

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 411

Paul's Use of the Old Testament Series: Introduction

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Episode Summary

Many Bible students are unaware of the controversy surrounding how Paul (and other New Testament writers) cite the Old Testament. This is not only a question of taking the time to notice how Paul's citations alter Old Testament verses, but also because of how we are conditioned to think about hermeneutics, the science and art of biblical interpretation. In this episode, the first of a series on the subject with guest scholar Dr. Matt Halsted, we survey why the issue is important and the sorts of controversies to which it leads.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 411: Paul's Use of the Old Testament Series Introduction with Matt Halsted. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! It's our new series! I'm looking forward to it!

MSH: Yeah, I've been looking forward to this for a while, too, and especially with our guest. We're going to have an extended discussion on, really, hermeneutics. But we're going to focus on Paul's use of the Old Testament, and that's going to take us down a number of rabbit trails that I think are going to be beneficial for our audience.

TS: Yeah. So this is kind of our first series. I know we're going to have a couple this year. But we're planning on at least ten-ish episodes. So people can expect this conversation to carry on over multiple episodes, and this is just the first of many.

MSH: Yep. I'm not sure how many we'll get, but we're going to have a number of them. So this is... Like we talked about on the year-end episode, this is the plan: to periodically inject conversation series about important topics. And so this is where we launch that.

MSH: We'll we're grateful to have Matt Halsted on the podcast with us. And I'm going to ask Matt to introduce himself to the podcast audience, because you're going to be hearing a lot of him and me talking about matters messianic and matters hermeneutical. That's what this series is going to be about. So Matt, thanks for agreeing to do this with us. Why don't you just tell our audience who you are, where you're at, and all that sort of good stuff?

MLH: Yeah, well, first of all, thanks for having me on. I've listened to your stuff or read your books for a while now, so it's always fun to get to chat and it's fun to be on the program. So thanks for having me.

So I am in Oklahoma and I teach for two different institutions, actually. I've been with Eternity Bible College for about six years. I've been with them the longest. And I currently teach at a classical Christian school in Oklahoma City, mostly Bible. And so between those two I stay pretty hooked up on just getting in the Word and sharing the Word with people. I finished my PhD in 2018, so a few years ago. And I was really led into that after... I guess it really all started in undergrad. I was a philosophy major—did philosophy for my bachelor's degree. Then I decided to go to seminary. I wanted to focus on theology. And when I did that... I actually did a stint of philosophy at grad level at the University of Oklahoma. I was working on a master's degree there. But I came to the conclusion, "No, I need to go to seminary and focus on theology." So I went to seminary and started focusing on theology, biblical studies, those sorts of things. And then I ended up transferring to London School of Theology, where I was able to study under a German biblical scholar, Torsten Moritz. And as I was doing master's work there, I transferred all of that work into a PhD. And the genesis of that was just researching Romans. I knew that I wanted to write on Romans. I was very intrigued with Paul's letter to Rome. And I was initially investigating righteousness language in Romans. And as I started doing that, I began to see really quickly, obviously, that Paul's righteousness language and his whole concept of justification and things of that sort actually just came from the Old Testament.

MSH: Mm hmm.

MLH: And as I began to see that he was drawing from the Old Testament, I began to notice how he was interpreting it—interpreting the Old Testament. So that started me on a trajectory to study hermeneutics. Long story short, I did a PhD on Paul's use of Scripture in Romans. And it's been fun to be able to investigate that.

MSH: I'm a little surprised. When you're at a classical school, don't they have you teaching any Greek there?

MLH: [laughs] No, I actually don't teach Greek there. Of course, I mean, all my students get the Greek and the Hebrew, just because I refuse to teach the Bible without touching on Greek and Hebrew.

MSH: Right. [laughter]

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MLH: So yeah. But no, I don't teach Greek for the school.

MSH: And also, just to sort of go down the bunny trail here—take a little segue off of biblical studies—you're also... My audience will find it interesting and they're going to probably just figure out why I'm having you on here. Because you're kind of like me—you're also interested in UFO stuff. [laughter]

MLH: Yeah, don't tell anybody. I mean... [laughter]

MSH: Don't tell anybody. Right, yeah.

MLH: Yeah, that's been... Well, look, I'm a product of the '90s. So we had *Independence Day* and movies, all that, and that Bob Lazar guy in the late '80s who came out. And so I remember hearing all those stories. So yeah, as a teenager, I read a few things on it. And I guess I put it down after a while. And then when I was a teenager... I don't know if you remember this, Mike, but a couple of years ago I told you about this. But when I was a teenager, I had kind of a supernatural experience. Well, it wasn't "kind of." It was a supernatural experience. And so I guess five years ago I began to ask myself, "Man, what did that experience mean? What was that all about?" So I guess I was finishing PhD work around that time, and I thought, "You know, I have a lot of scholar friends now. I guess I should talk to them." And I've made a lot of contacts. And so I talked...

