
Intertextuality in The Bible: The Destruction and Reconstruction of The City

Dr. John L. Agundez

ABSTRACT: In a previous article entitled *"Intertextuality in the Book of Psalms: The Death and Resurrection of the Just Man,"*¹ I proposed a methodology for studying intertextuality in the Book of Psalms. This approach facilitates valid interpretations not only of the Psalms themselves but also of those biblical texts in the New Testament that are intertextually linked to them. Here, after briefly outlining the principles of intertextuality, the methodology is applied to the most significant biblical passages addressing the theme of a city's destruction. This analysis paves the way for valid interpretations of select texts in both the Old and New Testaments.

KEYWORDS: intertextuality; intertextual network; meaning; metaphor; interpretation; destruction of the city; reconstruction of the city.

1. INTRODUCTION. The present study seeks to clarify what Christ intended when he foretold the destruction of Jerusalem. It must be asked whether he referred exclusively to the fall of the city at the hands of the Roman Empire during the Jewish War, or whether his words bear a further, more comprehensive significance. If the prophecy concerned only the historical ruin of Jerusalem, such a prediction would seem almost too modest a task for the Son of God, who raised the dead and healed every kind of infirmity. Moreover, the theological weight of

¹ John López Agundez, *"Intertextuality in The Book of Psalms: The Death and Coming Back to Life of The Just Man"*, *The Journal of Biblical Theology*, 6/4, (2023): 182.

Jerusalem's destruction within the broader context of Christ's public preaching still calls for careful examination.

A further question arises as to whether Jesus spoke merely of the city in which he was to be condemned, or whether his prophecy encompassed additional realities. It is therefore necessary to consider the possibility that more than a single, literal level of meaning is present in his words and, if so, to determine how such a richer reading can be justified on biblical grounds. To address these issues, the inquiry will follow the motif of the "destruction of the city" as it unfolds across the canon. By identifying the principal contours of this motif in the Old Testament and demonstrating their convergence with New Testament passages that treat the same theme, it becomes possible to articulate more precisely what Christ had in view when he spoke of Jerusalem's destruction.

The methodological approach adopted here is that of intertextuality, which has proved especially fruitful in the interpretation of biblical texts. Before mapping the intertextual network that concerns the destruction of the city, it is necessary first to recall the principal theoretical tenets of intertextual exegesis. All citations from Sacred Scripture are taken from the Navarre Bible.

2. PRINCIPLES OF INTERTEXTUALITY. Intertextuality is the shaping of a text's meaning by another text. Before applying intertextuality to a few texts of the book of Psalms it is important to lay out its main principles when applied to the study of the Biblical text:

—The Bible (like any other book) is one text made of texts and there are different forms of intertextuality in it. Explaining intertextuality in the Bible is part of the work of exegesis, because it helps to come up with a valid interpretation of a given text.

—There's intertextuality between texts when they are reasonably connected through reference.

—*There is implicit reference when a text alludes to other text through ideas. There are three forms of implicit reference: allusion, echo, and dialogical intertextuality.*

ALLUSION. In *allusion*, a text refers to other text by means of repeated words that allow us to make the connection between texts. Most scholars agree allusion is intended. For instance, J1 3,10 alludes to Is 2,4 and Mi 4,3. Being aware of this case of intertextuality is very helpful to come up with a valid interpretation of J1 3,10. Loader was right when he said: “*Whatever the final form of the text, we should draw its preceding stages into the equation*”².

ECHO. In *echo*, a text contains the same ideas of other text without repetition of words. Most scholars agree echo is not intended yet derives from a specific predecessor.³ For example, Lk 23,46 echoes J1 2,11 and Lk 19,33-38 echoes Zech 9,9.

DIALOGICAL INTERTEXTUALITY. There is *dialogical intertextuality* when two texts are telling you the same story with different words. It might happen that different texts repeat the same story with new bias, and that would be enough to consider those texts connected (Loader 2008:396). Therefore, it is not necessary for texts to be considered as connected that they repeat the same words, as Moyise says: “*Intertextual studies suggest that under the right conditions, allusions and echoes might be just as important as explicit quotations for an understanding of a text.*”⁴ Indeed, there is a connection between texts when someone writes a new version of an old theme with new words. For instance, according to Cair: “*Wherever the Old Testament says ‘Lion’, read ‘Lamb’*”. *Wherever the Old*

² James Alfred Loader, “*Intertextuality in Multi-Layered Texts of the Old Testament*”, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament OTE*, 21/2, (2008): 395.

