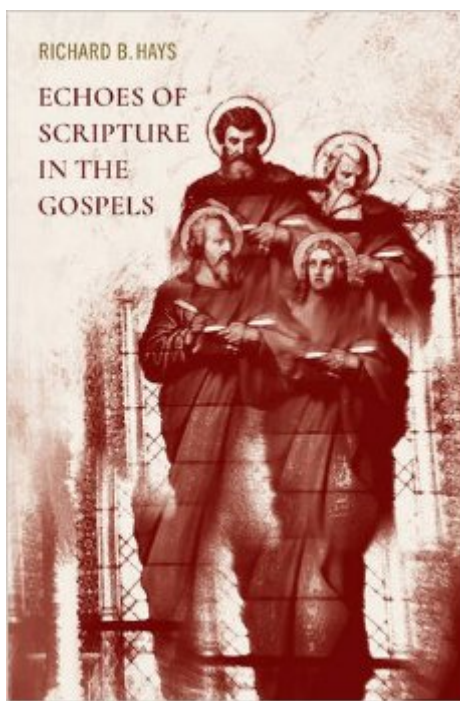


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# Echoes Of Scripture In The Gospels



## Synopsis

The claim that the events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection took place "according to the Scriptures" stands at the heart of the New Testament's message. All four canonical Gospels declare that the Torah and the Prophets and the Psalms mysteriously prefigure Jesus. The author of the Fourth Gospel states this claim succinctly: in his narrative, Jesus declares, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me" (John 5:46). Yet modern historical criticism characteristically judges that the New Testament's christological readings of Israel's Scripture misrepresent the original sense of the texts; this judgment forces fundamental questions to be asked: Why do the Gospel writers read the Scriptures in such surprising ways? Are their readings intelligible as coherent or persuasive interpretations of the Scriptures? Does Christian faith require the illegitimate theft of someone else's sacred texts? *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* answers these questions. Richard B. Hays chronicles the dramatically different ways the four Gospel writers interpreted Israel's Scripture and reveals that their readings were as complementary as they were faithful. In this long-awaited sequel to his *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, Hays highlights the theological consequences of the Gospel writers' distinctive hermeneutical approaches and asks what it might mean for contemporary readers to attempt to read Scripture through the eyes of the Evangelists. In particular, Hays carefully describes the Evangelists' practice of "figural reading" — an imaginative and retrospective move that creates narrative continuity and wholeness. He shows how each Gospel artfully uses scriptural echoes to re-narrate Israel's story, to assert that Jesus is the embodiment of Israel's God, and to prod the church in its vocation to engage the pagan world. Hays shows how the Evangelists summon readers to a conversion of their imagination. The Evangelists' use of scriptural echo beckons readers to believe the extraordinary: that Jesus was Israel's Messiah, that Jesus is Israel's God, and that contemporary believers are still on mission. The Evangelists, according to Hays, are training our scriptural senses, calling readers to be better scriptural people by being better scriptural poets.

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## Customer Reviews

In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes a pretty astonishing claim: "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me" (5:46, NRSV). Similarly, Luke remarks in his account of Jesus' conversation with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus that "he [Jesus] interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (24:27, NRSV). In one way or another, this claim that the events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection took place "according to the scriptures" sits at the heart of the Christian confession. But what does it mean to say that Moses wrote about Jesus? In the modern era, these sorts of claims have fallen on rather hard times. In the introduction of *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, Richard B. Hays brings up the German scholar Udo Schnelle, who brushes aside the possibility of doing "biblical theology" because "the Old Testament is silent about Jesus Christ" (p.3). Hays suggests that the writers of the New Testament would be surprised to learn this. For them, Christ's resurrection provided the integrative "hermeneutical clue" that allowed them to reread Israel's Scriptures with fresh eyes and find Jesus prefigured in them (p.3). Hays explains that one of the goals of his book is to offer: [A]n account of the narrative representation of Israel, Jesus, and the church in the canonical Gospels, with particular attention to the ways in which the four Evangelists reread Israel's Scripture "as well as the ways in which Israel's Scripture prefigures and illuminates the central character in the Gospel stories. It is, in short, an exercise in intertextual close reading. (p.7) Throughout the book, he seeks to demonstrate that the Evangelists interpreted the Old Testament figurally as they engaged with it in their respective accounts (p.4). What does "figural interpretation" mean? Hays (following Auerbach) explains that it demonstrates a connection between two events or characters such that "the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfills the first" (p.2). For him, the nature of figural reading is necessarily retrospective (pp.2-3). Once the figural pattern has been discerned, though, "the semantic force of the figure flows both ways," imparting deeper significance to both the Old Testament event/character and the Gospel passage (p.3). Finally, Hays asserts that interpreting Old Testament passages figurally needn't imply a rejection of the Old Testament in its own

