

God Created and All Was Good (Part 2)

Written on: October 31, 2021

Article by: Thayer Salisbury

The Good Wangai – A Modern Parable

(Editor's note: This is part 2 of selections from chapter 1 of Thayer's newest book *God's Mission Begins, Volume 1: Genesis and Exodus*. Thayer is working in Eswatini, Africa, writing a series of books specifically for use in Bible colleges across Africa in language appropriately accessible and applicable in the African context. As part of the teaching content, Thayer writes "a number of narratives inserted in the text to help the reader see how the biblical teaching applies in Africa today." Thayer's book is available for purchase online in paperback and Kindle format at very modest cost. May we all pray God will use Thayer's work to equip and empower churches in Africa in their important mission and ministry work with Him.)

It was a hot and windy day. It seemed that it was always hot and windy. There had not been any rain for a long time. Joseph was beginning to fear that his crop would be a failure as it had been last year, and the year before. Another year without a good crop would finish things for Joseph and his family. He could not understand why this was happening to him. Everyone was having difficulty because of the drought. But most of the people did not have it as bad as Joseph. Could it be that someone was using Juju against him? That must be the problem! Joseph's crop was failing because of someone. He must find out who.

Ofon lived near Joseph. Ofon was also concerned about the rains. He had worked very hard on his farm. Ofon did not just depend on hard work. He also made all the right sacrifices. He could not understand why the rains were being withheld again. Maybe it was a mistake to come to this place. It had long been a disputed area between the tribes. Maybe the Wangai were right. Maybe this was their land. Maybe Ofon's ancestors had no power to help him in this place. Maybe the rain god of his tribe, the Izupto, had no power here.

As Ofon thought on this he realised that the ancestors could not be the whole problem. Many of the Wangai were having trouble also. In fact, most of them were having more trouble than he. Evidently the

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ancestors and gods of the Wangai could not control the rain in this area either. So, this land must belong to the Izupto. Maybe the ancestors were angry because there were so many Wangai in the area. Maybe that was why the rains did not come.

Whatever caused the lack of rain, Ofon was glad that he had not cut down all the trees when he cleared the land. He had intended to do so, but he became too busy and did not cut down some of the bigger ones. He thought that this must have pleased the ancestors or the god of the earth, for he saw that the crops near the trees seemed to be doing better. Maybe there was a spirit in the trees that was helping him. Maybe he should thank the spirit in the trees for the little crop he was having.

Ofon was thinking about this when he heard a noise. Many people were coming toward his farm. Most were young men. Some seemed to be drunk. They were shouting and waving weapons. Most of them had sticks or clubs. A few had grass knives. Some of them were trying to sing a Wangai war song, but mostly they just seemed to be in confusion. Ofon could not understand why they would be coming to see him. He saw his neighbour, Joseph, at the front of the crowd. Ofon started to greet Joseph, but he noticed that Joseph looked angry.

When the young men came near Ofon's hut they began to destroy his property. They kicked over his cooking pot, smashed his radio, and one of them tried to set fire to his hut. Ofon tried to stop them but there were too many. Ofon struggled with them and asked them why they were treating him like this. They answered with curses and blows. Many of them were beating him now. Ofon fell to the ground. He was sure that he would die. He saw Joseph lift a club to hit him, but suddenly everyone stopped.

An old Wangai man stepped over Ofon where he was lying on the ground. The old man looked right at Joseph and demanded to know the reason for this violence. Ofon remembered who this old man was. He was Onfang. Two years ago, when the village chose a new chief some people thought that Onfang should be chief. Everyone trusted Onfang's judgment. They all knew that he was an honest man, but no one mentioned his name when the village met to choose the chief. Ofon wondered why. Later he had heard Joseph say that Onfang refused to offer sacrifices to the ancestors. They would not have a chief who did not respect the ancestors. Onfang refused to sacrifice because he was a Christian. "But we are all Christians," Joseph had said. "We are Christians and still sacrifice. Onfang should also."

Ofon knew that Joseph and Onfang attended the same church. He could not understand how two people could attend the same church and be so different.

Joseph told Onfang that they were driving Ofon from the village because he had brought a curse. Joseph had learned from an African doctor that the reason his crops were failing was that Ofon had cursed him. Joseph could not afford to counteract the curse, and he was angry that this worthless Izupto would cause him trouble. He wanted to drive him away.

All this talk made the young men angry. They wanted action, not words. One who had been drinking much shouted, "Out of the way old man or we will kill you too!" Onfang did not even turn his head. He did not speak loudly, but Ofon heard what he said to Joseph. Onfang said, "Joseph, if these men kill Ofon they will have to kill me too. And our blood will be on your head."

Joseph did not move at first. He did not reply. Joseph stood looking at Onfang. Then Joseph looked down at Ofon and said, "You better leave. You are not a Wangai. You do not belong here." Then Joseph turned and began to walk away. Others soon followed. Many continued to curse Ofon and to make threats. A few of the ones who were very drunk had to be led away by their friends.

When they were all gone Onfang knelt beside Ofon. Ofon sat up and looked around. His hut was burned. Most of his clothes and other properties destroyed. His crop was still there, but how would he be able to stay until time to harvest? He had no hut, and everyone was making threats.

Onfang seemed to know what Ofon was thinking. Onfang said, "You will stay at my house until your hut can be rebuilt. It is not far from my house to your farm. You will be able to look after it until the crop is ready."

