

Metalepsis

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Interpreters of the New Testament can explore intertextuality from a variety of angles and assumptions. A key assumption of this essay is that when NT authors cite or allude to “a brief part of another text . . . [they] may be evoking the entire context, message, or story of that other text.”¹ This assumption has a name in literary circles—*metalepsis*. I suggest that *metalepsis* is an important feature of intertextuality and that it has a basic storied quality.

Before commencing further discussion of *metalepsis* and examples from the use of the Old Testament in the New, I share a contemporary example of this discursive feature to illustrate the commonplace nature of importing context and story by means of verbal and conceptual references to another (precursor) text. Gospels scholar Rikki Watts shares this story:

As an Australian student studying in the United States I was fascinated by my lecturers’ occasional references to “four score and seven years ago” and the uniformly “knowing” response of my American fellow-students. Only on learning that the phrase was the first line of Abraham Lincoln’s famous Gettysburg address did its significance [become] apparent. By evoking the Founding Fathers’ ideology these few words functioned as a hermeneutical indicator, pointing not so much to the text of Lincoln’s address *per se* . . . but to the larger interpretation of American history which Lincoln’s speech assumed and with which it interacted.²

1. Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 110.

2. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus*, 3.

If just a few (well-known) words can evoke not only another text—an intertext—but also the story that sits behind and within the intertext, then careful attention to precursor texts and their contexts in the interpretation of a work is a valuable enterprise.

Description of Metalepsis

The term metalepsis has been connected in the history of rhetoric to metonymy, a figure of speech often described as a part standing in for the whole.³ Using this association, we can understand metalepsis as an author's reference to the larger literary context when offering a citation or allusion from an earlier text. In this sense, *metalepsis* is the use of a part of a precursor text to evoke the whole of it. As Litwak defines it, metalepsis is "the way in which one text is taken up and changed by another text through an echo of the former."⁴ For example, Isa 57:9 is alluded to in Eph 2:17:

Isa 57:19a: "... peace and peace to those who are far away and to those that are near. And the Lord said, 'I will heal them.'" (LXX).

Eph 2:17: "And he came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near."

In this case, it is telling that "those who are far away" in Isaiah are those from Israel still in exile. So the announcement of peace evokes the promise of God's restoration of Israel from exile (e.g., 57:14). Exile and restoration are storied features of the Isaiah text. The allusion in Ephesians then plays on this language of "near" and "far" (and its associated story), not to reference Israelites in the land and those in exile but now Jews and Gentiles, respectively. "Those who are far away" is expanded to refer to the Gentiles who are most remote from Israel's God (2:12). In this way, the Isaiah text "is taken up and changed by" the Ephesians text "through an echo of the former."⁵

Those who highlight the importance of metalepsis for New Testament studies often point to the seminal work of John Hollander, *The Figure of an Echo* (1981). Hollander introduces the concept of an "echo" from one text to another via "transumption" or "metalepsis."⁶ For Hollander,

3. See the discussion in Hollander, *Figure of Echo*, 133–49.

4. Litwak, *Echoes of Scripture in Luke-Acts*, 52.

5. Quotation adapted from Litwak, 52.

6. "Transumption" comes from the Latin *transumptio* and "metalepsis" from the Greek *metalambanō*. See Hollander, *Figure of Echo*, 133–34.

“[I]nterpretation of metalepsis entails the recovery of transumed material.”⁷ In other words, reading texts well includes attention not only to the parts of precursor texts that are referenced (e.g., citations, allusions, or echoes) but also focuses on the context and (back)story of the former text.

