

Dr. Matthew S. Harmon, Bible's Use of the Bible, Session 1, The Value of Studying the Bible's Use of the Bible and How to Get Started, Podcast Audio Overview

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I want you to imagine, just for a second, reading this massive multi-author fantasy epic. Oh, right, like a really dense one. Yeah, exactly.

Like, we are talking thousands of pages, dozens of writers, and it spans, you know, centuries of world-building. Wow. So you invest all this time, right, and you finally get to the later chapters, but then you suddenly realize that the newer writers aren't just, like, continuing the plot.

Right. What are they doing? They're constantly remixing, directly quoting, and actively reinterpreting the earlier chapters. Oh, wow.

Yeah. And the moment you catch on, the original story you just read completely changes its shape. And, I mean, that dynamic, that constant internal conversation, that is the reality of reading the Bible.

It really is. It completely shatters the illusion that you're just reading this flat document. Right.

When you take a step back, you realize you're actually walking into an ongoing, centuries-long debate and synthesis between the authors themselves. Yeah. They're actively reading their own sacred texts and, you know, arguing for how to apply them to their present moment.

Which honestly is the core mission for this deep dive today. Yes, it is. We're looking at this fascinating session by Dr. Matthew S. Harmon.

It's called The Bible's Use of the Bible. A very literal title, but very accurate. Super accurate.

And our goal for you, our real student learner, is to expose the hidden architecture of these ancient texts. We want to show you how to spot these brilliant internal connections without, you know, needing a seminary degree. Exactly.

You don't need to know ancient Hebrew for this. Right. Okay, let's unpack this because I want to promise you right up front: this is not about academic trivia.

This is about unlocking a completely different way to read. It really is a paradigm shift. Because to get to that architectural level, we have to look past the really obvious examples.

Like what? Well, most readers can easily spot when the New Testament directly quotes the Old Testament rightly. A gospel writer saying, as it is written in Isaiah, for instance. Sure.

Yeah, that's pretty spelled out. But the methodology Dr. Harmon explores, this scriptural exegesis of scripture, it goes back way further than that. Like Old Testament quoting Old Testament.

Yes. We're talking about ancient prophets intentionally lifting phrases from even older Old Testament texts to build entirely new theological frameworks. That is so cool.

And Dr. Harmon points to First Peter, right, chapter one, I think, to kind of capture the mindset of these ancient writers. Yeah, verses 10 through 12. Right.

Where Peter describes the ancient prophets as having searched and inquired carefully into what God was indicating. Exactly. They weren't just, they weren't sitting in a trance taking cosmic dictation.

Yeah, like some kind of ancient typewriter. Right. They were scholars of their own tradition.

They were scouring the older texts, trying to figure out how their current unfolding realities collided with what God had previously established. They viewed the past as the key to the present. Precisely.

And once your eyes adjust to this, I mean, you see it everywhere. Take Isaiah chapter six, for example. The famous throne room vision, right? Right.

God asks who will go; Isaiah volunteers, and we do. But look at the crushing message he is actually commissioned to deliver. He's told to go to the nation and say, keep on hearing, but do not understand.

Keep on seeing, but do not perceive. It sounds like, I don't know, a paradox. Yeah.

Or just this incredibly dark prophetic judgment. It is a judgment, yeah. But Isaiah isn't just generating that language in a vacuum.

Really? Where does it come from? He is intentionally lifting exact phrasing from Deuteronomy chapter 29. Oh wow. Yeah.

Moses, at the end of his life, is recounting the Exodus, and he laments, but to this day, the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear. Wait, so Isaiah is taking Moses's historical lament about this past generation and like weaponizing it as a judgment against his own contemporary audience. Yes, exactly.

Man, so my mind immediately goes to like the modern equivalent of sampling in hip hop. Oh, that's a great analogy. Right.

Like a producer takes a classic rhythm, strips it out of its original 1970s context, and builds a totally new modern track over it. Or you see it in massive cinematic universes. A character drops an obscure line from three movies ago.

Right, right. But with those examples, it's often just a nod to reward the hardcore fans. So my question is, is this biblical sampling just a neat literary trick to borrow Moses's authority?

Or does this actually change the fundamental meaning of the original text? What's fascinating here is that they aren't just copying and pasting.

They are actively interpreting and applying the ancient texts to new situations. They're reconstructing the theology. Stretching old rules over new paradigms.

Exactly. And Dr. Harmon highlights Paul doing exactly this in Romans chapter 10. Okay, set the scene for us.

So Paul is arguing about righteousness based on faith, and he writes, do not say in your heart who will ascend into heaven. But then Paul inserts his own immediate commentary. That is, to bring Christ down.