MSH: "And somebody's probably thought about this."

MLH: They have. And so I guess for a while I was just... Well, when I was younger I talked to friends about it. But as I became an adult, I was like, "Yeah, I don't need to talk about this stuff. Because it's weird. And I don't want to, especially as a young academic, I don't need to talk about this sort of thing." [laughs] But for some reason, four or five years ago, I just had this inkling. It was like, "I *have* to talk about that. I *need* to figure out what this meant." And interestingly, I talked to a number of scholars, one of which was yourself. And all the scholars I talked to (PhDs, right?) were very kind and they listened to me. In fact, some of them had experiences themselves. And I didn't feel weird. In fact, Craig Keener actually told me, "You should talk to your students about this stuff." And I was like, "I *should* talk to my students about this stuff." [laughter] So I just began talking about it as if I was a New Testament Christian who believed in the supernatural. And I just found that a lot of people had these experiences. Some

were benevolent. Some were sinister experiences. But they didn't like talking about that. But when they saw me, an ordained minister with a PhD, talking about it, it gave them permission to talk about it.

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: So yeah. So I'm interested in all that stuff, too, just like you. And of course, UFOs is how I guess this got brought up. If you ever look into UFOs, there's a cross in the personalities and the commentators into paranormal stuff, right?

MSH: Oh, sure.

MLH: And so I've just always been, as you say, interested in "weird stuff."

MSH: Yeah. So there you go. Now that'll explain, again [laughter], to this audience, anyway. No, I mean, but that's true. You do find that academics do have experiences. And a number of them are willing to talk about them.

MLH: Mm hmm.

MSH: So we're not that much different than "normal" people.

MLH: Right.

MSH: Other than we do geeky things with biblical languages and whatnot and all that stuff.

MLH: [laughs] Right.

MSH: But it's inherently theological and philosophical once you really get into it. You can't escape it.

MLH: No, not at all. It's been fun, just reaching out and talking to people about these things. I talked to a guy who is a PhD from Princeton. I won't say his name because I don't think I have his permission. But he was telling me some interesting things he had experienced—a couple interesting things he had experienced. And if I said his name, everybody would know. And that *really* gave me permission to talk about it. Because, you know, a guy, PhD, Princeton.

MSH: Mm hmm.

MLH: You know, "I can talk about it, too, then."

MSH: It's funny how we think. But yeah, when you're in academia, you know, that *is* how you think. You know? Because you want the approval of your peers. And

you're always afraid you're going to run into somebody that's just going to be hostile. But most people are more thoughtful than that.

MLH: Well, it's interesting, especially for biblical scholars and theologians to kind of scoff at this I guess. Because we're reading the Bible, right? I mean, if Paul or any first century Christian came to a church and said, "Hey, I saw an angel," or, "An angel gave me this message," or whatever, the church would be like, "Oh, really? That happened to someone else I know." They wouldn't balk at the idea.

MSH: Mm hmm.

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MLH: But for us modern, scientific, Enlightenment-type Christians (in the West, that is), it's just so odd. And yet what's odd, really, is that we don't think about the supernatural as Christians as much as we should. That's what's odd, right? So yeah.

MSH: Yeah. I actually think this is a good segue into today's topic and today's series. Really what we're going to do today is introduce the series that we've planned. Because it's this sort of default skepticism that I think consciously or subconsciously overtakes people in biblical studies, including evangelicals. And what's really odd is... We're going to be talking about messianic thought in Judaism. And what's really odd is that you would think the thing that everybody would be the most open toward in terms of God's activity in history—supernatural stuff—would be the subject of messiah. And that actually isn't true, even for many evangelicals. My audience has been prepped by the previous episode. If you listen to the previous episode or the end-of-the-year episode, you're going to know where we're going here. But we want to spend an extended amount of time talking about the propensity and really the trend... And it's more than a trend. It's really an entrenched way that academics talk about messiah. Because the guiding assumption seems to be that if we didn't have the New Testament and we were reading only the Old Testament, we would never come out with Jesus. [laughs]

MLH: Hmm.

MSH: You know? And that kind of shocks people. And for me to say that even evangelicals wonder about that question or go down that trajectory is a real surprise. But this is actually fairly common. You know? We make certain assumptions as academics about the messiah and about how to read the Old Testament. Then when we get to the New Testament and we see Paul doing this or that or coming up with some interpretation, we're taught as graduate students that Paul was just doing something a little bit funky, or he was freestyling, or what he's doing is out of step with what a plain reading of the Old Testament would yield. And I object to that. I don't think that's correct. And I know you object to it.

MLH: Mm hmm.

