



THE BEREA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

The Bible’s One Story

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“Why study the Old Testament? This question has echoed down through the centuries of church history” (Hill and Walton 2009, 11).

Most believers affirm that, at some level, the church needs to study the OT. We’ve read the reasons identified in Romans 15.4 (“instruction”) and 1 Corinthians 10.11 (“warnings” [NIV]). We know the OT’s importance for providing the details needed to understand references to names and events in some NT passages (e.g., Jude 5–11). We are enriched by the life lessons learned from people in the OT era who were called to serve YHWH. We are also generally aware of the OT’s role in the development of the theological teachings that constitute our faith.

These reasons for OT study are not of equal weight, but together they point to the integral connection between the testaments that we must understand to fully appreciate [Luke’s references to “the reign of God”](#) in Luke-Acts. Christopher Wright concisely summarizes the connection between testaments as follows: (1) “The Old Testament *tells the story that Jesus completes*.” (2) “Not only does the Old Testament *tell the story that Jesus completes*, it also *declares the promise that Jesus fulfills*” (Wright 2014, 16, 64).

Bear in mind that “the promise that Jesus fulfills” refers to “much more than a promise box full of blessed predictions about Jesus.” In fact, without the OT’s promises, “we would lose most of the meaning of Jesus himself” (Wright 2014, 38, 45). Or, as N. T. Wright stated it, when we get to the end of the OT, we have the sense that “it is an unfinished narrative, an unfinished *agenda*. Things are supposed to happen that haven’t happened yet” (Wright 2012, 66).

Luke-Acts, the two-part narrative of Christianity’s origins, illustrates the NT writers’ shared conviction that they were completing a single story already begun, not composing a new story. We see this at the outset of Luke in his use of the word “fulfilled” (πληροφορέω, *plērophoreō*; 1.1), and then in how he presents the birth narratives of John and Jesus. Though his preface in Luke 1.1–4 is written in some of the most cultured Greek in the NT, in the birth narratives in 1.5–2.52 he adopts the style of the LXX, unlike anything else in the remainder of Luke-Acts. People immersed in the OT’s language and themes would have noticed this shift. As Mark Strauss writes, they would have recognized that the chapters “transport the reader into the world of the Old Testament, . . . introduc[ing] the reader to the faithful remnant of the people of God, waiting expectantly for the fulfillment of the promises God has made to them.” Use of the LXX’s style, allusions, and themes reinforces “the central theme of the birth narrative [which] is *the arrival of God’s salvation and the fulfillment of his promise to Israel*” (Strauss 2007, 264). Important examples

of this idea are Mary's connecting of the events in her life to God remembering his mercy to Abraham (1.54–55), and Zechariah's emphasis on God's expected visitation, the house of David, the holy prophets, and the oath he swore to "our father Abraham" (1.68–75). From the outset, Luke is clear that his narrative is *continuing* a story already begun.

Though not the only other place it occurs, the same emphasis is evident at the end of Luke. After the two men Jesus met on the Emmaus road shared their dashed hope that he had been "the one who was about to redeem Israel" (Luke 24.21), he explained that "Moses and all the prophets" had been writing "things concerning himself in all the Scriptures" (v. 27). In Jerusalem later the same day, Jesus repeated the point for the Eleven and those gathered with them: "everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (v. 44). The "written Scriptures" had anticipated that "the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead the third day" (v. 46).

Richard Hays illustrates the effect Luke creates in Luke 24 as follows:

We might picture his narrative technique in the following way: it is as though the primary action of the Gospel is played out on center stage, in front of the footlights, while a screen at the back of the stage displays a kaleidoscopic series of flickering sepia-toned images, from Israel's Scripture (Hays 2014, 58–59).

The more we focus on this scene, the more we will appreciate God's wisdom in bringing to completion the amazing story the Bible tells.

Works Cited

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From the Sermons and Class Notes, Topical page ([here](#)), "The Bible's Story, 1 - The New Testament's Assumption" ([here](#)) — After addressing various reasons for studying the Old Testament, we turn attention to the need to study the two testaments together and to selections from Luke as an example of how the New Testament writings assume they are continuing the great story left incomplete at the end of the Old Testament.

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