Ofon had been surprised that a Wangai man had protected him from the mob. Now he was even more surprised. Onfang led Ofon home. Onfang told his wife to get Ofon something to eat. Then Onfang left. He went to talk with the village head. He reminded him of his duty to protect everyone in the village. Onfang also went to meet with the church leaders. He told the church elders of what had happened and of Joseph's part in the violence. Then Onfang returned home.

Ofon was beginning to recover from the shock. He wanted to ask Onfang why he was so willing to help him. Ofon had seen people being kind to a person from another tribe before, but he had never seen anyone risk their own life the way Onfang had risked his life today.

As it grew dark Ofon began to worry. Would the mob come again? Would Joseph put a curse on him? Would evil spirits trouble him in the night?

Onfang told Ofon to lie down and sleep in peace. "Tomorrow," Onfang said, "the church elders will send for Joseph. It will not be long until this matter will be put away. Joseph has not been a very faithful Christian for a long time. Now that he has done this, we will be able to talk to him and show him his wrong." Ofon was still afraid, but he was also very tired. Soon he was asleep.

The next day Joseph came to Onfang's house just as breakfast was finished. He said that the church elders had sent him to learn from Onfang what God's will was for him and why he was wrong to attack Ofon.

Onfang asked both Joseph and Ofon to sit down under a big tree. Onfang brought his chair and his Bible from the house and sat with them.

Onfang began by reading Deuteronomy 18:10–11. "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead." "You are wrong Joseph," Onfang said, "because you went to the African doctor to find the source of your problem. When a Christian needs to know why he is having trouble he should turn to God in prayer, and to God's people, his fellow Christians. A Christian must never go to doctors who call on the dead. The Bible forbids this because it may be Satan who speaks through these people. You turned to violence against Ofon because you took advice from the devil."

Then Onfang turned the pages in his Bible and read again from Exodus 23:9. "*Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt.*" "You were also wrong," Onfang said, "because you tried to oppress a man who was defenceless. Ofon was from another tribe, he was living as an alien among us, so you thought that you could mistreat him and no one would care. Well God cares, and so do I." Onfang began to show Joseph other passages that forbid us to mistreat strangers to our area. There were many of them. Leviticus 19:34 said, "*The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.*" Onfang also

read from Leviticus 23:22; Deuteronomy 10:17–19; Psalm 94:6; Jeremiah 7:6; and Zechariah 7:10. Onfang finished these readings with Luke 10:25–37, the story of the Good Samaritan.

Onfang looked at Joseph and asked, “Joseph, were you behaving as a Christian when you led an attack on Ofon?” Joseph did not even answer.

Onfang went on to read from Genesis 1:26 “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’” Onfang also read from Genesis 9:6. “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.” Onfang said, “Joseph, if you had caused Ofon to die you would have been killing not only Ofon but the image of God. Our ancestors killed the Izupto because they did not know that all people are made in the image of God. But you, Joseph, as a Christian, should have known this. What you did was very terrible.”

There was silence for a long time. Finally Joseph began to speak. “I know, he said, “that what I did was wrong. But I had to find out what was causing my crops to fail. My family is in big trouble. Our crops get smaller every year. But Ofon’s crop looks good compared to mine. I think he must be using something to make my crop fail while his continues to grow.”

Onfang did not speak. He looked very sad. So Ofon spoke instead.

“No Joseph,” Ofon said, “I have not done anything against you. My crops also are in trouble, all except those near the trees I did not cut down. I think that there must be a spirit in the trees that is pleased that I did not clear all the trees from my land. That must be why I have some crop. Maybe if you had some trees also your crops would do better.”

Now Onfang looked incredibly sad, almost angry. “Enough of this foolishness,” he said. “Joseph you should be leading Ofon to the Lord and instead you are causing him to worry about the spirits of trees instead of leading him to worship the God that made all the trees.”

“But I prayed to God and still my crops failed,” Joseph cried.

“Yes,” Onfang replied, “you prayed to God. You asked him to make your crops grow, but did you take care of the farm he gave you? You cut down all the trees. This allowed the sun and wind to dry out all the land you were supposed to take care of. You wanted more crop, more money, more food. You did not want to take care of the earth the Lord has made. Did you not hear what the verse I read about the image of God said? God made us in his image and he gave us a job to do. That job is not to rule over the earth just for ourselves; we are to care for it. Genesis 2:15 says that the first man was to “till and keep” the garden God gave him. You wanted to get all you could from the farm God gave you, but you did not want to take care of it. You abused the Lord’s earth. For a time you were not punished, but slowly the result of your sin is hurting you. Ofon is right that the trees help his farm, but he is wrong in thinking that it is a spirit in the trees that helps. It is not a spirit in the trees but the Spirit who created the trees that we should thank. God made the earth so that if we take care of it the earth will take care of us. But if we abuse the earth the Lord has provided it will fail to give us a crop. In his mercy this does not always happen right away, but if we abuse the Lord’s earth it will stop giving us food.”

“Why do you call it the Lord’s earth,” Joseph asked. “Why do you speak of the farm God gave me? I paid for that farm with my own money.”

“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for He founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters,” (Psalm 24:1). Onfang quoted. Then he asked, “Did you earn the money to buy the farm without breathing God’s air? Did you create

the water that nourishes your crops?” There was silence for a moment. Then Onfang continued, “We may buy and sell land, but ultimately it belongs to God, for he made it. Your problem, Joseph, is that you have forgotten about creation. Because you have forgotten creation you think the land is yours and that you may do as you please with it. And your treatment of Ofon also shows that you have forgotten that the same God who created the Wangai also created the Izupto. Until you learn that God is the creator of all the earth and all the people, you will not understand what it means to be a Christian.”

