



RABBINIC QUOTATIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AND HOW IT RELATES TO JOEL 2 AND ACTS 2

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THE RABBINIC BACKGROUND

In his definitive work, *The History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, Emil Schuerer noted that *Later Judaism discovered that there is a fourfold meaning of Scriptures, which is indicated by the word **pardes** (Paradise), viz. 1. **pshat**, the simple or literal meaning; 2. **remez** (suggestion), the meaning arbitrarily imported into it; 3. **drash** (investigation), the meaning deduced by investigation; and 4. **sod** (mystery), the theosophic meaning.* (pg. 348). He goes on to observe that the New Testament writers also applied these same four ways of quoting the Old Testament but makes the following distinction: *In saying this however it must be remarked, that the exegetic method practiced in the New Testament, when compared with the usual Jewish method, is distinguished from it by its great enlightenment. The apostles and the Christian authors in general were preserved from the extravagances of Jewish exegesis by the regulative norm of the gospel.* (pg. 349). As for the rabbinic extremes, he goes on to say: *Jewish exegesis however, from which such a regulatory was absent, degenerated into the most capricious puerilities. From its standpoint, e.g. the transposition of words into numbers, or of numbers into words, for the purpose of obtaining the most astonishing disclosures, was by no means strange, and quite in accordance with its spirit.* (Ibid).

The basic point should not be missed. The New Testament was not written in a vacuum but in the context of first century Judaism. Just as it is necessary to know the Roman and Greek backgrounds to understand books like Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, etc., by the same

token it is necessary to understand the first century Jewish background to understand the Gospels. This is also important to understand how the New Testament quotes the Old Testament. Understanding this will give Dispensationalists additional ammunition against all forms of Replacement Theology (such as Covenant Theology, Preterism, etc.). Replacement Theologians use these quotations to defend an allegorical interpretation to passages dealing with Israelology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology. The New Testament writers were Jewish writers who wrote as Jews wrote. Our view of verbal plenary inspiration teaches that the Holy Spirit superintended the biblical writers so that without violating the writer's personality, style of writing, or vocabulary, they produced exactly what God wanted them to produce down to the very words. On the one hand, the Holy Spirit's practice of not overwhelming the writer's background explains why the New Testament authors used the same four ways of quoting the Old Testament as the rabbis did. On the other hand, the superintending by the Holy Spirit kept them from going into the rabbinic extremes. Furthermore, the rabbis never denied the literal meaning of the Old Testament passages they quoted; but in seeking some deeper meanings and/or correlations between passages, they sometimes overused their imaginations and went well beyond the biblical author's intent. The inspiration of the Holy Spirit kept the New Testament writers from doing so. Thus the New Testament writers, while using rabbinic methodology, never changed the meaning of the Old Testament text.

THE REFINEMENT BY DR. DAVID L. COOPER

Dr. David L. Cooper, the late director of the Biblical Research Society, was quite familiar with Jewish writings and also knew all about the fourfold way the New Testament quotes the Old, but he created new names for the four categories to make it easier for Gentile Christians to understand. (*Messiah: His Historical Appearance*, pgs. 174-177). He also noted that the second chapter of the Gospel of Matthew has one example of each category. I will give his examples and add some of my own.

The first rabbinic category was *pshat* which has the basic meaning of "simple", "plain." Cooper referred to it as *literal prophecy plus literal fulfillment*. The example used is Matthew 2:5-6 which quotes Micah 5:2. In the original context of Micah 5:2, the prophet is speaking prophetically and prophesying that whenever the Messiah is born, He will be born in Bethlehem of Judah. Thus the *literal* meaning of Micah is that the Messiah will be born in the Bethlehem of Judah and not the Bethlehem of Galilee. When a literal prophecy is fulfilled in the New Testament, it is quoted as a *literal fulfillment*. Other prophecies that fall into this category include: Psalm 22 (describing the death of the Messiah); Psalm 110:1 (the Messiah will be seated on the right hand of God); Isaiah 7:14 (the virgin birth); 40:3 (the forerunner of the Messiah); 52:13-53:12 (the rejection, atoning death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah); 61:1-2a (the prophetic ministry of the Messiah); Zechariah 9:9 (the ride into Jerusalem on a donkey); Zechariah 11:4-14 (Messiah will be sold out for thirty pieces of silver); Malachi 3:1 (the forerunner of the Messiah); et. al. These are cases where the Old Testament literally speaks of a specific event in the future and when that specific event is fulfilled literally in the context of the

New Testament, the New Testament quotes that particular prophecy as a point-by-point fulfillment.

