a way I have devised: a set of two-word descriptions for the NT-OT connection.

1. The first word describes what the Old Testament text is doing. For example, if the first word is *prediction*, what we are saying is that the Old Testament passage is predicting an event that will occur at some point in the future.

2. The second word describes how the New Testament uses the OT text. For example, if the first word is *prediction* and the second word is *fulfilled*, then we are saying that the NT is describing a predicted event that has now happened. If the second word is *pending*, the NT is saying that the prediction is still upcoming.

B. Here is a list of these word-pairs that covers most cases of the New Testament's use of the Old Testament. I have marked with a ✓ those that are mentioned in the notes below.

✓ Historical Analogy
✓ Historical Reference
✓ Law Applied
✓ Law Exhorted
✓ Law Explained
✓ Law Obeyed
✓ Pattern Fulfilled
✓ Prediction Fulfilled
✓ Prediction Pending
✓ Prediction Previewed
✓ Scripture Reading
✓ Theology Misapplied
✓ Theology Applied
✓ Wording Adapted

C. Now we will examine several examples. We will start with one of the easiest.

II. Scripture Reading

In this case, the New Testament is simply reporting that a Scripture from the Old Testament is being read in a New Testament setting.

A. Turn to Luke 4:18-19. Here Jesus reads from Isaiah 61:1-2a. At a most basic level, what *Luke* is doing in writing this Old Testament *Scripture* is recording that Jesus *read* it. Then, there is another

layer here, and that is this: what is *Jesus* doing when He reads this text? He is about to say, "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21). So, he refers to Isaiah 61 as a prediction that is fulfilled. Even though it is written with some past tense verbs (anointed, sent), Isaiah is writing of a time future to him when the Messiah comes to preach the gospel and healing and the like. In this situation, many of the listeners became upset.

B. Look now at Acts 8:27-37. Luke records the *Scripture* Isaiah 53:7-8 because the Ethiopian official was *reading* it aloud. Philip hears this and goes to help the man understand what he is reading with the end result being that man's salvation.

III. Predictions Fulfilled, Pending, and Previewed

Another fairly straightforward category concerns predictions that come to pass or yet remain to happen. You might know of the fascinating story of Michael Burry, a physician who became a hedge-fund manager. He analyzed sub-prime mortgage-backed securities and saw that loan interest rate resets were coming in a couple of years. He was able to predict a housing crisis, and he made $100 million dollars on his short trades. Several other investors and economists predicted the 2008 housing crash. Their predictions were fulfilled.

A. This is what we probably most often think of when we think of the New Testament referring back to an Old Testament passage. It concerns a predicted future event that then comes to pass. This is also what we think of by default when we hear the word "fulfilled." **Remember that thought—it will become important in a minute.**

One of the most famous examples is Isaiah 7:14's *prediction* of a virgin birth. It is *fulfilled* in the virgin birth of the Messiah Jesus in Matthew 1:22-23. In the same events are fulfilled Micah 5:2's prediction of a ruler coming forth from Bethlehem, even understood by the religious leaders polled by Herod (Mat. 2:5-6).

B. A similar category of NT to OT relationships concerns those *predictions* that are re-stated or *still pending*. Daniel 12:3 predicts the bodily resurrection of God's people Israel, at which time "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the

firmament." Matthew 13:43 records Jesus saying, "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." These statements are connected to the same future event which has yet to occur.

> Although we in the church are not Israel, we shall enjoy a similar blessing in the future kingdom, shining brightly as God's co-reigning servants. Let this strengthen you when you are down, or ill, or facing the end of your earthly life.

C. A third category having to do with *predictions* concerns those that are not being fulfilled, but something like them is happening presently, so that the final fulfillment is being *previewed*. There is a bit of an "prediction analogy" flavor to these as well since they do not represent the actual fulfillment of the prophecy. Here are two examples of that use of the OT in the NT:

1. Matthew 8:17 says that the miracles Jesus worked were a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4, "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses." The interesting thing is that the text in Isaiah 53 is a prophecy of what the nation of Israel will realize in the future kingdom, *after* they have looked upon the one whom their pierced and mourn for Him (Zech 12:10). They will realize that they thought He was stricken by God—presumably for His own sins. But they will realize that *they* went astray, and the Lord laid upon Jesus *their* iniquity so that they could be rescued from their sin. He was not wounded for His own transgressions. So, the prophecy is portrayed as being fulfilled in the future age of Israel's repentance, that is, in Messiah's kingdom, when they finally see their healing comes from his sacrifice for them.