Richard Hays takes up Hollander’s insights to explore intertextuality in the New Testament in *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (1989) and later in *The Conversion of the Imagination* (2005).⁸ Hays defines metalepsis and its significance in Pauline interpretation as “a rhetorical and poetic device in which one text alludes to an earlier text in a way that evokes resonances of the earlier text *beyond those explicitly cited*. The result is that interpretation of a metalepsis requires the reader to recover unstated or suppressed correspondences between the two texts.”⁹ As Hays indicates more recently, a metalepsis “beckons readers to recover more of the original subtext in order to grasp the full force of the intertextual link.”¹⁰

Understandings of metalepsis have frequently accented its storied nature, since NT authors often draw upon and “transume” the storied features of Old Testament texts. Some of the facets of the meta-story of the OT include creation, covenant, slavery, sojourning, and return from exile. Viewing OT references in this broader storied context helps us to avoid the rather commonplace assumption that the NT authors treat the Scriptures more atomistically. Hays argues for such a storied reading: “[W]e do not simply scour the OT for isolated prooftexts and predictions; rather, we must perceive how the whole story of God’s covenant promise unfolds and leads toward the events of Jesus’ death and resurrection.”¹¹

Some brief examples will help us see these storied features of metalepsis more clearly. Since narratives are built on the basics of *setting*, *plot*, and *characters*, we will look at an example of storied metalepsis from each of these categories.

New Testament writers often exploit *settings* to highlight associations with an Old Testament story or text. For example, a crucial setting for Jesus’ passion, burial, and resurrection in the Gospel of John is “a garden” (18:1, 26; 19:41; 20:15). This setting very likely echoes the setting of the creation accounts (e.g., Gen 2:8–10), especially given other significant points of resonance between John 18–20 and Genesis 1–2.¹² The author of John uses this

7. Ibid., 115.

8. Hays later applies his method to the Gospels in *Reading Backwards*.

9. Hays, *Conversion of the Imagination*, 2 (author’s emphasis).

10. Hays, *Reading Backwards*, 42.

11. Ibid., 15–16.

12. See Brown, “Creation’s Renewal,” 275–90.

association to accent Jesus' role in inaugurating the renewal of creation in his death and resurrection. Yet this storied feature from Genesis into John's Gospel is easily overlooked if we only focus on pronounced verbal connections between the two texts and ignore storied ones.¹³

New Testament writers often draw on *events* portrayed in Old Testament texts to inform their reflections on the advent of Messiah Jesus. In his cataloging of how the NT authors draw on the OT text, Peter Mallen includes what he calls "narrative patterns" in addition to quotations and allusions (both verbal and conceptual). Mallen defines narrative pattern as "a series of events or interactions between characters whose similarity to those in an earlier text is apparent although the specific details and the language of expression may vary."¹⁴ One example of a narrative pattern occurs in Matthew's Gospel when the identity formation of Jesus is compared to (and contrasted with) that of Israel. "Jesus goes through the waters [of baptism] (cf. Exod 14:21–22), is pronounced 'God's son' (cf. Exod 4:22–23), and is then led into the wilderness to be tested in the same way Israel was (cf. Exod 14–32)."¹⁵

In addition to settings and narrative patterns or events, we can also note the "peopled" nature of NT references to the OT. References to OT *characters* abound in the Gospels and Epistles and provide further examples of what we are calling storied metalepsis. For example, when Matthew mentions a figure like Abraham (1:1, 2), he potentially raises a number of associations about Abraham for his reader. Part of the interpretive task is determining what parts of the Abraham "backstory" are relevant in these initial verses of Matthew. In other words, how has Matthew transumed the Abraham character for his specific purposes as he narrates Jesus' story?¹⁶ Is Matthew signaling covenantal associations via Abraham or his role as the ancestor of many nations (e.g., Gen 17:4–5) or both?¹⁷ What is important to note is that the reader experiences the reference to Abraham as a storied reference not necessarily tied or limited to a specific OT text.¹⁸

13. John uses *κηπος* rather than *παράδεισος*, potentially muting the intertextual connection. Yet there is good reason for John to avoid *παράδεισος*, since that term in the NT refers to the final state (Suggit, "Jesus the Gardener," 166). See discussion in Brown, "Creation's Renewal," 279–81.

