

Understanding the Old and New Testament: A Brief Survey and Guide

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Stated Thesis:

The goal of this project is to first assess the extent to which current Mannaites understand the Old Testament and to suggest ways that the Old Testament might be read in an intellectually-constructive and spiritually-edifying manner. This project is two-fold: The first is a survey to see how well students already understand OT. Though this survey is by no means scientific, it should provide an approximation of how the majority of the Mannaites see the Old Testament.

Secondly, this paper will suggest ways for staff to enrich the student's experience of the OT.

Provided also will be a quick introduction to the Pentateuch in general, surveying the modern critical understanding of its origins and compilation. The larger structure of this project will focus definitively on a few key and formative episodes in the Pentateuch: Creation, God's Promise to Abraham, and Exodus - and attempt to connect them to the NT at a theological and affective level.

A. Survey and Analysis

The following are the results of the survey given to Mannaites after Large Group. There are 36 respondents.

1. Do you feel like you have a strong understanding of the Old Testament?

Weak: 12

Uncertain: 11

Strong: 6

Out of the six members who stated that they had a strong understanding of the OT, four attended Catholic schools in their elementary years. For another student, his or her church made a concerted effort to provide a balanced reading from both testaments. However, it is clear that the vast majority of the students have either a weak or hesitant understanding of the OT. This is later verified by the analysis of the chronological order of figures in the OT (see q. 6). Also, the lack of emphasis on the OT in their respective churches seems to explain why most students do not have a confident grasp of the OT (see q. 2).

2. Which Testament do you know better? Why?

Unanimously New Testament.

Reasons:

More Teaching/Preaching on it: 14

Easier to relate: 9

Shorter: 4

Tells story of Christ/Foundation of gospel: 3

NT has more familiar Historical-Cultural Context: 2

NT Less Open to Interpretation: 2

Media Endorses it: 1

Spiritual teachings: 1

Every student claimed that he or she knew the NT better than the OT. While this is not altogether surprising, the reasons provided is worthy of careful consideration. At least amongst Mannaites, their lack of understanding from the OT is because of a lack of focus in the OT in their churches or in their spiritual communities. In our emphasis of the NT, perhaps we have forgotten the importance of the OT as the foundational text on which the NT completes. By knowing only the NT, we effectively skip out on reading the actual story – that is, the drama of humanity and God – and place preponderant weight on the resolution and not the entirety of the story. Just as we cannot understand fully the OT without the incarnation and passion of Christ, we cannot know fully the NT without the light of the OT. On the other hand, the top three

reasons given also evinces a tendency for “passive” learning, that is, the tendency for Mannaites to be satisfied with what they receive from service or from “easy” relatability with the OT. There is little “active” digging into the OT, but more so a form of passive reception. The top three reasons make this clear, and as will be argued in the next question and further on, perhaps it is symptomatic of a “practical” Christianity (see q. 3).

3. Which books in the Old Testament has been important in your growth?

Psalms	20
Genesis	17
Proverbs	10
Exodus	6
Isaiah	6
Job	4
Ecclesiastes	3
Hosea	2
Chronicles	2
Deut.	1
Daniel	1
Habakkuk	1
Lamentations	1
Kings	1
Samuel	1
Leviticus	1
Esther	1

The overwhelming popularity of the Psalms is attributed to the relatability of the book. Many of the respondents wrote that the Psalms provide a language to their prayers, or shows evidence of God’s faithfulness to David throughout his life. One student said that the Psalms makes the Bible more “real”. In this sense, to many Mannaites, the Psalms presents both a spiritual and human resource in their personal walks. In contrast, many students cited Genesis as a key text, most of them citing that it either answered the basic questions of life, and also that it presents the beginnings of the covenant with Israel, thus serving as a model of the covenantal

relationship. Surprisingly, no one mentioned the book of Genesis as a type of history that culminated in the incarnation of Christ, and there seemed to be less interest in historical questions than in the moral/theological dimensions of the union between the Old and Testament (see q. 4).

4. What types of questions do you have about the Old Testament?

- A. Historical Questions: 10
 - General lack of knowledge: 3
 - Practical Guidance: 3
 - Historicity of texts: 2

- B. Theological Issues: 14
 - Angry God/Merciful God 7
 - OT Laws: At what line? 7
 - Existence of Angelic Intermediaries 1

- C. New/Old Testament Relations: 14
 - Where does it really point to Christ? 3
 - Why do we read the NT into the OT? 1
 - Why do we even need an OT? 1

- D. Moral Issues: 14
 - God's commanding genocide on Canaanite Nations 3

The data in this question is a bit trickier to interpret. Although many people stated that they had questions on all four categories, most respondents who chose all four usually wrote specific questions only for Theological Issues (B), New/Old Testament Relations (C), or Moral (D). Out of the people who circled Historical Questions (A), seven wrote specific questions. Of these six, only two respondents talked about the problems of history and Biblical history (ie., evolution, problems inherent in history, historiography, historicity), the other three stated that they just did not know the OT history very well, and the last two wanted to know how the OT actually can help us in practically. This is, in my opinion, a shift in the understanding of the OT

as a battleground for debating history into one in which moral/theological issues has become primary.

Under closer inspection, it also seems evident that the questions in B, C, and D are fairly consistent: they all carry an absolute distinction between the Old and New Testament. The two popular questions in the Theological Issues largely overlap with the New/Old Testament Relations, as does the Moral Issues. Many Mannaites have trouble distinguishing between the Angry God of Justice which they associate with the Old Testament with the Loving God of Mercy in the New Testament. This is related to the Moral Issue's question, that God can be considered the moral exemplar while not only condoning but ordering the deaths of entire nations, while the God of the New Testament would never do such a thing. Another popular question was the role of the OT laws in the NT. Which laws are to be kept? Which are not? Why and under what circumstances? What did it mean when Jesus said the he came to fulfill the law and not to destroy it? The questions that all showed up showed a strong neo-Marcionite tendency in rejecting the God of the OT in practice, though not in thought.

5. Do you feel like you need to know the Old Testament Better? Why?

Yes	32	
	Part of Word of God:	11
	NT foundations in OT:	10
	No Reason Given:	4
	Don't Know it well:	4
	Stories/Lessons:	2
	Nature of God:	1
No	2	
	NT is more important:	1
	Not essential:	1
Unsure	1	
	Struggling to understand relationship	1

The majority of Mannaites believed that they needed to get to know the OT better because a) it was part of the Bible and b) the NT is built upon the OT. This might be a worrisome foundation to start on, though. How can they know that the OT is part of the Word of God, if they do not know or are unsure of the OT? The only reason why they believe that the OT is part of the Bible is because of tradition, and not actual study of the text. If this is true, then their understanding of the very structure of canon needs to be interrogated and strengthened if it is found to be untenable. Of the respondents, two of the students said that the OT was either inferior or not essential to the message of the NT. This is clearly a Neo-Marcionite position; if it is not essential or is inferior, it can be discarded. One student was quite frank and honest in saying that he or she is still struggling to understand the relationships in the text.