³ Christopher Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, (Boston: Brill, 2008), 24.

⁴ Steve Moyise, “*Intertextuality and Biblical Studies: A Review*”, *VERBUM ET ECCLESIA JRG*, 23(2), (2002): 429.

*Testament speaks of the victory of the Messiah or the overthrow of the enemies of God, we are to remember that the gospel recognizes no other way of achieving these ends than the way of the Cross.*⁵ This is what has been named *dialogical intertextuality*. Moyise was right when he said there is *dialogical intertextuality* in the case of the lion and the lamb because both texts deal with the same ideas but they use different images and different words, so both texts suggest two ways of influence: the new text affects the old and the old affects the new (Moyise 2002:424). That two way street of influence between texts is possible because words and texts have the capacity to mean infinite concepts —extended meanings or metaphorical meanings— as we know⁶. As St. Augustine said about the psalms: you get to a better understanding of a given psalm “*by similitudes, not in the proper sense of the words.*”⁷

—*There is explicit reference* when a text quotes previous material using the exact same words (*quotation*). It is a direct reference to another text with an acknowledgement of its composer. This happens in the Bible often when prophets quote other prophets; for instance, Mi 4,3 quotes Is 2,4.

In the following pages I will show an intertextual network of specific texts in the Old Testament which deal with the topic the destruction of the city, their openness to a metaphorical meaning, and their connection with texts of the NT. As Kim says: “*If the same patterns and types of discourse are found in texts, then intertextual relations can be posited.*”⁸ In the new context of the intertextual network texts both of the OT and the

⁵ G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St John the divine*, 2nd Ed, (London: A & C Black, 1984), 75.

⁶ Marcial Morera, “*La Palabra como Texto*”, *REVISTA DE FILOLOGÍA*, 23, (2005): 206.

⁷ Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 683.

⁸ Doosuk Kim, “*Intertextuality and New Testament Studies*”, *Currents in Biblical Research*, 20(3), (2022): 250.

NT will shape each others' meaning and the reader of the Bible will have access to valid interpretations of them.

3. INTERTEXTUAL NETWORK IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY OF JERUSALEM AND ITS RECONSTRUCTION.

A considerable number of Old Testament passages, particularly within the prophetic books, exhibit a dense web of interconnections, either by alluding to other texts that treat the same subject matter or by echoing analogous conceptual patterns. The central motif binding these passages together is the destruction of the city. The recurrent appearance of this motif indicates its theological and literary significance within the canon. Some illustrative instances of such intertextual phenomena in the Old Testament are as follows.

3.1. The destruction and the reconstruction of the city in the Book of Psalms. The book of Psalms exhibits a discernible pattern of prayer offered prior to entering and conquering the city, which can be systematically traced across several compositions. This pattern forms an intertextual network structured around the form of intertextuality commonly designated as an echo.

3.1.1. The destruction of the city. Before entering the city in order to conquer it, the just man—the Lord's warrior—entreats God for assistance and petitions for the strength necessary to charge against a troop and scale the city walls (Ps 18,29). Elsewhere, one encounters a supplication that God confound the enemies who sow violence and wickedness within the city, implying that divine intervention is required to repel the spread of evil there (Ps 55,9–11). These motifs reverberate in a further, succinct prayer that God arise, since the enemy has devastated the sanctuary and reduced Mount Zion to ruins (Ps 74,3).

3.1.2. The reconstruction of the city. The destruction of the city appears as one of God's acts that precedes the final

judgment of the world and his eternal reign in a renewed order, a renewal that entails the city's reconstruction. Thus, before the Lord reigns forever and prepares to judge the world, he annihilates the cities of his enemies (Ps 9:6). Once all his adversaries have been subdued, the city of God stands forth in enduring splendour, with the temple at its very centre (Ps 48).