14. Mallen, *Reading and Transformation*, 24.

15. Piotrowski, "After the Deportation," 190.

16. Abraham is also mentioned at 1:17; 3:9; 8:11; and 22:32.

17. See my discussion in "Genesis in Matthew's Gospel," 54–55.

18. On the idea of a character evoking a "composite figure" residing in the collective memory of author/audience, see Thatcher, "Cain and Abel," 749–50.

A central methodological question regarding metalepsis revolves around how to recognize allusions and echoes the author intends, especially as echoes may have fewer linguistic connections to a precursor text (and more storied and conceptual links). Any NT author steeped in Scripture, “was bound to express himself in ways that subconsciously echoed Scriptural texts on a regular basis without any metaleptic intentions.”¹⁹ So what are the signals that an echo is part of the author’s communicative intention?²⁰ Powell suggests three basic criteria to start the conversation.²¹

1. *Availability* of alluded text to author and readers of text being analyzed.
2. *Degree of repetition* of alluded text in text being analyzed.²²
3. *Thematic coherence* between the texts.²³

To these, we can add three additional discreet criteria from Hays:²⁴

4. *Historical plausibility*: could the author have intended the echo and the original readers understood it?
5. *History of interpretation*: have other contemporary or historical interpreters noticed the echo?
6. *Satisfaction*: Does “the proposed reading make sense?” Is it coherent?²⁵

If a potential echo or allusion (not to mention a citation) is determined to have the support of these varied criteria, what do we do next? How do we apply a *storied metaleptical approach* to a specific NT author and text?

19. Lucas, “Assessing Stanley E. Porter’s Objections,” 95.

20. On the possibility of *unattended meanings* still being a part of communicative intention, see Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 108–10.

21. Powell, *Following the Eastern Star*, 101–2.

22. The seven criteria of Hays, *Echoes*, 30, expand on the idea of repetition to explore *volume* (repetitions in the specific verse/text at hand) and *recurrence* (the same precursor text used at more than one place in the entire work).

23. Hays, *ibid.*, also indicates the importance of *thematic coherence*, which we might define as “the alignment of a possible echo within the author’s rhetorical emphases” (Brown, “Creation’s Renewal,” 289; I reshape Hays’s language originally developed for epistles to allow for a narrative focus for this criterion).

24. *Ibid.*, 29–32.

25. Lucas, “Assessing Stanley E. Porter’s Objections,” 99–100, addresses Porter’s critique of Hays’s criteria by noting that the latter actually both provide ways for determining potential allusions and act as guides to the meaning of allusions.

Examples of Storied Metalepsis in 1 Peter and in Matthew

To illustrate further the concept of metalepsis and its storied features, as well as exploring how to take account of these when interpreting the Bible, we will look at two extended examples from 1 Peter and Matthew, both of which are filled with citations, allusions, and echoes from the OT. We will first attend to the use of Psalm 34 in 1 Peter. The author of 1 Peter draws upon this Psalm more than once and in significant ways; and some have argued that it is foundational for his reflection upon the situation of his audience. The second example is a more subtle evocation—Gen 4:24 in Jesus' saying about forgiving another "seventy-seven times" in Matt 18:22. Yet "Matthew tells a story that demands a very high level of intertextual awareness."²⁶ So we do well to listen closely for storied connections at the intersection of these two passages.

Psalm 34 in 1 Peter

Psalm 34 (33 LXX) pictures a righteous person suffering and in trouble, but with the hope of the Lord's redemption and deliverance on the horizon. The psalm's attribution to David when pursued by Abimelek connects to the individual voice in the psalm reflecting on former troubles and present deliverance. The psalm is a thanksgiving hymn with some wisdom elements, such as the contrast between the righteous and evildoers (34:15–16, 21) and the "fear of Yahweh" motif (34:7, 9, 11).

