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The Bible's Use of the Bible

Session 4: A Case Study – Isaiah 49 in Galatians 1

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Abstract

In this case study, Dr. Matthew S. Harmon demonstrates how the Apostle Paul utilizes the language of the Isaianic Servant in Isaiah 49 to define his own apostolic calling and ministry in Galatians 1. By walking through a four-step hermeneutical process, Harmon highlights the textual and thematic correspondences between the Old Testament donor text and the New Testament receptor text. He argues that Paul's self-identification as the Servant is a form of indirect fulfillment made possible because Christ, the ultimate Servant, lives within him. Ultimately, this union enables the church to carry on the servant mission of being a light of salvation to the nations.

Outline

I. Introduction to the Session and Case Study

- A. Series: "The Bible's Use of the Bible" (Session 4)
- B. Base material: How to Study the Bible's Use of the Bible: Seven Hermeneutical Choices for both the Old and New Testaments by Dr. Matthew S. Harmon
- C. Focus: A case study of Isaiah 49 in Galatians 1
- D. Aim of the study: Demonstrate a step-by-step hermeneutical process at both scholarly and basic levels

II. Step 1: Identify the Allusion

- A. Definition: Recognizing connections between the donor text and receptor text
- B. Recommended tool: Connecting Scripture New Testament (published by the Christian Standard Bible publishers)
- C. Receptor text: Galatians 1:15–17 (Paul's narrative of his calling)
- D. Donor text: Isaiah 49:1–6 (The calling of the Isaianic Servant of the Lord)
- E. Key linguistic and conceptual points of contact:
 - 1. "From my mother's womb" (Isaiah 49:1 / Galatians 1:15)
 - 2. "Called" (Isaiah 49:1 / Galatians 1:15)

3. God's purpose to "reveal his Son in me" (Galatians 1:16) linked to "in you I will be glorified" (Isaiah 49:3 LXX)
4. Surrounding resonances:
 - a. "Servant" (doulos in Greek) in Galatians 1:10, matching the unique use of doulos in Isaiah 49:3 (rather than the more common pais used elsewhere in Isaiah)
 - b. Running or laboring "in vain" (Galatians 2:2 / Isaiah 49:4)
 - c. Proclaiming the gospel among the "nations/Gentiles" (ethne) (Galatians 1:16, 2:2 / Isaiah 49:6)

III. Step 2: Study the Donor Text (Isaiah 49)

- A. Textual issues: Checking for variants in Hebrew or Septuagint (none of significance affect the allusion in Isaiah 49; Net Bible notes recommended for English readers)
- B. Horizontal Context (the flow within Isaiah):
 1. Israel as a nation is designated as God's servant but fails due to spiritual blindness (e.g., Isaiah 42:18–19)
 2. God raises up an individual servant (Isaiah 49:1–6) to obey, suffer, and bring restoration where the nation failed
 3. This individual servant's work ultimately creates a community of "servants of the Lord" (noted in the plural starting in Isaiah 54)
- C. Vertical Context (broader biblical patterns and receptions):
 1. Pattern of God raising individual royal, priestly, and prophetic servants (Adam, Moses, Joshua, David, Jesus)
 2. Reception of Isaiah 49:6 in the New Testament: Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:46–48 use it to explain and justify their mission to the Gentiles

IV. Step 3: Study the Receptor Text (Galatians 1)

- A. Textual issues: No major variants in Galatians 1:15–16 that affect the presence of the allusion
- B. Horizontal Context (Galatians context):
 1. Paul defends his independent apostolic authority and gospel against rival teachings
 2. The surrounding context echoes Isaiah 49 themes (e.g., Galatians 1:24, "glorified God in me")
- C. Vertical Context:
 1. Key link in Galatians 2:20 ("I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me")
 2. Synthesis of Isaianic texts: Galatians 2:20 combines the servant-glorification of Isaiah 49:3 ("in me") with the self-giving suffering of Isaiah 53 ("loved me and gave himself for me")

V. Step 4: Identify the Exegetical Outcome

- A. Theological payoff ("the so what")

B. Dr. Harmon's classification: Indirect Fulfillment

1. Paul sees his specific call prefigured in the call of the Isaianic servant
2. Paul is not replacing Jesus; rather, Christ the promised Servant lives in Paul to fulfill the mission

C. Application to the Church:

1. The work of the individual Servant (Jesus) has created a servant people (the church)
2. The church inherits this calling, with Christ dwelling in them to be a light of salvation to the ends of the earth

VI. Conclusion and Additional Resources

A. Encouragement to read Scripture with fresh eyes

B. Online resources: otuot.com/7c (videos, interviews, articles)