



Bible Echoes

One very good way of reading the Bible effectively is to listen for "Bible echoes". Whenever you read the Bible keep asking yourself, "Where have I heard that word or phrase before?"

Consider this example of when the Pharisees and Herodians attempted to catch Jesus in his words, so they could arrest him. They asked:

Mark 12:13-17 *"Teacher, we know that You are true, and care about no one; for You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Shall we pay or shall we not pay?"*

Jesus recognized their treachery and asked for a penny. He asked "Whose image and inscription is this?" They replied, "Caesar's," to which Christ responded, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

The clear answer is pay your taxes because they belong to man's system of things. However, what are the things we ought to render to God? Look back to Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him." Whose image and inscription are we? Jesus' full message is not merely to pay our taxes, but also that we are in the image of God and must render to Him His due by reflecting in ourselves His image and character.

Cross-references can be used to help the listening process by indicating for you some passages which are "echoes".

What are Cross References?

There is no better commentary on the Bible than itself and no-one is better suited for interpreting

God's Word than God Himself. It is for these reasons that cross references can be so valuable.

Cross references are verse "references" supplied by the translators that direct the reader to other locations in the Bible where the same (or similar) phrase, word, event or person can be found. Cross references demonstrate how intricately interconnected the Bible is by showing how passages relate to each other across the pages of Scripture.

TIP 3

Listen for bible echoes and use cross references to find them.

If you have cross-references in your Bible they can be one of your greatest aids when you are trying to understand a difficult passage.

Formats for cross references:

Centre or side margin references: These can be presented in one of two ways. A superscript letter in the main text corresponds to the same letter in the reference column or the reference column may be organized by which verse the superscript letter comes from. Sometimes there are also alternative meanings of words.

Footnote references: The cross references appear at the bottom of the page in the form of footnotes. Such cross-references are usually not as complete as those listed in the centre.

Separate Books: If you do not have good cross-references in your Bible, and you really do not want to buy a new one, there are books available which only contain cross-references. The most popular one is *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*. It simply lists cross-references for each verse in the Bible. A word or phrase from the verse is listed with the list of references. This is also available online.

Using cross references

There are four main ways cross-references can be of help.

■ Linking teaching and prophecies between the Testaments.

Luke 1:31-33

31 ^a“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and ^bshall call His name JESUS.

32 “He will be great, ^aand will be called the Son of the Highest; and ^bthe Lord God will give Him the ^cthrone of His ^dfather David.

33 ^a“And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

31 ^a Is. 8:14; Matt. 1:21,25; Gal. 4:4 ^b Luke 2:21 32 ^a Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Mark 5:7; Luke 1:35,76; 6:35; Acts 7:48 ^b 2 Sam. 7:12,13,16; Ps. 132:11 ^c 2 Sam. 7:14-17 ^d Acts 2:33; 7:55; ^d Matt. 1:1

You may wonder “What is the throne of his father David?” You will notice a small letter “c” just before the word “throne”. This Bible is a reference “by verse” type, so look for the references to verse 32, then look for reference “c”, which includes 2 Samuel 7:14-17.

2 Samuel 7:14-17 says:

“I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, who I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.’ According to these words and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David.”

So this reference helps you to understand that Jesus is to fulfil a promise to David.

■ Details on persons, places, and subjects.

Acts 1:1

1 The former account I made, ^o Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,
2 ^o until the day in which He was taken up...

1 ^o Luke 1:3 2 ^o Mark 16:19

You may ask, “What is this former account?”

Luke 1:3 says:

“...it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus.”

We find that the former account is the book of Luke.

■ Filling in detail from parallel accounts.

1 Kings 15:34

34 He did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in ^a the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin.

34 ^a 1 Kings 13:33 14:16

You may ask, “What was the way of Jeroboam?”

1 Kings 13:33 says:

“After this event Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way, but again he made priests from every class of people for the high places; whoever wished, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places.”

■ Clarification of the meaning of a passage.

Matthew 9:10-13

10 ^a And so it was, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples.

11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, “Why does your Teacher eat with ^a tax collectors and ^b sinners?”

12 But when Jesus heard that, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

13 “But go and learn what this means ^o ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, ^b but sinners, ¹ to repentance.”

13 ^a Hos. 6:6 ^b 1 Tim. 1:15 ¹ NU omits ‘to repentance’

You may ask, “What does it mean to desire mercy and not sacrifice?”

Hosea 6:6 says:

“For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”

So Jesus was saying that simply following the Law was not what God required. He wanted people to learn of Him and develop a godly character.

Why are there two Testaments?

The contents page of the Bible shows that the Scriptures are divided into two parts: the Old and New Testaments.

The word “testament” used in this context means a covenant, agreement, promise or pledge between two parties.

The teaching of the Bible is based upon covenants of promise that God made with faithful men in times past.

