

Jesus' References to Old Testament Scriptures

by Rich Robinson | May 16, 2017

First, a personal note from the author: Many Jews prefer to say “Hebrew Bible” or “*Tanakh*.” When I grew up in Brooklyn, New York, our family along with many other Jews referred comfortably to the “Old Testament.” To me it sounded grander and more epic than the “New Testament.” Since it’s the term we used and many Christians also use, I will continue to refer in this article to the “Old Testament.”

From start to finish, the New Testament contains quotations, references, allusions and paraphrases of the Old Testament. Sometimes the New Testament follows the Hebrew text; in other cases it more closely follows the translation into Greek of the Old Testament called the Septuagint.

This article lists many references to the Old Testament found on the lips of Jesus in the Gospels. They have been organized by the three divisions of the Old Testament: *Torah* (Five Books of Moses), Prophets (or *Nevi'im*), and Writings (or *Ketuvim*).

The Torah

When Jesus was tempted

The Torah is foundational to Judaism, and Jesus quoted it often. The first three examples below come from the story of Jesus being tempted by Satan out in the desert. Jesus responds to each temptation by quoting from the Torah, showing the supreme value he placed on it for life, thought and behavior.

But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” ([Matthew 4:4](#), cf. [Luke 4:4](#))

And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. ([Deuteronomy 8:3](#))

Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ([Matthew 4:7](#); cf. [Luke 4:12](#))

“You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.” ([Deuteronomy 6:16](#))

Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” ([Matthew 4:10](#), cf. [Luke 4:8](#))

It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. ([Deuteronomy 6:13](#))

In the Sermon on the Mount

The next set of examples is from the “Sermon on the Mount,” in which Jesus gives ethical instruction. Each time Jesus begins “You have heard that it was said...” and contrasts it with “...but I say.” He is not contradicting the Torah, about which he would have said, “It is written.” The phrase “You have heard that it was said” referred to popular understandings of the Torah—the way it was understood and applied, the way people learned it from their parents and teachers, the way it was repeated at the watering trough and the back alleys and the shoemaker’s shop. Sometimes that was the same as what the Torah had to say; sometimes not. Yet the basis of those understandings was the text of the Torah, and so we include these examples here.

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’” ([Matthew 5:21](#))

“You shall not murder.” ([Exodus 20:13](#))

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’” ([Matthew 5:27](#))

“You shall not commit adultery.” ([Exodus 20:14](#); [Deuteronomy 5:18](#))

“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’” ([Matthew 5:31](#))

“When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house . . .” ([Deuteronomy 24:1](#))

“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’” ([Matthew 5:33](#))

If a man vows a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. ([Numbers 30:2](#); cf. [Deuteronomy 23:21](#))

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’” ([Matthew 5:38](#))

But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. ([Exodus 21:23–25](#); cf. [Leviticus 24:19–20](#), [Deuteronomy 19:21](#))

Honoring parents: a key Jewish value

Everyone Jesus spoke to agreed that [the Bible taught honor for one’s parents](#). Then as now, there were some legal loopholes that allowed unscrupulous (or lazy) people a way out. Someone might decide to donate their old bedroom dresser, which otherwise could have been sold or used to help one’s parents, to the Temple in Jerusalem. The dresser would be physically labeled with the Hebrew word “Korban,” meaning “given to God.” (Think of labeling your boxes on moving day “For the

kitchen,” “for the den.” These items were “for the Temple.”) According to one school of thought, now that the dresser was “for the Temple,” no one else could use it, including family members. In Jesus’ view, such people neglected to ensure that parents would be honored. In the following example, to make his point, Jesus quotes from the Torah.

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.”

He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,” he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.” ([Matthew 15:1-6](#)); cf. [Mark 7:10](#))

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” ([Exodus 20:12](#), cf. [Exodus 21:17](#))

Divorce and creation

In our next example, Jesus in addressing the question of divorce goes to the Torah.

He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” ([Matthew 19:4-6](#)), cf. [Mark 10:6-8](#))

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ([Genesis 1:27](#))

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ([Genesis 2:24](#))

The Ten Commandments

Next, Jesus converses with a young man regarding the way to eternal life and God’s commandments. He quotes from the Ten Commandments, also known in Jewish tradition as “the Ten Words.”