Matsapha, Eswatini



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The Case of Abraham

Written on: October 31, 2021

Article by: George Mansfield

A Study for the Here and Now

Abraham plays an important role in God's great eternal plan. He is one of the most important figures in the Bible. It is through his lineage that Jesus the Saviour of the world came (Matthew 1; Luke 3). No one can understand the Old and New Testaments without understanding Abraham, for he is a very important person in the history of God's work of redemption.

The Importance of Abraham to Us Today

Abraham plays an important role in Christianity. His name and life patterns are found in the Bible as an ancestor of Jesus. It is through his lineage that the Saviour of the world came (Matthew 1; Luke 3). The story of Abraham contains the first specific mention in the Bible of God's righteousness assigned to a man by faith and justification by his works which are both important parts of God's total means of salvation (Genesis 15:5–6 and James 2:20–24). It was Abraham whom God chose to be the father of many nations, simply because it was His will. God knew that Abraham would struggle with the call set before him but He also knew that his struggle would produce great faith, growth and maturity.

Are you ready to learn more about Abraham and how his life is an example for us in our walk with Jesus? Here are seven things from the Bible you may not know about Abraham:

- 1) God's righteousness is assigned to Abraham because of His faith before the law and the gospel (Genesis 15:5–6).
- 2) Abram (later Abraham) was 75 years old when God called him to leave his home.
- 3) Abraham grew up in Mesopotamia, which scholars identify as one of the oldest civilizations in the world.
- 4) Abraham was raised by idol-worshipping parents.
- 5) Abraham lied about Sarah being his sister (she was his half-sister).
- 6) Abraham was the tenth-generation descendant of Noah.
- 7) Abraham helped usher in a promised nation.

Abraham's name was originally "Abram," which means "the father is exalted." His name was changed to "Abraham," which means "father of a multitude," when God initiated His covenant with him (Genesis 17). God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many people. However, he and his wife Sarah were past the normal age of having children, therefore it would clearly be a miracle of God were they to have any. Nevertheless, Abraham trusted God and believed God could accomplish what He had promised.

From the Old Testament we find out lots of details about this good and valuable man. One of the most difficult requests by God to Abraham was that he take his son Isaac and offer him on the altar as a burnt sacrifice! Imagine this???

You may wish to read this account in Genesis 22. It is scary, thrilling and it demonstrates the will of God and the will power of His servant!

When God told Sarah and Abraham that they would have a child in their old age, they both laughed. Their laughter at God's plan showed their disbelief that He could do what He said He would do. The Bible tells us, "Then the LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did

Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is there anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.' Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, 'I did not laugh.' But he said, 'Yes, you did laugh.'"(Genesis 18: 13-15).



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We would like to think Abraham believed God at once without any doubt, but this is not the case. He finds God's word nearly impossible to believe. After all, Sarah is well past the age of childbearing. However, his response to the Lord does not to display total disbelief in the covenant promise. He falls on his face, symbolic of submission, trust and worship. Abraham shows us that real confidence in God doesn't rule out times when His incredible promises are hard for us to see.

When Abraham was called by God to leave Haran, he obediently did so. In Genesis 12, we read of Abraham (then called Abram) leaving Haran, where his father Terah had settled. This

account gives Abraham's age at this time as 75. Scripture also tells us that he was 86 when his first son Ishmael was born through Hagar, 99 when he was circumcised and 100 when his son Isaac was born through Sarah.

Abraham Became Impatient with God

God promised Abraham children (Genesis 15:5; 22:17). But when this didn't take place as quickly as Abraham thought it should, he became impatient with God and took matters into his own control (Genesis 16:1–6ff). Sarah was still childless, so she told Abraham to have relations with her handmaid, so that they might get a child from the union. A son was born from this union; his name was Ishmael. However, this was not God's plan. God's promise was for the offspring of Abraham and Sarah's union (Genesis 15:3–4). Isaac was the name of the son that came from the union of Abraham and Sarah. It would be through Isaac that the nations would be blessed.

When His Faith Was Tested He Proved His Faith with Obedience

Abraham and Sarah were very happy with their new son Isaac, however, God had a test for Abraham. God told him, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Genesis 22:2). This would have been a tremendous shock to any parent; to be blessed by a long-awaited child, only to have God tell you to sacrifice that child. The Bible does not say that Abraham hesitated for a moment. In fact, Genesis 22:8 indicates Abraham's strong faith that God might not take his son at all. Abraham believed that God would raise Isaac back to life if the sacrifice actually did take place (Hebrews 11:19).

Whether for God's sake or that of Abraham or Isaac or for our sake as an example, Abraham took his son up to a mountain, laid him down and prepared to kill him in obedience to God's command. However, God intervened by stopping Abraham from killing his son and by providing a sacrifice in the form of a ram caught in the nearby brush. While Abraham's faith had been tested, he proved his faith by his obedience to God.

Incredibly, about 2,000 years later God did offer his only Son for our sins in the shadow of Mount Moriah over which the Temple was built.

We Know through Abraham that God Always Keeps His Promises

Abraham had a long and challenging journey. Throughout this journey, he worked hard and experienced grief and blessings. Most of the time, he wasn't able to see the path ahead, but he held strongly to the promise in his heart. God would continue to fulfill that promise over approximately two thousand years after Abraham's death with its completion in His Son Jesus Christ. Abraham shows us that real confidence in God doesn't rule out times when His incredible promises are hard for us to see.

Abraham's Importance in the New Testament

There is another whole batch of great information about Abraham which sends us to the New Testament! That's right, the New Testament. As Bible believers we pay special attention to Abraham in the New Testament as well as the Old.