MSH: So that's what we want to talk about. Maybe we could just start off here. This is not so much of a lesson in this episode, but we just want to have a discussion for the sake of our audience. If we were at SBL and we're sitting in a hotel lobby or something like that (we're in comfortable chairs) and this subject came up, how would we talk about it? So I don't know. Have you had any direct nudgings or did you have a professor along the way somewhere that sort of made it clear to you that Paul and just other New Testament writers were just sort of making stuff up—that if we didn't have them, if we just read our Old Testament, we would never come out with a messiah like Jesus? Did you ever have anybody nudge you in that direction?

MLH: Yeah, it's interesting. The answer is no—no *professor* that I had did that. But the scholars that I was reading...

MSH: Reading, yeah.

MLH: Yeah, they would for sure. Yeah, so it's not uncommon to, say, pick a book up on Paul (or about Paul) by a scholar and that scholar say, "Well, Paul chose the wrong verse to quote here." [laughs] You know?

MSH: [laughs] Yeah.

MLH: I'm reminded of C. H. Dodd, who, when he's commenting on Paul's quotation that he gives in Romans 9:25-26 (there Paul quotes from Hosea)... And Paul does some interesting things there. And C. H. Dodd comments. He said, "Yeah, the verse that Paul picked to make the point that Paul wanted to make was ill chosen. He should have used it over here." You know? And he just kind of goes on. There's not much more comment than that. And those sorts of comments from scholars are rather common, right? I mean, Paul and other New Testament writers are just sort of at times depicted as being so free with the Old Testament that you really wonder, "Does Paul respect the text of the Old Testament?" At least that's what they want you to think.

MSH: Mm hmm.

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MLH: "Is Paul doing something new, like so brand new that it's so divorced from the Old Testament context that we can no longer say that Paul is consistent with the Old Testament anymore?" or whatever. And so yeah, I mean, reading scholars, those sorts of comments and pokes [laughs] at Paul are pretty common. And that's not the position I take. I mean, when I read Paul (and when I read the New Testament, but I'm more of a Paul guy—that's where I spent most of my years), I see a certain logic in what Paul is doing. I do not think he disrespects the Old Testament. He was too good a faithful Jew to hold the Old

Testament in disdain. He was a man immersed in the text of the Jews. And he knew it well and he respected it well. And so yeah, I come to different conclusions. Not because I want to defend Paul, it's just simply because I think there's evidence in Paul's writings to show that he greatly respects the text and he's not just being so free with the text that he's producing nonsense. [laughs]

MSH: Yeah, you know, it almost comes across as writers, scholars, authors, and professors occasionally in class that want to give you the impression that there's really only one way that you could read the Old Testament and "it's this way that I'm espousing, and if Paul isn't tracking with me, well then Paul made a mistake," or, "Paul just made a bad choice." And so there's a method problem here. There's certainly some bias. There's certainly some tension that's created by virtue of our own doing, and that is we don't teach hermeneutics in seminary the way Paul was operating with his Old Testament. You know, we look at the Bible as an artifact and we disassemble it and then reassemble it. And we have certain mechanisms by which we do that, that we teach and we call it hermeneutics. And when Paul does something different, when we run into that, then we're led to think that, "Well, Paul needed to take my hermeneutics class." [laughter] Or, "Paul needed to read this book," or, "Paul needed to read this scholar. Paul's just off there again doing his own thing." And that's just not the case. Because there's such a variety going on in Paul's own lifetime of how to approach the text honorably. And there's a lot of discussion going on that Paul lives in one of those streams. It may not be where everybody lives. There are different approaches. But he definitely lives in a stream that we would call Second Temple Jewish thought. And there's nothing disrespectful of the Old Testament about that.

MLH: Right. Absolutely. And one thing I... Well, you know this. The joke in seminary and in divinity schools is that Paul could never pass our hermeneutics exams. [laughter] Right? And I flip it. I say, "Well, that's an interesting statement. But what's even more interesting is the question, 'Would we pass *his*?'"

MSH: Yeah, "Would we pass his?"

MLH: And no, we probably wouldn't, at least the way hermeneutics is taught today in many seminaries. And my background is evangelical, and so I'm confident he would not pass those tests. [laughs] And so what's interesting, though, is the way we are so quick to judge Paul from our post-Enlightenment, modernistic standard way of reading texts. Paul was a pre-Enlightenment thinker, right? He was in the world that you said, Second Temple Judaism. And his posture toward texts and understanding Scripture was profoundly different than our posture, right? We are a scientific sort of society, essentially. Right? And I say that even as evangelicals. We are all about precision and we are all about exactness and $2 + 2 = 4$. You know? Not to say that Paul thought $2 + 2 = 5$. [laughs] But the point is, his assumptions about the way understanding texts works... His assumptions were different. And I think instead of judging Paul

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based on modern standards, we should give him the benefit of the doubt. And the way we do that is to enter his premodern world and learn the exegetical, hermeneutical standards that were around at that time. And I think once we do (once we place Paul side-by-side his contemporaries), then we begin to say, “Okay, there is an inner logic Paul is operating by.” And then once you do that, once you enter that world, everything changes. The whole Bible takes on a completely different look in the world. And it’s beautiful. It’s fun to get into at that point.

