



No man
cometh unto
the **FATHER**
but by
ME

John 14:6

SUNDAY
SCHOOL *Superintendent*

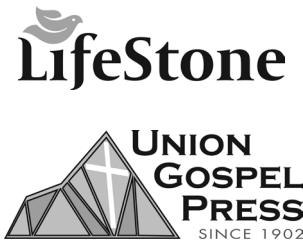
Winter Quarter | December | January | February 2025-26

Sunday School Superintendent

WINTER QUARTER

December 2025, January, February 2026

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Editorials

BY MATTHEW SWALE

Scripture's Use of Scripture

Leaders and participants will notice several threads running through all twelve biblical texts this quarter. Holiness is the most obvious. There is, however, a less obvious one that will become apparent in the lessons. Most of this quarter's texts make use of other biblical texts. Many Bible readers know that Bible passages quote other Bible passages, but often the extent of this phenomenon is underappreciated. For example, it is well known that the New Testament often quotes the Old Testament. What is lesser known is that New Testament writers learned this from Old Testament writers. Nearly all the Old Testament texts selected this quarter refer to other texts, but not as overtly as the New Testament does. It will help the ensuing lessons make more sense if we consider *how* and *why* Bible passages refer to one another so frequently.

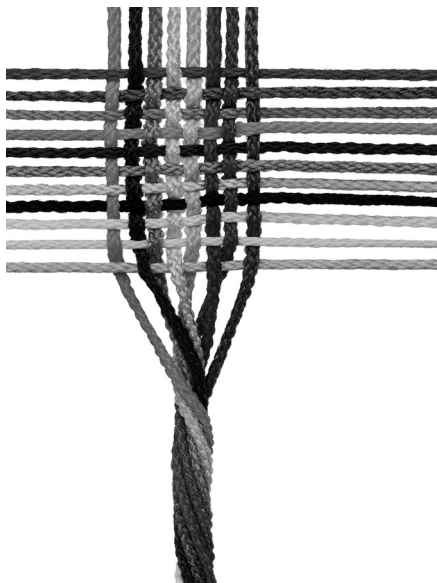
There are at least three ways that Scripture refers to Scripture. The first and most obvious is a formal citation. This is when the writer lets the reader know that Scripture is being quoted. Lesson 11 provides an example of this. First Peter 1:16 prefaces its quotation with the phrase "it is written" before quoting Leviticus 19:2. This kind of reference is more common in the New Testament, but it occasionally occurs in the Old Testament too.

The second way Scripture refers to Scripture is by quoting it without signaling it as clearly as a formal citation. The writer sort of slips into extended wording from another text. Lesson 12 shows this when Hebrews 12:5-6 transitions into a long quote from Proverbs 3:11-12. The Old Testament quotes that way frequently. Lesson 8 provides an example of this when Psalm 113:7-8 uses whole lines from 1 Samuel 2:8.

The third way Scripture uses Scripture is the sneakiest, for sometimes it occurs in just a word or two. These are known as allusions. Many readers miss these. Isaiah 9:1-7, examined in lesson 3, does this in six English words that are only two words in Hebrew: "as in the day of Midian" (vs. 4). In that simple phrase, Isaiah evoked the story of Gideon from Judges 6 through 8. Another example appears in lesson 12. Hebrews 12:15 alludes to Deuteronomy 29:18 with the brief phrase "root of bitterness."

Why does the Bible quote other parts of the Bible? There are at least four reasons. First, the Bible is its own best interpreter, so it nudges readers back and forth between texts that will mutually enlighten one another. God knows that Christians will understand His Word better when they see the Bible's vast interconnections. Those interconnections help Christians think about Bible passages the way that the

PLEASE NOTE: Fundamental, sound doctrine is the objective of LifeStone Ministries, Union Gospel Press. The writers are prayerfully selected for their Bible knowledge and willingness to submit to the Spirit of Truth, each writing in his own style as enlightened by the Holy Spirit. At best we know in part only. "They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).



biblical authors thought about Bible passages. It will help readers know, for example, that the biblical writers saw a connection between Eden and the tabernacle, as Moses used words from the story of Eden to describe the tabernacle (lesson 2).

Greg Lanier suggested the next three reasons. Second, the Bible refers to the Bible to show when prophecies are fulfilled. This occurs more frequently in the New Testament but also many times in the Old Testament, especially in 1 and 2 Kings (cf. 2 Kgs. 15:12).

