

The Deep Tapestry of Revelation: Linking the Teachings of Jesus Christ to the Old Testament (Tanakh)

I. Prolegomena: Jesus' Hermeneutic of Fulfillment

The ministry and instruction of Jesus Christ were fundamentally grounded in the Hebrew Scriptures, which He consistently affirmed as the authoritative and unbreakable word of God.¹ His teachings were not revolutionary in the sense of establishing entirely new doctrine apart from the tradition of Israel, but rather served to interpret, deepen, and ultimately fulfill the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Jesus articulated this principle explicitly, stating that He had not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17–18). This declaration establishes the theological precedent for understanding every subsequent teaching and action recorded in the New Testament Gospels.

Scholarly estimation suggests that the textual presence of the Old Testament (OT) in Jesus' recorded discourses is substantial. Approximately 180 of the 1,800 verses that report His direct speech in the four Gospels constitute either direct quotations or discernible allusions to the OT text.¹ This dense intertextuality demonstrates that the OT provided the entire historical and theological framework for His self-understanding and mission.

A. The Authority and Scope of Scripture in Jesus' Teaching

Jesus' appeal to the OT transcended mere moral instruction; it included affirming the literal, historical reality of key individuals and epochal events. He utilized these narratives as established precedents for both His ethical demands and His eschatological warnings. For instance, in His discussions regarding the end times, Jesus cited the corruption preceding Noah's flood (Genesis 6–7) and the judgment that fell upon Lot's generation (Genesis 19), explicitly treating these as historical templates for the final judgment.¹ Similarly, Jesus referenced the creation of Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:27; 2:24) when discussing the permanence of marriage (Mark 10:6–8).¹

The affirmation of foundational narratives, such as the pre-Sinaitic creation ordinance for marriage, demonstrates a hierarchical hermeneutic in Jesus' exegesis. When challenged regarding the Mosaic allowance for divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1–4), Jesus clarified that this

statute was a concession permitted due to human sin—the "hardness of heart"—whereas the foundational law established at Creation (Genesis 1–2) held ultimate and absolute precedence.¹ Thus, Jesus' method was not simply to cite the Law, but to penetrate the spirit and original intent of the Scriptures, ensuring that "the Scriptures could not be broken" (John 10:35) and that the Law would be completely fulfilled (Matthew 5:18).¹

B. Methodology: Distinguishing Quotation, Allusion, and Typology

A systematic analysis of Jesus' connection to the OT must differentiate between three modes of interaction: direct quotation, thematic allusion, and typological fulfillment. Direct quotations, such as citing Deuteronomy during the wilderness temptation narratives, are verifiable word-for-word correlations. Thematic allusions involve echoing specific prophetic language, such as the imagery used in parables. Typological fulfillment requires grounding the OT text in its original historical and literary context to understand the meaning conveyed to the first recipients, recognizing that certain titles and concepts, such as the Son of Man or the Servant of the Lord, may have gradually acquired messianic overtones through a developmental process of prophetic oracles and later Jewish interpretation.² The progressive development of messianic prophecy functions in both a genetic connection (rooted in historical relations) and a teleological connection (preparing Israel for its destiny and the messianic blessing).²

II. The Foundation of the Law: The Decalogue and Foundational Commands

Jesus' teachings consistently affirmed the validity and gravity of the Mosaic Law, focusing particularly on the Decalogue and synthesizing the entire body of legal instruction into two core obligations.

A. The Supremacy of the Great Commandment

When questioned about the greatest commandment in the Law, Jesus demonstrated His authority by synthesizing the core obligations from two distinct books of the Torah. The first and most important commandment, commanding absolute devotion to God, was drawn from the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4). Jesus cited Deuteronomy 6:5 (with allusions to 10:12 and 30:6), stating the primary obligation: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might".³ This profound declaration of divine unity and exclusive loyalty is referenced in Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, and Luke 10:27.³ The second commandment, which Jesus stated was "like unto it," defined the requisite ethical

response to this divine devotion. This was drawn from Leviticus 19:18: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself".³ This secondary command, affirmed in Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31, and Luke 10:27, establishes the practical ethical boundary for all human interaction and forms the explicit positive basis for what is often termed the Golden Rule.⁴ By linking Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, Jesus validated a holistic understanding of the Law that subordinates hundreds of individual statutes to two core, inseparable covenantal obligations. The juxtaposition of these two passages places the emphasis not merely on external adherence to rules, but on internal disposition: the obligation to love God with one's total being must precede and necessitate the righteous treatment of others.