MSH: Yeah, yeah. Trying to think the author’s thoughts after him and enter into his own worldview and (like I like to say) “have the Second Temple Jew living in your head” when you read the New Testament. I mean, it really matters. Because (just along this trajectory) one of the things that we are... We’re not even taught, it’s just sort of assumed. And if people assume it out loud enough then it becomes dogma. And that is, we’ve sort of been trained to think that Paul, if Paul had his head on straight [laughter], he would be thinking just like Jews do today. Because we assume that the Jewish approach to messiah and their Old Testament today is the same as it was back in Israelite days or back in Second Temple Jewish times. Like there’s this unified stream of thought that had no variation—that Judaism today is Judaism of the rabbis, and the Judaism of the rabbis was, of course, “This is how anyone during the biblical period would have read their Old Testament.” And that’s a deeply flawed assumption. [laughs]

MLH: Right. Absolutely.

MSH: But it’s really common. I want to read something. We had Kent Yinger on a few weeks ago to talk about a couple of his books. And he has this wonderful quote in his book, *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds*. This is on page 64. He writes:

Earlier studies of Jewish theology in the so-called intertestamental period generally drew upon tannaitic [MH: or the rabbinic] and pseudepigraphical sources indiscriminately, seeking to present a composite position. This approach falsely assumed that later rabbinic traditions accurately portrayed ‘normative’ Judaism in the first century CE. Instead, it is now generally recognized that Judaism of the first century was a religion encompassing much more creative variety than the rabbis might suggest.

So I love this quote because it exposes this notion that, “Oh, whoa! What the rabbis think... Surely they know their Old Testament because they’re Jews. And they can sight-read Hebrew. Surely what they think is what every Jew thought and every Jew would have thought, or every Jew should have thought of their Old Testament way back when—way back in biblical days.” And that just simply is not the case. There was a great variety of opinion—hermeneutical opinion and

hermeneutical strategy—when it came to their Old Testament. I'm wondering at what point you sort of discovered that yourself.

MLH: Yeah, that's a good question. I grew up thinking all of the wrong thoughts about the Bible. "The New Testament's full of grace; the Old Testament's all about works." Right? And then, "The Jews of Jesus' day were *all* in agreement." That was another false assumption. And it was like Jesus versus all the first century Jews, or something. And when I got into seminary, of course you are required to actually get into the Bible [laughs] and to read every bit of it. That's when I really began to see there's more going on. And of course doing my PhD, you do a lot of comparative work. So I showed in my dissertation some material from the Dead Sea Scrolls—the pesharim (the commentaries on the Bible). And of course, anytime you get into the Dead Sea Scrolls, that is just a whole interesting sociological study.

MSH: That just changed everything.

MLH: It did, it did. It reveals that there were lots of heated disputes within Judaism of the time. And of course, just reading through the Gospels, the audience knows about the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Essenes, the Zealots. I mean, these are different parties. And I think it would be wrong for us to look back and say, "Yep. There was *Judaism*. Singular."

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MSH: Yeah.

MLH: When in fact, scholars today speak of *Judaisms*, plural.

MSH: Or, "When all those groups got together to talk about messiah, they all said the same thing."

MLH: [laughs] Yeah, exactly. And so, you know, we have to remember that the people of the first century were in many ways a lot like the people of the 21st. We don't agree with each other on a lot of things. And so in Second Temple Judaism, you have competing viewpoints. And so yeah, I think at least in my evangelical background, there were these assumptions that there was just Judaism. It was just the Jews. And I think once you do that, you're opening doors to many mistakes in your interpretations of Scripture. But once we pull out, we see that there were *many* different perspectives on a range of issues.

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: Then we can see Paul as yet another interpreter within that matrix of thought.

MSH: Mm hmm.

MLH: You know? Paul is a Jew. Right? As Christians, we can't forget that. He's a Jew and he's thinking Jewish-ly. And once we get the others around him—his contemporaries around him—we begin to see how his own thought worked.