Third, the Bible refers to the Bible to show patterns in the way God works. Lesson 8 will discuss how Psalm 113 picks up on a pattern articulated in 1 Samuel 2 (Hannah's song), namely, that God exalts the humble. Likewise, in lesson 12, Hebrews 12 quotes Proverbs to show the pattern of God's loving discipline.

Fourth, the Bible refers to the Bible to show prescriptions for how to trust and obey the Lord (*Old Made New*, Crossway). Lesson 11 provides an ex-

ample of that reason in 1 Peter 1's quotation of the command to love one's neighbor in Leviticus 19:18.

It is only natural for us to think that the biblical writers would refer to previous parts of Scripture. In general, God provided new revelation that built upon previous revelation. By referring to other sections of Scripture, readers of the new revelation are also pulled into the teaching of the previous revelation.

Why is that important? There are many reasons. First, God's character does not change. His expectation for obedience and His judgment of disobedience persist because His character is always the same. This is why, for example, many commands and prohibitions from the Mosaic Law are repeated in the New Testament.

Second, the praiseworthy actions of an earlier generation are worthy of emulating. Later writers may appeal to a previous example for his readers to follow. Of course, there are many examples of disobedience as well. A writer may warn his readers against following a notorious action committed in an earlier age.

There is another reason that we should consider as well. New Testament Christians living outside of places mentioned in the Bible may have difficulty identifying with Old Testament stories and Jewish lineages. References to the Old Testament help New Testament Christians identify with Old Testament Israel as we see their story as a necessary precursor to the work that God continues to do in the world.

The Old Testament stories are rich in the history of how God gathers His people. We are the spiritual ancestors of biblical characters. It is important for us to learn from their lessons.

The Bible is a brilliant tapestry. Keeping an eye out for citations, quotations, and allusions can assist readers in appreciating some of its most beautiful intricacies.

Holiness in Isaiah

The three units this quarter all deal with holiness. Theologian T. Desmond Alexander wrote, "Of all the divine attributes mentioned in the Bible, holiness is perhaps the most significant but possibly also the most difficult to comprehend" (*Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, Baker). That sentiment likely holds true in most churches.

Understanding holiness is difficult in most churches because of cultural issues. What does it mean to be holy? For some people, the concept of holiness is synonymous with the moral and cultural standards of a previous generation. For others, it is a foreign concept, as they have no connection to anything remotely holy in their lives. Both groups need a word from God on the true meaning of holiness.

There are a few ways to pursue a greater grasp on a biblical topic like holiness. One way is to survey references to holiness throughout the Bible, and that is a fruitful exercise. Another way, less common in churches, is to focus on the theme of holiness in one portion or book of the Bible. The book of Isaiah is a strong candidate for inquiry. Three of this quarter's lessons are drawn from Isaiah (see lessons 3, 4, and 7). Isaiah used the word "holy," or words derived from it, seventy-three times in sixty-six chapters. On average, holiness is referred to more than once per chapter in Isaiah. Isaiah's view of God and the story he told shed light on the concept of holiness.

In Isaiah, God is the reference point for holiness. Isaiah, more than any other Old Testament book, uses the title "The Holy One of Israel" to refer to God. Isaiah uses the title twenty-five times, compared to three times in Psalms, twice in Jeremiah, and once in 2 Kings. It may

have been Isaiah's favorite designation for the Lord. Perhaps his vision of God, in which he heard foundation-shaking voices cry, "Holy, holy, holy" (Isa. 6:3), is why he could not shake this way of referring to God. That vision cemented holiness in his mind, soul, and ringing ears!

What, then, does the title "Holy One of Israel" convey? There are at least three truths discussed here. First, because the basic meaning of "holy" is "set apart," the title conveys the distinction between the Creator and His creation. Thus Isaiah 57:15 says, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place."

Second, and related to the first truth, God alone is inherently holy. Repentant believers are "sanctified ones" (13:3) because the Holy One makes them so, but the Lord is holy Himself.

Third, and paradoxically related to the first two, the title conveys that the Holy One, who is distinct from creation, has linked Himself through covenant promises to Israel. The phrase "of Israel" in Isaiah's favorite divine title should surprise readers. The second half of Isaiah 57:15 teaches this truth: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Theologians call the collection of these three truths the interplay between God's transcendence (exaltedness) and immanence (nearness).