6. Put the Following in Order:

Correct:	21
Incorrect:	15

Although this is a bit better than what was expected, only a little more than half of the Mannaites surveyed were able to put the OT figures and events in the correct order. For the ones who could not do it, some were wildly off, while others were off only by one person or event. Either way, this figure shows that the majority of the Mannaites have a decent understanding of the way large and central figures connect, but only in vague terms. However, if pressed for details on these people, they might be a bit more hesitant to answer.

7. Interpret Genesis 22 in a “Christian” manner:

To obey

12

Do we trust God's promises?	9
Foreshadowing	8
Asks us to give up most important	4
Loves God or Son more?	3
What is ours is not ours but given	3
Not focus on worldly things?	1
Teleological suspension of Ethics.	1

The majority of the answers, that is all except the “Foreshadowing” question, shows that Mannaites tend to stress more the practical aspects of OT narrative rather than the foreshadowing. The general thought of Manna then is towards application and practice rather than intellectualization or study. Students were keener on saying that the story of the sacrifice of Isaac shows that *we* must give up *our* most beloved to God, or what it tells about *us* in our relationship with God, or how *we* must trust God more given the promises of God. All the data seems to consistently point to a less “theologized” understanding of the OT, though many certainly wanted insightful theological answers (q. 4, q. 5).

Analysis and Problems of the Survey Results

Although wide generalizations cannot be credibly made in this project, at least within Manna, there seems to be a mindset of mining the text for a set of principles or inspiration for direct application or other benefits. However, this method of looking at the text precludes or ignores the “second sense” of the OT text, the second sense which is open to typological, allegorical, and gospel-centric methods of interpretation. Unfortunately, our post-modern understanding of reading texts, and not just Scripture, is heavily biased against such methods like typology, analogy, allegory, basically any method to uncover (not mine) a truth believed to be in the text itself. Therefore, the study of the OT presents a unique problem in understanding: If the

tools that had been used widely in the historical Church is now viewed as stripped of its power, then how should we proceed in reading Scripture?

The NT, in contrast to the OT, does not pose as much of a problem, since it tends to present itself in a more forward manner and also because the text of the NT already includes the interpretation of the OT.¹ Also, most the NT can be taken at a more literal level, in that many of the epistles are occasional letters – they were written for certain occasions to deal with certain problems within the Church, and they also explain the theology of Christ’s death and resurrection fuller. They are, in this epistolary manner, less “mysterious” and more straightforward. Also, it takes place in a more familiar context, without the uncomfortable insertions found in the OT,² and is easier to relate in that way.

The number of questions that Mannaites have about the relationship between the OT and the NT evinces the very real fact that they are reading the OT like they would the NT, looking for concise, clear-cut, and practical matters for Christian spirituality. While the NT, then, is more relatable in its “open meaning,” the study of the OT requires at least some knowledge of how to engage the text with a reverence for its “second sense.” If we continue to read the OT with the same mentality as the NT, then we will only look in it a story that is about us and not about Christ.

This is particularly clear since many of the students claim that they read the New Testament in hopes that it would apply to their lives, or because it lends itself to application to their lives easier, or at least, more easily than the Old Testament. Although this is good and true – the gospel does indeed need to be applied in practical steps – when this becomes the preponderant thrust of what it means to be a Christian, we reduce Christianity and we can no

¹ Hebrews 7; Revelation; Galatians.

² Genesis 34, Exodus 4:24-26.

longer perceive a sense of mystery in the text; the mining of the text for practical benefits – even spiritual benefits – does not take into account the larger narrative of the text and our incorporation into that narrative. Furthermore, this is directly in contradiction to the very heart of Christianity, which is, anti-practical.³ This project will hope to not destroy this inclination of applying Scripture, since it is a good, but seek to expand the Manna’s cognitive-literature understanding of the Old Testament into also an affective-gospel-centric understanding as well.

B. Quick Introduction to the Pentateuch

In popular Christian thought, the Pentateuch has been wrongly relegated into the depths of the pre-deluvian antiquity, in part because it is widely perceived to be in sole possession of the Jewish faith and not so much the Christian, and also because it is seen, perhaps even subconsciously, as belonging to ancient history. Without getting into the theological welter of the relationship between history and the Bible, there is common ground when we as Christians state that the Pentateuch is not so much about the past, but the present. As Prof. Davie Napier wrote,

All of which is to say at the very outset of our study of Exodus that through all the centuries of the life of Israel, the people of the Old Covenant (Old Testament), and equally of the life of the Church (the New Israel, the people of the New Covenant), the events and episodes told in the Book of Exodus have been read and reread, told and retold, not so much for their "was-ness" as for their "is-ness." The ultimate goal of our study of Exodus is the deeper understanding of and commitment to our faith in him whose love daily brings us again out of Egypt, out of bondage, out of all our besetting slaveries into the land of forgiveness, renewal, redemption, and love.⁴

³ The call of Christ, to die so that we might live, is directly against the practical aspects, which might sometimes translate into “convenient” aspects, that is prevalent in the Manna mindset. If they do coincide, it ought to be coincidence, and not the goal of reading the Bible in the first place.

⁴ Napier, The Book of Exodus, <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=2297&C=2225>.

In this way, the Old Testament speaks to us about the works of God even from thousands of years ago and is still relevant to us now. It is not simply history, because history confines the text to a historical era. Because it is the Word of God, it is relevant in the present.

The following section is a bit more academic in nature. It will present an overview of academic thought in the origins and development of the Pentateuch. It is meant only to be a very brief overview from a critical academic perspective, since it is good for Christians to know the “other” side of the debate as well. Undoubtedly, a few Christians may find the following section problematic, but simply closing your eyes does not mean that it’s not there, and we as Christians ought to be bold in confronting these issues not running from them.

What is the Pentateuch?

The *Pentateuch* refers to the first five books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It is a collection of intimately woven stories and laws which deals with the faithfulness of God in fulfilling his promises to Man. As a story, it covers the great primeval history of the Old Testament, from the Creation story, to the reception of the Torah from YHWH on Sinai, up until the very cusp of the Canaanite conquest. As a legal document, it carefully outlines the rules and outlines necessary for holiness and purity, with laws ranging from social order, justice and mercy, to priestly activity, to how a king should act.

It is, to most people of modern sensibilities, not a book that is easily transformed into a PG story, *via* Veggie Tales (as great as that production is). The Pentateuch begins with the story of creation – a beautiful garden in Eden in perfect harmony with man, woman, beast, earth, and God. Then, the Fall. By “the Fall”, in order to capture its immense gravity, instead of thinking of a sluggish descent, it is more appropriate to compare it to the total collapsing of all creation, the

great tragedy of losing what was once perfect and finding only broken cacophony and incongruity. It results in the immediate dissolution of a perfect bond that had existed between Man and God, a bond that is reattached only through covenants initiated by God because of his *hesed* – great faithfulness. Because of this broken relationship, throughout the Pentateuch, and indeed throughout the entire Old Testament, one can detect a palpable disappointment, both in man from God’s side (the examples are too many to count) and in God from man’s side (Job, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, the perpetual grumblings of the Israelites in the desert). This disappointment is one that is ultimately reversed into joy as Christ comes to fulfill the law and to make God manifest in Himself and His body, the church, *us*, through His incarnation and the outpouring of His Spirit.