B. Specific Affirmations of the Decalogue and Civil Law

Jesus utilized specific citations from the Torah to reinforce essential moral standards, often using them to expose hypocrisy or erroneous interpretation. In discussions concerning eternal life (such as with the rich young ruler), Jesus reiterated the core ethical commandments of the Decalogue: "Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness".³ These citations align directly with Exodus 20:13–16 and Deuteronomy 5:17–20, referenced in Matthew 19:18.³ Furthermore, Jesus condemned the contemporary practice of using legalistic loopholes (such as the *Corban* vow) to evade filial duties. In doing so, He upheld the severity of the command to honor one's father and mother (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16), citing the Mosaic civil law that prescribed the death penalty for severe transgression: "He that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death" (Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9).³ These specific references, recorded in Matthew 15:4 and Mark 7:10, underscore Jesus' assertion of the Law's gravity and His refusal to permit cultural traditions to nullify its divine mandate. In the temptation narratives (Matthew 4, Luke 4), Jesus relied entirely on the book of Deuteronomy to establish His obedience to God's sovereignty. He affirmed the principle that life is sustained not by material provision alone, but by divine command (Deuteronomy 8:3, cited in Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4).³ He enforced the demand for exclusive worship: "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him" (Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20, cited in Matthew 4:10 and Luke 4:8).³ Finally, He rejected the notion of forcing God's hand, citing the prohibition: "Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 6:16, cited in Matthew 4:7 and Luke 4:12).³ These citations established His identity as the perfectly obedient Son who submits absolutely to the Torah.

Table 1 summarizes Jesus' direct citations of the Law.

Table 1: Jesus' Direct Citations of the Law (Torah)

NT Teaching/Passage	OT Source (Chapter:Verse)	OT Book/Law Category	Theological Function
Matt 22:37 (Love God)	Deut 6:5; 10:12; 30:6	Torah/Shema	Primary Obligation
Matt 22:39 (Love Neighbor)	Lev 19:18	Torah/Ethics	Secondary Obligation/Foundation

			of Golden Rule
Matt 4:4 (Life Sustained)	Deut 8:3	Torah/Provision	Rejection of Materialism
Matt 4:7 (Do not tempt God)	Deut 6:16	Torah/Sovereignty	Obedience to God's authority
Matt 15:4, Mark 7:10 (Cursing Parents)	Ex 21:17; Lev 20:9	Torah/Civil Law	Upholding the gravity of the Law
Matt 19:18 (Decalogue Summary)	Ex 20:13–16; Deut 5:17–20	Torah/Decalogue	Defining moral minimum for eternal life

III. The Sermon on the Mount: Intensification and Internalization of the Torah

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) represents the most significant clarification of Jesus' relationship to the Mosaic Law. In this discourse, Jesus did not replace the commandments but intensified their application, moving the sphere of obedience from external compliance to internal, spiritual disposition.

A. The Beatitudes and the Prophetic Standard

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12) define the blessed characteristics of the citizen of the Kingdom of God. These blessings are profoundly rooted in the Wisdom and Prophetic literature of the OT, often echoing or reversing the worldly expectations of success.⁷ The promise that "The meek shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5) is a direct, near-verbatim citation of Psalm 37:11.³ This validates the ancient hope of the Psalmist for the vindication of the quiet, humble righteous person who trusts in divine justice. The concept of the "poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3) aligns theologically with the language of Isaiah 61, identifying the blessed not necessarily with material destitution, but with those who recognize their spiritual bankruptcy and rely solely on God for vindication.⁸ Furthermore, the blessings pronounced upon those who suffer persecution (Matthew 5:11–12) are directly tied to the historical trajectory of the OT prophets (Luke 6:23) and thematically linked to the suffering of the righteous described in Isaiah 51:7.⁸ The structure and concept of the Beatitudes generally reflects the extensive conditional blessings of the covenant described in Deuteronomy 28 and the opening Psalm 1, emphasizing that divine blessing is contingent upon faithful covenant obedience.⁷