   Matthew refers to the prophecy in advance of its millennial fulfillment because Jesus is their king, and He is offering them the kingdom, and he is authenticating Himself as the king. Jesus is giving them a preview of what is to come. Remember, they were promised blessing for obedience, and curses for disobedience. But in the future they will experience healing for those curses because God will wipe away their sin! So Matthew is telling us about a *prediction previewed*. The fulfillment is still

coming in the future, and you can be in on it. He will heal your physical afflictions in the future. Not now—but then yes.

2. Another example of a prediction previewed or an analogy of a prediction is Acts 2:17-21 which records Peter's use of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32. Many Christians read Acts 2 in this way: "Joel's prophecy is now coming to pass." But notice that both Peter and Joel mention cosmic manifestations such as "wonders in heaven above, the sun turned into darkness, the moon into blood." And he said that God would pour out his Spirit on "all flesh." Those things did not happen—the Spirit came upon *some, not all*. The heavenly disturbances did not happen. But these things will occur in the far future, at a time associated with the coming of Jesus. Therefore, I firmly believe it is better to see Peter as saying that the things that are happening are an analogy *like,* or a *preview*, of things to come.

IV. Law Explained, Obeyed, Applied, Exhorted

Sometimes the New Testament *explains* a statement given in a *law* in the Old Testament.

A. An example is in Deuteronomy 5:21 which prohibits covetousness and give several concrete examples. Romans 7:7 points back to that command when it says, "For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, *'You shall not covet.'* 8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all *manner of evil* desire." Paul here explains a bit of the meaning and implications of a law from the Old Testament. It still does apply today.

B. Another example is Romans 13:9, which explains several laws in the 10 commandments in Exodus 20:13-17 in single summary statement: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. This instruction was already known to God's people from Lev. 19:18.

C. Jesus is a perfect example of *obeying* the *Law*: He cites an instruction from the OT and then obeys that instruction. Consider Deut. 6:13 and 16, and Jesus's quotations of them when He is facing Satan's temptations in Matthew 4:7 and 10.

This is a good approach for you to use today. When you face temptation of any sort, decide to submit to the authority of Scripture and be obedient to it. That is the kind of stuff that sanctification is made from.

D. Sometimes the NT shows how the OT *Law* was *applied* in the lives of the disciples. Consider Mark 2:23 where they ate some grain as they walked along. This was in accord with Deuteronomy 23:25.

Jesus also applied the law to the man who wanted to know what to do in order to gain eternal life (Matthew 19:16). He applied the Law of Moses to the man and said you have to keep the commandments. Of course, that is impossible to do, so it should have caused the young man to cry out to Jesus that he could not keep them and needed something else—a Savior. But the man, like all self-sufficient religious people of the day did not do that.

E. Regarding the grain-eating situation, it became more complicated when the Pharisees observed it and said it was the Sabbath, so they should not be "doing work" at all. So, Jesus *explained* that the *Law* of the Sabbath was not made to be a burden to man, and certainly not to prevent man from eating. The Sabbath was made to be a blessing to mankind (Mark 2:27).

F. Finally, sometimes the contents of prior Scripture like the *Law* or the prophets (which I am loosely including under the heading of the Law) are used to *exhort* the audience or reader of the Bible. For example, Jesus went into the temple and told them that the Law says the temple is supposed to be a house of prayer for all nations, not a den of thieves (Luke 19:46, referring to Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11).

V. Theology Misapplied

Sometimes people *misapply* the *theology* of the Old Testament.

A. Jesus told us that we are commanded to honor our father and mother (Exodus 20:12, Matt 15:4-9). But the religious leaders devised a way around that by giving their money as a designated gift to the Lord, thus "voiding" the commandment because they now "did not have any money" to help their parents.

