

**PRINCIPLES THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS USED
WHEN QUOTING THE OLD
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After we were dismissed at our last faculty meeting Dr. Neal handed me a slip of paper with twelve words written on it; these read “The Relation of the Old Testament to its Quotation in the New.” Certainly this topic is small compared to discussing Homer’s or Shakespeare’s writings, yet it is much too big to be read as a paper before professors who have labored all day and are now looking forward to having a time of relaxation this evening with their families. Therefore I must limit my paper to 30 minutes, which may leave you wanting more details for some parts of the discussion.

Since the rise of textual criticism, some critics have considered the unreconciled situation of the Old Testament quotations in the New as evidence strong enough to invalidate the verbal inspiration of Scripture. Their argument might be summarized in this way:

1. Since New Testament writers quote the Old Testament freely, often paying little regard to the exact words or wording of the Old Testament, the New Testament writers could not have considered the Old Testament as being verbally inspired.
2. Since quite a few Old Testament passages quoted in the New are inexact as to the wording or improper as to the sense of the Old, it is hard to prove that the Holy Spirit is the real author.

Thus they first attack the inspiration of the Old Testament, and then of the New Testament, in order to tear down the authority of all the Scriptures.

The discussion tonight is aiming, on the one hand, to point out some rights which we should allow the writers of the New Testament to have in their quoting other biblical passages, and, on the other, to discuss some principles which the Holy Spirit adopted in giving His New Testament quotations. Both together should enable us to understand whether the above critical arguments are logical or not.

A. The rights that we should allow the New Testament writers to have.

1. They had to translate Old Testament quotations. When a writer quotes a passage in a foreign language, he must either quote it literally from the original or translate it into the language in which he is writing. Hence, since the Hebrew or Aramaic in the Old Testament and the Greek in the New are entirely different languages, the Old Testament passages had either to be translated into Greek when put in the New or the literal Hebrew/Aramaic translation had to be used. All of us realize that to translate a foreign language is not an easy job. No matter how carefully a translator might work, some foreign words are impossible to reproduce exactly as they stand in the original, and some, even with our elaborate paraphrases, still cannot be completely understood. The New Testament writers cannot be an exception to this. So in order to make sense to their readers, they had to translate or even to interpret

the original. This is why the Old Testament “Yahweh” had to be changed into “the Lord” in the New; “my glory” in Psalm 16:9 had to become “my tongue” in Acts 2:26; “their line” in Psalm 19:4 had to become “their sound” in Romans 10:18; “corn in heaven” in Psalm 78:24 had to become “bread from heaven to eat” in John 6:31; and “worship Him all ye gods (Elohim)” in Psalm 97:7 had to become “let all the angels of God worship Him” in Hebrews 1:6.

2. They had no quotation marks, brackets, etc., with which to set off their quotations. Ancient writers had more freedom in quoting passages than do modern ones. They were obligated neither to indicate the *terminus a quo* [beginning] nor the *terminus ad quem* [ending] of a quotation. Neither had they ellipsis marks [. . .] with which to denote passages where they had omitted a portion of either the beginning, middle or ending; nor brackets with which to distinguish their own interpretation or notes inserted into the actual quotation. For example: in Luke 10:27 he adds “and with all your mind” to the passage which he quotes from Deuteronomy 6:5. In Ephesians 6:2-3 the writer apparently adds an explanatory comment (“which is the first commandment with a promise”) to the quotation from either Exodus 20:12 or Deuteronomy 5:16.
3. They were not accustomed to using footnotes. The use of footnote references was not familiar to ancient writers. Writings in ancient times were usually not for commoners but for scholars; neither for popular enjoyment, but for special study. They took for granted that scholars would know from where their quotations came and would be able to explain them to others. Since this was the case, why should they lower their scholastic standard by putting in footnotes? Therefore, unless the writer gave the source of his quotation, we have no sure way to determine the origin of his quote, nor have we the right to say that this quotation or that sentence must be quoted from this or that Old Testament passage. Quite a few books mentioned in the Old Testament and used to confirm historical Old Testament events are not included in the biblical canon. How do we know that New Testament writers did not quote some passages from those books, instead of from the similar passages recorded in the Old Testament? Luke 8:10 is apparently not from Isaiah 6:9. Luke 20:28 is a summary of Deuteronomy 25:5. Neither John 7:38 nor James 4:5 is from any recognizable source in the canon. Hebrews 11:21 is not quoted from Genesis 47:31, since the temporal sequences of both passages differ. All these problems would have been settled, had the writers used footnotes to indicate their origin, but they did not. Therefore, to presume that a New Testament quote contradicts an Old Testament passage when the writer does not give the origin of his statement is neither scientific nor logical.
4. They had the privilege both to quote and to allude. Some passages in the New Testament are not quotations at all but allusions. When any author finds some literary content which is very familiar to his readers, he can allude to it rather than quote it directly. This was also true with the New Testament writers. There are quite a few allusions in the New Testament. The distinction

between an allusion and a quotation is that the former appears always without a formula of introduction, or as indirect discourse after *`oti*, (translated as “that” in Mark 12:19 but when indicating indirect discourse is usually left untranslated as in Luke 2:33; Acts 3: 23; etc.), or after *`opos plarotha* or *`ina plarotha* (in order that) as in Matthew 2:23; 4:15-16; 8:17, 23; etc. Thus John 8:17 (“EVEN IN YOUR LAW IT HAS BEEN WRITTEN, THAT THE TESTIMONY OF TWO MEN IS TRUE”) is an allusion to Deuteronomy 19:15 (“on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed”). Romans 2:24 (“FOR ‘THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU,’ JUST AS IT IS WRITTEN”) alludes to Isaiah 52:5 (“My name is continually blasphemed all day long”). Galatians 3:10 (“CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM”) is an allusion to Deuteronomy 27:26 (“cursed is he who does not confirm the words of the law by doing them). Further, rather than being a direct quote, Hebrews 4:4 (“AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS”) is only an allusion to Genesis 2:3 (“Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made”).