Many years after Abraham died his genealogy shows up in Matthew 1:1, 2 and 17. Faithful Jews and new believers were called sons and daughters of Abraham (Luke 13:16; 19:9; Galatians 3:7). We also see the promise that he will be there to meet them when they depart from this life (Luke 16:22–23; Acts 7 and Hebrews 11). James 2:20–24 gives us a powerful summary statement of the two important acts of Abraham: believing God for righteousness and offering up Isaac as an obedient work resulting in justification.

Abraham's faith was important to Paul as well. He writes of "*the faith of Abraham*" (Galatians 3:6–9), which leads us to the conclusion that this Old Testament man of God truly was an example of faith to all. Finally, read Galatians 3:10–14 and James 2:20–24 noting that God wants us to follow Abraham's example "in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" and God's justification by putting our faith into action through obedient service.

Beamsville, Ontario

Joseph's Journeys:

Written on: October 31, 2021

Article by: Paul Birston

From Paddan-aram to the Promised Land to the Pasture to the Pit to Potiphar's to Prison to Pharaoh's Palace to Power to the Promised Land

Joseph did a lot of travelling in his 110 years. He learned important lessons on his journeys through life and places that transformed him into a wise, magnanimous and compassionate leader ultimately fulfilling God's purpose to save lives.



From Paddan-aram to the Promised Land

Joseph travelled the same long journey from Paddan-aram to the Promised Land, Canaan at the time, that his great grandparents Abraham and Sarah and his grandmother Rebekah made. Joseph's first long journey was about 650 kms as the crow flies, perhaps 850 kms along the Euphrates, the international trade route, past Damascus, down the Jabbok gorge, across the Jordan River and up the Wadi Farah and along the hill country ridge to Bethel on "the way of the patriarchs."

A big difference for Joseph from his great grandparents and grandmother were the family dynamics with which he grew up and travelled. Joseph made this first long journey with his father Jacob, ten of his brothers, their four mothers and his sister Dinah.

Joseph grew up with tensions between his step-mother Leah and his mother Rachel and his father's favouritism toward her (Genesis 29). To add to these dynamics, though Joseph was his father's eleventh son, he was the firstborn of Rachel whom Jacob (Israel) loved the most, so "Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a full-length robe" (Genesis 37:3). Based on the Greek Septuagint translation, some versions describe Joseph's coat as many coloured. As a full-length robe it set him apart from those who wore shorter robes more suitable for manual labour.

Soon after their arrival in Canaan, Joseph witnessed the deceit and potential for violence his older brothers were capable of as they avenged Shechem's rape of their sister Dinah. On the pretence of acceptance of the men of Shechem by their agreement to be circumcised, Simeon and Levi slaughtered them all (Genesis 34). The willingness

of his brothers to deceive and even murder soon played a key role in Joseph's next major journey.

To the Pasture to the Pit

Jacob's favouritism made life difficult for Joseph as a young man of 17. Sibling envy and rivalry from his brothers were thus not surprising. Joseph's bad report about them pasturing their father's flocks didn't help. Additionally, his dreams of sheaves (his brothers), the sun, moon (his parents) and eleven stars (his brothers) bowing down to him only exacerbated these tensions (Genesis 37:1–11). So Joseph had to live with the dynamics of being simultaneously favoured and resented by his family while being the chosen recipient of prophetic dreams from God! Pretty heady learning experiences for a young man of 17!

After Joseph's first report about his brothers, Israel sent him on another journey from Hebron up to Shechem and then up to Dothan, about 105 kms in all, to check up on his brothers again. They "saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death.... Here comes this dreamer.... let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits" (Genesis 37:18–20). Reuben intervened with a less violent but none the less deceitful plot of his own.

They threw Joseph into the pit alive. Fortunately there was no water in it. Joseph was there alone. Helpless. Far from his father. A literal low point in his short gifted life. God was his only hope. The only way out was up.



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To Potiphar's to Prison

A surprising deliverance from the pit set Joseph on his next major journey of about 525 kms.

By God's grace and providence, the ancient coastal international trade route passed not far west of Dothan. A caravan of Ishmaelites, descendants of Joseph's great uncle, were passing by. Before Judah's plan C to sell Joseph to them could be acted on, Midianite traders also passing by pulled Joseph out of the pit "and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver" (Genesis 37:28). After taking him on the long journey to Egypt, they sold Joseph into the service of "Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the bodyguard"

(Genesis 37:36).

Back home, Joseph's brothers deceived their father Jacob with Joseph's coat stained with blood. Jacob who deceived his father with Esau's finest garment would spend the next 20 years thinking his favourite son was dead.

Joseph grew to adulthood in Potiphar's house where he served possibly up to about eleven years. Joseph proved himself to be a trustworthy man of diligence, integrity and faith, very conscious of God's presence and honour. Joseph's stellar character came to the forefront in resisting the seduction of Potiphar's wife notably explaining this would break his master's trust and be "sin against God" (Genesis 39:9).

Potiphar likely knew his wife's character and Joseph's innocence. He could have had Joseph killed. He had to do something. He satisfied the need for justice and sparing Joseph's life (for God's purposes) by putting him in prison.

Joseph has gone from his father's favour to the pit to favour again and then to prison, another hazardous pit. He relies on God through all these ups and downs and is rewarded: "the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favour in the sight of the warden of the prison" (Genesis 39:21).

As God was with Joseph in the pit and Potiphar's house He was working with Joseph in prison. Through another low, God brought Joseph one step closer to where He wanted him. Joseph's willingness to receive God's revelations again and properly interpret them is a key to his progress.