Which is wild because that quote, who will ascend into heaven, is ripped straight out of Deuteronomy 30. And in Deuteronomy, Moses is talking exclusively about the Mosaic law. Like he's telling the Israelites the law isn't too hard to reach; it isn't way up in heaven.

And Paul grabs that established text about the law and just audaciously reassigns its meaning to Christ. He is performing like live exegetical surgery. Paul isn't just saying Jesus is kind of like the law.

He is arguing that the ultimate intended trajectory of Moses' words was always pointing toward the incarnation. Even if Moses' original audience couldn't see it yet. Right.

Paul is fundamentally changing the application of the text. So if these biblical authors are constantly synthesizing and reapplying texts in real time like that, it really forces a massive shift in how we approach theology today. Oh, completely.

Because you can't just build a doctrine by randomly dropping verses into a bucket if the authors themselves were already actively weaving those verses together into a specific framework. Right. It drives both biblical theology tracing that Genesis-to-Revelation storyline and systematic theology.

Yeah. How we categorize topics like God or humanity. Exactly.

If you want to know how the Old and New Testaments fit together, your primary guide shouldn't just be some modern commentary. The best way is to look at how the New Testament offers itself as viewed by the Old Testament. That makes so much sense.

And honestly, this solves one of the most persistent headaches for anyone reading the Bible today. Oh, the Leviticus problem. The Leviticus problem.

Yes. When modern readers encounter those sweeping, granular animal sacrifice laws and purity codes, they largely ignore them. They do.

But the challenge is always: on what authority do you ignore part of the text? Are you just, you know, picking and choosing what feels culturally relevant today? Right. And the biblical authors' use of their own texts answers that exact tension. How so? Well, we just look at how later writers utilize Leviticus.

Take first Peter again. He reaches back to Leviticus chapter 11, but he bypasses the sacrificial mechanics entirely. You just skip them.

Yep. And he zeroes in on a specific command. You shall be holy for I am holy.

Wow. It's like finding a master blueprint for a massive renovation project. Oh, I like that.

Yeah. The later authors point to the blueprint and say, OK, this concept of holiness, that's a load-bearing wall. Right.

You can't take that down. But the animal sacrifices, that was temporary scaffolding. The house is built now, so you can take the scaffolding away.

If we connect this to the bigger picture, understanding this methodology shapes the entire Christian life. It removes the guesswork, you know? Yeah, absolutely. You don't have to throw darts at a board to figure out what's obsolete and what's binding.

You simply trace the interpretive trail the authors left behind. But I mean, if the biblical authors gave us the blueprint, how easily can an everyday reader actually read it without misinterpreting the blueprint itself? Because practically speaking, extracting this isn't a walk in the park. No, it's not.

This deep dive wouldn't be honest if we didn't look at the massive academic obstacle course you have to run to map these connections. Oh, the roadblocks are real. The foundational one is always presuppositions.

A reader's starting worldview changes everything. If an interpreter assumes the supernatural doesn't exist, they'll read a miracle text and have to explain it away as a myth or a metaphor. Right.

But someone who assumes a supernatural reality will read the exact same linguistic data and trace entirely different theological connections. And then you run into the absolute nightmare of historical dating. Oh, man.

Dr. Harmon brings up the book of Joel as the classic example for this, right? Yes. Scholars fiercely debate whether Joel was written before the Babylonian exile or centuries later. And because Joel and Isaiah share identical blocks of text.

You have zero idea who is quoting whom. That's crazy. If you can't definitively date Joel, you don't know who's establishing the theological baseline and who is doing the radical reinterpreting.

OK, here's where it gets really interesting, though. We aren't just talking about authors borrowing from within the Bible. Right.

The broader context. Yeah. Did authors like Proverbs borrow from ancient Near Eastern wisdom texts? Or did New Testament authors borrow from Jewish thinkers like Philo or directly from the Old Testament? It creates a labyrinth.

And that labyrinth is built on top of a linguistic fault line. The translation maze. Oh, my gosh.

This is the part that genuinely makes my head spin. I want to push back on the mechanics of this, actually. Go for it.

So the New Testament is written in Greek. The Old Testament is primarily Hebrew. But the New Testament authors are frequently quoting the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

That's right. Wait, so we're looking at Greek translations of Hebrew texts quoted by Greek authors, which were then fixed by later scribes. Uh-huh.

Textual criticism, yes. It's like a multi-generational game of telephone. How do we know what the original connection even was? I know.

It sounds paralyzing when you stack all the variables together. It really does. But this is where you can breathe a sigh of relief.

