

Reading

**Between**  
**the Lines**

Discovering Christ in the Old Testament

Daniel L. Seagraves



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by Daniel L. Segraves

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# 1

## In the Beginning

In order to discover what the Old Testament—the Hebrew Scripture—has to say about Jesus, we must learn to be alert to references to the Old Testament as they are found in the New Testament. Phrases like “as it is written” or references to the prophets are the kinds of clues for which we should look. Many study Bibles are helpful because they set off quotes from the Old Testament in a different typeface, with indents, or by some other visual indication. Although these techniques are useful, we should not rely on them to give us an exhaustive list of the references to the Old Testament in the New Testament, because the nearly eight hundred references to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament are not always in the form of complete quotes. These references include paraphrases and allusions, which may not be indicated by typical introductory language such as “it is written” or by typographical techniques. To be sure we are aware of every use the New Testament makes of the Old Testament, there is no substitute for simply reading the text carefully.

### **Innertextuality and Intertextuality**

If we wish to explore the messianic content of the Old Testament, it is important we be aware of something called innertextuality and intertextuality.<sup>8</sup> These terms refer to the use Scripture makes of Scripture. We have discussed the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. This is intertextuality. In other words, intertextuality has to do with how those who wrote Scripture quoted or referred to other Scriptures that had already been written. Often intertextuality helps us interpret Scripture. The way later authors referred to earlier authors is interpretive. For example, on the Day of Pentecost, after the Holy Spirit was poured out on the waiting believers, and in response to the question, “Whatever could this mean?” (Acts 2:12), Peter answered, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16). Then Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32, indicating that Joel had anticipated the events of the Day of Pentecost. Then, as recorded in Acts 2:25-28, Peter quoted from Psalm 16:8-11 to declare that David wrote of Jesus Christ. These are examples of a form of intertextuality.

But there is also innertextuality, which refers to a biblical author referring back to something already written in an earlier part of the same book. For example, Psalm 1, which is part of the introduction to the Book of Psalms, describes a contrast between the righteous and the wicked. This contrast forms a major part of the structure of the Psalter, and it is referred to again and again in the following psalms. Each time there is a reference to the righteous and the wicked, it is rooted in Psalm 1, further explaining and developing the contrast between the two.

For our purposes, we want to look at an example of intertextuality in the Bible. When we do this, it is impor-

tant to read the Bible carefully, being alert to the appearance of phrases that are similar to phrases that appear elsewhere in Scripture. Since Jesus opened the Scripture to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus by starting with the first book of the Bible, let's do the same.

### **In the Beginning**

The first verse of the Bible, Genesis 1:1, reads, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The phrase "in the beginning" immediately reminds us of another place in the Bible where these same words appear. The apostle John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2, KJV). Not only did John twice use the phrase "in the beginning"—the same phrase that appears in the first verse of the Bible, but he was also discussing the same subject: Creation. John wrote, "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3, KJV).

But this is not the only time John referred to the beginning. In the opening verses of his first letter, just as in the Gospel of John 1:1-2, John wrote of the beginning: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us." The similarities between John 1:1-2 and I John 1:1-2 are remarkable. In both places, John referred to the beginning and to the Word. And there is a further connection