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# Why Should We Care about Allegories and Such?

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**READING SCRIPTURE DEEPLY**  
**MILLENNIALS TAKE A FRESH LOOK AT**  
**THE BIBLE.**

Edited by Richard S. Hess

And

E. Randolph Richards

## CHAPTER 2

# WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT ALLEGORIES AND SUCH?

Joseph R. Dodson

My family once trekked to the north rim of the Grand Canyon. When we arrived, we sprang from the vehicle and raced onto a giant rock jutting into the sky. We marveled at this breathtaking wonder of the world. Our eyes darted around trying to fathom it all. Each time we caught a fascinating feature we had not previously noticed. I then realized that one of my sons had stopped beside our vehicle. I urged him to join us. He could see *so much more* from our vantage point. To my dismay, however, he was content to enjoy the view from the car. His vista was still spectacular, but there were multitudes of other astounding sights he missed because he was satisfied to remain where he was.

For many years I stood stunned before Scripture and attempted to grasp the landscape of God's love. After a while, however, I began to take the view for granted. I had seen the same passages from the same perspective for so long that I got bored. Consequently, Scripture no longer inspired my love for the Lord as it once did. But then I ventured farther from the car. I started to discover how investigating passages from different angles revealed great and unsearchable truths I had never seen before. These fresh perspectives led to a renewed appreciation of the Bible and restored vitality in my relationship with Christ. These new insights also reinvigorated my ministry. Due to the constant demands of a pastor, I had gotten to the point where I was so eager to arrive at the contemporary application of a passage that I bypassed a more comprehensive understanding of it. As a result, my sermon applications were often anemic, abstract, hackneyed or just plain wrong.

The authors of this book believe that a fuller appreciation of Scripture helps foster a deeper walk with Christ and a revived vigor in ministry. Therefore, in this book, we want to lead you out farther. We will invite you to some less traveled terrain that has provided us with new perspectives by which to understand and treasure the Bible all the more. We will focus on three vantages: citations, allegories and typologies.

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### Citations

The first step away from the car is moving beyond reading Scripture to explore how Scripture reads itself—that is, how biblical authors cite and allude to previous passages. When we investigate how and why the biblical authors use quotations we discover extraordinary insights. But just as peering into the depths of a canyon can paralyze a person, so can all the questions that rise up once we peek beyond the surface of the text. For instance, there are times when biblical authors quote passages without informing us who or what they are citing. Do they assume we will recognize the passages on our own? (How many quotations would we miss without the help of bold fonts and cross-reference notes in our modern study Bibles?) Further, what is the significance of the different ways authors introduce citations—such as “as it is written” in comparison to “as Scripture foresaw...and announced;”<sup>2</sup> or as “Isaiah cries out”<sup>3</sup> in contrast to as “the Holy Spirit says”<sup>4</sup>?

Moreover, do the authors cite the respective passages exactly or do they tweak the verses (e.g., leaving out words or changing their order)? If so, what are the implications of these modifications? There are also questions involving context. For instance, is the quotation of a single verse meant to evoke the surrounding verses, chapters, or narrative? Or, does

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 3:8.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 9:27.

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 3:7.

the citation have little to do with the original situation? Along these lines, does the cited verse originally mean what the current author says it means? And why does the author quote Scripture in the first place—to illustrate an argument, to support a thesis, to marginalize the verse as outdated, or for some other reason?<sup>5</sup>

As I said, all these questions can cause one’s head to spin. So before we get too dizzy, let us come back from the edge and focus on a few examples to give you an idea of the type of insights you will find in the pursuing chapters. Although biblical authors often cite passages without any modification, the following examples demonstrate the tendency of New Testament authors to cite Old Testament passages and reinterpret them in light of the gospel.

### Psalm 22 and Mark 15

Mark only records one sentence that Jesus spoke on the cross: and he does so in Aramaic—“*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani*; (i.e. “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me”)? Thereby, Mark provides a clue that this is more than a mere cry of desolation. Rather, on closer inspection, we discover a citation of Psalm 22:1. Going back to the Psalm, we find striking similarities between David’s words and the circumstances around Jesus’ cross. Below are some highlights.

<sup>5</sup> For more on Paul’s citations of OT verses, see Joseph Dodson, “The Voices of Scripture: Citations and Personifications in Paul.” *BBR* 20.3 (2010), pp. 419-32.

Psalms 22	Mark 15
<p>“let the Lord rescue him. since he delights in him.” (vv. 6b-8)</p> <p>My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? (v. 1)</p> <p>I am scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me mock me;</p> <p>they hurl insults, shaking their heads.</p> <p>“He trusts in the Lord,” they say, Let him deliver him,</p> <p>Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet</p> <p>All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.</p> <p>They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. (vv. 14-18)</p>	<p>And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “<i>Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?</i>” “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (v. 33-34) Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads . . . In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him. (vv. 29-32)</p> <p>And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. (v. 24)</p>

Mark wants us to recognize this connection with the Psalm. But his use of the Psalm raises some questions. For instance, why does Mark reverse the order? Did you notice that? The Psalmist gives (A) the cry of desolation, then (B) the insult by the crowds, and then (C) the account of the villains piercing his extremities and casting lots for his clothes. Mark, on the other hand, begins with (C) the crucifixion and the casting of lots to set up (B) the insults and (A) the final climax—the cry of desolation.