This is not to say that the Pentateuch is a *wholly* transcendent work: it is also indeed a work of human creativity, and is a genetic descendent of Ancient Near Eastern thought. But, there is a social and theological revolution that occurs in this text. In this book, the God YHWH does not side with the powerful, though he is powerful; he does not side with the rich, but he demands the welfare of the aliens, the orphans, the widows, and the oppressed. Over his own enjoyment, he prefers justice and mercy to be wrought throughout the land.⁵ Over his own perceived gain, he prefers the shame of being associated with a “stiff-necked people” steeped in its own idolatries; and not only that, he goes at great lengths to call them back into his fold, though he himself had been wronged. This eventually culminated in the death of his own Son, whom he ransoms in order to regain his people who had spurned him for powerless idols.

⁵ Isaiah 1:11, 14, 16, 17: What need have I for your sacrifices? ... Your new moons and fixed seasons fill me with loathing... though you pray at great length, I will not listen. Your hands are stained with crime – wash yourself clean; put your evil doings away from my sight, cease to do evil, learn to do good. Devote yourself to justice, aid the wronged, uphold the rights of the orphans, defend the cause of the widow!

Who is its author? How did it come to be?

Traditionally, before the modern era, the Pentateuch has been thought to have been written under the dictation or authorship of Moses, thanks to passages like Exodus 34:27: *And the Lord said to Moses, Write down these commandments, for in accordance with these commandments I will make a covenant with you and with Israel.* However, in modern times, Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch has been preserved largely in conservative Jewish and Christian circles. This is due to the rise of Biblical criticism, which began in earnest during the turn of the 20th century.

Biblical scholars who study the compilation of the Pentateuch (Biblical critics) refer to the vocabulary and thoughts of Julius Wellhausen who popularized higher criticism into the mainstream American consciousness. Wellhausen proposed that there were in fact four different “documents,” or texts, which were cut and spliced together to form the whole Pentateuch. These documents, commonly referred to as the J (Jahwist), E (Elohist), D (Deuteronomist), P (Priestly), and sometimes with R (Redactor), were the separate texts that eventually formed the Pentateuch. Though there have been significant changes to this theory, with a sizeable (and growing) minority even rejecting it outright, in favor of a supplementary view (that is, there were kernels of the stories that were added upon more and more, eventually being strung together as a larger narrative), or a fragmentary theory (that the pericopes are fragments from other stories that were strung together), most scholars continue to use this vocabulary of JEDP. However, modern scholarship has gone far past the classical Documentary Hypothesis.⁶ All such studies, however,

⁶ http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_pentateuch_wenham.html

presume that the text itself does not have a “method-to-the-madness.” Perceived incongruities, redundancies, and contradictions are interpreted as cues for figuring out the sources.⁷

In the past few decades, however, thanks to literary critics like Robert Alter,⁸ instead of surgically dissecting the text with a scalpel, the astounding depth of the Pentateuch’s literary unity is now stressed. No longer does the “form” of the Old Testament dictate once and for all what is “true,” but deeper levels of biblical intertextuality are found to be key to understanding (at least in academic circles). Broadly speaking, *intertextuality* is the way the Bible itself makes either explicit or implicit references to other Biblical passages, a sort of an inner-dialogue of the Bible which shows the historical breadth involved in the formation of the how later biblical writers interpreted earlier biblical writers. What scholars had once casually dismissed as belonging to a Jahwistic or Elohist source, now literary theorists link it with other stories, studying the cadence of the language, the imagery invoked, and other devices to form a coherent whole. The literary unity of the Bible, which had once been too casually dismissed, is now being stressed as a key to understanding the Old Testament. With this trend in scholarship, it is now tentatively possible to begin re-entertaining the idea of authors or perhaps a single author, perhaps Moses himself.

Ultimately, our current understandings about the origins of the Pentateuch cannot simply rest on Sunday school answers. These questions require honest, intensive ways of understanding God’s Word. Instead of running from these problems, or even worse, harping the same tired defenses, it is necessary for Christians to engage in this vigorous conversation of our Bible’s

⁷ Before the modern, critical era, these perceived incongruities and paradoxes were not thought to be “mistakes” but in fact, the focus of much religious-scholarly attention. These were opportunities for exegetes to “work their magic” and try to devise a clever, but hidden, way of explaining away the problem. They would resort often to mystical readings, use other parts of scripture to interpret that part, and gematria (a way of discovering hidden meaning through mathematical correlations with the Hebrew script.)

⁸ Read Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.

origins because it does and should directly affect our lives. However, though it is easy to get bogged down in the question of human authorship in order to place a “Who-What-Where-When-How” on the OT texts, it is more the job of the everyday Christian to not care not only about the literary horizontal, flat interpretations, but to read the Old Testament from the perspective of the New Testament, which makes itself in present in the pneumatic working of the Holy Spirit.

Methods of Interpretation

This section will discuss the various ways that the Old Testament has been studied throughout history.⁹

Throughout the rich breadth of Christian history, there have been many different ways of interpreting Scripture, in particular, the Old Testament. In these interpretations, the early Church fathers held that there were two “senses” to reading scripture – one literal/literary and another hidden.¹⁰ Though different interpreters placed varying amount of weight on either the literal or the hidden interpretation, both were deemed necessary in order to understand Scripture. In this way of dual interpretation, the hidden truth has a complex relationship to the literal/literary truth. To many early church theologians, the literal/literary truth was overshadowed by the deeper, “hidden” truth, although not without cost to the “literary/literal” truth and at the risk of haphazard misinterpretations.

⁹ Here it might be opportune to explain what I mean by the following: literal and literary. The literal way of reading the text would be to take the text exactly for what it says. Obviously, there are degrees of this literal way of reading, as seen by the number of different “Christian” stances on the order of creation. The literary way is reading the text as literature, as would be taught in most universities. For most Christians, these are not necessarily divorced concepts. Both the text can be true literally (in various degrees) and literarily. In fact, the redemptive-historical method of understanding the text is more akin to “literary”, in that it envisages a mega (or meta) narrative from Creation to New Jerusalem, the story in which enter into as Christians.

¹⁰ Ramsey, 25.

