

Top Twenty Reasons for Not Reinterpreting the Old Testament by the New

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Introduction

It seems to be almost an axiom within contemporary evangelical Bible interpretation that the New Testament must be allowed to reinterpret the Old Testament. This belief in the interpretative priority of the NT over the OT is accepted as “received truth” by a great many evangelical scholars and students today. But there are corollaries which are often left unexplored or ill-considered. Did God speak to men in times past in symbolic language so that we today could unravel what He really meant? Doesn’t this strongly imply that the OT was not really for them, but for us? This list comes from a longer list of forty reasons why a student of the Bible should not adopt the common tactic of reading the New Testament back into the Old:

20 Reasons

1. Neither Testament instructs us to reinterpret the OT by the NT. Hence, we venture into uncertain waters when we allow this. No Apostolic writer felt it necessary to place in our hands this hermeneutical key, which they supposedly used when they wrote the NT.
2. Since the OT was the Bible of the Early Christians it would mean no one could be sure they had correctly interpreted the OT until they *had* the NT. In many cases this deficit would last for a good three centuries after the first coming of Jesus Christ.
3. If the OT is in need of reinterpretation because many of its referents (e.g. Israel, land, king, throne, priesthood, temple, Jerusalem, Zion, etc.) in actual fact refer symbolically to Jesus and the NT Church, then these OT “symbols” and “types” must be seen for what they are in the NT. But the NT never does plainly identify the realities and antitypes these OT referents are said to point towards.
4. It would require the Lord Jesus to have used a brand new set of hermeneutical rules in, e.g., Lk. 24:44; rules not accessible until the arrival of the entire NT, and not fully understood even today. These would have to include rules for each “genre”, which would not have been apparent to anyone interpreting the OT on its own terms.
5. If the OT cannot be interpreted without the NT then what it says on its own account cannot be trusted, as it could well be a “type,” or even part of an obtuse redemptive state of affairs to be alluded to and reinterpreted by the NT.
6. Thus, it would mean the seeming clear predictions about the Coming One in the OT could not be relied upon to present anything but a typological/symbolic picture which would need deciphering by the NT. The most clearly expressed promises of God in the OT would be vulnerable to being eventually turned into types and shadows.
7. It would excuse anyone (e.g. the scribes in Jn. 5:35f.) for not accepting Jesus’ claims based on OT prophecies – since those prophecies required the NT to reinterpret them. Therefore, the Lord’s reprimand of the scribes in the context would have been unreasonable.

1 <http://drreluctant.wordpress.com/2012/10/15/top-twenty-reasons-for-not-reinterpreting-the-old-testament-by-to-the-new/>

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8. Any rejection of this, with a corresponding assertion that the OT prophecies about Christ *did* mean what they said, would create the strange hermeneutical paradox of finding clear, plain-sense testimony to Christ in the OT while claiming the OT cannot be interpreted without the NT. One could not maintain this position without calling the whole assumption under review.
9. The divining of these OT types and shadows is no easy task, especially as the NT does not provide any specific help on the matter. NT scholarship has never come to consensus on these matters, let alone “the common people” to whom the NT was purportedly written.
10. If the Author of the OT does not mean what He appears to say, but is in reality speaking in types and shadows, which He will apparently reveal later, what assurance is there that He is not *still* speaking in types and shadows in the NT? Especially is this problem intensified because many places in the NT are said to be types and shadows still (e.g. the Temple in 2 Thess. 2 and Rev. 11).
11. This view imposes a “unity” on the Bible which is symbolic and metaphorical only. Hence, taking the Bible in a normal, plain-sense *should* destroy any unity between the Testaments. What we mean by “normal, plain-sense” is the sense scholars advocating this view take for granted their readers will adopt with *them*, which we would identify as “literal.”
12. Thus, no unbeliever could be accused of unbelief so long as they only possessed the OT, since the apparatus for belief (the NT) was not within their grasp.
13. This all makes mincemeat of any claim for the clarity of Scripture. At the very least it makes this an attribute possessed only by the NT, and only tortuous logic could equate the word “perspicuity” to such wholesale symbolic and typological approaches.
14. A corollary to this is that the authority of the OT to speak in its own voice is severely undermined.
15. In consequence of the above the status of the OT as “Word of God” would be logically inferior to the status of the NT. The result is that the NT (which refers to the OT as the “Word of God”) is more inspired than the OT, producing the unwelcome outcome of two levels of inspiration.
16. It effectively shoves aside the hermeneutical import of the inspired inter-textual usage of an earlier OT text by later OT writers (e.g. earlier covenants are cited and taken to mean what they say in Psa. 89:33-37; 105:6-12; 106:30-31; 132:11-12; Jer. 33:17-18, 20-22, 25-26; Ezek. 37:14, 21-26). God is always taken at face value (e.g. 2 Ki. 1:3-4, 16-17; 5:10, 14; Dan. 9:2, 13). This sets up an expectation that covenant commitments will find

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“fulfillment” in *expected* ways, certainly not in completely unforeseeable ones.

17. It would make the specific wording of the covenant oaths, which God took for man’s benefit, misleading and hence unreliable as a witness to God’s intentions. This sets a poor precedent for people making covenants and not sticking to what they actually promise to do (e.g. Jer. 34:18; cf. 33:15ff. and 35:13-16). This encourages theological nominalism, wherein God’s oath can be altered just because He says it can.
18. The character of any being, be it man or angel, but especially God, is bound to the words agreed to in a covenant (cf. Jer. 33:14, 24-26; 34:18). This being so, God could not make such covenants and then perform them in a way totally foreign to the plain wording of the oaths He took; at least not without it testifying against His own holy veracious character. Hence, not even God could “expand” His promises in a fashion that would lead literally thousands of saints to be misled by them.
19. A God who would “expand” His promises in such an unanticipated way could never be trusted not to “transform” His promises to us in the Gospel. Thus, there might be a difference between the Gospel message as we preach it (relying on the face value language of say Jn. 3:16; 5:24; Rom. 3:23-26), and God’s real intentions when He eventually “fulfills” the promises in the Gospel. Since it is thought that He did so in the past, it is conceivable that He might do so again in the future. Perhaps the promises to the Church will be “fulfilled” in totally unexpected ways with a people other than the Church, the Church being just a shadow of a future reality?
20. Finally, there is no critical awareness of many of the problems enumerated above because that awareness is provided by the OT texts and the specific wording of those texts. But, of course, the OT is not allowed a voice on par with what the NT text is assumed to make it mean. Only verses which preserve the desired theological picture are allowed to mean what they say. Hence a vicious circle is created of the NT reinterpreting the Old.



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