3.2. The destruction of the city and its reconstruction in the Prophetic Books. Although the prophetic books constitute the Bible's richest repository of references to the theme of the city's destruction, not every prophet develops this motif extensively. The ensuing analysis presents the most pertinent passages from those prophets whose contributions to this theme are most substantial.

3.2.1. Isaiah. From the outset, Isaiah announces that the Lord will both bring the existing city to ruin and establish a new one (Is 1,24–31). The city in view is explicitly Jerusalem, whose collapse he describes in detail (Is 3,1.8). At various points, however, Isaiah designates Jerusalem under other names, notably "Babylon." Thus, an oracle is pronounced against Babylon, declaring that it will be overthrown by the Lord's army (Is 13,1–22). It is plausible that Joel and other prophets who depict the Lord's army advancing against Jerusalem drew on Isaiah's imagery. Isaiah's identification of Jerusalem with Babylon is suggested, for example, by the sign of impending disaster for "Babylon": the arrival of a rider on a donkey (Is 21,6–10), an image that finds a clear echo in the Gospel accounts of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem (Mt 21,1–11; Mk 11,1–11; Lk 19,28–40; Jn 12,12–15).

In Isaiah, the destruction of Jerusalem is described in both physical and spiritual terms. On the one hand, the city is left desolate, its houses closed, its gate shattered, and its structures ruined (Is 24,10–12; 30,25). On the other hand, on Mount Zion the Lord destroys "the veil" spread over all nations, swallows up death forever, wipes away every tear, and thus brings an end to suffering (Is 25,7–8). The theme of the city's

reconstruction therefore appears primarily in a spiritual register: the rebuilt city is a renewed, eschatological community marked by the absence of death, sorrow, and tears.

Isaiah also identifies the agent of the city's destruction. The Lord of hosts himself comes down to do battle on Mount Zion (Is 31,4). The destruction is further portrayed in terms of being trampled down to the dust by "the feet of the poor" and "the steps of the needy" (Is 26:4–6), which resonates typologically with the humble yet royal figure of Jesus entering the city mounted on a donkey in the Gospel narratives cited above.

At several points, Isaiah juxtaposes the motifs of destruction and reconstruction. The city of Moab, for example, is brought low (Is 25,12), yet just beforehand the prophet declares that the Lord's hand will rest on this mountain (Is 25,10), and he then speaks of "that day"—the day of YHWH—when a new city will be established on the Lord's mountain (Is 26,1–6) and entrusted to a righteous nation. In this renewed order, the poor tread down the proud and bring them low. Within the same theological horizon of restoration, Isaiah affirms that on the day of slaughter the Lord will bind up the wounds of his people (Is 30,26), indicating that the rebuilding of the city ultimately signifies the formation of a healed humanity, a community without wounds.

3.2.2. Amos. Amos situates the destruction of the city of Jerusalem (Am 2,5) within a broader sequence of oracles against several regional powers: the house of Hazael and the strongholds of Ben-hadad face ruin (Am 1,4); the wall of Gaza and its citadels will be razed to the ground (Am 1,7); Tyre will suffer a parallel fate (Am 1,10); as will Edom (Am 1,12), Teman (Am 1,12), Ammon (Am 1,14), and Moab (Am 2,2). The prophet ultimately extends this judgment to Samaria itself (Am 3,11–12).

Amos attributes the destruction of a city in the northern kingdom of Israel directly to the Lord (Am 5,9). More explicitly,

he declares that the Lord brings ruin upon the city as he passes through it (Am 5,16–17). In Am 6,14, the prophet announces that the Lord will raise up a nation against Israel—a prediction that many scholars interpret as foreshadowing the Assyrian conquest and the historical fall of the kingdom⁹.

3.2.3. Nahum. The Book of Nahum declares that the Lord restores Israel through the destruction of Nineveh, vividly depicting the city's overthrow in Nah 2,4–9.

3.2.4. Zephaniah. The Book of the prophet Zephaniah depicts the destruction of the city in the following terms: according to Zeph 1,16, the day of the Lord arrives amid trumpet blasts and battle array against the fortified cities and lofty battlements; Zeph 2,13–15 portrays Nineveh in the aftermath of its overthrow; and Zeph 3,1–4 details the corruption of Jerusalem—particularly its recalcitrance and lack of docility¹⁰—before the prophet announces the Lord's devastation of the city (Zeph 3,6–7).