B. The Antitheses: Perfecting the Law (Matthew 5:21–48)

The six "Antitheses" of Matthew 5 (You have heard... But I say to you...) are central to understanding Jesus' legislative authority. In these statements, Jesus did not contradict the Torah, but rather revealed its ultimate and intended spiritual depth, demonstrating that true fulfillment requires obedience of the heart.

1. **Murder vs. Anger (Matthew 5:21–22):** Based upon the sixth command (Exodus 20:13), Jesus moves the judicial consequence for murder to the internal sphere, subjecting anger, contempt, and verbal abuse to judgment.⁹
2. **Adultery vs. Lust (Matthew 5:27–28):** Stemming from the seventh command (Exodus 20:14), Jesus expands the prohibition from the physical act of adultery to the inward thought of lust.
3. **Divorce (Matthew 5:31–32):** Here, Jesus corrects the prevailing interpretation of the legal provision for divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1–4), stating that the allowance for a certificate was granted only because of "hardness of heart." He reverts the standard to the original pre-Sinaitic creation ordinance, affirming the unity described in Genesis 1:27 and 2:24.¹
4. **Oaths (Matthew 5:33–37):** Referencing OT statutes regarding vows to God (Leviticus, Numbers), Jesus demands such a level of absolute truthfulness that judicial swearing becomes unnecessary, negating the human need to rely on external oaths.¹⁰
5. **Lex Talionis vs. Non-Retaliatio (Matthew 5:38–42):** Jesus directly quotes the principle of limited retribution: "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20).³ The Law originally functioned to place a proportional limit on vengeance (preventing a person from taking a life for a tooth). Jesus performs a radical restriction of this law's application, transferring it from the public sphere (a judicial limitation) to the personal ethical realm, mandating non-resistance and gracious submission to injury.
6. **Loving Neighbor vs. Loving Enemy (Matthew 5:43–48):** Jesus cites the secondary Great Commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18).³ He then overturns the accompanying interpretation prevalent among contemporaries—the supposed negative command to "hate your enemy"—by expanding the definition of 'neighbor' to encompass one's persecutors, commanding perfect love.

The intensity of these requirements fundamentally demonstrates that the Law, as interpreted by Jesus, exposes the utter inadequacy of human capability to achieve righteousness merely through external compliance. The very structure of the Antitheses highlights a necessary theological transition: the impossible ethical perfection demanded in Matthew 5 requires a divine enablement promised in the prophetic tradition.

Table 2: The Antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5)

NT Teaching/Passage	OT Source (Chapter:Verse)	OT Principle Cited	Jesus' Intensification/Functi on
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Matt 5:21 (Murder)	Ex 20:13	Decalogue: Life Sanctity	Internalizes law: extends judgment to anger.
Matt 5:31 (Divorce)	Deut 24:1-4	Mosaic Concession	Appeals to Creation Order: Gen 1:27, 2:24 ¹
Matt 5:38 (Retaliation)	Ex 21:24; Lev 24:20	Lex Talionis	Restricts application: mandates personal non-resistance ³
Matt 5:43 (Love Enemy)	Lev 19:18	Love Neighbor	Expands definition: mandates love for enemies ³

IV. Kingdom, Covenant, and Parabolic Prophecy

The central message of Jesus Christ—the announcement that the Kingdom of God was "at hand"—was entirely predicated upon the eschatological and covenantal promises embedded within the Hebrew Scriptures.