The author of 1 Peter seems to find Psalm 34 fertile ground for reflection upon the situation of his audience.²⁷ He draws upon it paradigmatically to parallel their situation and to suggest a way forward for them.²⁸ We might put it this way—the psalmist's story and the story of the Petrine audience align in enough ways to invite a metaleptical reading of the psalm into 1 Peter.²⁹ Peter marshals the psalm's theological vision to draw his audience into reflection on their own situation and behavior and to provide a rationale for their exemplary behavior even in the midst of suffering. He does this with

26. Piotrowski, "After the Deportation," 189.

27. Without wading into authorial questions, I will use "Peter" to designate the author of the letter; similarly, "Matthew" will be used below.

28. Moyise, *Later New Testament Writings*, 43–44, notes that Psalm 34 is only quoted here in all of the NT; it "appears to be the author's own discovery."

29. The connection between the stories is heightened in the Septuagint (33:5), where the Hebrew noun for "fears" (34:5) is rendered with the language of "sojourns" (παροικία), a word that occurs in 1 Peter 1:17 as part of a Petrine exilic motif (1:1, 17; 2:11). See Jobes, *1 Peter*, 220.

a lengthy citation from Psalm 34 in 1 Pet 3:10–12, as well as with a clear allusion in 2:3.

Peter writes to believers in Jesus in Asia Minor (1:1) who are experiencing slanderous accusations from their neighbors and even members of their household (e.g., 2:18; 3:1) because they have withdrawn from various socio-religious activities of their former pre-Christian way of life (1:18; 2:12; 3:16; 4:3–4, 14). As Elliott notes, this withdrawal was perceived as “anti-social” and resulted in “social tensions deriving from the social, cultural, religious differences demarcating believers from their neighbors.”³⁰ In the face of this situation, Christians were susceptible “to charges of wrongdoing and conduct injurious to the well-being of the commonwealth and the favor of the gods.”³¹ Into this difficult situation, Peter commends a way of living characterized by “soft difference,” that is, a stance toward society that is distinctive when necessary and accommodating whenever possible.³²

There are two clear references to Psalm 34 in 1 Peter—an extended citation at 3:10–12 (Ps 34:12–16 [33:13–17aLXX]) and an obvious allusion at 2:3 (Ps 34:8 [33:9 LXX]). Peter uses the extended citation to conclude a household code begun at 2:11 (2:11—3:12).

Ps 33:13–17 (LXX; Eng: 34:12–16)	1 Pet 3:10–12
13 Who is the person who desires to love life and to see good days?	10 For whoever desires to loves life and to see good days
14 Stop your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.	must stop their tongue from evil and their lips from speaking deceit;
15 Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.	11 That one must turn from evil and do good, they must seek peace and pursue it.
16 The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer,	12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer,
17a But the face of the Lord is set against those who do evil.	But the face of the Lord is set against those who do evil.

The gist of the quotation is an exhortation to honorable speech and peaceable living through doing good; these are actions that Peter has already commended in his letter (cf. 1:15; 2:1, 12). They aptly sum up the sense of the household code, which focuses on how those with little power in the

30. Elliott, *1 Peter*, 103.

31. Ibid., 94.

32. This language comes from Volf, “Soft Difference,” 15–30.

household might mitigate hostilities toward their faith within that sphere (e.g., 2:18; 3:1).³³ By living peaceably, within cultural constraints, these slaves and wives, along with the other believers, will “silence the ignorant talk of foolish people” (2:15).³⁴

The allusion to Ps 34:8 in 1 Peter consists in the words “taste[d] that the Lord is good” (1 Pet 2:3: “ἐγεύσασθε ὅτι χρηστὸς ὁ κύριος”). In the psalm it is paired with a blessing: “Taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the person who hopes in him” (Ps 33:9; LXX).