B. We can easily understand that Satan would misapply theological truth. He did so in Matthew 4:6 when he misused Psalm 91:11-12 to tempt the Lord Jesus. **Make sure you do not do the same!**

VI. Theology Applied

Sometimes it is not the Law as law *per se* that receives the emphasis, but a principle from the Law and prophets that is applied. I call that *Theology applied*.

A. In John 8:58 Jesus applied the theology of Exodus 3:14 to Himself.

B. The author of Hebrews in 1:10 applies the theology about God in Psalm 102:25-27 to show His superiority to angels and his equality with the Father.

C. In 1 Peter 2:24-25, Peter is applying the theology of Christ's work of sin-bearing to our Christian lives, that we might live for righteousness. The healing refers to our regeneration, not to physical healing from disease.

VII. Wording Adapted

Sometimes the Old Testament Scripture provides language or phrasing that is useful in another context. The OT text is not a prediction or particularly theological in nature. But it is a text that people know well and tend to adapt to a new and somewhat different situations. We do this quite frequently, and the phenomenon is called in scholarly literature by this fancy name: *lexical priming*. Our brains are "primed" by the words of Scripture and use old words for a new situation.

A. Here is an example: in Psalm 6:8 David is writing a lament and asking God to save him. He tells all sinful people to depart from him. He does not want anything to do with them. Jesus *adapted* this same *wording* in Matthew 7:23 when He will say to the unsaved at the end of time, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

B. David's wording in Psalm 51:4 about his own confession is adapted by Paul to express the absolute truthfulness of God in Romans 3:4.

C. Have you use or heard the phrases “salt of the earth,” “an eye for an eye,” “live by the sword, die by the sword,” “the writing is on the wall,” “by the skin of your teeth,” “turn the other cheek,” or “a house divided against itself”? These are all phrases we adapt for a multitude of situations that have almost nothing to do with the Bible passage they come from.

VIII. Pattern Fulfilled

In certain portions, the New Testament author writes using an Old Testament prophet’s words, but those words were not specifically a prediction of a future event, but of a situation current at the time which became a pattern for the future. There could be a corporate pattern of fulfillment as in the next example.

A. Consider Matthew 15:7-9 where Jesus called the people hypocrites for breaking God’s law. They honored God with their lips, but their hearts were far from God. This follows a previously established precedent, pattern, or template. The *pattern* was the behavior observed in Isaiah 29:13 where centuries ago God told Isaiah that the people of Israel were that way—honoring God with their lips but hearts far away from God. **I hope that is not us.**

Matthew records that Jesus said Isaiah was right *when he prophesied about you*. Looking at the context of Isaiah 29:13, it is obvious that this is not a prediction of a *future* people who will be hypocritical in their relationship with God. It is a statement about a *present* people in the 8th century B.C. So, when Jesus says that Isaiah *prophesied* about them, He is not saying Isaiah was making a future prediction. He is using *prophesied* in a different way, not as *predicting* but as *preaching*. Isaiah wrote/preached a general truth about the people at that time, *which also serves to express the pattern of how sinful people are in every age*.

Note: not all prophesying is predicting. Some of it is plain old exhortational preaching.

Still, I call this category Pattern *fulfilled*: I use *fulfilled* to correspond to *prophesied* language, taking note that as *prophesying* is not just *predicting*, so *fulfilled* is used in Scripture in

a way other than "a predicted event coming to pass." **Hold onto that thought.**

It is a general truism that sinners do this hypocritical behavior because they want to "look good" and still have their sinful fun. In some cases, like this one, the pattern-fulfillment makes sense because there is an organic connection or solidarity between the people who were first "preached at" and the later people who are just like them. The connection? They share the same sinful nature!

B. We see a similar example in the several times that the NT quotes Isaiah 6:9-10. God assigned Isaiah to prophesy to a people of hard heart and heavy ears. This pattern is fulfilled in Matthew 13:14, John 12:40, Acts 28:26-27, and Romans 11:8. I use the *pattern* language because it is something that happens over and over again with different people in different generations. The Bible can make timeless statements about sinful human nature because that nature does not change.

