

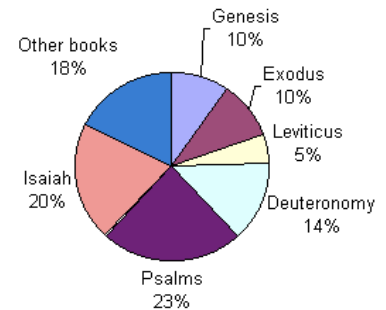
## e-concepts

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# Interpretation Conflicts Between the Old and New Testaments

By Dr. David DeWitt

[The chart shows the distribution of Old Testament quotes]  
There are three ways the New Testament authors used the Old Testament:



- 1. This is that.** This New Testament statement means the same as that Old Testament passage.
- 2. This is like that.** This New Testament statement is not the same as that Old Testament. In these cases, either:
  - There is a **double meaning** for the same or similar words or
  - There is a **different meaning** for the same or similar words
- 3. This is a fulfillment of that.** This New Testament statement is the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy. There are two kinds of these:
  - Where the New Testament has **the same meaning**, as the Old Testament prophecy.
  - Where the New Testament prophecy has a **meaning beyond** the Old Testament prophecy.

We need to understand that every passage must be understood in its own context. That's not just for Bible study. The same principles used for interpreting the Bible are used in understanding a newspaper, a novel, a textbook, a letter I might write you, or two farmers discussing how to best plant corn.

**Understanding someone's meaning is the same everywhere.** The most basic principle of interpretation is:

The correct meaning is whatever the **author** meant, and  
What the author meant is determined through the **context** of what he said

“Scripture interprets Scripture” only means one passage puts parameters on our understanding, not that the context of a passage can be ignored and that of another passage imposed on it to determine its meaning. Each passage stands in its own context.

**Here are some examples of each category.**

- 1. This is that.** This New Testament statement is the same as an Old Testament passage. For example, in Matthew 4:4 (and Luke 4:4), Jesus said, “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.*” This is a direct quote from Deuteronomy 8:3, where it has the same meaning as it does in Matthew 4:4, a one-for-one corollary.
- 2. This is like that.** This is when the New Testament statement is not the same, that is, it does not have the same meaning as the Old Testament passage. There are two categories of this:
  - First, the passage actually has a **double meaning**. The author of the Old and New Testaments each had one different meaning in mind, but the Holy Spirit who inspired it had both meanings in mind. For example, in Psalm 8:6, David used the sentence *You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet* to refer to humans ruling over nature. The author of Hebrews 2:8 used this same phrase, clearly referring to Psalm 8, to speak of the rule of Christ.

Here's an every-day example of using a **double meaning**. The other day I saw a newspaper delivery truck which said, "GRAND RAPIDS FREE PRESS, BE ONE WHO GETS IT." They meant, "Be one who receives the paper" and "Be one who understands the news because you read their paper." So "GETS" = receives and "GETS" = understands.

Later, I saw a Michigan Blood Drive truck that carried the sign: "MI Blood Saves Lives." MI is, of course, the abbreviation for Michigan, but when pronounced, it sounds like "MY". So MI is intended to have a double meaning. MI= My, and MI = Michigan. So, it is possible for God to have two meanings in mind when revealing a text such as Psalm 8:6 also in Hebrews 2:8.

**PT:** There is no need to impose the meaning of Psalm 8:6 on Hebrews 2:6-8, or the meaning of Hebrews 2:6-8 on Psalm 8:6. There is no indication in Psalm 8 that the psalmist had the Messiah in mind. Also, the author of Hebrews does not say that in Psalm 8 David had the Messiah in mind. But the author of Hebrews does indicate that the words of Psalm 8 refer to Jesus the Messiah.

- **Second**, the words of the passage are **used in some different ways**. It is not uncommon to use a well-known phrase or sentence to refer to a completely different idea. The second author is not trying to reproduce the first author's idea, but only to use his words. For example, in John 1:23, we read of John the Baptist saying: *I [am] the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias [Elijah]*. John is not claiming to be Elijah, nor is he claiming to fulfill the ministry of Elijah. But what John is doing in preparing the way for Christ's ministry, which can be represented by the same words Elijah used of his ministry.

Here's a secular example. Lincoln ended his "Gettysburg Address" with these words "...and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." Since then, this phrase has been used in different ways. Suppose, for example, that I wish to promote a product my company has invented (say, a new technology or a new type of outlet store). I might say this product is "of the people, by the people and for the people." These words do not have a double meaning, it's just that the same words are used a different way. When President Truman was in office, he put a sign on his desk which read: "The buck stops here." He meant the national issues ultimately come to his desk for a decision, since his is the final responsibility. This phrase has been used many times since to refer to responsibilities totally disconnected from the US presidency.

3. **This is a fulfillment of that.** This New Testament statement is a fulfillment of a prophecy or "type" in the Old Testament. There are two kinds of these:
  - Where the New Testament has **the same meaning** as the Old Testament prophecy. This is where the Old Testament author knew he was prophesying a future event. For example, Hebrews 7:21 declares: *The Lord has sworn and will not repent, Thou [art] a priest forever after the order of Melchisedeck* (KJV). This statement comes from Psalm 110:4, where the psalmist makes a Messianic prediction, which the author of Hebrews says was fulfilled in Christ.
  - Where the New Testament prophecy has a **meaning beyond** the Old Testament prophecy. This is where the author did not necessarily know he was prophesying a future event. For example, Matthew 1:23 says concerning the birth of Christ: *Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel*. This is a quote from Isaiah 7:14, where it is likely (from the first verses of Isaiah 8) that Isaiah is referring to his own future child.