MSH: Yeah. So I'm hoping that the audience picks up on this. Because one of the things we want to do in this series and reinforce in this series is the important truth that back in Paul's day (back in Jesus' day and earlier, creeping back toward the "Old Testament" biblical period), there was no *one* Judaism. And there was no *one* stream of thought. Everybody did not think the same way about messiah or a whole host of other things that wound up being put into the Scriptures. There was a lot of discussion and a lot of debate. And this happened among the literate class, naturally, because they could read the texts. They had access to the texts. But there was this multiplicity. There's this variety within Judaism that needs to be understood and accepted as the reality that it is. And the Dead Sea Scrolls reflect this. Not only do you have more than one version of the Hebrew Bible preserved in the biblical Dead Sea Scrolls... You have texts that would agree with what we now call the Masoretic Text. You have texts that would agree with what we now call the Septuagint—the Hebrew base of the Septuagint, which is the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament. You would have texts that agree with the Samaritans—the Samaritan community, the Samaritan Pentateuch. They preserved the variety. They weren't offended by the variety. There's no attempt to censor the variety. There was great variety, not only in just the texts, but the things that they're writing about the texts to try to understand the biblical text. There's a lot of disagreement. There's a lot of discussion. There's a lot of variety that goes on there.

And so like you just said, if Paul were invited into the room with a Pharisee and a Sadducee and an Essene and a handful of other Jewish thinkers who wrote different books that we may have access to today, he's going to have points of agreement with them and he's going to have points of disagreement. And the same goes for every person in that room. There is no *one* Judaism. And so it's deeply flawed and very wrong-headed to accuse Paul of sort of paving his own way and dismissing Judaism. He doesn't do that. He's somewhere in the stream. Now what Paul has to his advantage is he's looking at Scripture post-resurrection. He has the Christ event to influence him. So maybe you could say a little bit about that.

MLH: Yeah, and in my own research, that's what I conclude, kind of the logic behind Paul's hermeneutic (the way he interprets Scripture) is based around his experience of the resurrected Christ and his belief that Christ has come and resurrected and launched a new era. And so there are so many texts that I could point to. Just now I'm thinking of Romans 4, where Paul retells the Abraham story. And that's fun. I'll leave the audience to go and look at that. And pay close attention to how he retells the Abraham story with the language of deadness and resurrection. It's really interesting. But the piece that I think is...

30:00 **MSH:** Yes, because you don't get that in Genesis.

MLH: No, you don't. You know, I have a whole section on this in my book, *Paul and the Meaning of Scripture*. It should come out in a few months. I don't know. But if you pay attention to the way Paul retells in Romans 4 the Abraham story, he almost primes that story by inserting language of deadness and resurrection to speak about Abraham's body and Sarah's womb. And the only way he's really doing that is because he thinks it's important. And he thinks that Jesus' resurrection is important for interpreting that text, and that text, therefore, speaks to the reality of the Christ believers in the Church, and so forth. So it's really interesting to see how Paul takes his belief that Jesus is messiah and does things with the text creatively. There is a creative element to it. But it's still consistent with (it's not contradictory to) the Old Testament.

Interesting... One text comes from 2 Corinthians 6, where Paul is writing, obviously, to the church at Corinth. And in chapter 6 he's telling them, "Stay holy. Stay pure. You are the temple of the living God. And what does the temple of God have to do with unrighteousness?" And things of that sort. "So stay holy and so forth." And at the end of that chapter, he brings in several texts (Ezekiel is thrown in there as well). But then at the very end, the last text that he cites is this text from 2 Samuel 7:14 that speaks of... Originally it was God's promise to David that he would have a son, and this son would be a special son—someone that God would establish and he would make king. And this takes on messianic...

MSH: Establish his dynasty, yeah.

MLH: Yeah, establish a dynasty—that whole thing. And it's the text that says, "I will be to this son a father, and he will be a son to me." And so he's clearly talking there in the original text about a particular individual. I mean, the language is in the singular. And Paul quotes that text, though, rather creatively, by applying it to the church at Corinth. And he even alters the language a bit to adjust for his new application. And he takes that verse that originally said, "I will be a father to this Davidic son, and he will be a son to me," and he says to the Corinthians—he refashions it and says...

MSH: Gentiles, even.

MLH: Yeah! That's right. This is a Gentile church. And he says, "I will be to you all (so now it's plural) a father, and you all (plural) will be to me sons (plural) and daughters." This is interesting to me. Because he pluralizes those nouns. He's not talking about a son anymore, but *sons* (plural). And then Paul just adds in daughters. Right? So there's sort of this equality piece that gets thrown in there. And what's interesting, again, just kind of a broad view, you ask yourself, "What is Paul doing here?" Because the original text spoke about a singular person that God would raise up from David to be a king, to have a dynasty. It's a he. It's a

him. And yet Paul's saying, "No, this is an 'us.' This is a 'we.' This is Jews *and* Gentiles." And just noticing the way he fashions the text is interesting. Now how can Paul do that? Right? I mean, what is Paul doing here? Well, it's based upon his belief (his prior belief) that Jesus is truly messiah—that he has risen from the dead. *And* it's based on his new belief about temple. The idea is that the temple (where God's presence rests) is in a people. It is in the Church. And so this whole idea of union with Christ is important for Paul, and that allows him to read this text freshly.