In 1 Peter, the allusion provides (part of) the basis for the encouragement to “grow up into your salvation” (2:2). Additionally, a referent has shifted between the psalm and its use in 1 Peter. While “Lord” (κύριος) in the Psalm refers to Yahweh, Israel’s God, in 1 Peter it has a Christological focus. The subsequent verse clearly identifies the “Lord” (κύριος) of 2:3 with Christ, who is described as the living stone, chosen by God (2:4). In a move not uncommon in the New Testament, Jesus the Messiah is identified with Yahweh in such a way that texts about the latter can be applied to the former.³⁵ In this way, Psalm 34 is transumed into the fabric of meaning of 1 Peter.

Just a verse prior, Peter very likely alludes to Psalm 34:13 (LXX: 33:14) as well, given verbal repetition and thematic resonance: “Stop your tongue from evil [κακός] and your lips from speaking deceit [δόλος]. . .” (Ps 33:14; LXX). “So rid yourselves of all evil [κακία] and all deceit [δόλος]. . .” (1 Pet 2:1).³⁶

Given the aligning of the stories of these texts—a beleaguered person who has experienced rescue and a group of Christians who hope for the same—along with these two or three citations/allusions to the psalm in 1 Peter, we are justified in continuing with this metaleptical reading to notice some of the psalm’s motifs that make their way into 1 Peter. The “fear of the Lord” is an important theme in Psalm 34 (34:7, 9, 11 [Eng]), and in 1 Peter fearing God (1:17; 2:18) displaces fear of those who seek to harm Christians (3:14; also 2:18; cf. Ps 34:4 [Eng]). The psalm also indicates that the shame that would naturally attend trouble and affliction (e.g., 34:17–18 [Eng]) melts away as the righteous look to Yahweh their God (34:5 [Eng])—“Come to him and be enlightened; and your faces will never be covered with

33. See Brown, “Silent Wives,” 395–403.

34. Moyise, *Later New Testament Writings*, 43, suggests that Peter uses the Psalm’s references to “those who use their ‘tongues’ and ‘lips’ to do evil” to refer (obliquely) to those who are maligning the Petrine Christians with their malicious speech.

35. On this identification, see e.g., Bauckham, *God Crucified*.

36. Woan, “Psalms in 1 Peter,” 222, refers to this connection as a strong or significant allusion (vs. a weak one), with shared language of κακός/κακία (“evil”) and δόλος (“deceit”) as well as thematic resonance.

shame” (33:6 LXX). Similarly, Peter affirms that those who trust in Christ “will never be put to shame” (1 Pet 2:6; citing Isa 28:16). The Petrine audience is later exhorted to be unashamed if they are suffering as a Christian (one who bears the name of Christ: 4:16). Rather, Peter indicates that those who slander them might themselves be put to shame if believers respond “with gentleness and respect” (3:15–16).³⁷

By following this trail of citations, allusions, and themes, we have mapped the context and backstory of the psalm onto 1 Peter.³⁸ For a group of Jesus followers who are experiencing verbal slander from those around them as well as the fear and shame that would naturally accompany this social persecution, Peter evokes the story of Psalm 34. It is the story of a troubled person (David, by psalm attribution) who remains faithful and true in spite of persecution and is restored by his God. Peter uses this story of God’s faithfulness and salvation to encourage his audience to persevere in doing good, “commit[ing] themselves to their faithful Creator” (4:19) and redeemer. As Jobes notes,

[Peter’s] logic appears to be just as God delivered David from his sojourn among the Philistines, God will deliver the Asian Christians from the afflictions caused by their faith in Christ, because they are no less God’s covenant people than was David.³⁹

Genesis 4 in Matthew 18

A more allusive connection to the Old Testament occurs at Matt 18:22 in Jesus’ reference to the “seventy-seven times” a follower of Jesus should be ready to forgive a brother or sister (18:21–22). While only consisting of three words in Greek (ἐπτάκις and ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἐπτά), this allusion to the Septuagint is strong given the thematic and storied connections between the two texts.⁴⁰

37. For a summary of these connections, see Christensen, “Solidarity in Suffering,” 346.

38. We have also seen how the psalm is transformed at points to meet the needs and eschatological time frame of the Petrine audience.

