

"Figural interpretation" *Echoes* p.2

Quote from Luther at beginning of *Echoes*

There are some who have little regard for the Old Testament. They think of it as a book that was given to the Jewish people only and is now out of date, containing only stories of past times But Christ says in John 5, "Search the Scriptures, for it is they that bear witness to me." . . . [T]he Scriptures of the Old Testament are not to be despised but diligently read. . . . Therefore dismiss your own opinions and feelings and think of the Scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest of mines which can never be sufficiently explored, in order that you may find that divine wisdom which God here lays before you in such simple guise as to quench all pride. Here you will find the swaddling cloths and the manger in which Christ lies. Simple and lowly are these swaddling cloths, but dear is the treasure, Christ, who lies in them.

Luther is reading the birth story *figurally*.

FIGURAL INTERPRETATION

AUERBACH'S DEFINITION

Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events of persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfills the first.

...

Figural reading need not presume that the OT authors—or the characters they narrate—were conscious of predicting or anticipating Christ. Rather, the discernment of a figural correspondence is necessarily retrospective rather than prospective.

...

Because the two poles of a figure are events within the "flowing stream" of time, the correspondence can be discerned only after the second event has occurred and imparted a new pattern of significance to the first. But once the pattern of correspondence has been grasped, the semantic force of the figure flows both ways, as the second event receives deeper significance from the first.

Different ways in which the NT can make reference to the OT

- Quotation
- Allusion
- Echo

I first became aware of this when reading Jesus' familiar parable of the Good Shepherd.

Read John 10:11-21

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

The Jews who heard these words were again divided. Many of them said, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?”

But others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

But read on to v.33. Why did the Jews want to stone him? What had he said? When did he claim to be God?

Look at the highlighted passages in Ezekiel 34:1-31.

The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: **‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?** You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

“ ‘Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.

“ **‘For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep.** I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. **I myself will**

tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

“ ‘As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

“ ‘Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken.

“ **‘I will make a covenant of peace with them** and rid the land of savage beasts so that they may live in the wilderness and sleep in the forests in safety. I will make them and the places surrounding my hill a blessing. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. The trees will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land. **They will know that I am the Lord,** when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them. They will no longer be plundered by the nations, nor will wild animals devour them. **They will live in safety, and no one will make them afraid.** I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops, and they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations. Then they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them and that they, the Israelites, are my people, declares the Sovereign Lord. **You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign Lord.’ ”**

This also opened my eyes to the fact that when a New Testament writer makes a quotation/allusion/echo from the OT, he includes the context in what he expects the reader to understand.

The word for "shepherd" is used to mean "king" in several languages of the ancient NE.

In the Iliad, Agamemnon's epithet is "shepherd of the people."

How do we read the Bible?

How does the way we read the Bible inform our theology and ministry?

Modern and postmodern methods of Biblical interpretation (hermeneutics) have tended to read the Bible as an isolated text with little unified meaning or coherence.

If you don't understand that, think about how you read the Bible (a) in your personal Bible reading, (b) in church.

You Tube Anglican TV Ministries Jun 17 2013

[Lecture - Richard Hays - Did Moses Write about Jesus? The Challenges of Figural Reading](#)

16:47 - 33:03

Luke 24 The Emmaus Road

Cleopas' understanding of who Jesus was

Contemporary theologians: low view of Christology. (Cleopas' view: a prophet).

(They would discount the nativity stories and resurrection as later additions)

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Luke 13:34/Deut 32:10-12/Ps 91:1-4a

Luke 13:34

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."

Deut 32:10-12

In a desert land he found him,
in a barren and howling waste.
He shielded him and cared for him;
he guarded him as the apple of his eye,
like an eagle that stirs up its nest
and hovers over its young,
that spreads its wings to catch them
and carries them aloft.
The Lord alone led him;
no foreign god was with him.

Ps 91:1-4a

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."
Surely he will save you
from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge.

1. Jesus does not appeal to God to protect him from the violence that lies ahead.
2. His lament portrays Jerusalem as repeatedly rejecting the protection Jesus is offering. But, in Luke's narrative, Jesus has not been to Jerusalem before.

Who then should we understand as the speaker in Luke 13:34?
They are nothing other than a cry from the heart of Israel's God.

We need to be Reading Backwards, seeking to find previously hidden figural correspondences between Moses and the prophets and the mysterious stranger on the Emmaus road.

Catena of texts from Isaiah with ὁ λυτρώμενος.

Is 41:14 Do not fear, you worm Jacob, you insect Israel

Is 43:14-15 Thus says the Lord, you redeemer, . . . I am the Lord

In their blindness they truly name Jesus' identity without realizing what they are saying or whom they are speaking to.