C. Think about Psalm 2:1-2. It portrays the raging of the nations against the LORD and against the Messiah. They do not wish for him to reign over them. The language of the Psalm is, to this reader, unmistakably Messianic and future oriented. But we see the same pattern at work throughout history—the peoples and kings of the nations do not want God to rule over them. The last time that the nations will rage against Christ is in the eschaton before the enemies are put under Messiah's feet. The early disciples recognized an application of this pattern in their own day in Acts 4:24 when they prayed using those words because of the opposition that they were facing under Jewish persecution. What the Psalmist portrays in a simple, straightforward fashion becomes a pattern of all similar behavior in time to come.

IX. Historical Reference and Analogy

These are two common categories.

A. The first concerns the dozens of examples in the New Testament where there is a *reference* to a *historical* event. We find these in Jesus's genealogies. Matthew 1:5 mentions blessed Ruth who converted to Yahweh from her pagan background and followed her

mother-in-law Naomi back to Israel. She was married to Boaz and had a son Obed, who was the grandfather of David the King and a forefather of Jesus, according to the flesh.

Another example is in John 6:31 where John records the people of Israel telling Jesus (as if He needed to be reminded!) that God gave them bread from heaven to eat. That is a historical reference to Exodus 16:4, reiterated in Psalm 78:24 and Nehemiah 9:15. Stephen's sermon is loaded with historical references (Acts 7).

B. The second sub-category having to do with history is a *historical analogy*, where the Scriptural authors write something in the NT that is an analogy of something in the OT. Basically, they are saying, "this new thing is *like* that old thing." God certainly knew the OT thing would be useful in the future as an analogy or likeness, and as the divine author He had an intentionality about that at some level. But that was almost never known to the OT author. The fact that it became analogized later is not the OT author's business or necessarily in his intention at all. God can use the most mundane persons, things, or events as analogies, or the most symbolically loaded events.

C. The example I will share may catch your attention. We will have to approach the Scripture with the utmost discipline and care to properly analyze this example. It is the first historical analogy we find in the New Testament, and it is in Matthew 2:15. There it says that Joseph departed for Egypt with Mary and Jesus and stayed there until the death of Herod, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying 'Out of Egypt I called My Son.'"

Now, go back and read the passage this comes from in Hosea 11:1. It says, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son." This is *clearly* a reference to the historical event of the Exodus, recorded in the book by that same name. Israel is the nation; the child-status indicates it was a young nation; the word *son* refers to Israel as related to God. The *son* idea comes from Exodus 4:22-23 where God says, "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord: "Israel *is* My son, My firstborn. So, I say to you, let My son go." Clearly Hosea is speaking of the *nation* of Israel,

not the Messiah. It is a historical reference to the nation, not a prediction of a future event about an individual.

So, how is Matthew using Hosea? Remember when I said that "fulfillment" does not always refer to a predicted event coming to pass? That is the case here—it is referring to a non-predictive piece of historical information. We can clearly see it and have to submit to that clarity.

It is incorrect to say, "That cannot be. *Fulfillment* must mean that Hosea was a prediction or God changed the meaning of Hosea to make it a prediction." No! *Fulfillment* is a broad word and sometimes it means "this event happened in a similar way that an event from old times that happened." It means that Jesus is *like* the nation of Israel in this respect: like they came out of Egypt, He came out of Egypt. It is nothing more complicated than that. In other words, Matthew is using Hosea as a *historical analogy*.

There are quite a few of these in the New Testament. And when you recognize this category and think it through, it helps you have a clear and simple understanding of how the NT uses the OT. This approach helps you see wonderful likenesses and similarities. Many interpreters call these *types,* but I do not prefer that language unless the type is *explicit*. This simple approach protects you from wrong ideas like "the Holy Spirit changed the meaning of Hosea when Matthew wrote this" or "there must be two meanings in the prophecy—one open and one hidden." No, in fact, there is only one meaning, and it never changes. God just changed our appreciation of that single meaning by adding another thing to connect it to in our minds. The next time we read Hosea 11:1, we may remember that like Israel came out of Egypt, Jesus did too! And Jesus did much better than Israel did.

Conclusion

What I hope this message will accomplish is to show you that the NT's use of the OT is rich. It is a source of much blessing to read and carefully study. It is also not so mysterious that it is beyond your reach. Try to categorize each Old Testament quotation you run into and let me know what you find! MAP