Zephaniah also envisions the city's reconstruction. According to Zeph 3,14–18, following Jerusalem's destruction, the daughter of Zion—that is, the new Jerusalem—will arise. In this renewed city, no enemies or evil will remain, for the Lord, the victorious warrior, dwells in its midst, ushering in joy, renewed love, and song as on a festival day.

3.2.5. Jeremiah. The theme of the city's destruction manifests several distinctive features in the prophet Jeremiah. Primarily, this destruction is enacted by the Lord and encompasses all cities (Jer 4,7; 4,23–28; 48,8), with particular emphasis on Jerusalem, for whose overthrow a detailed plan of devastation

⁹ New Jerome Biblical Commentary, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 211.

¹⁰ The Navarre Bible: Minor Prophets, (New York: Scepter Publishers Inc., 2005), 266.

is prescribed owing to the profound corruption within (Jer 6,2–6).

The Book of Jeremiah delineates the advance of the northern army and its invasion in vivid terms: the sounding of the trumpet (Jer 4,5), the Lord's authorization for Zion's ruin (Jer 4,6), and the predatory presence of a lion laying waste the surroundings (Jer 4,7). Moreover, Jeremiah portrays this destruction as directed against human authority in general—princes, priests, and kings alike (Jer 4,9–11). The northern army ultimately brings Jerusalem to ruin (Jer 4,11–13) on account of the people's sins (Jer 4,16–31); the prophet specifies the hour of attack as midday (Jer 6,1–4) and depicts the invaders as roaring like the sea while mounted on swift horses (Jer 6,22–26). Jer 25,9 makes explicit that the Lord wields sovereign control over this northern force.

Jeremiah 21 anticipates the siege of Jerusalem under King Zedekiah (early sixth century BC), notwithstanding concomitant promises of restoration in the kingdom which speaks about an eschatological restoration (Jer 23,1–8; 33,14–16)¹¹.

3.2.6. Ezekiel. The prophet Ezekiel announces the divine threat of Tyre's destruction (Ezek 26,3–6), a judgment that extends more broadly to numerous cities (Ezek 12,20; 35,4).

3.2.7. Daniel. The prophet Daniel announces that the Lord's army will bring destruction upon the city and the sanctuary, entailing the temple's overthrow as well (Dan 9,26). The book further encompasses the prophecy of Jerusalem's desolation lasting seventy years, culminating in the city's ruin (Dan 9,1–4, 18–27).

¹¹ New Jerome Biblical Commentary, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 323.

3.2.8. Zechariah. The prophet Zechariah portrays a divine warrior entering the city mounted on a donkey (Zech 9,9–10) and subsequently depicts the ensuing battle and the city of Jerusalem’s devastation (Zech 14,1–5).

3.2.9. Joel. Joel depicts the Lord’s army overrunning the city of Jerusalem (Jl 2,7–9). The prophet subsequently identifies the Lord himself as this invincible force (Jl 2,25) and announces the city’s restoration following the devastation, with abundant harvests (Jl 2,26) and renewed temple offerings. The rebuilt city endures perpetually, as Judah and Jerusalem “shall dwell forever” (Jl 3,20).

4. INTERTEXTUAL NETWORK IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT: THE ESCHATOLOGICAL DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY OF JERUSALEM BY JESUS OF NAZARETH AND ITS RECONSTRUCTION.

What links the texts from the Psalms and prophetic books examined thus far to the New Testament? The precise intertextual mechanism that establishes this connection is the echo. Specific New Testament passages reverberate with the Old Testament texts surveyed in §3 above, amplifying their eschatological horizon. A grasp of this intertextual network proves indispensable for a sound interpretation of those Psalms and prophetic passages concerning the city’s destruction and reconstruction.

4.1 The Lord as Warrior and Army. The Lord manifests as both the warrior and the Lord’s army, offering prayer prior to entering the city for its destruction. Psalm 18,29, which records the warrior’s supplication before assaulting the city, reverberates in the New Testament narratives of Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane—situated just beyond Jerusalem’s walls—prior to entering the city for his Passion, death, and resurrection (Mt 26,36–46; Mk 14,32–42; Lk 22,39–46; Jn 18,1).