Beyond the title "The Holy One of Israel," the use of the word "holy" in Isaiah foreshadowed the full revelation of the New Testament concerning the Holy Trinity.

As God the Father is the Holy One of Israel, so too Isaiah hinted that the

Son is the Holy One of Israel. One of the first references to the Messiah in Isaiah is the phrase “holy seed” (6:13). The promised offspring (cf. Gen. 3:15) would be inherently holy because He is the Holy One of Israel.

Whether or not he knew exactly what it meant at the time, Isaiah introduced the name of the Third Person of the Trinity: “holy Spirit” (Isa. 63:10, 11). The Old Testament refers early to God’s Spirit (cf. Gen. 1:2), but two of the three times the Holy Spirit is referenced in the Old Testament are in Isaiah. Isaiah taught what the New Testament would make clear: there is one Holy God who exists eternally in three distinct Persons—these are the “Holy Father” (John 17:11), Christ, who is called the “Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24), and the “Holy Spirit” (Luke 11:13).

The story Isaiah tells relates to holiness as well. Paul House argued that the massive book of Isaiah includes seven movements or cycles (Isa. 1–4; 5–12; 13–27; 28–35; 36:1–56:8; 56:9–62:12; 63–66). Each cycle contains the basic movement one finds also in the New Testament gospel message: “the movement from people’s disastrous sins . . . to their residing with God in Zion in a new heavens and earth, through God’s redemptive work, shared with His servants” (*Isaiah 1–27*, Christian Focus).

For example, Isaiah 1 through 4 begins with an unholy “sinful nation” that has “provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger” (1:4). By the end of the four-chapter section, there is a surviving remnant in Zion that “shall be called holy” (4:3). How did unholy people escape judgment and end up with God in a holy place? By repentant faith (1:18-19). Isaiah tells the gospel story as a move from unholiness to eternal holiness through salvation from judgment.

The next gospel cycle in Isaiah introduces someone through whom

unholy people are made holy. He is the “holy seed” (6:13), virgin-born Immanuel (7:14), “Prince of Peace” (9:6), and Spirit-empowered King (11:1-5). Through this figure, the Holy One brings His people from an unholy, sour vineyard (5:2) to the well of salvation in Zion, where “the Holy One of Israel” would dwell among them (12:3, 6).

Isaiah tells the gospel story as a move from unholiness to eternal holiness through salvation from judgment by the anointed King who brings judgment (9:7).

The cycle in Isaiah 36:1 through 56:8 shakes things up. Isaiah introduces a figure called the “servant” (42:1). Like the anointed King in Isaiah 9 and 11, the Servant would be “exalted and exalted, and be very high” (52:13). This relates to holiness language: the Servant is set apart. Yet the Servant would also be “wounded” and “bruised” for His people’s unholiness (53:5). Judgment features in every gospel cycle in Isaiah, but in a strange development, the Servant is judged (vs. 7). He is not unholy but is the “righteous servant.” He absorbs judgment for the unholy so that He can “justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities” (vs. 11).

Through judgment absorbed by the Servant-King, even Gentiles and outcasts (55:5; 56:3, 8) are brought from an unholy world “to [God’s] holy mountain” (56:7). The anointed King judges unholiness, but He also absorbs judgment for the unholy to make them holy.

This quarter looks at a holy God (unit 1) who meets in holy places (unit 2) with people He makes holy (unit 3). This is a well-worn story told by Isaiah and fulfilled in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Unholy people, through faith in God’s holy Son, can be made holy and dwell with Him in holiness forever.

The Glory of the Lord

Lesson Text: Exodus 33:12-23

GOLDEN TEXT—“And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live” (Exodus 33:20).

OPENING MOMENTS

Suggested Song (Adults)

“To God Be the Glory” (Crosby)

Suggested Song (Children)

“My God Is So Big” (Anonymous)

Icebreaker

If you could make two requests knowing He would answer yes, what would they be?

LESSON OUTLINE

1. **Moses’ first request: Show Your ways, Lord (Ex. 33:12-17)**
2. **Moses’ second request: Show Your glory, Lord (Ex. 33:18-23)**

KEY ISSUES

In today’s text, Moses made two bold requests of the Lord. Learners will grasp the import of Moses’ two requests more thoroughly if they consider what prompted the requests and how God answered them.