39. Jobes, *1 Peter*, 223. As Christensen, “Solidarity in Suffering,” 351, notes: “The psalm thus functions well to bring the Christian reader into solidarity with the experience of Israel through the lens of David.”

40. Woan, “Psalms in 1 Peter,” 215, defines a strong allusion as well replicated and the only textual contender for the reference.

Seven times (ἐπτάκις) vengeance has been taken by Cain, but by Lamech seventy-seven times (ἐβδομηκοντάκις ἐπτά). (Gen 4:24 LXX)

Then Peter approached [Jesus] and said, “Lord, how many times will my brother or sister sin against me and I forgive them? Up to seven times (ἐπτάκις)?” Jesus replied, “I tell you, not up to seven times (ἐπτάκις) but seventy-seven times (ἐβδομηκοντάκις ἐπτά).” (Matt 18:21–22)

If we apply Powell’s criteria to this potential allusion, we can affirm that Genesis, the precursor text, was available when Matthew’s Gospel was written (criterion of availability) and that there is a three-word repetition between the texts (criterion of repetition). Remembering that Hays includes *recurrence* as a criterion that expands upon repetition (Hays’s *volume*),⁴¹ we can note that Genesis is frequently referenced in Matthew,⁴² and the specific precursor text of Genesis 4 (the Cain and Abel story with its aftermath) is alluded to at Matt 23:35 and likely also at 5:21–24.⁴³

Quite importantly, this allusion fulfills the criterion of thematic coherence and is best seen through a storied (metaleptical) lens. The story of Genesis 4 follows the entry of sin into the human condition (Gen 3:1–19) and illustrates the escalation of sin’s effects on subsequent human generations (4:1–8). The story that is picked up metaleptically in Matthew focuses on one of Cain’s descendants, Lamech (4:17–18). Lamech makes the claim that the vengeance God declared would be visited upon anyone killing Cain (“seven times,” ἐπτάκις; 4:15–16) will now be visited upon anyone who kills Lamech, and it will be applied *seventy-seven fold* (ἐβδομηκοντάκις ἐπτά; 4:23–24 [LXX]).⁴⁴ With the number seven functioning as an expression of fullness, seventy-seven implies an unlimited figure.⁴⁵ Thus, a theme of this story is the multiplication of revenge—from God’s word to protect

41. Lucas, “Assessing Stanley E. Porter’s Objections,” 96, helpfully points to Hays’s own subsequent clarification of *volume* to note that it focuses not only on the degree of verbal and syntactical repetition, but also on the prominence of the precursor text and the rhetorical stress the repeated language receives in both literary contexts. In this regard, Genesis is arguably a prominent OT text for NT authors and audiences.

42. See Brown, “Genesis in Matthew’s Gospel,” 42–59.

43. See Allison, *Studies in Matthew*, 65–78.

44. While the number in Greek is ambiguous and could refer either to the equation 70 times 7 or the number 77, the Hebrew behind the rendering clearly denotes the number: cf. Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 22.

45. Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 2:793.

Cain the murderer, to Lamech's self-pronouncement that he will be avenged exponentially.⁴⁶

This Genesis story is echoed in Matthew 18, providing a compelling vision of competing stories. The first story centers on archetypal revenge as it spirals out of control. This story is contrasted with the unlimited forgiveness that should characterize believers in Jesus. The Community Discourse, as Matthew 18 is called, focuses on Jesus' teachings to his followers about the ways they are to live with one another in community. If we think of the storied elements of the chapter—the vision of the church that is projected by it, we see a community that rejects the hierarchical status categories (“greatness”) imposed on it by society, where stratification of honor, resources, and privilege creates a differential system of valuing people (18:1, 10). Instead, Jesus points to a child—representative of those with little or no status—to be the model for those who gather in his presence (18:2–5). Renunciation of status and its privilege corresponds to the care for “little ones” (itself a status category)—those who are most vulnerable and at the margins (18:6–9).⁴⁷