While academic scholars must wrestle with these deep layers, everyday readers don't need to panic. Okay. Why not? Because the core meanings don't rely on a single, isolated textual variant.

The major theological throughlines are robust enough to survive the translation maze, even if some books of the Septuagint were translated dynamically and others super-literally. So the big picture remains intact. Exactly.

And to help us navigate the details, Dr. Harmon provides actual frameworks to make sense of the chaos. Yes. Let's get into the frameworks.

He introduces the spectrum of influence to categorize just how strong a textual connection really is. Okay. Walk us through the spectrum.

Well, on the far left, the strongest connection is a citation. This is undeniable. The author uses an introductory formula like, it is written, followed by a quote.

Right. Easy to spot. But as you move right across the spectrum, it gets fainter.

Next is an allusion. This is intentional but uncredited. They are borrowing specific words but not telling you where they got them.

Got it. Then you hit an echo. This is a faint, highly debatable overlap, maybe just a single evocative word.

Sounds a bit subjective. Very subjective. And finally, on the far right, you have thematic similarity.

No shared vocabulary at all, just wrestling with identical concepts. Okay. So donor and receptor texts- wait, actually, my mind goes to a medical analogy here.

So donor and receptor texts are basically like an organ transplant, where the old text, the donor, gives life to a completely new theological body, the receptor. That is a brilliant way

to look at it, yes. So what does this all mean when we talk about exegetical outcome? If an echo is so faint, isn't it just a scholar seeing shapes in the clouds? It can be.

Finding genuine allusions requires a balance of art and science. You need strict criteria, but also intuitive sensibilities born from just, you know, deep immersion in the text. And you can't study these in a vacuum, right? Dr. Harmon talks about the connected versus sequestered choice.

Right. He argues we must study the Old Testament's use of itself alongside the New Testament's use of the Old. You can't keep them in separate academic silos.

Because they're part of the same ongoing conversation. Exactly. And sometimes that conversation involves a technique called prosopological exegesis.

Hey, that sounds incredibly intimidating. Prosopological. I know, it's a mouthful.

It comes from the Greek word for face. Basically, it's when a later author takes words spoken by one character, say a human king in a psalm, and puts them directly in the mouth of another character. Wait, really? Like who? Like God in the book of Hebrews.

The author of Hebrews takes a royal wedding song from Psalm 45 and applies it to Christ to prove his deity. Wow. So he just changes the face of the speaker to create a massive theological shift.

Exactly. OK, this is all amazing theory, but I want to transition to our toolkit. Practical application.

Yes. How does the listener sitting in their car or living room actually do this tonight? Well, the first step is simply being on the lookout. It's far more common than people realize.

Just having the radar on. Right. And second, use the cross-references in your English Bible, but with a warning.

You have to distinguish between an actual illusion and a mere conceptual parallel. Oh, like if two texts are just talking about giving, that doesn't mean it's an illusion. Exactly.

Don't force a connection that isn't there. And for a recommended resource, Dr. Harmon points to the Connecting Scripture New Testament. Oh, yeah.

Based on the CSV, right? Yeah. It's fantastic. It has green text for illusions, blue text for quotes, and study notes explaining the actual significance.

That is so helpful. And crucially, it has an Old Testament index in the back. So you can look up, say, Genesis 44 and see exactly where it pops up, anywhere in the New Testament.

OK, that is amazing. But I do have to ask, I mean, how do I keep myself from getting so lost in the weeds of cross-references that I forget what chapter I originally sat down to read? It feels like falling down a Wikipedia rabbit hole. That is such a real danger.

But this raises an important question about our goal. The goal isn't just data collection. It's about tracing the vertical context.

That's the rich accumulation of meaning over centuries. It should ultimately lead to a more profound understanding of the specific passage you're reading, not just distract you with historical trivia. Read deeply to spot the vocabulary, but read widely so you don't miss the big picture.

You nailed it. Well, this has been incredible. Just celebrating this realization that this ancient library is in constant, brilliant conversation with itself.

It really provides a dynamic treasure hunt for the curious reader. It really does. And I want to leave everyone with a final lingering question to kind of chew on.

Lay it on us. If these biblical authors, under the inspiration of the Spirit, felt the freedom to radically reinterpret and reapply ancient, sacred text for their present moment, what does that mean for us? Oh, wow. Is the meaning of an ancient text ever truly finished, or is it always waiting for a new context to unlock a new layer? That is a huge question and a perfect place to land.

Thank you so much for joining us on this deep dive today. Keep learning, keep questioning, and keep connecting the dots.