First, we will take a look at the context leading up to our passage. Just as Jesus would later solemnize the new covenant with a meal at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:26-30), the elders of Israel solemnized the nation’s covenant with the Lord in a meal (Ex. 24:9-11). The Lord then summoned Moses up Mount Sinai to give him further instructions for living in relationship with the Lord (vss. 12-18). Those instructions are recorded in Exodus 25 through

31. Meanwhile, Israel broke the brand-new Ten Commandments by worshipping a golden image of a calf (32:1-6). That notorious sin was tantamount to a newlywed committing adultery shortly after the wedding reception meal.

That breaking of faith occurred right before today’s text. Therefore, when Moses asked for displays of the Lord’s ways (33:13) and glory (vs. 18), he was wondering the same thing an unfaithful spouse would want to know in the aftermath of the betrayal: what is the future of the relationship? Moses wanted to know how God would interact with an unfaithful covenant partner. What would unfaithful Israel’s future be with the Lord? Moses’ request did not occur in a vacuum, as if he were merely curious what God’s glory is like. Moses’ request stemmed from his intercessory role for Israel. He stood before God on their behalf to see whether the broken relationship could be restored and whether God would still dwell in their midst as He had promised while Moses was up on the mountain (29:45-46).

DID MOSES SEE GOD’S FACE?

In Exodus 33:20, God told Moses, “Thou canst not see my face: . . . and live.” Similarly, John 1:18 says that “no man hath seen God.” But how

does that fit with the assertion that Jacob saw “God face to face” (Gen. 32:30) or, for that matter, the statement just a few verses before our lesson texts that says Moses spoke with God “face to face” (Ex. 33:11). Texts that emphasize the impossibility of seeing God’s face likely refer to fallen humanity’s inability to see the unmediated, or unrestricted, glory of God. Thus, Jacob and Moses saw mediated, or restricted, revelations of God’s glory.

Second, we will look at the Lord’s response to Moses’ two requests. The Lord agreed to proclaim His “name” as He passed by Moses (Ex. 33:19). In the Old Testament, “name” connotes one’s reputation (cf. Gen. 11:4) and character (cf. Ps. 33:21). In Exodus 34, when the Lord fulfilled His promise to Moses, He proclaimed His name through seven divine attributes. He is merciful, gracious, long-suffering, full of goodness, full of truth, forgiving toward repentant sinners, and just in punishing unrepentant sinners (vss. 6-7). In this way, the Lord supplied a fitting answer to the question behind Moses’ two requests: Israel’s covenant relationship with the Lord would be possible because of the Lord’s gracious character.

Moses showed that he viewed the Lord’s response as satisfactory when he quoted Exodus 34:6-7 back to the Lord the next time Israel jeopardized their collective relationship with God by refusing to enter the Promised Land (Num. 14:17-19). The Lord’s answer to Moses’ two requests satisfied later biblical writers as well, as psalmists (cf. Pss. 86:15; 103:8), prophets (cf. Jonah 4:2; Mic. 7:18), priests (cf. Neh. 9:17), and kings (cf. 2 Chr. 30:9) all alluded to it. Teachers often say that students ought to ask their questions because others might have the same unspoken

question. Moses asked what all subsequent biblical writers would want to know: what is God like, and how does He interact with sinners?

BRINGING IT HOME

Moses’s request to see God’s glory would be horrific to many people. Throughout their lives, they seek to avoid God and the wrath He carries with Him. They live in fear of judgment with little hope of pardon for their sinful living. Their best course, they think, is to believe arguments for His nonexistence and dismiss thoughts of the afterlife from their minds. Despite the ferocious demonstration of God’s power in delivering Israel out of Egypt, Moses was not deterred from making his request to see God. Yes, he saw God’s vengeance, but he saw something else, too. He saw God’s compassion for His people.

Modern believers often wish they could experience the glory of God as Moses requested in Exodus 33:18 and experienced in 34:5-7. That warrants two responses. First, since God’s answer to Moses’ two requests came in the form of proclaiming God’s character, believers who experience God’s forgiveness when they sin enjoy the substance of Moses’ experience.

Second, the New Testament teaches that those who behold “the light of the glorious gospel of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4) encounter a greater glory than Moses experienced (cf. 3:12-18). Moses had to veil his face after encountering God, but believers “with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory” (vs. 18). Of course, we experience that glory “by the Spirit of the Lord” rather than by a literal mountaintop experience. Nevertheless, by grace through ongoing faith, Moses’ experience is replicated in modern believers’ lives.