A. The Kingdom of God: Sovereignty and Eschatology

The concept of the Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven) was immediately comprehensible to Jesus' Jewish audience as the final, end-time, saving reign promised by the prophets.¹¹ The concept rests on the theological bedrock of God's eternal sovereignty over all creation (Psalms 93:1–2; 95:3–6; Isaiah 37:16).¹²

The prophetic hope centered on the future realization of God's dominion through a specific king. The Davidic Covenant promised a perpetual kingly line (Psalm 89), who would ultimately fulfill the original dominion mandate given to Adam (Genesis 1:28). This culminated in the vision that "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14).¹¹ Jesus, in proclaiming the Kingdom's immediate presence, affirmed Himself as the kingly figure through whom this prophetic destiny was breaking into the world.¹¹

Jesus frequently utilized prophetic imagery to describe the nature of this Kingdom. For instance, the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:32) describes the Kingdom originating from humble, inauspicious beginnings and growing into a massive, world-encompassing reality.¹³ This image of a great sheltering tree is consistently employed in OT prophecy (e.g., Ezekiel 17, Daniel 4) to symbolize great world empires; Jesus subverted this geopolitical imagery, applying it instead to the spiritual, transforming Kingdom of God.¹³

B. The New Covenant and Forgiveness

The ultimate realization of the Kingdom involves the transformation of covenant relationships. Jesus established the New Covenant, explicitly linking His work to the foundational prophecy found in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31:31–34 is uniquely significant because it is the only passage in the entire Old Testament that uses the designation "New Covenant".¹⁴ This passage directly addresses the house of Israel and Judah, announcing a replacement for the Mosaic Covenant made during the Exodus (Jeremiah 31:32).¹⁴ Jesus' ministry realizes the promises contained within this oracle: specifically, the promise that God will write His "law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it" (Jeremiah 31:33).¹⁵ This internal inscription provides the mechanism necessary for the kind of heart-obedience demanded in the Sermon on the Mount, demonstrating the coherence between the ethical standard and the covenantal provision. Crucially, the New Covenant promises the radical forgiveness of sin: "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more" (Jeremiah 31:34).¹⁵ This forgiveness is the means by which humanity can attain fellowship with God and fulfill the Abrahamic promise of blessing to all families of the earth.¹⁴ The establishment of the New Covenant through Jesus' body and blood during the Last Supper confirms His role as the covenant mediator who perfects the failed Mosaic Law through substitutionary sacrifice.

C. Parables: Prophetic Imagery and Judicial Veiling

Jesus' use of parables was not merely a pedagogical choice but a conscious fulfillment of prophetic tradition concerning judicial hardening. The reason Jesus spoke in parables—"so that, 'though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand'" (Luke 8:10)—is a direct fulfillment of the judicial commission given to Isaiah in Isaiah 6:6–10.¹⁶ By utilizing parables, Jesus confirmed the prophetic judgment that the Kingdom would be initially hidden from those who rejected Him.

Many of Jesus' parables echo specific prophetic images of judgment. The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13) uses the imagery of different soils¹⁷, a theme found in wisdom literature contrasting the righteous (e.g., Psalm 1) with the ephemeral.¹⁸ Most notably, the Parable of the Wicked Tenants is a profound retelling of Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard (Isaiah 5:1–7).¹⁶ Isaiah 5:7 explicitly identifies the vineyard as "the house of Israel" and the desired fruit as "justice" and "righteousness." By repeating this prophecy, Jesus placed Himself as the divine landlord's son and the rightful heir, interpreting Israel's history as a narrative of rejecting God's messengers and bringing the OT prophetic tradition of judgment to its climax.¹⁶

V. Messianic Self-Identification, Suffering, and

Vindication

Jesus' most direct claims to authority and fulfillment occurred in statements concerning His mission, suffering, and subsequent vindication, primarily through citations from the Psalms and Prophets.

A. Fulfillment of Historical and Typological Narratives

Jesus consistently asserted a unique identity that encompassed the historical experience of Israel. His family's flight into and return from Egypt, as recorded in Matthew 2:15, is explicitly stated to fulfill the prophecy, "Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Hosea 11:1).¹⁹ This passage originally referred to the nation of Israel's Exodus, demonstrating Jesus' identity as the one who embodies Israel's true destiny.