The second rabbinic category was *remez* which means "hint" or "clue" or "suggestion." Cooper dubbed this category as *literal plus typical* and the example is Matthew 2:15 which quotes Hosea 11:1. In the original context of the Hosea passage, it is not even a prophecy but refers to an historical event, that of the Exodus. The background to the Hosea passage is Exodus 4:22-23 which refers to Israel as the national son of God. Thus, according to Hosea, when God brought Israel out of Egypt, He divinely called His son out of Egypt. The *literal* meaning of the Hosea passage refers to the Exodus under Moses. There is nothing in the New Testament that can change or reinterpret the meaning of the Hosea passage nor does the New Testament deny that a literal exodus of Israel out of Egypt actually occurred. However, the Old Testament *literal* event becomes a *type* of a New Testament event. In the New Testament, an individual *Son of God*, the Messiah, is also divinely called out of Egypt. The passage is not quoted as a fulfillment of prophecy since it was not a prophecy to begin with, but quoted as a *type*. Matthew does not deny, change, or reinterpret the original meaning. He understands it literally, but the literal Old Testament event becomes a type of a New Testament event. In rabbinic parlance, it is a *remez* or a hint of another meaning in addition to the literal, in this case a *typology*. Other examples include: Isaiah 29:13 (Israel has become religious only in the outward sense, obeying man-made commandments while ignoring the divine commandments) quoted in Matthew 15:7-9 (Israel becomes a type of the Pharisees and their traditions which made them very religious. They were religious based upon man-made traditions while actively disobeying divine law such as honoring father and mother); Isaiah 6:10 (speaks of Isaiah's ministry that will be largely rejected) quoted in John 12:39-40 (Isaiah's ministry becomes a type of Messiah's ministry which was also largely rejected); Psalm 118:22-23 (the rejected stone) quoted in Matthew 21:42 (a type of the rejection of the Messianic stone that becomes a stone of stumbling); Exodus 12:46 (prohibition against breaking any bone of the Passover lamb) quoted in John 19:36 (that prohibition is now a type for not breaking the bones of the Passover Lamb of God). Many of the quotations and/or references to the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers in the Book of Hebrews fall into this category. While the author of Hebrews makes references to the sin of Kadesh Barnea, Moses, Aaron, the Levitical priesthood, the blood sacrifices, the Day of Atonement, Melchizedek, etc., he never once denied that there was a literal sin of Kadesh Barnea, Moses, Aaron, blood sacrifices, Day of Atonement, or Melchizedek. However, all these now become types of the person and/or work of Jesus the Messiah.

The third rabbinic category was *drash*. It has the meaning of "exposition", "investigation" which expanded on the meaning of the text, drew conclusions, and applied to a new situation based often on only one point of similarity. Cooper referred to this category as *literal plus application* giving the example of Matthew 2:17-18 which quotes Jeremiah 31:15. In the original context, Jeremiah was not prophesying of an event in the far future, as was the case with Micah, or dealing with an event that was long history as was the case with Hosea. Jeremiah was prophesying about a current event happening in his own time, the beginnings of the Babylonian Captivity. As the Jewish young men were being taken into captivity, they went by the town of

Ramah, a town not far from where Rachel was buried. Rachel had become the symbol of Jewish motherhood. As the young men were marched toward Babylon, the Jewish mothers of Ramah came out weeping for sons they would never see again. Jeremiah pictured the scene as *Rachel weeping for her children*. This is the *literal* meaning of the Jeremiah passage. Like the rabbis, the New Testament cannot change or reinterpret what the verse means in that context, nor does it try to do so. But in this category there is a New Testament event that has one point of similarity with the Old Testament event and it is quoted as an *application*. The one point of similarity here is that once again there are Jewish mothers weeping for sons they will never see again. Otherwise, the two situations are totally different. The Jeremiah event happened in Ramah, north of Jerusalem; the Matthew event happened in Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem. In the Matthew passage, the sons are killed; in the Jeremiah passage, the sons are not killed but taken into captivity. There is only one point of similarity in the two events: Jewish mothers weeping for sons they will never see again. The *literal* meaning of the Jeremiah passage is dealing with the Babylonian Captivity. But by means of *drash*, the verse is quoted as an *application* because of one point of similarity. Another example is the quotation of Isaiah 53:4 (where Isaiah is speaking of the spiritual healing of Israel as a nation from their sins by means of the blood atonement of the Messiah) in Matthew 8:17 (applied to the physical healing of Jewish individuals by Jesus). The point of similarity is the healing by the Messiah. Isaiah deals with the spiritual healing of the Jewish nation resulting from Messiah's atonement; Matthew describes the physical healing of Jewish individuals at a point of time when Jesus had not yet died and therefore no atonement had yet been made. Another example is the quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10 (which describes the nature of Isaiah's ministry) quoted in Matthew 13:14-15 (which applies to the ministry of Jesus), and the one point of similarity is that both speak in a way the unbelieving Jewish audience will not be able to understand. The same is true with the quotation of Psalm 78:2 (which states that the Psalmist will speak a *parable* and *dark sayings* that are well known and passed down from generations) in Matthew 13:35 (where Jesus now speaks in parables teaching things that they had not known before but are revealing new truth). The point of similarity is that of speaking in parables. This is the category to which the Joel two and Acts two passages fall into and this will be discussed later in the paper.