Moreover, does the evangelist use David’s words only to underline Jesus’ suffering or also to highlight the hope of the situation? It light of the empty tomb, it would be appropriate if Mark intended for us to understand the end of Jesus’ life with respect to the end of the Psalm, which concludes in triumph—not despair.

[God] has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

Does the evangelist use David’s words only to underline Jesus’ suffering or also to highlight the hope of the situation?

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. (Psalm 22:24, 27-28, NIV)

Psalm 2 and Acts 4

In response to suffering, the church in Acts 4 also cites and reinterprets the Psalms. As she lifts her voice in prayer, the church quotes Psalm 2. “You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one. (Ps 2:1-2/Acts 4:25-26)

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.

They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. (Acts 4:27-29)

Although the church acknowledges David as the speaker, she marginalizes him as a mouthpiece and ignores his original historical context (i.e., the events surrounding David as a pre-exilic king of Israel). Rather, her prayer explains that the plot of the nations, peoples, and kings in Psalm 2 points to the partnership between Pilate and Herod, the Gentiles and Jews, as they raged together against the Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke likely intends for us to follow the church's lead and connect the rest of the dots between Psalm 2 and Acts 4. We can read between the lines to see God scoffing at those who stand against his Son—the anointed one whom, on the holy mountain, the Lord has established as king (Ps 2:4-6). Moreover, perhaps Luke expect us to notice the similarity between the thesis of his work in Acts 1:8 with God's promise to his Son in Psalm 2:8: "I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession." Maybe the evangelist even wants us to recognize the beleaguered church as praying for boldness because she knows how the Psalm ends: "Blessed are they who take refuge in the Lord" (2:12).

#### Habakkuk 2:4 and Romans 1:17

Paul also cites and reinterprets Old Testament passages in light of Jesus Christ. Although Habakkuk and Paul both consider faith crucial for the followers of God,<sup>6</sup> Habakkuk expresses this in a context where he is straining his eyes to see beyond the shadows of the impending exile. Consequently, the prophet pens Habakkuk 2:4 to stress a steadfast trust in God in the face of incredible suffering. In Romans 1:17, however, Paul considers the prophet's words from the other side of the gloom, where faith stands illuminated by the gospel.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas Moo, *Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 78.

But what exactly does Paul intend to highlight through the words of this minor prophet—the person of Jesus Christ or the means of salvation? For example, is the apostle reading a messianic promise into Habakkuk 2:4 so as to have Habakkuk prophesy: "[Jesus], the righteous one, will live on the basis of faith"? If so, Paul uses the words of the prophet to proclaim that the faithful life of Christ reveals the righteousness of God. Or does the apostle refashion Habakkuk 2:4 into a declaration about how believers obtain everlasting salvation on the basis of faith: "by faith, the righteous will receive life"?<sup>7</sup>

The process causes us to ask important questions about these passages that perhaps we have not previously considered.

By investigating the citations in these familiar verses, the passages become even more profound. Moreover, the process causes us to ask important questions about these passages that perhaps we have not previously considered.

#### Allegories

The edge of allegory serves as the next vantage point that can help us see more in Scripture. Modern literature tends to limit allegory to a story where fictional characters and actions correspond to real characters and actions, such as what we see in works by Bunyan and Orwell. But in ancient literature, allegories are more generally defined. They can be as simple as a metaphor that has matured so as to expand beyond a sentence. Or, on the other end of the spectrum, they can take up an entire *pericope* and include personifications (the attribution of human traits to an impersonal concept, virtue or vice). Furthermore, there are also times where an author gives an Old Testament event an allegorical interpretation (cf. Galatians 4:22-31).

<sup>7</sup> It is even more complicated than this. For a more detailed treatment on this, see my blog post, "Punch line, Proof Texts and Paul" at <http://www.hearthevoice.com/blog/74>.

Scripture is replete with allegories because the biblical authors considered the use of them important to communicate divine truth.<sup>8</sup> In order to understand God's Word more fully, then, we need to study biblical allegories more deeply. Such an investigation includes examining biblical allegories in their own right as well as comparing them to similar allegories that occur elsewhere in Scripture. Here are a couple of examples.

Romans 5:12-21; 6:16-19

Paul uses allegory in Romans 5:12-21 where he personifies Sin and Death in mortal combat with Grace. The allegory depicts Sin and Death as an evil queen and king who invaded God's world only to be triumphed by God's Grace. Through the act of Christ, Grace rises up to surpass Sin, dethrone Death, and restore the righteousness of God.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned... death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses... For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! ... But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In 6:16-19, Paul goes on to personify Righteousness as a slave owner. He argues that since we live under the reign of Grace rather than the captivity of Sin, we must offer our members as servants to Righteousness.

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have

<sup>8</sup> Allegories are part of the very nature of human thought.

become slaves to righteousness. I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.