B. Some principles that the Holy Spirit adopted in making the New Testament quotations.

1. God’s word is for man. Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. Likewise, man was not created for God’s word but God’s word was written for the need of man. In order to make God’s word clear enough for man to understand, the writing in the Bible had to be accommodated to human understanding. For this reason God’s word is not only written in human language but is also written according to man’s capacity to understand. For the New Testament readers, the Holy Spirit had to change His wording, style, and vocabulary, in order that those with a background, culture, and education different from that of the Old Testament people might be able to understand what He was teaching. This is why “But thou, Bethlehem Ephrata” in Micah 5:2 had to be changed into “But thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah” in Matthew 2:6; and Exodus 12:46 “neither shall ye break a bone thereof” into “a bone of him shall not be broken” in John 19:36. The passage in Exodus is a type while the one in John is the fulfillment. This same principle explains also the difference between Psalm 40:6 (“My ears Thou hast opened”) and Hebrews 10:5 (“But a body Thou hast prepared for me”). As Samuel Davidson says, “To open or to uncover the ear was a customary expression among the Hebrews for revealing, including the idea of listening to a communication, followed by prompt obedience.” Hence the Greek phrase adopted by the writer of the Epistle is substantially equivalent to that of the Hebrew.
2. God’s revelation is progressive. Any student of biblical theology knows that God’s revelation is organic and progressive. His truth is like an orange seed: it begins as just a small seed, yet it has all the DNA which the mature orange tree will have. During the process of the seed’s growth new stages develop

time after time, but no one would say that the sapling contradicts the full-grown tree. Yet some of today's scholars unhesitatingly affirm contradictions between the Old Testament and the New wherever they find an Old Testament quotation in the New having more words or explanations than the original Old Testament passage. The principle of biblical truth is always the same, but its application is not the same in the New Testament as it was in the Old. Since the process from simplicity to complexity is the very nature of progress, the development of the Old Testament truth by later paraphrase or interpretation is very natural to God's self-revelation. In truth such modification rather proves that God's word is organic and living. As long as the Holy Spirit was the Author who selected the word, whether or not the words are identical to the Old Testament passage makes little difference to its inspiration. The changing of a noun to a pronoun, or vice versa; the transformation of a verb in its tense, mood, voice, or person; the summarization of a certain Old Testament passage or a certain teaching of the Old Testament—none has to do with contradiction, but rather has to do with the bringing out of God's progressive revelation. Thus, John 1:23 changes "the voice of one crying" of Isaiah 40:3 to "I am the voice of one crying." Second Timothy 2:19 takes "the name of God" instead of "my name" in Isaiah 52:5. Ephesians 4:8 makes the second person of Psalm 68:18 to be the third person, and its clause "Thou hast received gifts among men" to be "He gave gifts to men."

3. The sources of the New Testament quotations were not limited to the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit did not limit the New Testament writers to quote just from the Old Testament. As aforementioned, God's revelation is for man. Any truth that was familiar to the reader and was also capable of expressing God's revelation, the Holy Spirit would use. For this reason the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to quote a Greek poem in the Acts 17:28, a saying from a now-lost comedy in 1 Corinthians 15:33, and two names (Jannes and Jambres) from the Talmud or the Targum of Jonathan in 2 Timothy 3:8. At the time when the New Testament was being written, the Septuagint was the most widely spread translation among the Gentiles. It was natural for the Holy Spirit to use this translation to express God's truth since it was familiar to most readers. No matter how poor the quality of the Septuagint translation, it had at least more value than a Greek poem or Corinthian comedy. If Jude could quote the Apocryphal Book of Enoch to emphasize the certainty of God's judgment (Jude 14-15), other writers certainly could quote from the Septuagint. Accordingly, Acts 2:25-28; 8:32-33 and Romans 3:4, 14; 9:27-28 are quoted from the Septuagint and not from Hebrew. John 12:14-15, 40, Acts 3:22-23, Ephesians 5:14, and James 4:5 are neither from the Septuagint nor from Hebrew. Inspiration regards not the source but the divine Author and the writers of the Bible. No matter what the source once it became part of the New Testament, it is just as inspired as are the words spoken by Herod, the Pharisees, or even by Satan. At this point we disagree with Davidson who says: "It has been easily explained by the supporters of verbal inspiration, that the words of the Septuagint became literally inspired as soon as they were

taken from that version and transferred to the New Testament pages.” Our answer is: “Truly, the verbal inspiration of biblical quotes from biblical and extra-biblical sources is easily explained unless Davidson counts everything that the Scriptures record concerning secular sources (history) and sinful conduct (Satan’s speech to Eve) as being uninspired once they are recorded in the New Testament by holy men moved by the Holy Spirit.” Since we accept the New Testament quotation from a Greek poem and other secular sources as inspired, surely we can accept the inspiration of the quotations from the Septuagint?

To conclude his talk Dr. Lin read pages 215, 219-220 from B. B. Warfield’s *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*.

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