Within the second sense, the fathers would often use *typological* and *allegorical* methods of interpretation.¹¹ The typological methods would seek to find the *types* of Christ in the Old Testament. For example, Jonah in the belly of the great fish for three days was considered a type of Christ as Christ was in the belly of the earth for three days. Also, Isaac about to be sacrificed by his father Abraham was considered a type of Christ as Jesus went on his steps to his crucifixion. In this sense, the Old Testament figures prefigured or correlated to the person and narrative of Christ, and the OT figures and events were, in Paul's words, "a shadow of things that were to come, but the reality is Christ."¹² Likewise, many Christians believe that passing through the waters of the Red Sea was a type of baptism, and Manna from heaven was a type of Eucharist as well.¹³ One mark of this typological method is that it respects in some sense the history presented in the OT; it did not ignore the historical context of the type but asserted that there was more than what met the eye. Another mark is that the types found in the OT are legitimated through their reference in the OT, to safeguard it from devolving into mere allegory.

The allegorical method is a bit like the typological, but in this method, there is less concern for the historicity of the types. In this method, two figures or events that are hitherto unconnected are done so in order to expound a greater truth. The justification for this approach come from an understanding of the unity of the Scripture and also that Scripture is used to interpret Scripture as well. However, because the allegorical method seems to implicitly refuse

¹¹ This is a very helpful definition of types: "Types are Old Testament pointers which direct one to the New Testament concrete realities. God preordained certain persons, events, and institutions in the Old Testament to prefigure corresponding persons, events, and institutions in the New. These types point to and anticipate their matching historical New Testament antitypes. The antitype is no mere repetition of the type, but is always greater than its prefiguration. This type-antitype relationship can be compared to an object reflected in a mirror. The type is the mirror image or picture of the New Testament reality. Typological exegesis then is based on the conviction that God the Father determined that certain persons and events in the history of Israel would prefigure what He would accomplish in the fullness of time in the person of His only begotten Son."

<http://www.blts.edu/essays/schmelingGR/Typological%20Interpretation%20of%20Old%20Testament.pdf>.

¹² Colossians 2:17.

¹³ Ramsey, 30.

or otherwise ignores the nature of the text in which the conclusions are being drawn, it is extremely susceptible to wild interpretations, effectively turning all of Scripture into a medium to say just whatever one wants to say.

The gospel-centric method is a bit more nuanced way of looking at the entire Old Testament. In all things, this method tries to discern both the presence of Christ in the OT, or in the interaction between the reader and the OT, and also in the orientation of the OT in its pointing to Christ. As you can imagine, this method can take shape through various shapes and forms, sometimes adhering very closely to the typological method of interpretation. However, it is not a method of stating resolutely that Christ is found in the OT, and thus fall into a sort of “Where’s Jesus?” in the OT; but rather, it takes into account more carefully the story of redemption, and is thus more akin to a literary (narrative) understanding rather than the strictly allegorical or typological.

For example, when reading a book, there is usually an introduction, complications, a climax, and resolution. But, just because you know the resolution of the story, it does not mean that you need to go back into the complications and read into it that resolution. Rather, the complications are the building blocks that lead up to the resolution of the text; the resolution resolves the complications, and does not necessarily re-enter it. This is analogous to understand the redemptive-history of the Bible in a Christocentric way. Just because you know that Jesus died, resurrected, and will come again, does not mean that “Jesus” must be present in every complication or iota of the OT. Indeed, all Scripture points to Christ, but to say that Christ is in every verse of the OT can only be done through wild imaginative leaps. In fact, trying to read too much into it may lead to problematic eisegesis.

Though it is not necessary to read Jesus into every single thing of the OT, one can, however, see the way that the OT leads towards Jesus and in that way rethink all of the OT. A good analysis might be the ending to *The Sixth Sense*. In the movie, a psychiatrist named Dr. Crowe is visited by a young Cole Sear who is able to see ghosts. Dr. Crowe helps Cole in his quest to understand the ghosts, when in the last scene it is revealed that Dr. Crowe is himself a ghost. From that scene, it becomes immediately recognizable that all the strange things that occurred with Dr. Crowe make sense now that the key to understanding the movie is revealed. This is the same with the Scriptures, as the NT now becomes the key to understand the OT in a new light.

Through there are different methods of interpretation, it is also very important to keep in mind that the goal of scripture is to edify; Scripture is instrumental both for faith and for building up the Church.¹⁴ It is not simply Scripture for the sake of being Scripture. Therefore, it is the important that one considers the Augustinian standard, that is, that the interpretative lens is not based on thought or rationale, but *charity* and *love*. Scripture must be read with the love of both neighbor and the enemy in mind, and in a way that would edify and bless both. Augustine writes,

Whoever, therefore, thinks that he understands the divine Scriptures of any part of them so that it does not build the double love of God and of our neighbor does not understand it at all. Whoever finds a lesson there useful to the building of charity, even though he has not said what the author may be shown to have intended in that place, has not been deceived, nor is he lying in any way.¹⁵

In this way, it shows that interpreting Scripture must take into account the personal holiness of the reader him or herself. Augustine no doubt has in mind the words of Paul,

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I

¹⁴ 2 Timothy 3:16.

¹⁵ On Christian Doctrine, 30.

have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing.¹⁶

With that said, it is important to realize that in interpreting scripture, it is important to have in mind of the other person in interpreting, for it is not simply Scripture for the sake of being Scripture, but as an instrument of salvation and edification. In fact, interpreting Scripture falls under what Paul says “walking in the Spirit.”¹⁷ In the very fact that we live in the Spirit, we ought to be leaving our interpretation of the text in the Spirit as well.

However, the way this comes about is not through an intellectual systematization of the OT text, thereby reducing the power of or the functions of the Spirit. In this sense of spiritual reading, interpretation can be profoundly personal and resistant to normative statements to the broader community.¹⁸ Still, when all is said and done, it comes to the question of reading Scripture aided by prayer, which are intimately woven together.

The difference then lies in wondering what is artificial “it’s all in my head” and what is by the Spirit. There is no question that interpretation is profoundly subjective, but that does not mean that direct inspiration from the Spirit is not possible or even rare; One is and can often be struck by the grounded truthfulness of Scripture. It is a “hearing” that manifests itself in the consciousness, and as Abraham Kuyper writes of prayer,

Thirdly, the speaking of the Lord, especially of the *inward* word, is peculiarly the work of the Holy Spirit, which, as we have found before, appears most strikingly when God comes into closest contact with the creature. And the consciousness is the most intimate part of man’s being. Wherefore, as often as the Lord our God enters human consciousness to communicate His thoughts, clothed in human

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

¹⁷ Romans 8:4.

¹⁸ The resistance to normative statements is suspended in discussions of doctrine. For a discussion on this problem, read, Moltmann, Jurgen. *The Shape of Pneumatology*, 259.

thoughts and speech, the Scripture and the believer honor and adore therein the comforting operation of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

Further on, Kuyper notes that reading Scripture is not simply a passive reading of a text, but also a discipline, an exercise,

Consequently the working of Scripture embraces not only the *quicken*ing of faith, but also the *exercise* of faith. Therefore instead of being a dead-letter, unspiritual, mechanically opposing the spiritual life, it is the very fountain of living water, which, being opened, springs up to eternal life.²⁰

Ultimately, the purpose of reading Scripture is not to read it as any other book, but instead, trying to find in it what God is trying to speak through the Scriptures to you and to others. Kuyper goes on to say, “All our reading of the miracles in our Bible is unprofitable unless the Holy Spirit opens our eyes, and then we see them live, hear their testimony, experience their power, and glorify God for His mighty works.”²¹ Therefore, we should approach the text relying by faith that the Spirit will illuminate and reveal the will and the desire of God, and not read it as one reads another novel or magazine.