The fourth rabbinic category was *sod* which means "secret" or "mystery." This category was so called since generally it was neither based on a single passage of Scripture nor a quotation of any specific scripture. It tended to summarize what the Scriptures said on a subject. An example from the *Midrash Rabbah* 63:11 reads as follows: *Hence it is written as in the verse, And I will no more make you a reproach of famine among the nations*. There is no actual verse that reads like this but it is a combination of the concepts found in Ezekiel 36:30 and Joel 1:19. Hence this *midrash* is a summary of a biblical teaching and not an actual quote. Cooper titled this category as *summation*, and cites Matthew 2:23 as the example: *...that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets, that he should be called a Nazarene*. As in the *midrash* quote, there is no such actual statement anywhere in the Old Testament. While many try to make a reference to Isaiah 11:1, the only point of similarity is the sound of *netzer*, but that passage is not dealing with a town called Nazareth. Matthew is not quoting a specific Old Testament statement but is summarizing what the Old Testament said. While this will not be true in every case, one clue is

when the plural *prophets* is used as it is here in verse 23. In the three preceding examples, the singular *prophet* was used and a specific prophet was quoted. However, here the plural *prophets* is used, but Matthew does not quote an actual prophet for in this case his purpose was to summarize what the Prophets said. In the first century context of Israel, a *Nazarene* was a despised and rejected individual and the term was used to reproach and to shame (John 1:46). The Prophets did teach that the Messiah would be a despised and rejected individual (Isaiah 49:1-13; 52:13-53:12), and this was well summarized by the term *Nazarene*. Another example of this category is Luke 18:31-33 where Jesus said he must fulfill *all the things written in the prophets* (plural). That includes the following: going to Jerusalem, the Jews turning him over to the gentiles who will mock him, spit on him, scourge him, and kill him, and also rising again on the third day. Here again, no one prophet ever said all this. However, putting the prophets together, they did say all this. Therefore, this is a summation of what the prophets said about the Messiah but not a direct quotation. Yet another example of this category is James 4:5: *Or think ye that the scripture speaks in vain? Does the spirit which he made to dwell in us long unto envying?* There is no such statement anywhere in the Old Testament. The clue to what he is referring to is the mention of *adulteresses* in the previous verse and the fact that he is writing specifically to the Jewish believers (1:1). In the Old Testament, Israel was the wife of Jehovah. When the wife worshipped other gods, this was viewed by the prophets as spiritual adultery. As a result, the jealousy of God burned against his wife, Israel, resulting in divine discipline. In James, believers now have the presence of the Holy Spirit and so the believer's total loyalty belongs to God and to the things of God. If a believer begins to make *friendship of the world*, he is harboring a rival spirit causing the indwelling Holy Spirit to become jealous. This too can lead to divine discipline (verses 1-3). Thus, James is not quoting any specific statement of the Old Testament but summarizing what the Scripture taught about spiritual adultery and the jealousy it creates in God.

PETER'S QUOTATION OF JOEL 2:28-32 IN ACTS 2:16-21

SOME BASIC OBSERVATIONS

Peter's quotation is essentially from the *Septuagint* with one exception. Joel states: *After these things*; Peter states: *In the last days*. Furthermore, Peter did not use the normal formula for fulfillment but simply used the phrase *this is that*. The fact is that nothing Joel prophesied actually happened in Acts two. This includes signs in the heavens and on the earth such as blood, fire, and billows of smoke; the sun turning into darkness or the moon into blood; there is no record of young men seeing visions or of old men dreaming dreams. The one thing that happened in Acts two (tongues) is not even mentioned by Joel. The question then is: why is Peter quoting the Joel passage to explain a phenomenon that Joel says nothing about?