Similarly, Jesus linked the ultimate destruction and rebuilding of the Temple to prophetic texts, suggesting that His bodily resurrection (the Temple of His body) was the fulfillment of promises found in Hosea 6:1–2 and 2 Kings 20:8.¹⁹

B. The Passion Psalms and the Righteous Sufferer

The Passion narratives reveal Jesus' conscious and intentional reliance on the Psalms of the Righteous Sufferer, demonstrating that His death was not an unforeseen tragedy but a pre-scripted, necessary act of covenant fulfillment.

Jesus acknowledged the treachery of His betrayer, identifying the act as a fulfillment of Psalm 41:9: "Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted... hath lifted up his heel against me" (John 13:18).³ He also explained the hostility directed toward Him by quoting Psalm 35:19 and 69:4: "They that hate me without a cause" (John 15:25), predicting that the disciples would face similar persecution.¹

The two most powerful OT citations occurred on the cross itself. Jesus' fourth utterance, the cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34), is a direct quotation of Psalm 22:1.¹ By quoting the opening line of this psalm, Jesus consciously claimed the entire trajectory of the psalm, which moves rapidly from utter abandonment to global kingship and eternal vindication (Psalm 22:27–31). This signifies that His suffering was designed to lead inevitably to His reign. His seventh and final recorded utterance, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46), is a statement of ultimate trust, directly quoting Psalm 31:5¹, confirming that His death was a voluntary, intentional commitment to God's plan, not a mere expiration.

Table 3: Jesus' Messianic Fulfillment and Passion Narrative Citations

NT Event/Utterance	NT Reference	OT Source (Chapter:Verse)	Context and Function
Creation/Marriage Authority	Mark 10:6-8	Gen 1:27; 2:24	Reasserting foundational law over Mosaic concession ¹
Betrayal Foreknowledge	John 13:18	Ps 41:9	Conscious fulfillment of the righteous sufferer narrative ³
Cry of Abandonment	Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34	Ps 22:1	Highlighting the necessary nature of suffering and sacrifice ¹
Committing the Spirit	Luke 23:46	Ps 31:5	Expressing trust and final voluntary surrender ¹
Rejection by World	John 15:25	Ps 35:19; 69:4	Explaining disciples' future persecution ¹
Return from Egypt	Matt 2:15	Hos 11:1	Typological identification with Israel's historical calling ¹⁹

VI. Conclusion: Teleological Coherence and the Unity of the Testaments

The exhaustive examination of Jesus' teachings reveals a profound and systematic commitment to the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus did not merely borrow from the OT; He established Himself as the living culmination of its historical, legal, and prophetic streams.

A. Jesus as the Climax of Prophetic History

The teachings of Jesus serve to establish the *teleological connection* between the entirety of the Old Testament narrative and the inauguration of the New Covenant.² Jesus used the OT as the foundational storyline that He brought to its necessary completion.¹⁶ By citing historical precedent (Genesis 1-2), demanding the ethical imperative (Leviticus 19:18), and enacting the Messianic suffering (Psalm 22:1), Jesus demonstrated that all of Scripture pointed toward His person and ministry. The overwhelming evidence confirms that Jesus affirmed the divine inspiration, historical reliability, and literal authority of the OT in all its components: Law,

history, and prophecy.¹

B. The Unbreakable Link: Law, Prophecy, and Fulfillment

The relationship between Jesus' teaching and the OT is characterized by continuity rather than contradiction. The primary function of the major discourses, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, was to reveal the internal, spiritual intent of the Law, demonstrating that the external ordinances given at Sinai pointed toward a standard of righteousness that was humanly impossible to attain.

The ultimate solution for this legal and ethical failure is found in the New Covenant, explicitly prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31–34.¹⁵ This prophetic promise provided the mechanism—the writing of the law on the heart and the complete forgiveness of sins—that enables the ethical perfection demanded by Jesus. Thus, the moral rigor of the Sermon on the Mount is only made possible by the redemptive provision of the New Covenant. This systemic dependency confirms the theological unity of God's redemptive plan across the Testaments, where the OT educated Israel for the reception of the messianic blessing, and Jesus delivered that blessing through conscious fulfillment of the ancient texts.²

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