Among other implications, by making virtues and vices come to life so to speak, these allegories enable Paul to stress the pre-eminence of grace and righteousness in his gospel while highlighting the utter folly of living in terminal sin. We gain even more insights when we compare Paul's allegory here with a similar one in James.

James 1:13-15

James also uses allegory to accentuate the roles of Sin and Death. When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each of you is tempted when you are dragged away by your own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (1:13-15, NIV)

Whereas Paul uses the allegory in Romans 5 to set up Grace's defeat of Death and Sin, James personifies Sin and Death to defend God's justice. To explain the main thrust of temptation, James presents a sexual allegory. Desire conceives and gives birth to Sin; Sin conceives and gives birth to Death. Rather than as a spurious queen and fraudulent king, here, Sin is an illicit lover with Death as her illegitimate son. Furthermore, in Romans 6, Paul uses allegory to implore us to refuse to offer our bodies as slaves to Sin. James does so to warn us of what happens when we offer her our seed.

As the examples above demonstrate, examining the use of allegory in passages brings to life certain aspects and points the original authors wanted to accentuate—those which we may have a tendency to miss. Their

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allegories come into focus even more when we compare them to similar usages elsewhere. Now that we have discovered new insights from the vantage points of citations and allegory, let's try one last location—the rim of typology.

### Typologies

As mentioned in the introduction, typologies occur when individuals or events in some manner foreshadow future people and events by describing parallel circumstances and the meanings that develop within them. Whereas a type looks forward, an antitype looks backwards. So, whereas the priesthood of Melchizedek—as the type—foreshadows the priesthood of Jesus: as the antitype, the priesthood of Jesus echoes that of Melchizedek. The antitype is often greater than the type. But it does not have to be.

All typologies are not created equal. Some are more conspicuous than others. For instance, while Paul will not let us miss that Christ is the Second Adam, his presentation in Rom 16:20 of Satan as the serpent from Genesis 3 is more enigmatic and less sustained. (Although perhaps it was more novel to the original audiences than it is to us.) Furthermore, while some typologies simply feature similarities, others begin with the similarities in order to underscore significant differences. Here are a couple of examples.

### Adam and Noah

In the beginning, as described in Genesis 1-3, God split the waters, put the creatures in the world and made Adam from the dirt (Hebrew *adamah*). The man was naked in the garden and felt no shame. But then he took fruit from the tree. As a result, there was a curse, which was followed by God's gracious act of clothing Adam. From the perspective of typology we notice the connections between Adam's fall and Noah's stumble. We begin to discover hints that the Pentateuch hides in plain sight. For instance, in Noah's story, God also caused the waters over the earth's surface to recede so that the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground could multiply on the land (8:13-18).

Further, to continue to underscore continuity with Adam, Genesis 9:20 notes that Noah was a man of the *adamah*.

It continues. As Adam took fruit from the tree, Noah took fruit from the vine. Consequently, Adam realizes he is naked, while Noah gets drunk and naked. Similarly, Noah's drunken stupor sets up a dreadful curse and the compassionate covering of his naked shame. Upon closer inspection, then, we discover that Noah is an antitype of Adam; thereby, he highlights the pitiful nature of humanity on the one hand and sets up the hope for the ultimate Second Adam on the other (see Romans 5:12-21).

### Babel and Pentecost

Genesis 11 recounts how God descended to Babel and confused their tongues, so that the people could not understand each other. Then, the Lord scattered them all over the earth. He did this because: "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them (Genesis 11.6)." Similarly, in Acts 2, God's Spirit descends upon the church and causes them to speak in tongues. In contrast to Babel, the confusion comes upon the people in Jerusalem because, in the midst of all the tongues, they heard their own language being spoken.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. (2:5-6)

Acts will go on to recount how the new believers are scattered throughout the world as witnesses for Christ. Moreover, while God foiled the plans of the wicked to build their tower in Babel, the typology establishes from the beginning of Acts that nothing will stop God's people from building his church.

It has been said that stopping to study the seeds results in a fuller appreciation of the flower. So also, as with citations and allegories, looking



at a passage in light of typology causes us to admire and understand it all the more.

### Conclusion

These examples of citations, allegories and typologies have provided only a glimpse of the type of insights you will find in the pursuing chapters. There is so much more. We are confident that the Lord will use this book not only to refresh your love for the Bible but also for him.

It has been said that stopping to study the seeds results in a fuller appreciation of the flower.

When my family and I lived in Germany, we strolled to the city center each week to purchase the fresh, luscious produce on offer at the *Bauernmarkt* (farmers' market). When we moved back to the States, however, we had to settle for the supermarket. When we first gave my toddler a store-bought apple, he complained: "There's something wrong with this 'fwuit': it's lost its 'fwuitness.'" Our hope is that the Bible will never lose its 'fruitness' in your life and ministry—that it will never grow bland or turn stale. We write this book because we are convinced that an investigation of citations, allegories and typologies will help you experience the potency of Scripture again for the first time. Join us, as we taste and see that his Word is good.

## PART ONE: READING THE BIG STORIES MORE DEEPLY