context:Figural readings do not annihilate the earlier pole of the figural correspondence; to the contrary, they affirm its reality and find in it a significance beyond that which anyone could previously have grasped... [in light of the resurrection] all four Evangelists are deeply engaged in the task of reading backwards, discovering figural fusions between the story of Jesus and older and longer story of Israel's journey with God. (p.14)Most of the book is taken up with a close, meditative reading of each canonical Gospel account. In these chapters, Hays explores the ways in which each Evangelist uses the texts and images of the Old Testament to retell Israel's story, narrate the identity of Jesus, and ponder the life of the church in relation to the world (p.9). Some intertextual citations in the Gospels are indirect and subtle, so reading with an attuned ear for echoes and allusions is an important aspect of Hays' reading strategy. He divides the intertextual Old Testament references found throughout the Gospels into three broad categories: "quotation," "allusion," and "echo" (p.10). It's most helpful to think of these categories as being points on a gradual spectrum, "moving from the most to the least explicit forms of reference" (p.10).Echoes of Scripture in Each GospelMark is generally agreed to be the earliest canonical Gospel. For Hays, "The Gospel of Mark tells a mysterious story enveloped in apocalyptic urgency" (p.15). Mark tends to avoid pointing explicitly to the connections between the Old Testament and the story of Jesus, preferring to be more indirect and allusive (p.98).For those who miss the intertextual allusions, the story is still intelligible and moving. Nevertheless, Hays suggests that cultivating a more sensitive awareness of Mark's engagement with the Old Testament opens up "new levels of complexity and significance" (p.99). A good example of this is the story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a colt in chapter 11. Mark mentions this without comment, but for readers who hear the allusion to Zechariah 9:9 (Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey, NRSV), the significance of this detail will be more meaningfully understood.Hays uses this episode as an example because it highlights the distinctive narrative styles of Matthew and Mark. In Matthew's Gospel (unlike Mark's), he "eagerly supplies the quotation of Zechariah" (p.99). Hays understands this episode to be just one of many indirect, yet meaningful, intertextual references in Mark's Gospel. Because of the allusive nature of Mark's narrative, Hays suggests that readers should be attentive lest they "miss the message of Jesus' divine identity" (p.350).Matthew shows little of Mark's reticence for explicitly making claims about Jesus' identity and linking them to Old Testament passages. Indeed, Matthew makes significant use of a prediction-fulfillment motif and "in many passages we find him supplying overt explanations to Mark's hints and allusions" (pp.105, 107). It's important to realize, though, that Matthew's usage of Scripture extends beyond his explicit quotations:[W]e also must reckon with Matthew's use of