Reasons for Reading the Old Testament

Although many Mannaites said that they believe that the Old Testament was part of Holy Scripture, they had a hesitant understanding of it. Here, I will list a few reasons why it is absolutely necessary to have a solid understanding of the OT.

¹⁹ http://www.ccel.org/ccel/kuyper/holy_spirit.vi.iv.iv.html.

²⁰ http://www.ccel.org/ccel/kuyper/holy_spirit.vi.iv.i.html. Kuyper also writes later on the role of the Spirit, “For the Scripture had to be constructed so as to leave room for the exercise of *faith*. It was not intended to be approved by the critical judgment and accepted on this ground. This would eliminate faith. Faith takes hold directly with the fulness of our personality. To have faith in the Word, Scripture must not grasp us in our *critical thought*, but in the life of the *soul*. To believe in the Scripture is an act of life of which thou, O lifeless man! art not capable, except the Quickener, the Holy Ghost, enable thee. He that caused Holy Scripture to be written is the same that must teach thee to read it. Without Him this product of divine art can not affect thee.”
(http://www.ccel.org/ccel/kuyper/holy_spirit.vi.iv.v.html)

²¹ http://www.ccel.org/ccel/kuyper/holy_spirit.vi.iv.iii.html.

- 1) The story of Christ is the culmination of the long line of failed judges, kings, and prophets. You cannot appreciate the coming of Christ in its entirety if you do not understand the failures that preceded Him, and how Christ is superior to all those who came before him.
- 2) The New Testament presupposes a strong understanding of the Old Testament. Contrary to popular thinking, when the New Testament is quoting a passage from the Old Testament, it is often to actually recall the entire passage or context of that quoted-passage and not just the passage itself. What does this mean? It means whenever coming across a quoted OT passage in the NT, you should read the entire context of that passage in the OT, and not just the NT.
- 3) As a Christian, you belong to the redemptive history started by God since the beginning. That means that the story of Israel is your story through Christ, who has grafted you into the promise of Abraham. The story of the kingdom of David and its failures are the stories of your failures and successes; the continual faithfulness of God in the era of the wilderness, Judges, and Kings, mirrors God's faithfulness to you.
- 4) Often, themes and subjects that are found in the NT are to be understood on the context of the Old Testament. For example, the term "firstborn" does not simply mean the-child-born-first, as will be explained in the following section. Reading the Old Testament makes sure that we are not referencing the New Testament based on our own limited experiences and understanding, but on the foil of the entire redemptive-history of God.
- 5) The Old Testament is part of Holy Scripture. Abraham Kuyper writes, "Among the divine works of art produced by the Holy Spirit, the Sacred Scripture stands first."²² If the Bible is truly your authority, there must be some intellectual and spiritual investment in

²² http://www.ccel.org/ccel/kuyper/holy_spirit.vi.iv.i.html.

the Old Testament. You cannot have a Biblical understanding of the world without actually referring to the Old Testament.

C. Interpreting Key Moments in the OT

We have already stated that there might be a functionally-Marcionite position prevalent in some Manna students. To counter this, I hope to first show them the definite connections between the two testaments and show how they cannot stand alone. I also hope to present the Old Testament as the source of the ideas found in the NT and how it forces us to re-contextualize the NT, and how Jesus is the fulfillment, the reality, of what is found in the OT. I will not be able to go into the hairy questions of ethics and the presentation of God in the OT and NT, but hopefully, that will be the fruit of wrestling with the text on their own.

It is the hard reality that in order to understand the Bible, you have to study it. Contrary to popular belief, it is not an easy task to understand the Bible in its entirety. First, it must be acknowledged that this is Holy Scripture. Anyone who chooses to only superficially understand the Bible, that is, not engage it in serious thought, struggle with it theologically, and try to understand the Bible through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is neither respecting the Bible as holy nor reading it to help him or her grow spiritually. The Bible must be studied as an act of devotion, not in the sense of “I got what I need, therefore, I do not need to read the Bible anymore”, but in the spirit of, “What are the depths of the Bible and how it help me grow in Christ?” One author writes,

I am troubled by the word devotions. When people say they study the Bible devotionally, I’m not sure what that means. I’m afraid that too often it means, “I’m going to close my mind to what the passage might mean or what all the commentaries might help me to understand what it means. Instead, I’m just

going to let the words trickle down through my being and filter out something that will be useful for me.²³

Another writes,

The core of the gospel, the historical facts of what God did in Christ, is often down-graded today in favor of a more mystical emphasis on the private spiritual experience of the individual... Indeed, it is only the objective (redemptive-historical) facts are grasped that the subjective experience of the individual Christian can be understood.²⁴

I know that in my life these are fair criticisms. There is little active engagement with the text itself, and I skim the book as if there is no deeper reality or meaning in the text. However, to do so actually functionally relegates the Bible to nothing more important than a casual book, and not as the word of God. Therefore, it is important, particularly in the study of the Old Testament, to study the text devotionally, that is, to make the study of the text a part of a devotional exercise, and not simply read the text with a vague understanding of mystical subjectivity.

In the next sections, I will attempt to demonstrate what this might look like by discussing the creation and Law in the NT and how they can be understood in the Old Testament's terms. These thoughts are by no means definitive, nor are they to be prescriptive. They merely outline my own thinking about how one might approach the study of the Old Testament. However, these are a few questions that might help practically in reading the Old Testament both literarily and theologically.

- 1) Situate the OT text in the larger narrative. What comes before and after this story, and is it important? Who are the characters involved in this text and what are their motivations? Is there a moral to the story? What is the genre – is it a poem, narrative, short story, prophecy?

²³ Jae Adams. *Biblical Interpretation and Counseling*. Journal of Biblical Counseling. (Vol. 16, 3.) P.16.

²⁴ Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Goldsworthy Trilogy*, 21.

- 2) Does this passage sound similar to something you read in the New Testament? Go and find the New Testament passage and try to understand what it is saying. What does the NT passage say about the characters, the prophecies, or the motivations of the characters in the OT passage? Does it make the OT story more “real”?
- 3) Return to the OT text and try to reinterpret it in light of the New Testament passage that you had just read. Don’t try too hard to “fit” the NT passage into the OT, but do look for similar thoughts, imagery, motivations, etc.

Creation: Genesis 1

At the theological level, Genesis 1 really defines our understanding of God as the “Creator-God,” the God who fashioned all things *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). God as creator is a refrain in the Old Testament, in which the God is regularly called “the Creator of heaven and earth.”²⁵ In the OT, however, we are not given a real understanding of the process of creation other than it was *spoken* into being by God. There are hints of how God had worked in the OT, but the idea of God as creator *par excellence* is consistent throughout the Old Testament.