In fact, because God cares so deeply for “little ones” (18:10), care for these “little ones” extends to searching them out like a shepherd leaving the flock to seek out the single straying sheep (18:12–14). Care for the whole church works itself out in recognition of the seriousness of sin within and against the community (18:15–20; already in vv. 6–9). Addressing sin has as its goal full restoration of the offending person (18:15). Yet the accused person is also protected by the biblical requirement of adequate testimony about the identification of sin (18:16). The church as a whole is responsible for communal restoration and health (18:17–18).

This thematic pairing and potential tension between care for all, especially the most vulnerable, and the potentially serious communal effects of sin segues well to the topic of forgiveness. A community that is called to deep care for one another and taught to watch out especially for those who have little value in the eyes of society (18:10) may be tempted to overlook sin. Alternately, a community that is focused on purity and the seriousness of sin as an obstacle to communal wholeness or *shalom* may be tempted to see certain people as expendable. Into this tension, Matthew highlights and concludes with the theme of extravagant forgiveness (18:21–35). Forgiveness as Matthew envisions it here does not minimize sin's seriousness. The huge debt of the parable of the unforgiving slave emphasizes that forgiveness

46. Narrative-critical methodology raises the question of point of view in stories such as this one. What Lamech (a character in the narrative) claims should not be read as expressing the narrator's point of view, or the divine point of view for that matter. See Brown, *Matthew*, 37.

47. See Brown, “Matthew's ‘Least of These’ Theology,” 294.

is not simply an overlooking of sin (18:23–24).⁴⁸ Yet the use of Genesis suggests that forgiveness in the Jesus community is to be without limit (i.e., “seventy-seven times;” 18:21–22); it is to be extravagant, even excessive. As Lamech claims unlimited revenge, Matthew’s Jesus announces unlimited forgiveness.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored the intertextual category of metalepsis as an important feature of NT texts. Metalepsis refers to the NT authors’ frequent practice of drawing upon the surrounding material—and, often more importantly, the contextual story—of their specific citations, allusions, or echoes of OT texts. Even fairly allusive references, if recognized, can conjure up significant textual backstory. In this way, intertextuality moves beyond allusion and quotation to include “a common nexus of images and themes informing a whole passage.”⁴⁹

So it is important to determine the legitimacy of any particular allusion or echo (in addition to clear citations and allusions). To do this, I have suggested following the criteria discussed above and provided by Hays and Powell. Once these are delineated, the full import of the metalepsis can be explored. In our discussion, I have provided two extended examples, one from a psalm in 1 Peter and the other a Genesis allusion in Matthew. In both cases, we have seen that the expressed or implied stories of the OT precursor text have been important for a fuller understanding of its NT use. Given the conviction of the writers of the New Testament that Jesus the Messiah completes the story of the Old Testament, their liberal and evocative use of not only Scriptural texts but also the Scriptural stories surrounding those texts should come as no surprise.

48. “Some interpreters have complained that if God is the king in this analogy, then even God does not live out Jesus’ exhortation to unlimited forgiveness (18:22). Presumably, the king in this parable does not even forgive the servant up to seven times, much less seventy-seven, so the logic goes. However, the purpose of the parable is to provide the basis for forgiveness—God’s forgiveness of the greatest of debts—not to provide an example of unlimited forgiveness. This basic analogy between the parable and the kingdom stands without requiring all details to be analogous.” (Brown, *Matthew*, 217).

49. Litwak, *Echoes of Scripture*, 52–53.

Recommended Reading

- Brown, Jeannine K. "Creation's Renewal in the Gospel of John." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72 (2010) 275–90.
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