figuration, his deft narration of "shadow stories from the Old Testament." Through this narrative device, with or without explicit citation, Matthew encourages the reader to see Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament precursors, particularly Moses, David, and Isaiah's Servant figure. (p.109) Indeed, one of Matthew's central claims regarding Jesus is that he is "Emmanuel, the embodiment of the personal presence of Israel's God" (p.351). Stepping back and looking at Matthew's Gospel as a whole, Hays notes that one of Matthew's strengths consists in his hard-to-miss way of engaging with the Old Testament. "He draws clear lines of continuity with the story of Israel and overtly portrays Jesus as 'God with us'" (p.352). He points out, though, that Matthew's assertive manner of writing can at times become quite polemical towards other Jewish groups, and that Matthew's willingness to make overt confessions regarding Jesus' divine identity "stands in some tension with Mark's reverent reticence before the divine mystery" (p.352). To me, these differences between Gospel accounts demonstrate why it is helpful for Christian readers to interpret them in light of each other—reading them canonically, as Scripture. In Luke, maybe even more than in the other Gospel accounts, we need to grapple with the fact that his portrait of Jesus is constructed in narrative form: [W]e cannot adequately estimate Luke's understanding of Jesus' identity simply by studying christological titles or by isolating direct propositional statements; rather, we come to know Jesus in Luke only as his narrative identity is enacted in and through the story. (p.244) This brings us once again to Jesus' conversation on the Emmaus road. Jesus doesn't tell the disciples exactly how "all the scriptures" point to him. Instead, we are just assured that they do. Luke implicitly tells his audience that they will have to read retrospectively, going "back to the beginning of the Gospel to reread it, in hopes of discerning more clearly how... Jesus might be prefigured in Israel's Scripture" (p.223). That, in essence, is the reading strategy that Hays is advocating throughout the book. Luke "boldly narrates the historical continuity between Israel's past, present, and future" (p.353). Nevertheless, Hays rightly suggests that readers of Luke should avoid understanding him to be advocating an overly-triumphant "salvation-history." After all, Luke does spend time dwelling upon the necessity of the Messiah's suffering and weaves the same theme into his subsequent account of the early church (p.354). Regardless, this potential pitfall of overconfidence again points to the value of reading the Gospels canonically, "we need Mark alongside Luke in the canon, as a counterweight to any possible triumphalism" (p.354). Lastly, we come to Hays' treatment of the John's Gospel. John's allusions and scriptural citations often focus less on the repetition of "chains of words and phrases" from the Old Testament and more on "images and figures" (p.284). For example, in John 3, when Jesus tells Nicodemus "And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (3:14, NRSV).

Hays writes that despite John's clear allusion to Numbers 21:8-9, "the only explicit verbal links between the two passages are... 'Moses' and the word 'serpent'... [John's] intertextual sensibility is more visual than auditory" (p.284). Like Luke, John also highlights the need to read the Old Testament afresh in light of Christ's resurrection (p.283). This is especially apparent in John 2, where we find Jesus' cleansing of the Jerusalem temple. In the middle of this episode, Jesus says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19, NRSV). At the time, the disciples (and the other Jews) were clearly confused by this claim. However, John goes on to say that after Jesus had risen, the disciples remembered Jesus' words and "believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken" (2:22, NRSV). In both this passage and in others, Hays argues that: He [John] is teaching us to read figurally, teaching us to read Scripture retrospectively, in light of the resurrection. Only on such a reading does it make sense to see the Jerusalem temple as prefiguring the truth now definitely embodied in the crucified and risen Jesus. (p.312) John is frequently described in severely dualistic terms, but Hays argues that the logic of the Fourth Evangelist "drives towards a mystical affirmation of incarnation and of God's mysterious presence in and through creation," thereby affirming creation as good, even if fallen (p.355). What are some potential pitfalls of John's Gospel? There is the danger that some will find John to be anti-Jewish and/or supersessionistic. Hays disagrees with this reading because such dualistic interpretations mistakenly deny the literal meaning of Israel's Scriptures. Attributing a figural reading strategy to John, on the other hand, "does not deny the literal sense but completes it by linking it typologically with the narrative of Jesus and disclosing a deeper prefigurative truth within the fleshly, literal historical sense" (p.356). Conclusion Near the end of the book, Hays steps back to survey the results of his efforts. One of the most hard fought battlefields in biblical studies has been the debate related to the New Testament authors' readings of the Old Testament. Especially when they interpret passages christologically in ways that would not be immediately apparent to those in the original settings of those texts. Hays thinks that both sides of this debate err by giving in to the temptations of modernistic rationalistic historicism. He suggests a potentially better option: [T]he canonical Evangelists, through their artful narration, offer us a different way to understand the New Testament's transformational reception of the Old... This hermeneutical sensibility locates the deep logic of the intertextual linkage between Israel's Scripture and the Gospels not in human intentionality but in the mysterious providence of God, who is ultimately the author of the correspondences woven into these texts and events. (p.359) It seems clear to me that this book will come to be known as a masterpiece of close theological reading, an excellent example of why it's worth spending years thinking deeply about the writings of both the Old and New Testaments. I'm