MSH: And that idea isn't foreign to the Old Testament. Because Paul, as you just mentioned, quotes Leviticus 26 before he ever gets to this point where he quotes 2 Samuel. And the part in Leviticus 26 he quotes says, "I will be to them (to the people) their God, and they will be to me a people."

MLH: Right.

MSH: So he actually uses Old Testament as a springboard to pluralize this.

MLH: Mm hmm.

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MSH: Anyway. So this is a good example. Because on the one hand, if you just restrict the discussion to 2 Samuel 7, it does look like Paul is doing something a little crazy.

MLH: Right.

MSH: But right on the heels of using the Old Testament's own plurality language. You can see he's using it as a bridge from the people of God in the Old Testament to the people of God now, which is... They're in Christ.

MLH: Right. You're exactly right. So we have to situate his exegesis within the wider matrix of his other beliefs. Right? But what's interesting too is (I was just reading this earlier) in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, you get that same language of the people—the community—as a temple.

MSH: Mm hmm.

MLH: The sectarians who are responsible for those scrolls, they are the community. They are the temple.

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: Scholars have talked a little bit about this. And so that right there is just more evidence that Paul is not doing something novel, because you have just given biblical evidence, and now there's...

MSH: Somebody else did it before him.

MLH: [laughs] That's exactly right. And the scrolls represent thought before him as well. So yeah, that's very important. But I think the important piece here is, Paul is not applying this to non-Christians. Okay? He's applying this to those who are in Christ. So there's a Christological interpretive approach. I just tell people this: he's got his "Jesus glasses" on. Right? And he is refracting this text through those lenses. And that's what's giving him this picture that's emerging.

MSH: You know, you could also say... My hobby horse theme is believing loyalty. This is how I talk about salvation across the testaments. He's also got his "believing loyalty glasses" on. Because in Leviticus 26, he's not talking about people who are disloyal to the covenant. He's not talking about Baal worship. He's not talking about people who refused to be circumcised. He's talking about those who have believing loyalty. And what changes is the object for believing loyalty for Paul is now... It's not exclusively the covenant with Israel at Sinai and with Abraham and some of these other Old Testament structures. But it's the Christ event. It's what Christ did on the cross and the resurrection.

MLH: Mm hmm.

MSH: But he still has his "believing loyalty glasses" on. This is the people that this applies to.

MLH: Right. Yeah, Paul does nothing really that different with respect to faith language or believing loyalty language. It's always for Paul loyalty to the covenant. That's *pistis* or "faith" in Greek.

MSH: Yep.

MLH: Loyalty to what God's doing. But even then, that loyalty to covenant is rooted in the Abrahamic covenant. So Paul does not think that he is overturning the story of Israel. He doesn't think he's overturning even the Mosaic covenant. He believes that the covenant is actually...

MSH: He sees it's fulfilled.

MLH: Yeah—*telos* language, Romans 10:4—that it's culminated into Christ. Christ is the keeper of the law. And if you are in Christ, you are a keeper of the law. And if your fidelity is to Christ, who completes Torah, then you complete Torah. And if you complete Torah, and if in our bodies the sacrifices of praises are going up through Christ, we become the living sacrifices. Our bodies are the living sacrifices. That's Romans 12. And then if the place where sacrifice is made

is in our bodies—in our communities as believers—then it follows we are temple. We are the temple. And so that all...

MSH: Yeah, there's a nice, logical flow to it.

MLH: Exactly. And so we have to be aware, I think, of becoming Marcionites, right? [laughs] And some people, I'm pretty convinced, are Marcionites in the sense that they reject the Old Testament, and "Paul's doing something new," and all that sort of thing. Look, no, no, no. Paul is operating within the story of Israel. And that story is completed in Jesus. And yes, there is creativity with Paul's interpretations and his reading of Scripture. But that creativity is not flippant. It is not undisciplined. There's a rhythm and a cadence to it that is just absolutely stunning and beautiful. We will never see it, though, if we do not situate Paul within the Second Temple Jewish matrix.

MSH: Yeah, it's interesting. It is novel because he's viewing it through the Christ event. But on the other hand, it's not novel, because the Christ event for him is rooted in the Old Testament covenantal structures.

MLH: Yes.

40:00

MSH: So it's like he's novel, but he's not. Or he isn't but he is. You know?

MLH: Right.

MSH: So this gets to what you had mentioned earlier at the beginning of our discussion, about how we need to be able to follow Paul's line of thinking—you know, these connections that were intuitive to Paul and that, honestly, ought to be intuitive to us because Paul writes about them to us. But if we had these things in our head and see how Paul attaches the Old Testament to Christ, then the conclusions that he draws and the interpretations that he expresses in his writings make sense. They make sense on their own terms. And by virtue of being locked in or hooked firmly into the Old Testament, you can't accuse Paul of dismissing the Old Testament. You just can't.