Consider God’s reply to Job,

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? – Surely, you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?²⁶

In this passage, God demonstrates His might and power, and indeed, His pre-eminence by the very fact that He existed before existence and had the power to create. More importantly, God is credited in the creation of mankind, and as later authors would reinterpret it, gives to man

²⁵ Genesis 14:19, 22.

²⁶ Job 38:4-7.

his own breath to give him life. Not only that, God fashions mankind in his very own image, which is later reinterpreted as Man's reasoning faculty.²⁷

But why is this so important in our understanding of God? To our modern minds, the understanding of God as a creator-God is a matter of course and does not come to any surprise. It is an old truth and not something new and powerful. However, in the Ancient Near Eastern context, God as the creator-God was a revolution. In other ANE myths, the gods were never presented as having the awesome power of "creation through *ex nihilo*." One of the popular stories recorded in the Enuma Elish, for instance, talks about the supreme god Marduk creating the material world from the carcasses of slain gods, and mankind from the blood of his slain enemy. YHWH on the other hand, retains the right and the power of creation through his very being and speech. The power and the unity of God presented in the OT is what some scholars term the "monotheizing tendency" in Genesis 1, whereas before there were multiple gods doing multiple things and deferring to Marduk, in Genesis 1:1, God speaks from his own, takes counsel with himself, and speaks creation into being without any pre-existing material. YHWH is clearly above all the other gods presented prior.

While in the OT, the presentation of God as the supreme creator God is presented in a new light, especially since the pre-eminence of Christ is stressed above all, particularly in John 1:1 and Colossians 1:15.

The Book of John and Creation

In John 1:1, the Christian is given a fuller understanding of the processes of creation. John writes,

²⁷ Augustine, and his role of reason as the spirit of God.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and darkness has not overcome it.”²⁸

Here, John is obviously recalling the words of Genesis 1 and recasting it in light of what he knows to be true; that Christ is divine and that through Him all things were made. In this new working of Genesis 1, John remembers that God *spoke* creation into being, and He believes that this Word was with God and was intimately connected to Him with the beginning. (You can see how this kind of thinking eventually would lead to Trinitarian thought; Indeed, John was used much more than any other gospel in order to provided Scriptural evidence for the Trinity.) This Word is essentially both “with” God and “is God”, and it is this Word that is made flesh in the Jesus Christ. Here, God in the OT is being shown to be actually at least two persons, that is, both Word and God, but also, John makes clear that “All things were made through him (the Word).”²⁹ All things were made through the work of Christ.

Here, it might do well to recall the words of Paul, who said that the Old Testament laws and festivals presented a shadow of things to come, and not their reality.³⁰ We see, in John 1 and as will be shown in Colossians and Revelations, a fuller understanding of the OT’s account of creation by means of a certain Christology: that Christ is indeed divine, the “Word made flesh”, and God Himself. Does this mean that the OT is irrelevant? To recall Paul’s own emphatic words, by no means! The OT sets the very foundational thought, that is, that God is the creator-God, and the NT elaborates more on the process of creation, through the Word, and also the pre-eminence of God in all things, as will be shown in Colossians 1.

²⁸ John 1:1-5.

²⁹ This is why we say that Jesus was “begotten and not made,” since Jesus as the Word had existed eternally before he was “incarnated” into the world. He was not “made” at the moment of His birth, but he “entered” into it.

³⁰ Colossians 2:16-18.

Colossians: Christ as Firstborn and Beginning

In Colossians, Christ is presented as the being who is pre-eminent before all things, similar to what we had when God answers Job. Paul writes,

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him, all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in Him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.³¹

So what does all this mean in light of what we know about Genesis 1? Like John 1, it presents a fuller understanding of creation, but instead of the person of God the Son – who is the Word – there is here instead a particular stress on the status of Christ; He is the “firstborn”, the “beginning”, the “head”, the “fullness of God”. However, these terms, particularly the “firstborn” and the “beginning” have a great history behind it. To a first century Jew, the words “firstborn” and the “beginning” would mean differently from the way that we understand it.

To the Jew at the time of Jesus, the term firstborn, (*bechor*) carried with it different connotations than our own harmless connotations. In fact, the *bechor* in the OT is always getting hoodwinked or passed over for his rightful inheritance. Sometime, the *bechor* suffers even a worse fate than anyone else! Consider the following characters in the OT: Ishmael and Isaac; Ephraim and Manessah; Esau and Jacob; Leah and Rachel. In Ishmael and Isaac’s story (Genesis 16, 21), Ishmael is born of the slave Hagar as the firstborn. However, due to Sarai’s influence, Ishmael is kicked out of the family to make room for Isaac, the second-born. Also, consider the

³¹ Colossians 1:15-20.

story of Esau and Jacob (Genesis 27). Jacob, at the prodding of his mother, completely deceives his father and his brother into receiving the blessing that is reserved only for the firstborn, Esau. Again, in Ephraim and Manessah's story (Genesis 48), Israel blesses not the *bechor*, but the second-born in what seems to be an arbitrary move. Joseph too is a bit disturbed by this, but, perhaps realizing that his own situation as the youngest and the most blessed from his brothers, eventually acquiesces. Also consider Leah and Rachel (Genesis 29), Leah the firstborn is the one who remains unloved by Jacob, though she has much more right to be since she bears more of his children, and it is Rachel who is loved instead, the second-born. Finally, if understood typologically, God sends out his destroyer to kill all the firstborn in Egypt, from the least to Pharaoh's own heir. This is understood as also divine justice for Pharaoh's command to kill all the firstborn of the Hebrew males.³² In these examples, we can clearly see the strong OT overtones that inform us of the way that the term "firstborn" might have been understood.³³

Considering all these examples of the idea of the "firstborn" in the OT, it is clear that the term "firstborn" could mean more than simply a designated title; it carries with it an ominous connotation of undeserved punishment.³⁴ In this way, Christ as the firstborn fulfills and magnifies this theme; Christ is not only the firstborn of a woman, but the *firstborn* of all *creation*, that is, he was even in the *beginning*, and as such, he was the one who felt the ultimate undeserved punishment.

Indeed, what could Paul have meant when he said that Jesus was "the beginning?" Could this mean simply that He was the beginning of all things? However, the very word that Jesus was "the Beginning" is being linked to Genesis 1, "In the beginning, God created heaven and earth."

³² Exodus 1:22.

³³ Also, look at Mark 2:7, which uses Psalms, "I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, You are my Son; today I have begotten you." (Ps. 2:7)

³⁴ For deeper reading into this idea, read: Jon Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*.

In ancient rabbinic and Christian discourse, the word “the beginning” had a lot of power. For the Jews, some had interpreted the “beginning” to be “wisdom” since in Proverbs 8:21-22, it reads, “The Lord created me (Wisdom) in the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.” Exegetes would then equate “beginning” with “wisdom”, so much so that in some later Jewish works, it reads in Genesis 1:1, “In *Wisdom*, God created the heavens and the earth.” In this context, then what does it mean that Jesus is “the beginning?” The author of Colossians could have been asserting that in here that Christ was, like Wisdom or IS wisdom, with God since the beginning. It is not simply a matter-of-fact statement, like, “He is the beginning”, but it can be considered a declaration that Jesus was over Wisdom, or is Wisdom, and that, like John, He was the beginning of all things so that He would be first in all things.