To Pharaoh's Palace to Power

Joseph helps his prison mates, Pharaoh's chief baker and chief cup bearer, by interpreting their dreams which predict the former's demise and the latter's deliverance (Genesis 40). Though temporarily forgotten in prison for two years by the cup bearer, Joseph's interpretations of his prison mate's dreams bring him into the presence of Pharaoh who is in need of an interpreter for his dreams regarding the fat and thin cows and ears of grain (Genesis 41). Joseph correctly interprets the prophetic dreams God gave Pharaoh which symbolize the upcoming seven years of plenty followed by seven of famine.

Joseph's wise counsel for Pharaoh to stockpile grain during the years of plenty for food in reserve for the years of famine earned him the power of second in command to Pharaoh. Pharaoh gave Joseph a new name, Zaphenath-paneah (possibly "God lives and speaks") and Asenath as his wife through whom he had two sons, Manasseh ("making to forget") and Ephraim ("fruitfulness"), "for God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction" (Genesis 41:52). Joseph reveals his feelings about all this. It's been hard: afflictions. But God has brought fruitful blessings out of his affliction.

In further fulfilment of God's promise to his great grandfather, Joseph uses his power to bless all nations and his family. Through a tense series of events, Joseph brings his

family to Egypt who fulfil his dreams by bowing before his authority. He reveals himself and his love for them in the most compassionate and sincere way by his tears, embraces and provisions for them.

Joseph has learned and informs his family that God fulfilled His bigger purposes through all of His journeys: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to keep many people alive” (Genesis 50:20).

To the Promised Land

Joseph makes three profound gestures affirming his love of God, his family and the legacy of their eternal heritage. First Joseph returns to the Promised Land with his family to bury their father Jacob in the family burial place bought by his great grandfather. Second, upon returning to Egypt, he reminded his brothers “God will assuredly take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (Genesis 50:24). Third, he makes them swear “you shall carry my bones up from here” (Genesis 50:25). Moses carried them up and Joshua brought them into the Promised Land where Joseph’s remains finally came to rest where the tribes of his sons eventually came to be.

Joseph’s Journeys and Ours

We are all on journeys with God. Joseph’s journeys are an inspiration for ours.

Joseph grew up with challenging family dynamics. He honoured his father even when it made life difficult with his brothers. In the end he showed his perseverance, compassionate love and dedication to them all. He was a major force in keeping them in the family of God.

Joseph lived with losses, separation and being alone. He lost his mother at a young age. He lost touch with his father, brothers, sister and their families for twenty years. Through this time on his own, he learned to rely on God and serve Him faithfully with integrity regardless of his circumstances.

When the time came Joseph knew how to lead and use power for God’s purposes not his own.

Joseph valued history and honour while keeping his eye on the future.

Joseph knew Israel’s future was in the Promised Land. Ours is with him and the whole family of God in His new heaven and earth.

Joseph demonstrated his willingness to receive and accept God’s revelation as He gave it to him and then to properly interpret it for the benefit of others.

Joseph saw the big picture of God’s eternal purpose to save lives and did his part using the resources God gave him.

Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament

Written on: October 31, 2021

Article by: Kevin Cleary

Part 1 of Hebrews Use of the Old Testament

As we progress in our study of Scripture, there comes a time when we notice that the margins of our study Bible is filled with numbers and letters. At some point, it becomes clear that these are a mixture of cross references and textual notations. Cross references point to other places in the Bible where a similar word or idea occurs, while textual information adds insight into the state of preservation and variant reading associated with that passage. When added together, this information adds both depth and breadth to our understanding.

Many of the cross-references in the New Testament are drawn from passages in the Old Testament. Some are quotes or near-quotes while others paraphrase an idea or allude to a similar treatment of parallel subject matter. We will come back to this and discuss the New Testament's use of the Old testament in general, giving particular attention to the book of Hebrews. In the process we hope to surface some helpful principles that will enrich our Bible study.

The Gospel of Matthew uses the Old Testament in a way that can be very hard to follow. ¹ Matthew is filled with references to the Old Testament but his use of these references may be rather difficult for a modern reader to understand. If, however, Matthew is the most difficult to grasp, we might suggest that a reasonable case could be made that Hebrews could take the second-place ribbon for difficulty (Carson, 2019).

There are several things that the author of Hebrews does, which can make it difficult for a modern reader to understand what rules he is following, as he references the Old Testament. In this article we will discuss those uses and demonstrate that the author of Hebrews uses the Old Testament in an appropriate and convincing way. But he uses it, from a Christocentric, redemptive-history standpoint. His approach preserves the original context, but sees Jesus as the fulfillment of the expectations of the Old Testament writers. In other words the whole of the Old Testament is pointing ultimately to Jesus, and we should expect to find him there. (Heb 5:11-14).

Before we get to that point, we should establish some general principals related to the New Testaments use of the Old Testament. We should also examine some of the proposals put forward to make sense of the hermeneutical approach used by New Testament authors. We can begin simply by outlining the kind of references we find being made to the Old Testament.

As we read the New Testament, we should keep in mind that the original writers and their hearers were intimately familiar with the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 6:6 commanded the people to have the words of God at the forefront of their lives. There is every indication that this is exactly what they did, Learning the Old Testament from a very early age (Davis, 1991). We would expect then, to see references made to the Old Testament with great frequency and variability. This is in fact, exactly what we find.

New Testament authors will sometimes make direct quotations. Other times there will be just an allusion to a text or a theme. Archer and Chirichigno identify five categories. These categories range from a direct quote, free from any significant difference from the Masoretic text, to “passages that seem to take questionable liberty with the Old Testament original” (Gleason L. Archer, 1983) Richard B. Hays identifies three categories; “Quotations, Allusions and Echo’s.” (Carson, 2019.)