MLH: Right.

MSH: I mean, you can say that all day long, but you'd be wrong. You know? It just... Right there it is.

MLH: Yeah, it would be very odd to say that Paul leads us to dismiss the Old Testament when, in fact, so much of the Old Testament is embedded in Paul's own letters, right? [laughs] And he argues from them to make his points. And he relies on them. Which is fascinating, because when you actually look at the way Paul cites the Scriptures, he's begging you to go back and check him out. Right?

Go look at the text. So he's presenting arguments from Scripture. And I don't think it's fair to say he's unilaterally imposing on the Old Testament his assumptions. No, no. It's more of a dialogue for Paul. It's a conversation. And that's a very Jewish way of reading texts, I think.

MSH: What do we imagine the pushback to this would be? This is where, in my mind, the pushback falls—that somebody... And there are plenty of scholars, plenty of books, plenty of professors out there who would say, "Look, you know, you're making the assumption that Jesus was the messiah." [laughter] Okay, yeah, yeah, we are. And so was Paul. Okay?

MLH: Mm hmm.

MSH: So with that assumption, the trajectory would be, "Is that true? Let's take a look at the word 'messiah.' What does the Old Testament actually say about messiah?" Now this is going to be actually the subject of the next installment of our series, so I don't want to go too far down the rabbit hole here. But I think you already know what I'm talking about here, about how the pushback—what the other side of this question (the negative side, our opponents) will say to this. The first thing they're going to do is question our understanding of the term "messiah." Can you think of another pushback, or would you agree with that? Would you agree that that's sort of a reasonable starting point?

MLH: Yeah, I think so. I think we have to talk about that issue. We have to talk about that objection. In addition to that, I would say that depending on people's background in this stuff will determine what sort of objection they'll make. I mean, for example, whenever Paul quotes Scripture and some people could be alarmed when they actually investigate how Paul's reading Scripture because he's kind of creative. You know? And so am I turning Paul into this textual relativist—that the Bible can mean anything that it wants to mean? And I would deny that. So some people would be worried about that.

MSH: Mm hmm.

MLH: But other people would probably make the opposite mistake. They'll go down that hole. They'll welcome the whole relativist idea. But in my background, one of the objections that I get is the assumption that Paul's just reading Scripture straight and there is *no* creativity or anything of the sort. And I just always want to...

MSH: That would be a common evangelical misperception.

MLH: Right. Yeah. [sigh] You know... It's interesting...

MSH: You know, let's be bluntly honest here. It's because a lot of evangelical believers don't spend much time in the Old Testament.

MLH: Exactly.

MSH: They don't know it well enough to know—well enough to see—that Paul is being creative.

MLH: Exactly. Yeah.

45:00

MSH: It's like, how many would know 2 Samuel 7:14 just off the top of their heads? And know that, okay, "I, even I, will be to him (singular)," the Davidic covenant here—the Davidic dynasty inheritor, David.

MLH: Mm hmm.

MSH: "I will be to him a father; he will be to me a son." Okay? How many of them would just intuitively, reflexively know that this is about one person, one individual? This is how it would've been read in David's time. This is how David would've read it, would've heard it. But then what Paul does is he pluralizes it.

MLH: Mm hmm.

MSH: You have to know your Old Testament pretty well to read 2 Corinthians 6:18 and see what Paul is doing. But a lot of the people on our side broadly, theologically, in the evangelical world don't know their Old Testament that well. And so they assume that there's just this one-to-one correspondence between what the Old Testament says and the words that are coming out of Paul's mouth or from Paul's pen. And that's not necessary the case.

MLH: So let me up the ante a little bit. Because not only is there not one-to-one correspondence between say Paul and certain Old Testament texts, but there may not even be one-to-one correspondence between Old Testament texts—the Septuagint and the Hebrew Bible.

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: So I mean, there are some differences there. And so when you factor that in, now you've got more to account for.

MSH: Yep. Like which text should we be recognizing? Do we have to make that decision? I mean, that's a bigger decision. Do we have to pick Septuagint over MT or are we going to live with the plurality like they did back... Whoever assembled the Dead Sea Scrolls, they were fine with it.

MLH: And this is something that really affects our hermeneutic approach. Because as Westerners, immersed as we are in Enlightenment, objective “assumptions,” we’re not comfortable with tension. We’re just not. But you know...

MSH: We’re not comfortable with plurality either. [laughs]

MLH: We’re not comfortable with plurality. Because... I mean, yeah. Especially if you’re evangelical. Like, for me, just speaking personally, I was always afraid that these sorts of things would always lead to relativism, and we do *not* want relativism. You know? And yeah, I don’t want moral relativism. There is a right and wrong, and that sort of thing. But we have to understand that just because there can be several interpretations does not commit us to the view that just *any* interpretation goes.