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

In an unpublished paper written by Bruce A. Baker for Baptist Bible Seminary in Clark's Summit, Pennsylvania, the author has summarized the various views of how to explain this quote

(pgs. 14-23). The following is taken from his research. Richard Longenecker: Peter quoted the entire section because of the messianic significance of the passage and because he wanted to focus on the last statement that those who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved and this in turn opened the door for Peter to present the gospel; as for the supernatural elements in the prophecy, Peter probably expected them to occur in the near future. Charles Ryrie: His conclusion is similar to that of Longenecker in that what is stated in verses 19-20 "is simply a connecting link between the two key points of his argument." He states that the events prophesied by Joel did not actually come to pass. Joseph A. Alexander: Since the prophecy does not correspond to what actually happened, the prophecy of Joel should be taken metaphorically and all the supernatural language of Joel should be understood symbolically of a revolutionary change so dramatic as to be compared to the extinction of the heavenly bodies. H.B. Hackett: The judgment section of Joel refers to the events of A.D. 70 and while the supernatural signs themselves did not occur, these auguries are to be understood figuratively of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Darrell Bock: This is the use of the *peshar* formula, which assumes a hidden meaning to the text and may add multiple layers of meaning to the original text, and therefore it is used as an example to justify complementary hermeneutics used by Progressive Dispensationalists. Zane Hodges: He also sees it as a *peshar* formula, but as a Classical Dispensationalist, he does not use it for the same reason. Merrill Unger: The phrase *this is that* introduces an example of a similar event; thus the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts two was a similar event to the expected outpouring of the Spirit at the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. Daniel Wallace: He interprets the phrase *this is that* as a "convertible proposition" which intends to show an equivalence that is less than total which in turn leads to seeing a partial fulfillment of the prophecy in Acts two but a full fulfillment in the future; hence this is a partial fulfillment of the total prophecy.

Baker opts for the last view: *Therefore, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as well as Samaria and Caesarea are part of the preliminary fulfillment to the promised outpouring associated with Christ's second advent.* This is the view of Progressive Dispensationalism, but Baker notes that *Traditional Dispensationalists should have no quarrel with this interpretation. After all, this approach takes Joel at face value, leaves room for a future fulfillment within the nation of Israel, and best explains the text.* This is also the view of Mal Couch: *Holding this view does not necessarily make one a "progressive" dispensationalist. This view best explains the biblical data and accords well with classical dispensationalism.*

LITERAL PLUS APPLICATION

If Joel had mentioned the speaking in tongues, then one could make a case for a partial fulfillment. The fact is, Joel does not mention it. If the Joel passage was partially fulfilled, exactly what part was fulfilled? This is not the same as the prophecies of Isaiah 61:1-3 and Zechariah 9:9-10 where partial fulfillment is obvious since the first part of both passages speak of the first coming and the second part speaks of the second coming. The Joel passage simply does not fit this category.

This author views that it is best to take the passage as fitting into the category of *drash* or Cooper's *literal plus application* where an Old Testament passage is quoted based on one point of similarity. As already noted, nothing that happened in Acts two was predicted by Joel two. What actually did happen in Acts two (the speaking in tongues) was not mentioned by Joel. What Joel did mention (dreams, visions, the sun darkened, the moon turned into blood) did not happen in Acts two. Joel was speaking of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the whole nation of Israel in the last days while Acts two speaks of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Twelve Apostles, or, at most, on the 120 in the Upper Room. Either way, this is a far cry from Joel's *all flesh*. Furthermore, according to verse 18, the servants of the Jewish people were to experience the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but there were no servants in the Upper Room to experience these things.

However, there was one point of similarity: an outpouring of the Holy Spirit resulting in an unusual manifestation. Acts two neither changes or reinterprets Joel two nor does it deny that Joel two will have a literal fulfillment when the Holy Spirit will be poured out on the whole nation of Israel. It is simply applying it to a New Testament event because of one point of similarity. In Joel the Spirit is poured out resulting in the unusual manifestation of prophetic dreams and visions; in Acts the Spirit is poured out resulting in the unusual manifestation of speaking in tongues.