thankful for the work Hays has put into being a scholar who cares both for the Academy and the Church. *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* is a real gem, and I can't recommend it enough. \*Disclosure: I received this book free from Baylor University Press for review purposes. The opinions I have expressed are my own, and I was not required to write a positive review. \*\*More theology book reviews can be found at [Tabletalktheology.com](http://Tabletalktheology.com)

This is a great book which will inform and inspire its readers for years. It's not to be read once and put on the shelf. Rather when you're going to preach or teach lessons from a particular Gospel, you will find yourself returning to this treasure chest again and again to enjoy its riches anew. In his Introduction Hays details his goal: "... we are seeking to listen carefully to the ways in which each of them (Evangelists) draws upon Israel's Scriptures in constructing a distinctive narrative testimony to Jesus. In order to listen well, we will pose three heuristic questions to each Gospel (1) We will be asking how each Evangelist carries forward and renarrates the story of Israel through intertextual references to Scripture (2) We will listen carefully for the ways in which each Evangelist draws on scriptural stories and images to interpret the world-changing significance of Jesus. And finally (3) we will ask how each of the Evangelists begins to shape the story of the church (i.e., the community of Jesus' followers) through evoking texts from Israel's Scripture" (p. 14). Hays does not engage in proof-texting. Rather he uses many sophisticated tools to achieve his goal. He will seek out citations of, allusions to, and echoes of the Scriptures. He will engage in figural interpretation and will adopt Erich Auerback's definition thereof. In addition, Hays is keen to point out and pursue the Evangelists' use of "the poetic effect known as "metalepsis." Finally he will appeal to an "encyclopedia of content/reception." Although he refers to this concept at least four times, he never defines it and only once references it (p. 390 n. 157). It seems to mean the reader's background/memory of Israel's Scriptures. What areas need improvement? One is almost beyond Hays' control. The publisher seems to want to market this book to a scholarly audience and thus allows Greek and Hebrew in the body of the text. However, the publisher eschews footnotes, which would aid scholars, and favors endnotes. Also the publisher forgot to add A List of Abbreviations. It is not helpful to find a vague reference to an important article with the cryptic abbreviation HvTST (p. 393 n. 22). Hays could greatly improve his book and repulse the criticism of anachronism by demonstrating how his tools and arguments work in an oral culture, which was the predominant culture when the Gospels were produced. His tools and arguments seem to work very well with a literary culture. He seems to be aware of this problem. In his treatment of Luke, he writes about reading the text: "Luke is creating readers, seeking to foster the intertextual competence necessary

to appreciate the nuances of the sort of narrative he is spinning... A story of such complexity and nuance helps to cultivate readers who read patiently, carefully and subtly. Of course, such cultivation does not happen automatically. It is probably right to see Luke's Gospel as, inter alia, a teaching tool, a story crying out for commentary. The necessary instruction would have been provided by teachers in the early church who expounded the text for their communities of Gentile converts and explained some of its intertextual intricacies" (p. 276; see also pp. 195-96 and p. 409 n. 9). If Hays had the space and time, he might also have indicated how his methodology relates to what years ago was called "the sensus plenior" of "the more complete/full meaning."If someone is asking you what you want for Christmas, tell them that you want a copy of Hays' latest under your tree. Studying it will enrich you and pleasantly help you pass the long Winter days.Robert J. Karris

Hays' book is really good. I enjoyed it more than the first Echoes book just because the structure is simple. You cover all four gospels. He reveals how each uses OT texts and provides helpful insights into the meaning. He does a great job of showing how they are individual works, but then how they work together as well. The concept of figural interpretation is really important, and he shows why. This may be a bit much for someone with no Biblical studies background. He does quote Greek with no English translation at times, but it isn't often.

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