It is therefore unsurprising that Zechariah 14,3–4 portrays the Lord as a divine warrior standing upon the Mount of Olives amid the eschatological battle against the nations besieging Jerusalem—an image that echoes in Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer. The Lord as warrior and army finds further expression in Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem astride a donkey (Mt 21,1–11; Mk 11,1–11; Lk 19,29–44; Jn 12,12–19), fulfilling texts such as Zech 9,9–10.

This warrior characterization of the Lord in the New Testament aligns seamlessly with early Christian interpretation. Indeed, Stephen’s accusers charged that he preached Jesus would destroy “this place”—that is, Jerusalem—and alter the Mosaic customs (Acts 6,13–14).

4.2. The destruction of the city of Jerusalem carried out by Jesus of Nazareth is an eschatological one. At Jesus’ death on the cross, the temple veil was torn (Mt 27,51; Mk 15,38; Lk 23,45), echoing Dan 9:26. As noted earlier, Isaiah proclaims that on Mount Zion the Lord removes “the veil” cast over all nations, swallows up death forever, wipes away every tear, and abolishes suffering (Is 25,7–8).

The theme of the city’s destruction and reconstruction thus unfolds primarily in a spiritual register: Jesus’ death shatters the temple as an emblem of the old covenant order—Jerusalem itself—since its inhabitants failed to recognize “*the time of God’s visitation*” (Lk 19,43–44). The rebuilt city emerges as an eschatological community free from death, sorrow, and tears, the fruit of Christ’s Paschal Mystery. Indeed, Jesus himself declared, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*” (Jn 2,19–21), referring to his body as the new temple. With this temple reconstituted, a new city arises, as John beholds: “*I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God*” (Rev 21,2); believers thus become “*fellow citizens with God’s people, members of God’s household*” (Eph 2:19).

5. CONCLUSIONS. Once the intertextual method is applied to the relevant psalmic and prophetic texts on the destruction and reconstruction of the city, and their echoes in the New Testament are traced, it becomes clear that Jesus' predictions of Jerusalem's fall cannot be reduced to a mere forecast of the city's physical ruin at the hands of the Roman Empire. Rather, they also signify the eschatological dismantling of an old order and the inauguration of a renewed order liberated from the consequences of sin. Furthermore, the thematic development of the city's destruction and reconstruction unfolds in discernible stages: preparatory prayer, the Lord's solemn entrance into the city, and the offering of the sacrifice of his death in Zion.

From this analysis, three principal conclusions emerge. First, Jesus' prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction entails both a concrete historical judgment on the earthly city and an eschatological judgment on the old covenantal order. Second, the reconstruction of the city points typologically to a new, redeemed community in which the effects of sin are overcome. Third, the narrative pattern—prayer, entry into the city, and sacrificial death in Zion—functions as the structural itinerary by which Scripture articulates the passage from destruction to renewal.

Sources

- Beetham, Christopher A. *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*. Boston: Brill, 2008.
- Brown, Raymond E., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990.
- Caird, G. B. *The Revelation of St John the divine. 2nd Ed.* London: A & C Black, 1984.
- Hippo, A. *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*. Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994.
- John López Agúndez, "Intertextuality in The Book of Psalms: The Death and Coming Back to Life of The Just Man", *The Journal of Biblical Theology*, 6/4, (2023): 182.

- Kim, D. (2022). "Intertextuality and New Testament Studies". *Currents in Biblical Research* 20(3) (2022): 238–260.
- Loader, J. A. "Intertextuality in Multi-Layered Texts of the Old Testament". *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament OTE* 21/2 (2008): 391-403.
- Morera, M. "La Palabra como Texto". *Revista de Filología* 23 (2005): 197-208.
- Moyise, S. "Intertextuality and Biblical Studies: A Review". *Verbum et Ecclesia JRG* 23(2) (2002): 418-431.
- Navarre Bible, The. *Minor Prophets*. New York: Scepter Publishers Inc., 2005.