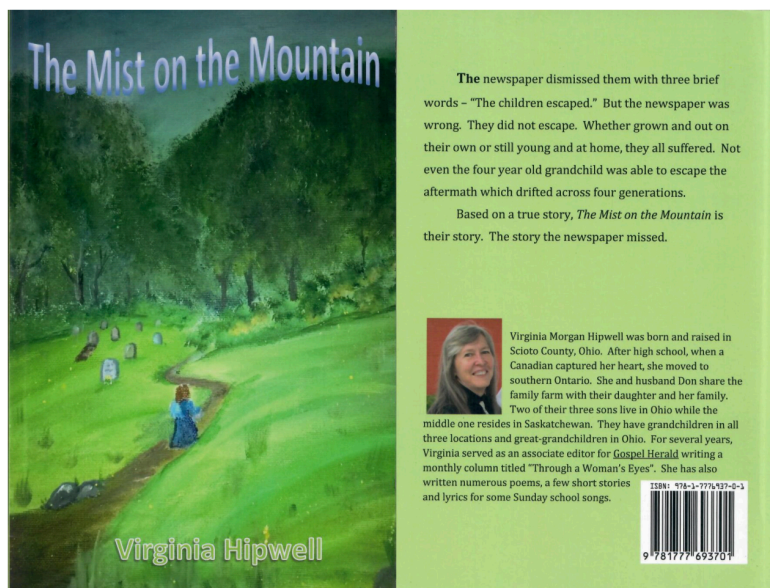
Common sense and knowledge of how we use quotations today can also shed light on this. Consider how a song lyric or movie quote may be used in any number of different ways and communicated in different forms, which will vary in accuracy and purpose. We should give some attention to these different kinds of quotations.

Sometimes a New Testament author will give a direct quotation from the Old Testament, in which a whole phrase is copied word for word or nearly word for word.

For example, Matthew 2:6 there is a straightforward quotation of Micah 5:2 in reference to the birthplace of the Messiah. Even in direct quotations some variation could be expected, for several reasons. The author could be quoting from memory, or he might be using the Septuagint (Greek translation of the O.T.). He might also be using Hebrew text and translating it into Greek for his readers. Each of these might all account for some variation between a New Testament quotation and what we have in our Old Testaments. Consider Jesus’ words in Matthew 27:46, quoting from Psalm 22. Here we

have Aramaic words transliterated in Greek and then translated into English. His message has passed through at least three languages, demonstrating the complexity that may be involved in a quotation.

On other occasions, the New Testament author may not offer a direct quotation but rather an allusion to an Old Testament text. Consider for example, Paul’s allusion to the events of the Exodus in I Corinthians 10:1-5. In this case, not a



The Mist on the Mountain

The newspaper dismissed them with three brief words – “The children escaped.” But the newspaper was wrong. They did not escape. Whether grown and out on their own or still young and at home, they all suffered. Not even the four year old grandchild was able to escape the aftermath which drifted across four generations.

Based on a true story, *The Mist on the Mountain* is their story. The story the newspaper missed.

Virginia Morgan Hipwell was born and raised in Scioto County, Ohio. After high school, when a Canadian captured her heart, she moved to southern Ontario. She and husband Don share the family farm with their daughter and her family. Two of their three sons live in Ohio while the middle one resides in Saskatchewan. They have grandchildren in all three locations and great-grandchildren in Ohio. For several years, Virginia served as an associate editor for *Gospel Herald* writing a monthly column titled “Through a Woman’s Eyes”. She has also written numerous poems, a few short stories and lyrics for some Sunday school songs.

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single word is quoted from Exodus but it is abundantly clear that Paul is referring to the events in Exodus 12 – Numbers 14. The prologue to John’s gospel (John 1:1-5) begins with an obvious allusion to Genesis 1:1. Much could be said of the powerful dual meanings that John employs, but the allusion is obvious. In these examples we do not have an exact quotation from the Old Testament but the references are obvious.

Sometimes the reference to the Old Testament is evident but less specific. Think of Peter’s words in I Peter 1:10

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully.”

Clearly, Peter has in mind, not a specific passage but the echo of expectation that rings down through the ages.

A similar use of scripture by Jesus is found in Matthew 23:34, when he says, “Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town”. Again, no specific Old Testament passage is referenced but rather a theme. In fact, the whole of Matthew 23 is an echo of the woe’s pronounced by the prophets against all who stood in opposition to God and his work. We could possibly add to this category, passing references or uses of Old Testament phrases that come to the mind of an author. Matthew’s quotation of Hosea 11:1, could be an example of this, where Jesus’ life echo’s the experience of Israel.

We observe then that some of the New Testament authors use the Old Testament in various ways and for various purposes. And while not all of these are common for us today, some of them are. For example, I frequently hear preachers and teachers paraphrase a passage or allude to a Biblical account. We might also engage in partial quotations as part of our everyday conversational speech. Someone might say – “I wash my hands of this,” when fed up with a project, or “Let there be light,” when tripping a light switch. So while we make this kind of use of scripture to get a point across, it surprises us to find that the Biblical writers occasionally did the same thing. It has been said many times, but I will say it again – the Bible is written in language, and translated into language. And while scripture is of far more consequence than a news paper or magazine, similar rules of interpretation should be employed.

As you read your New Testament, take time and track down the references to the Old Testament. Some may be difficult to follow or explain but most often your Study will be deeply enriched. An excellent resource for this kind of study is Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament Edited by D.A. Carson.