MSH: Yeah.

MLH: So there are false interpretations. I’m not a relativist—by *no* stretch of the imagination. I’m fairly conservative. But at the same time, there’s a plasticity or a... What’s the word? There’s just tension that we...

MSH: Elasticity?

MLH: Oh, maybe that’s the word. Yeah, something to that effect. And the fact is, if we’re not comfortable with it and we recognize that, I say, “That’s fine. Just recognize that. That’s a good start. But just know that that’s only because you are approaching Scripture differently than Paul or any Second Temple Jew.” We talked earlier about these kinds of... maybe “the word is competing” interpretations or different viewpoints among Jews. And you know, that really captures the spirit of their interpretive approach. So we need that, I think.

MSH: We actually live with it more than we think we do.

MLH: Good point.

MSH: Because on any given Sunday, you could be listening to a sermon and the pastor could be going off script, away from his notes, and start quoting a passage. Did he actually quote it with precision? Like, how many people are going to care? If his citing something from memory, and if you looked later and, “Oh, well, he missed the indefinite article here.” [MLH laughs] You know? Like there’s a word he left out. Nobody’s going to care because he gets the gist of it anyway.

MLH: Exactly.

MSH: You know? And so we live with how Scripture is used in the pulpit on any given Sunday. We live with this every week. We do it ourselves when we're talking about the Lord or talking about Scripture with somebody else. There's no sense that we have to stop our discussion and go run and pull our Bible off the shelf and make sure that what we're quoting corresponds to that. And look at what we're doing. We're picking one version, in English.

MLH: Yeah. [laughs]

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MSH: I mean, we live with this plurality and this elasticity all the time. But somehow when we're taught to do hermeneutics, "Oh. Well, you can't have that." You can't do here what you do every other day? And the question is, "Well, why? Who made up the cosmic rule that it can only operate one way?"

MLH: Right, right. Yeah. I mean, when people ask me, "How tall are you?" I don't say 5' 11 ¾." Right? I say "six foot" or something to that effect. It depends who I'm talking to, right? And so there is... Yeah, we do live with it more than we realize. But for some reason, when we come to the Bible, it's code-breaking. Right? It's all about code-breaking. [MH laughs] And we've talked a little bit about that. And again, it comes back to certain philosophical assumptions that are packaged with the way we're taught to read Scripture—hermeneutics, right? In seminaries and divinity schools, it's Enlightenment assumptions. It's this weird commitment to a rote literalism.

MSH: Thinking like a modern, yep.

MLH: Thinking like a modern. Yeah, this literalistic approach. And look, I know your audience doesn't need to hear me say this because I know that you talk about this a lot. But if you commit to a purely, all the time, 100% literal approach, you're going to mess up the meaning and the intention of the text. And even though that literal approach is often coupled with this idea of respecting the text, sometimes a literal approach will *disrespect* the text. I mean, go read Genesis 1. You know, you've talked about this. Do we really interpret that completely literally? If we do, we might have some problems, right? So anyway, lots to say.

MSH: Yeah, we fashion the enterprise after our own assumptions, is ultimately what we're doing. And what you and I are asking people to do who are listening to this is, "Well, let's try to think along *Paul's* assumptions. Let's try to have those in our head instead of our own assumptions."

MLH: Right. And the temptation is for folks to say, "Oh, okay, well, let's just get rid of all of our assumptions and just read it objectively." And I want to say, "Well, no, no, no. You actually can't do that. You don't ever get rid of assumptions. You're a human being. We're asking you to get Jewish assumptions—Second Temple assumptions." That's the key.

MSH: Well, this has been a good discussion. I think this is a good place to end for the day. Because the next time we're going to drill down into one of these topics that we touched on—this whole notion that if we just had the Old Testament and we just looked at what the Old Testament said about messiah (*mashiach*), that we wouldn't come out with anything that looked like Jesus. So we're going to talk about that next time in more specific detail. So Matt, thanks again for being with us. And I think this is going to be a really useful discussion for our audience.

MLH: Yeah, thanks for having me. I'm excited.

TS: Alright, Mike. Well, that was a really good conversation. I'm looking forward to the entire series. Honestly, I hope it spans a ton of episodes. I hope y'all keep the conversation going on and on and on and on, because I know there's going to be lots of good stuff turning up. So I'm excited to hear what this "Paul's Use of the Old Testament" series has in store for us.

MSH: Yeah, Matt has done extensive work in Paul's use of the Old Testament, so it could go on for quite a bit. But we'll figure out how many we need and what passages we want to park on. But there's a lot of interesting stuff, I think, for our audience in how to approach Scripture.

TS: Alright. Sounds great. Well, with that, I want to thank Matt for doing the series with us, and I want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.