And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The young man said to him, “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?” ([Matthew 19:17-20](#), cf. [Mark 10:19](#), [Luke 18:20](#))

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” ([Exodus 20:12-16](#), cf. [Deuteronomy 5:16-20](#), [Leviticus 19:18](#))

The Torah and the resurrection from the dead

In the following example, Jesus quotes from the Torah to challenge the Sadducees' lack of belief that the dead will (eventually) rise again with a quote from the Torah. Jesus is either arguing that God says, "I *am*," not "I *was*," and so affirming that if He is their God in the present, then Abraham, Isaac and Jacob must have continued to live beyond death.

"And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." ([Matthew 22:31–32](#), cf. [Mark 12:26, 27](#), [Luke 20:37-38](#))

And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. ([Exodus 3:6](#))

This kind of argument was known to rabbinic Judaism, too. We find something in similar in the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 90b), as scholar Joseph Klausner notes:

"It is written, 'And I also kept my covenant with them (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) to give them the land of Canaan;'" it says not "to you" but "to them;" therefore we must deduce the resurrection of the dead from the Law—i.e. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob shall come to life again and to them shall be given the land of Canaan in the world to come. (Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth* [New York, Macmillan, 1926] p. 319.)

The two greatest commandments

In the next instance, Jesus replies to an inquiry by citing the two greatest of all the 613 commandments of the Torah. Why are they the greatest? Because all the others can be placed under one or the other of these. Note that while the Torah has "all your might," in Matthew Jesus says "all your mind." Variations like that were common (the Greek translation of the Torah has "all your strength") and all the more in verbal conversation. Perhaps Jesus wanted his inquirer to think more deeply about things!

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ([Matthew 22:37–39](#), cf. [Mark 12:28-34](#))

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ([Deuteronomy 6:5](#), cf. [Leviticus 19:18](#))

The testimony of two

In John chapter 8, Jesus' discussion with some Pharisees is cast in terms of a legal case, for which two or three witnesses are needed. Jesus appears to use the rabbinic *qal va-homer* ("how much more") argument: if the testimony of two people is true, how much more so is the testimony of Jesus and his heavenly Father. The chapter is really about the identity of Jesus (he claims to be the light of the world), and he uses Deuteronomy to highlight that his claim is true.

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

So the Pharisees said to him, "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true." . . .

“In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.” ([John 8:12-13](#), [17-18](#))

On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. ([Deuteronomy 17:6](#), cf. [Deuteronomy 19:15](#))

The Prophets

The prophets were the watchdogs of Israel’s conscience. While the Torah instructed in *what* to do, people often fell short, or worse. So the prophets *reminded* Israel of the Torah, called them to *repentance*, and in addition told of what would happen to the nation in the future—judgment for sin, but hope for the future if the people *returned* to God. Remind, repent, return—this is one of the rhythms we find in the prophets.

Jesus reads from the Haftarah

In the first example below, Jesus is in his hometown synagogue, invited to speak on what today we would call the *Haftarah*, the portion of the Old Testament accompanying the weekly Torah reading. Here is a message of hope, which Jesus applies to himself. Audacious or not? The listeners will need to decide based on what Jesus will teach and do from now on.

And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” . . . *Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.* [Emphasis supplied.] ([Luke 4:17–19](#), [21](#))

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; . . . ([Isaiah 61:1–2](#))

The centrality of mercy

In the next example, Jesus is confronted by some who wonder why he was not as stringent as they were when it came to whom to eat with. Jesus’ response in [Matthew 9:13](#) is taken from the prophet Hosea, and he applies it to his own attitudes and behavior. “Go and learn” was common rabbinic parlance for studying the Scripture; here Jesus sends his listeners to the prophet Hosea. Later, in [Matthew 12:7](#), he cites the same passage in connection with criticism that his disciples were plucking grain on the Sabbath.

“Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” ([Matthew 9:13](#), cf. [Matthew 12:7](#))

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. ([Hosea 6:6](#))

The pains of the messianic age

Jesus is sometimes accused of encouraging family turmoil, whereas his followers portray him as a man peace. One might gain such an impression from the following passage in [Matthew 10](#), unless one recognizes that Jesus is quoting from the prophet Micah. Micah's words form the backdrop to the rabbinic understanding that the messianic age would be a time of great social disruption—and not just the rabbinic understanding, but Jesus' as well. For more on this section, see [“Did Jesus teach his disciples to hate their parents?”](#)

For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. ([Matthew 10:35–36](#)), cf. [Luke 12:52](#), [53](#))

For the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house. ([Micah 7:6](#))

The messenger arrives

[John the Baptist \(or Baptizer\) was the forerunner of Jesus.](#) Here Jesus quotes from the prophet Malachi to indicate that John was also a messenger who prepared the way for the Lord. There is an undertone here that Jesus is more than meets the eye, [for if Malachi's messenger prepared the way for God, and John was fulfilling that promise by preparing the way for Jesus](#), what does that say about Jesus? But it is here no more than an undertone; the focus is on exactly who John is, given the fact that crowds came out to hear him preach.

This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.” ([Matthew 11:10](#); cf. [Luke 7:27](#))

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. ([Malachi 3:1](#))

Hearing but not understanding

Jesus frequently taught in parables, that is, stories with a point. The point, while often unstated, would be understood by the disciples of a rabbi. Here, Jesus quotes Isaiah, who was told by God that the people would hear Isaiah's words but fail to understand their spiritual import. Jesus applies that to the people of his day. Many of them will also hear the words of Jesus but not really grasp their import, which was designed to lead them to repentance and faith.

Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.” ([Matthew 13:14–15](#), cf. [Mark 4:11–13](#), [Luke 8:10](#))

And he said, “Go, and say to this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” ([Isaiah 6:9–10](#))

True and false honor

For details, see above on “Honoring parents: a key Jewish value.” There Jesus quoted from the Torah on honoring parents. Here, in the same chapter, he also quotes from the prophet Isaiah about “commandments of men,” that is, human-constructed commandments.

It’s important to note that Jesus was not against any and all traditions. For example, when he observed Passover, he did so by following many traditions that had developed since the days of Moses (the drinking of cups at the Last Supper, etc.). Jesus loved his people, but took issue with certain traditions that may originally have been well-intentioned, but ended up violating the very Torah they were meant to uphold.

“You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’” ([Matthew 15:7–9](#), cf. [Mark 7:6–7](#))

And the Lord said: “Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men, . . .” ([Isaiah 29:13](#))

House of prayer or den of robbers?

The context in the following gospel passages is Jesus’ displeasure with the way moneychangers operated in the Temple. When Jews from around the Diaspora came to Jerusalem to buy animals for sacrifice, they would need to convert their foreign currency into local coinage. Jesus’ problem was not with the system itself, but with the fact of its location. It may well be that the area called the Court of the Gentiles—the furthest that non-Jewish visitors could approach to the Temple proper—was being overspread by moneychangers, limiting the access non-Jews could actually have. There is also the possibility that price gouging took place. Jesus quotes from both Isaiah and Jeremiah to sum up his assessment of the situation; the “den of robbers” in Jeremiah is metaphorical for a variety of sins listed there. Perhaps the thought is that people were robbing God of the worship and obedience due him by their behavior.

He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.” ([Matthew 21:13](#), cf. [Mark 11:17](#), [Luke 19:46](#))

...these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” ([Isaiah 56:7](#))

Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord. ([Jeremiah 7:11](#))

Shepherd and sheep

Jesus here predicts that in the ensuing events—his arrest, trial, and crucifixion—his disciples will scatter as though they never had been his followers. Subsequent events show that when he was crucified, many of them returned to their old jobs, so to speak, disillusioned that he had failed to show himself to be the Redeemer—until the Resurrection forever changed their minds. Jesus here quotes from a portion of Zechariah describing a messianic figure who is taken for a false prophet. He is “my shepherd,” that is God’s, but his striking is all in God’s plan, though it leads to his followers being scattered about.

Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’” ([Matthew 26:31](#), cf. [Mark 14:27](#))

“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me,” declares the Lord of hosts. “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. . . .” ([Zechariah 13:7](#))

Counted as a criminal

Here, Jesus quotes from [Isaiah 52:13–53:12](#), the famous Suffering Servant passage of Isaiah. [A significant stream of Jewish tradition sees Israel in this passage, while other Jewish writers and the New Testament point to the Messiah as the fulfillment.](#) Inasmuch as the New Testament shows Jesus to be the ultimate Israelite, it makes sense that the passage would be fulfilled in him. Here Jesus quotes from a verse that speaks of how he will be perceived by others: as a criminal, a transgressor, a sinner in Israel.

“For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment.” ([Luke 22:37](#))

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. ([Isaiah 53:12](#))

God and his students

Here Jesus uses a verse from Isaiah to illustrate his point. [Isaiah 54](#) is talking about the messianic age, a time of comfort and peace when the LORD himself will be the teacher. Jesus intimates that his followers, those who “come to” him are the ones who will show that they have been taught by God and will participate in the messianic age. The additional thought of peace is an undercurrent, suggesting that coming to Jesus will bring peace to individuals and society.

It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me . . .’ ([John 6:45](#))

All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children. ([Isaiah 54:13](#))

The Writings

The Writings, or *Ketuvim*, include the Psalms (which form an integral part of Jewish liturgy), the Proverbs (giving practical, God-centered advice for life), and a number of other books such as *Qohelet* (Ecclesiastes), Job, Song of Solomon, and others.

Out of the mouths of babes

In Matthew chapter 21, Jesus is being acclaimed by the crowds as “the Son of David,” a messianic title. Even the children, we read in verse 15, are crying out, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” The acclamation is seen as a threat to the status quo of the Temple and its relationship to Rome. Jesus proceeds to quote from [Psalm 8](#), in which babies may be metaphoric for the weak and powerless who “speak truth to power”—as the literal children, unbeknownst to themselves, were doing in Matthew. (*Praise* in place of [Psalm 8](#)’s *strength* is from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, in wide use among Greek-speaking Jews.)

...and they said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise’?”

([Matthew 21:16](#))

Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger. ([Psalms 8:2](#))

The unexpected cornerstone

Later in the same chapter, Jesus tells a parable (a story with a point), giving another example of “speaking truth to power.” This parable indicts the leadership of the day and warns that they will be replaced by leaders true to their calling. In the process Jesus again quotes from the Psalms, this time from one of the Hallel Psalms, recited at Passover and other occasions. The verse Jesus cites speaks of a “rejected” stone becoming a “cornerstone,” which is a stone of great significance for the entire structure. Perhaps in the original Psalm it referred to the reversal of positions: the nation that once was enslaved becomes a key to the world’s redemption. Jesus applies it to himself: rejected by the Jewish leadership of his day, Jesus will nevertheless occupy the key position in the redemption of the world.

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’” ([Matthew 21:42](#), cf. [Mark 12:10](#), [11](#), [Luke 20:17](#))

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. ([Psalms 118:22–23](#))

The Lord to the Lord

Jesus engages in a discussion about the widely accepted idea that [the Messiah would be the son, or descendant, of King David](#). Jesus quotes from [Psalm 110](#) to demonstrate that the Messiah is more than simply an ordinary descendant of David. Jesus’ words, “How is it then,” is not meant to argue *against* the common idea, but is a typical challenge to figure out just how various parts of Scripture lined up with one another. The Messiah is *both* David’s descendant *and yet* someone greater than that.