May God Bless Your Bible Study.

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1. For the purposes of this paper I will use the term Old Testament because it's the common way we refer to the Hebrew Bible. It's important to add at this point, that for Matthew and other New Testament writers it was just scripture, or to use our terminology, the Bible. There was no New Testament as we understand it. It was being written at the time. This is not to say that New Testament writers didn't see their work and the work of their contemporaries as Scripture. Consider that Paul sites Deuteronomy along side Luke calling both scripture (I Tim 5:18 quoting Duet 25:4 and Luke 10:7). It is to say, when New Testament authors were going to cite scripture to support a particular point, they would be citing the Old Testament.)



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 GREAT LAKES
BIBLE COLLEGE

The story of Naaman

Written on: October 31, 2021

Article by: Bob Sandiford

A Bible Story for Adults

2 Kings 5:1-14 (NASB)

Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man was also a valiant warrior, but he was a leper. ² Now the Arameans had gone out in bands and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman's wife. ³ She said to her mistress, "I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy." ⁴ Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus spoke the girl who is from the land of Israel." ⁵ Then the king of Aram said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." He departed and took with him ten talents of silver and six thousand shekels of gold and ten changes of clothes.

⁶ He brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, "And now as this letter comes to you, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may cure him of his leprosy." ⁷ When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? But consider now, and see how he is seeking a quarrel against me."

⁸ It happened when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent word to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Now let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." ⁹ So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots and stood at the doorway of the house of Elisha. ¹⁰ Elisha sent a



messenger to him, saying, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and you will be clean.”¹¹ But Naaman was furious and went away and said, “Behold, I thought, ‘He will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.’¹² Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?” So he turned and went away in a rage.¹³ Then his servants came near and spoke to him and said, “My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, ‘Wash, and be clean’?”¹⁴ So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean.

¹⁵ When he returned to the man of God with all his company, and came and stood before him, he said, “Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; so please take a present from your servant now.”¹⁶ But he said, “As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will take nothing.” And he urged him to take it, but he refused.¹⁷ Naaman said, “If not, please let your servant at least be given two mules’ load of earth; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD.¹⁸ In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter.”¹⁹ He said to him, “Go in peace.” So he departed from him some distance.

Some background bits and pieces:

Aram was the kingdom bordering Israel on the north and west. Damascus was a leading city of Aram. We know this country also as Syria.

The reference to Israel is to the northern kingdom whose capital city was Samaria.

- These two kingdoms were officially at peace. Albeit an uneasy one. Border incursions were common, and people were taken captive

Naaman enjoyed his high position in large part because God had used Aram to punish Israel for their disobedience. The king of Aram credited Naaman with these victories and it seems likely that Naaman was unaware of the role played by God.

The OT used the term leprosy as a catch-all for many skin conditions. Ancient people did not have a cure for any of them.

Ten talents of silver came to about 340 Kilograms which at today’s prices, would be worth about \$350,000 CAD.

- 6,000 shekels of gold – about 68 KG of gold – worth \$5.5 million CAD

In the ancient world, the belief was common that a nation's gods were tied to the physical location of that nation. So – Naaman wanting to take a load of soil reflected that – thinking that God could only be worshiped on the soil of Israel.

Lessons:

- Be the best you can be in all circumstances. Show compassion to those who aren't necessarily compassionate toward you.
 - The little girl was captured and kidnapped, made a servant or a slave of Naaman's wife.
 - She could have said nothing, and enjoyed Naaman's misery.
 - But – the little girl from Israel had her master's best interest at heart, and showed Godly character.
- Don't assume the worst.
 - When King Jehoram of Israel read the letter, he kind of freaked out.
 - Who does the king of Aram think I am? Jehoram likely thought Aram was trying to pick a quarrel with Israel.
 - He assumed an evil agenda, which wasn't the case here.
- God's actions don't always jive with our expectations.
 - Naaman expected a magic show – he himself put on an impressive show with his retinue.
 - Elisha didn't even come out of his house – had a messenger tell Naaman what to do.
 - Naaman didn't get a magic show – not even an audience with this prophet. What he got was instruction to take 7 baths in muddy water
- Listen to good advice, even when you're in a bad mood.
 - Had it not been for Naaman's servants, he likely would have returned home as a leper.
 - They pointed out that if Elisha had told Naaman to do some great deed, he probably would have done it. Why not at least try this washing?
- Pride gets between us and God
 - Naaman expected immediate results and on his terms. When he didn't get that, he was offended by what he was told to do – to bathe in the Jordan, 7 times.
 - Our pride can cause us to be offended by what God tells us – but like Naaman, when we humble ourselves, God can work.
 - Imagine the scene – Naaman dipped once. No results. Twice. No change. Three times. Four times. Is something supposed to happen? Five times. Six times. Is this really worth all this humiliation? Seven times – God healed him!
- Elisha gave God got the credit, though he didn't come right out and say so to Naaman.
 - Elisha took nothing from Naaman for the healing – he was only a go-between
 - God's miracles weren't for sale – and the gift Naaman received was beyond price.

- Helping people can change their lives.
 - Naaman wasn't just physically healed. He also came to know that there is only one true God
 - He committed to worship only the God of Israel – asking God's forgiveness that he still had to go into a pagan temple with his boss.
- When we don't know what to do – ask God.
 - God has lots of ways of accomplishing his will – Naaman dunked seven times. Jesus put mud on a blind man's eyes to heal him. Jesus simply told a paralyzed man to get up and walk – and he did.
 - A good prayer would be, "God please work this out – and let me know what you decide."
 - We may think there's only one way to resolve a difficult situation – but God isn't limited by our expectations.
- While the OT is primarily a history of God's dealings with Israel, God didn't restrict His actions to that nation.
 - God has always looked for those who would follow Him.
 - The Jews were supposed to have been a lamp to the nations
- No situation is hopeless or beyond God's help
 - But God expects us to trust Him enough to obey Him in order to receive the gift that he really wants to bestow.