These agreements or covenants between God and mankind form the basis of God’s plan and tell us what God intends to do. Many of us enter into agreements or contracts of various kinds, for example contracts of employment and loan agreements. These contracts always spell out the following:

1. What is being agreed to
2. The benefits both parties can expect
3. The responsibilities of both sides
4. The consequences of breaking the agreement.

God’s agreements are the same. He has spelled out clearly what is involved, the responsibilities of both Himself and us. Sometimes these agreements have conditions attached, at other times they do not.

One of the earliest covenants was made following the great flood which destroyed all land-based life except that in the ark with Noah.

Genesis 9:8-16 “And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, and I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you...neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of the flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.

And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud, and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.”

Why Old versus New Testaments?

The Lord Jesus Christ is described as the Mediator of the “new covenant” (Hebrews 9:15). The events surrounding the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ provide a natural means of division in Scripture, between those writings dealing with the Old Testament and those of the New Testament.

It must be remembered, however, that this division of the Scriptures into Old and New Testaments is man-made. The whole Bible is the revelation of God, and is one complete, indivisible book.

The Bible itself confirms this. In 1 Timothy 5:18 the Apostle Paul cites two passages, both of which he calls “Scripture.” The first passage, “*You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads the grain,*” is cited from Deuteronomy 25:4 in the Old Testament. The second passage, “*The laborer is worthy of his wages,*” however, is a direct quote from Luke 10:7 (see also Matthew 10:10). Thus 1 Timothy 5:18 demonstrates that Paul considered passages from both the Old Testament and what became the New Testament to be inspired Scripture.

Some claim that the Old Testament became outdated when Christ appeared, but that is not so. The New Testament constantly refers the readers back to the Old. Christ told his listeners to “*search the Scriptures*” (John 5:39), by which he meant the Old Testament (as the New Testament was not yet written).

Christ appealed to these same Scriptures to expound the things concerning himself: “*And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them [the disciples] in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself*” (Luke 24:27). The Bible will never be properly understood if the Old Testament is neglected. The Gospel itself is based upon an Old Testament promise, as we read in Galatians 3:8: “*[God] preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’*”

To illustrate this, consider the following promises or covenants made by God in the Old Testament:

1. In the garden of Eden following the sin of Adam and Eve:

Genesis 3:15 “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

2. Promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—the “fathers of old:”

Genesis 12:2-3 *“I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

3. Promise to David:

2 Samuel 7:12-13 *“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”*

4. Promises of the Kingdom to the prophets:

Isaiah 9:6-7 *“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever.”*

The angel Gabriel’s testimony in the New Testament alludes to all these Old Testament promises:

Luke 1:31-33 *“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, [the seed of the woman] and shall call His name Jesus...and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David [promise to David]. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever [the seed promised to Abraham], and of His kingdom there will be no end [the promise to the prophets].”*

Another example of how God’s promises span the Testaments is found in Paul’s letter to the Galatians:

Galatians 3:8-9,29 *“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham . . . if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”*

God’s promises are not yet complete:

Jeremiah 31:31-34 *“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people...they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD.”*

Figures of Speech in the Bible

His bark is worse than his bite! She was born with a silver spoon in her mouth. He’s like a bull in a china shop. She brings home the bacon...

Expressions like these are called idioms. These are peculiar to the English language and to someone who has known English all their life they present no problems. However, taken literally they don’t make a lot of sense.

Every language has its idioms and the language of the Bible is no different. Old Testament Hebrew is especially rich in idiom due largely to the fact that it lacks abstract terminology and adjectives. Some examples of this are the expression “how beautiful are the feet” which means “how welcome is the message; “he slept with his fathers” which means “he died”.

Unless you recognise when an idiom is being used you can easily misunderstand the meaning of a text. Modern translations, such as the *NIV*, attempt to use an equivalent figure of speech in English to translate many biblical idioms. However, more literal versions, particularly the King James Version, translate idioms word for word.

Since the Bible has been available in English for over five centuries many Hebrew idioms and biblical sayings have become part of the English language. This can be a problem at times when reading the Bible because we are so familiar with sayings which, to their original audience, were often meant to be startling. For example, “*be sure your sin will find you out*” (Numbers 32:23), “*the salt of the earth*” (Matthew 5:13), “*in the lion’s den*” (Daniel 6:1-24).

When you come across phrases that are not readily understandable you may want to consider that perhaps you have come across an example of figure of speech. The books of poetry in the Bible are full of this kind of language. Often it requires some personal effort, thought and imagination to understand what the writer is trying to say. It also may be helpful to check to see how the phrase or word occurs elsewhere in the Bible.

For more information on Biblical idioms try:

E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible Explained and Illustrated*, 1898. Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 1968 reprint.