He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet?’” ([Matthew 22:43–44](#)), cf. [Mark 12:36](#), [Luke 20:42](#), [43](#))

The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” ([Psalms 110:1](#))

When redemption happens

The following example is quite straightforward. Jesus cries out a lament over Jerusalem in the tradition of the prophets and books such as Lamentation. The nation has not accepted the divine love offered, pictured under the image of a hen gathering its chicks. Jesus speaks of the soon-to-come the destruction of the Temple (which occurred some forty years later) and quoting from [Psalm 118](#) again, intimates that redemption will not come to Israel until he is accepted as Messiah.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” ([Matthew 23:37–39](#), cf. [Luke 13:35](#))

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by. ([Psalms 57:1](#); see also [Exodus 19:4](#); [Psalms 61:4](#))

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord. ([Psalms 118:26](#))

The abomination of desolation

Jesus refers to the book of Daniel which, on several occasions, mentions an “abomination that makes desolate” or a similar phrase. The chronological context in Daniel varies from the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (2nd century B.C.E.) to the first century C.E. and beyond. In other words, this “abomination” is not a one-time occurrence but a pattern that happens at various points in Jewish history. Matthew refers to the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., and the abomination has been thought to refer to the bringing of Roman standards into the Temple or Josephus’ mention of a desecration of the Temple by the Zealots. At any rate, the citation from the book of Daniel is to warn Jesus’ hearers and the later readers of Matthew to flee the devastation. (Note: in the Jewish Bible, Daniel is included among the Writings rather than in the Prophets.)

“So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ([Matthew 24:15–16](#))

And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator. ([Daniel 9:27](#))

Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate. ([Daniel 11:31](#); cf. [12:11](#))

Gods and the Son of God

Next, we find Jesus quoting from [Psalm 82](#). That psalm spoke of “gods,” referring either to the kings of the world who thought of themselves as deities, or to those in Israel such as the judges—we should think of the day-to-day judges of the legal system rather than the special leaders in the book of Judges—who were meant to administer God’s justice. Either way, the psalm says, so much for their failure to do so; the unjust and arrogant will die like all human beings. In John, Jesus uses the rabbinic *qal va-homer* argument, from the lesser to the greater. If the term “gods” could be applied to those people, how much more can Jesus be the “Son of God.” His remark about consecration may reflect the context of Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication, which is explicitly mentioned in [John 10:22](#).

Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods?’” If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? ([John 10:34-36](#))

I said, “You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.” ([Psalms 82:6-7](#))

Betrayal by a friend

Here, Jesus intimates his betrayal by Judas and quotes from [Psalm 41](#). That psalm speaks of a righteous person suffering from illness and from his enemies. Even the psalmist’s close friend who ate meals with him—a special mark of intimacy in ancient times—has turned against him, that is, “lifted his heel” (a move of contempt in some ancient cultures). Jesus had chosen Judas to be part of his intimate circle, but he ended up being the betrayer.

“I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’” ([John 13:18](#))

Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me. ([Psalms 41:9](#))

Baseless hatred

Jesus quotes from one of two psalm that speak of a righteous person and the groundless hatred shown by his enemies. Jesus applies the verse to the way his opponents reacted to his person and to his message. Interestingly, Jewish tradition names baseless hatred (*sinat hinam*) as one of the causes of the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.

“But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’” ([John 15:25](#))

Let not those rejoice over me who are wrongfully my foes, and let not those wink the eye who hate me without cause. ([Psalms 35:19](#), cf. [Psalm 69:4](#))

A psalm from the cross

In the following, Jesus is dying on the cross and cries out with the first verse of [Psalm 22](#). Some have taken this as showing that Jesus abandoned all hope; but the full context of [Psalm 22](#) is rescue and vindication following suffering, and it was frequent to quote part of a Scriptural passage with the full context in mind (possible even in the midst of the agony of crucifixion!). Furthermore, since Jesus atoned for the sins of the world at his crucifixion, it is often suggested that for a moment God the Father forsook Jesus as He turned away from the sins of humanity that Jesus had taken on.

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ([Matthew 27:46](#), cf. [Mark 15:34](#))

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? ([Psalms 22:1](#))



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To delve further, see these resources:

Gregory K. Beale and D. A. Carson, ed. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007. A thorough and up-to-date reference work.

Commentaries on the gospels. Two recommended series are:

- *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, published by Zondervan (good for pastors and all Bible students; there is a valuable older edition edited by Frank Gaebelin and an update edited by Tremper Longman and David Garland.)
- *New International Commentary on the New Testament*, published by Eerdmans (for serious research; longer and more in-depth commentaries than *Expositor's*).

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