Creation and its Transformation in Revelations 22

In Revelations 22:1-5, the story of Eden is reformulated away from a garden but in a city. The imagery found in the Genesis 2-4 is reformulated into a clearer understanding of the coming New Jerusalem.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city, also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no

more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.³⁵

Although at one level, it seems that his story only takes into account the tree of life and is reformulating it instead, this passage is full of suggestive imagery from the Genesis 1 account of creation.

- 1) The tree of life is the tree which was not eaten or the one which was forbidden to be eaten, and would give eternal life to the person. In the New Jerusalem, this tree is available to all who live inside.
- 2) The fruit will be given in monthly increments. This is tied directly to the role of the lights in Genesis 1:14-17, which were used to measure out the time in an orderly way, in “seasons, and for days, and for years.”
- 3) “No longer will anything accursed” alludes to the curse that God places on mankind and the world in response to man’s disobedience. There is no longer anything accursed because God Himself, the giver of all blessings, is now sitting on the throne in the city.
- 4) The name of God will be written on their foreheads. In comparison to the Genesis story, in which only the breath of God is put into man, in this scene, the very name of God is written on the person’s forehead, perhaps as a sign of allegiance to God. This placing of God’s name on the being of the person is something that is a sign of power over all things, and it is showing that God will be making us co-rulers with Christ over all things. Consider Philippians 2:9, “Therefore God has highly exalted him *and bestowed on him the name that is above every name*, so that at the name of Jesus every name should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

³⁵ Revelations 22:1-5.

5) There is no more separation between darkness and light, as alluded to in Genesis, nor is there a need for the greater light or a lesser light, since God Himself will be their light.

We have seen in the previous section the deep intimacy between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and how the NT builds upon the OT and gives it a fuller meaning. It helps us read the NT in a much fuller manner, and not simply in reference to our own experiences. Therefore, when we read “firstborn” we do not simply think that it is the son-that-was-born-first, but rather has a different, almost ominous notion to it, as the OT shows. Also, John gives us a fuller understanding of God in the process of creation and the role of Christ in that process, while Revelation presents the transformation of a garden into the New Jerusalem.

Questions for Reflection:

But how does this affect our spiritual lives? Is this simply a database for head-knowledge, something nice to know, but not necessary? No, because for a serious student of the Holy Scriptures, it is necessary to study the OT text *devotionally* as well. It is not possible to separate categorically the act of studying the OT, understanding the OT, and being able to draw upon it as a spiritual resource. These are a few questions for you to think about:

1) What does it mean that you are created in the image of God, that you became alive through the Spirit of God, and that ultimately, the *very* name of God will be on you? How is this an occasion for joy and a deeper understanding of your unity with Christ? What could it mean about the relationships between you and another Christian?

2) How does the way of conceiving Christ as the firstborn and as the beginning affect your understanding of Christ? How does it add or detract from the tension in the gospels as presented in the New Testament?

3) In Revelation, John envisions a new world, a new creation, and a New Jerusalem. How does the re-appropriation of Eden imagery affect your understanding of God as renewing all things?

4) How does the Creation that is sustained and formed through the Word affect your understanding of this world? What issues can this address?

Promise to Abraham: Genesis 12; Romans 4; Galatians 3

The patriarch Abraham is called nowadays as the common patriarch for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. He is the first to whom God's promise is given and it is through him that the promise of Jesus Christ as the Messiah is alluded to. Abraham, though not without his own faults, was singularly called by God to be the vessel for his promise, and it was through his line that the blessing of the whole world, Jesus Christ, would come to fruition. In Genesis 12, God promises Abraham the following,

Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.³⁶

This is the story which begins the long story that culminates in the coming of Jesus Christ. As such, it occupies a pivotal position as introducing the narrative of redemption from the

³⁶ Genesis 12:1-3.

Old Testament to the New. Here, God is promising not a blessing that remains only with the Jews, but to all the families of the world.

However, who is Abraham that he should be given such a glorious promise? Why is he singled out of all the people of the earth to be the promised line? Read Genesis 11 and the Tower of Babel. How does this story fit into the story of Abraham? The Old Testament is silent on this matter, but it is in this silence that Paul speaks, telling us that it was not on the merit of Abraham but of his faith in God which was counted to him as righteousness.

Read Romans 4, Galatians 3, Hebrews 6: 13-20.

In this Romans 4, Paul is drawing heavily on the story of Abraham to show that it is faith and not works of the law which would justify someone in the eyes of God. It is a theological interpretation of the process of salvation. In so doing, Paul is stressing that salvation from faith is not a remnant of the Old Testament, but is the vehicle for salvation in both the Old Testament and the New. *The way Abraham was justified is the same that we as Christians are justified; there is no difference.* Nowhere is this link between the OT and NT more concretely emphasized than Hebrews 11:17-40, in which the author takes pains to point out that all of the prophets and figures who preceded Jesus, starting from Abraham, had been redeemed through faith. That is to say the entirety of the gospel, *that justification before God is something that is never earned but freely given, had been manifested in the Old Testament, since the time of Abraham.*

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith... and if you Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heir according to promise.³⁷

³⁷ Galatians 3:7-9, 29.

He later states even more explicitly, ‘For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir to the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.’³⁸ In fact, throughout the entire epistle to the Romans, Paul lays out the means of salvation as something by faith and not by deeds of the law. Even more astonishingly, what Paul calls the “mystery of the gospel” is that this blessing is extended to Gentiles, or non-Jews, so that truly all nations of the earth will be blessed through the promise of Abraham.

This is the heart of the gospel, the unifying message in both the Old and New Testaments. According to Paul, salvation was never meant to be earned through the carrying out of the law, but rather through faith which is counted as righteousness.

Questions for Reflection:

- 1) Read Hebrews 11: How does understanding that justification by faith alone is present in both the Old Testament and the New color our way of understanding the Old Testament as a whole? How does it add to the unity of Scripture?
- 2) How does salvation by faith alone help us in understanding community and diversity?
- 3) Read Deuteronomy 9: God constantly calls the Israelites a “stiff-necked” people. How does this passage give light to the understanding of justification by faith?
- 4) Read through Judges: How does God react to Israel’s idolatry? What causes Israel to stray almost constantly? How does the finished work of Jesus Christ put this in perspective?

³⁸ Romans 4:13-15.

C. Reading Exodus

The book of Exodus recounts the working of God in saving Israel from their bondage to Egypt. It is a commonly recounted tale and is considered the greatest saving work of God in the Old Testament since it becomes the grounds for Israel becoming nation under YHWH. Moreover, it is the story that is typologically rich and the way that it points to Christ is particularly easy to see. Indeed, this is why Christians still call Jesus the paschal lamb, which comes from the Hebrew word *pesah*, meaning Passover. This refers to the sheep that was slaughtered so that the Destroyer will bypass the Israelites so that they might not die but live.