Acknowledgments

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Kitchener, ON

Ministry at Home

Written on: October 31, 2021

Article by: Dave Knutson

Jesus said “ I came not to be served but to serve and to give my life a ransom for Many”. The God of heaven and earth came into this world to serve his Heavenly Father by serving and saving a lost humanity. Service was not beneath him and should not be beneath us. Let me suggest instead, that service to God is the highest calling of all.

The *prophet Isaiah* described the messiah as a suffering servant (Isa. 53). Many times, the *apostle Paul* called himself the slave of Christ and felt that he was indebted to all men. In his second letter, the *apostle Peter* refers to himself as a bond-servant of Christ.

From Jesus on down, all of the leaders in the N.T. Church were servants. They were servants of God. But since God himself does not really need anything, his servants are told to serve other people in God’s name. Even a casual understanding of scripture makes it clear that all Christians are supposed to serve in Jesus’ name. And as such, we are all servants of the most-high God.

Let me suggest one place where such service is indispensable. It is in our families. Service is the glue that holds families together, and love really does begin at home.

The connection between love and service is a bit like love and obedience. Jesus said: “if you love me, you will keep my commandments”. In other words, there is no point in saying that we love Jesus if we won’t keep his word. In the same way, it is impossible to say that we love others unless we are willing to serve them.. God so loved the world – that he gave his one and only son. Therefore, love and Service are two sides of the same coin.

John was reflecting the teachings of Jesus when he said:

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and everyone

who loves is born of God and knows God" (1st Jo.4:7)

As important as it is for Christians to love one another, love begins at home. What I mean is that we ought to be *just as kind and understanding* at home as we are with people in the church. We should be just as *quick to see the good* in our family members and to encourage it at home as we are in the Lord's church. And we ought to be just as *slow to find fault* at home as we are outside of it.

Love really does begin at home. It starts with us, with a husband who loves his wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. Love is serving your wife and your children by putting them ahead of yourself – in your heart and in your life. Love begins with a wife who honours her husband as the head of the home. Who supports him and encourages him to lead. In other words, love that begins at home begins by *honouring the home* as it was created by God. It sees the home as a *divine institution* and not just a social convention. You and I did not think it up. And we will not find ways to improve on it. Dad-Mom-and the kids – is a profound reality. It is a gift from God to us. It mirrors the divine family of God that is eternal. And it comes with instructions that say: *do not tamper*.

For those who do not believe in God, faith rests on several assumptions: One of these is "that matter can neither be created nor destroyed". In other words, matter is eternal and is the basic building block of the universe.

Christians see the world in a different way. This world has been created by God and He will one day destroy it. Families are a part of God's creation and as such they can also be

destroyed. But God's plan is for all families to become indestructible. His plan is that they should become Christian families and be sustained by His power. And as such, Christian families are intended to make up that part of this creation that will last forever. So when we say that love starts at home, we mean that it starts in a very important place.

Of course, in order for families to be truly Christian, their members must have entered the Kingdom of God. We become related to each other by the blood of Jesus Christ and enter into God's Family. But service is the glue that holds the family together. If it is true that talk is cheap... *then talk of love* can also be cheap. But service puts arms and legs on our love.

What then does Christian service look like at home?

To begin with, service means *being there*. I mean, you and me, at home, with your wife, your husband, your children...present in the flesh. Until Jesus came to earth in the flesh...he was not here in the flesh. And apparently, nothing short of that would do to accomplish God's work here on earth.

In the same way, being where I am supposed to be and doing what I am supposed to do counts for something with God. This is especially so when it comes to being a husband and a father or a wife and a mother. Just ask your kids...it really counts for something with them. So, love is being there. Now of course, it is more than just being a warm body, but if you're not there then you are just not there.

Okay – so I am there....what else is it? *Well, as a Christian, it is potentially everything that you do to serve.*

It is kissing your kids goodbye as you leave to put bread on the table.

- Holding down a job is a credit to God.
- It is security for your family.
- It is honourable in the sight of all and contributes to society.
- It means that you can bless others by sharing and giving.

As important as it is to go off to work, it is also important to come home again. To spend time with the family at the end of the day. Work notwithstanding, love is still – being there.

Sometimes service, is sewing and cleaning, cooking and doing dishes. It is washing skinned knees and drying tears. It is listening without interrupting and softening your heart. It may be a trip to the little league game or time together at the fishing-hole. Service shows up in hundreds of the ordinary everyday things that may seem to be mundane.

Service is also being a leader. It is teaching your children the difference between right and wrong and explaining why there is such a thing in the first place. It is praying together at the end of the day and teaching your children how to pray. It is bringing God into your children's lives so that they believe in God and not just in you. To do that, my kids need to know scripture better than they know their video games or the latest lyrics on the radio. For that to happen, I need to spend time with them in God's word – in ways that are not artificial. Do it in a way that comes from the heart...and God will bless you for it.

There are few things as sad as the child who walks out the door of a 'Christian' home to make their own way – without faith in God. But how encouraging, how full of hope and expectation, how confident of the future, if they walk through that door with Christ as their saviour and Lord of their lives.

Love begins at home and in the form of service that brings honour to God by instilling faith in Him.

Barrie ON