Does that mean that typology is the only way to look at Exodus story? Not always; Because the work of redemption of Christ is a continuing process, of restoring ourselves to God through sanctification and also of restoring all things by God, we can see from our own experience the truth of this story. Our own story of sin, redemption and the continuing witness of God in our own lives resonates with the story of bondage to Pharaoh and later emancipation.

Typological Reading in Exodus

The following is a list of some of the more prominent types present in the story of Moses and the exodus of Israel from Egypt, the land of bondage, to the wilderness.

- 1) The blood on the doorposts of the lamb is a type of Christ's blood. The lamb that was slaughtered had to be one without blemish.³⁹ It is not as if the blood itself had some type of apotropaic power here to repel the Destroyer from entering into the Israelite homes; rather, the lamb acts as the substitute for the firstborn of the Israelites. The wages for death must be met, and while in the OT, they were met with ineffective blood offerings of

³⁹ Exodus 12:5.

animals, in Christ, the fullness and the reality of the final and perfect sacrifice is installed.⁴⁰

- 2) The crossing of the Red Sea is a type of baptism, from which Israel, and the spiritual Church of Christ, walks over from death and bondage to sin and salvation on the other. However, because we are currently waiting for the second coming of Jesus, typologically, we are still in the wilderness, attacked from every side, yet looking forward to the Sabbath rest that is promised in the New Jerusalem.⁴¹
- 3) The 40 years of wandering in the wilderness after crossing the Red Sea is a type of the 40 days in the wilderness that Jesus went right after his baptism.⁴²
- 4) Moses is given the law on Mount Sinai, while Jesus gives the new laws on Mount of Beatitudes take place. It should be noted that the author of Matthew is consciously modeling Jesus after the figure of Moses, although, he does so to show that Jesus is superior to Him. This is shown by the patterning of the words, “You have heard that it was said.... But I say to you...”⁴³

Obviously, this is an abbreviated portion of the various ideas that are found in the NT that directly allude to or are founded on OT ideas. But to the discerning reader of both Testaments, the fullness of the story of Moses and of Jesus gains a greater clarity and depth.⁴⁴

Questions for Reflection:

⁴⁰ Revelation 5:6; 1 Peter 1:19.

⁴¹ Hebrews 3:7 - 4:13.

⁴² Matthew 4:1-11; Numbers 14:34.

⁴³ Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 38, 43.

⁴⁴ There are plenty of good references for typological studies online. Read

http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/exodus_nixon.pdf,

<http://www.blts.edu/essays/schmelingGR/Typological%20Interpretation%20of%20Old%20Testament.pdf>,

<http://www.leithart.com/pdf/jesus-as-israel-the-typological-structure-of-matthew-s-gospel.pdf>.

1. In the book of Matthew and Hebrews 3, Jesus is portrayed as the greater Moses. Read through Exodus 1-15, to familiarize yourself with the emancipation of the Israelites from Egyptian rule. Also, in Galatians 5:1, it says, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.” Where do you see Christ setting you or others free today?

2. The author of Hebrews is emphatic in saying that though Jesus is better than all the figures and covenants that preceded him, He is still linked to them as their fulfillment. Also, since your faith is linked directly to the faith of the Israelites by the breaking of the wall of hostility, what does it mean that our faith is similar but “superior” to that of the Israelites?

Conclusion

Hopefully, I have been able to stress the importance of knowing the Old Testament, since our knowledge of the New depends on it. In showing the connection between the Old and the New, I realize that there is a significant problem in this brief overview: the ethical system in which many Mannaites had taken umbrage in which YHWH commands genocide and cruel compared to the New Testament God of love. Though I have identified this as really a question of the relationship between the Old and New, I have not been able to address this problem here. Still, I hope that I have at least begun to start taking down one brick in that wall of hostility that seems to separate the Old and the New for many Mannaites. Even if the paradox of a Just and Merciful God cannot be reconciled, it is clear that God had emptied his eternal wrath on His Son, therefore showing Himself to be both Just and Merciful. Hopefully, as students really read the

both testaments with an attitude not simply of self-benefit but from a desire to know the Word of God regardless, they will start internalizing the very real similarities found in the New and Old.⁴⁵

For instance, hopefully, as shown in this section, even when we understand God of Love, we must not use ourselves as the sole reference point of understanding what “love” is, nor should we rely only on Greek definitions, but rather, we need to look back at the Old Testament to see how “love” is being defined. Equally on the defensive, we cannot impose on the Testaments our own modern ethical system, as easy as that is to do. To do so would be to deny the historicity of these texts and solely categorize them as a “transcendent work” without any transmission through humans. It is, actually, the very fact that God uses ancient people in their cultural time-period that ought to be our focus, not simply casting God into modern ethical contraptions. Rather, so we do not fall into this trap, we should be looking for ways to constantly re-contextualize our lives into the grand redemptive-history as laid out in Scripture: First, from the OT, then the appropriation of the OT in the NT, and finally, where we are, in our privileged perspective of having both Testaments accessible to us as the medium of God.

⁴⁵ I encourage students to read the less popular works in the New Testament and I dare them to find a way that the God of the NT is not the same as the God of the OT in His divine wrath. In a culture in which all talk of hell-fire has been discarded for the sake of our brother (perhaps this is a good thing), we need to realize that the early Christians were largely apocalyptic. There was a battle between good and evil, of holiness and sin, of life and death, and God is an active warrior (Exod. 15:3) who is waging war against the forces of Satan. With that said, perhaps students should really read and try to understand books like 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation. Even in the epistles, when Paul writes about those who will be left out of the Kingdom of God, is that not showing the just God? We cannot and we must not think that our God is impotent or “nice.” Perhaps the best way to put this is in the words of Lucy and Mr. Beaver in the Chronicles of Narnia. Lucy asks, “Is He (Asland) safe?” Mr. Beaver replies, “Safe? ... Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the king, I tell you.”

APPENDIX A

Manna Internship Project: Questionnaire

- 1) How have you grown up understanding the Old Testament? Do you feel like you have a strong basis for understanding the OT? Why or Why not?

- 2) Which Testament do you think you know better?
 - a. Why do you think this is so?

- 3) Which books, if any, in the OT have been important to your intellectual, theological, or spiritual development? How so?

- 4) What type of questions do you have about the OT? Circle all that apply and elaborate!
 - a. Historical Questions
 - b. Theological Issues
 - c. New Testament – Old Testament relationship
 - d. Moral Issues
 - e. Other

- 5) Do you feel a need to get to know the OT better? Why or why not?

EXTRA:

Please put the following in order:

Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Joshua, Noah, Adam, Isaac, Giving of the Torah.

Please translate Genesis 22 (Abraham commanded by God to sacrifice Isaac on Mt. Moriah) in a “Christian” way: