

The Rabbinic Paul and the Messiah Jesus

Paul's use of rabbinic reasoning

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Glossary

Hebrew words and references used in the study:

Torah – Instruction, guidance and usually refers to the first five books of the Bible.

Ha Mashiach (the Messiah) – This was the supreme anointed one, expected by the Jewish people. He would deliver them from their enemies and establish a Jewish Kingdom. Hence, Jesus was Yeshua Ha Mashiach – Jesus the Christ.

Gezerah shavah — linking texts by shared words or phrases

Qal wahomer — argument from lesser to greater (a fortiori)

Midrash — creative, narrative-theological exposition of Scripture

Pesher — “this is that” fulfilment interpretation

Typology — reading persons and events as foreshadowing later realities

Shema – The word means ‘hear and act’ and called the people of Israel to put God first in every aspect of their lives. Found in Deuteronomy 6:4–9, Deuteronomy 11:13–21 and Numbers 15:37–41.

Haggadah – Narrative expansion



INTRODUCTION

There is an amazing amount of argument about Paul and what he meant in his letters and the reports of him in Acts. Paul is indeed difficult to understand at times. Peter knew this and knew that Paul was being misinterpreted. That is why he wrote:

2 Peter 3:15-16 *“Bear in mind that the patience of our Lord means salvation—just as our dearly loved brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom given to him. He speaks about these matters in all of his letters. Some things in them are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist (as they also do with the rest of the Scriptures)—to their own*

destruction.”

This highlights the problem. Those who read and hear Paul, fail to understand his Hebrew background, and then, distort them to their advantage. Therefore, we, who are Greek, particularly need to get into the mind of the Rabbinic Paul. Because of the nature of this study the Tree of Life, Bible version will be used.

Let us the begin by asking who exactly is Paul? To answer we will let Paul speak for Himself.

Philippian 3:5-7 “...circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel; from the tribe of Benjamin; a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the Torah, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting Messiah’s community; as for Torah righteousness, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, these I have considered as loss for the sake of the Messiah.”

It is important to note Paul’s Jewish teacher. His influence is often seen in Paul’s arguments. Gamaliel the Elder was the

most celebrated Rabbinic teacher of his generation — grandson of Hillel and president of the Sanhedrin. To study at his feet was like going to a great University, such as Oxford or Cambridge and getting the highest doctorate possible. Gamaliel was known for a more flexible, interpretive approach to Torah. Something that is seen in Paul's arguments. For example, about marriage and divorce. Paul used the following Jewish methods of interpretation of Scripture: *Gezerah shavah*, *Qal wahomer*, *Midrash*, *Pesher* and *Typology* (See *Glossary*). These tools are found throughout Paul's works, demonstrating his Rabbinic training and mastery of the Scriptures. Whilst it is not necessary to be an expert and learn these things in depth, they show how Paul reasoned, as a Jew. His writings were not made up or created out of any mal intent. They were considered and well-reasoned expositions of Scripture, with the chief aim of Paul, putting *Yeshua Ha Mashiach* at the heart of the Jewish Scriptures.

His hope, initially, was to persuade his fellow Jews to accept their Messiah. God had other ideas for the thrust of his mission, and he became an Apostle to the Gentiles. Because of this Paul has influenced not only Western theology but philosophy, law and ethics throughout the ages. We can see this, as we consider how Paul, once confronted by Jesus, on

the Damascus Road was changed. He went into Arabia after his vision and there his faith was honed. He became convinced that the Jesus he had met, was indeed the Jewish Messiah. This study cannot cover everything regarding this change of understanding, that would take a book. The problem Paul had to address was the central message of the faith of the Jewish followers of Jesus. That was, that the death of the Messiah on the cross was necessary for salvation.

Addressing a Scandal

This claim of a Messiah dying, as Jesus did, was a scandal to the Jewish authorities. The idea of a crucified Messiah was an abhorrence to their Jewish minds. In fact, to first-century Jews, it was theologically offensive. The Torah itself stated:

"Anyone who is hung on a pole is under God's curse." — Deuteronomy 21:23

A Messiah was expected to be a triumphant Davidic King who would defeat Israel's enemies, rebuild the Temple, and usher in the age of God's kingdom. This man Jesus, in the minds of Jewish leaders, had blasphemed and declared Himself equal

with the Father – the “I Am”. He had been executed by a Roman Governor, as a criminal. This was the complete opposite of Jewish expectation. Paul's Rabbinic genius, anointed by the Holy Spirit, was seen in showing that the curse of the cross was not the defeat of the Messiah — it was in fact, the means of redemption.

1 Corinthians 1:18 *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the intelligent.” Where is the wise one? Where is the Torah scholar? Where is the debater of this age? Hasn’t God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”*

Paulis was using a quotation from Isaiah:

Isaiah 29:14 *“Therefore, behold, once more I will do a marvellous work among this people—a marvel and a wonder—so the wisdom of their wise will perish, and the discernment of their discerning will be concealed.”*

Here in Corinthians, Paul is using a Mixture of Typological Reasoning with some Peshet. The original context was the Assyrian crisis. Jerusalem's leaders were making secret alliances with Egypt instead of trusting God — their "wisdom" was actually faithless cleverness. Paul is arguing that both the Greek and Jewish scholars were not understanding that Isaiah's statement still applied and continues to do so. Therefore, the rejection of Jesus as a crucified Messiah was no more than an attempt to reject His Messianic claims through clever arguments not based on faith. This is perhaps one of the strongest examples of the Rabbinic Paul contesting for the Gospel, using Jewish reasoning.

The Shema

We will now consider the great verses of Scripture, which are at the heart of the Jewish faith – the *Shema*. Paul will once more, through his Rabbinic skills, show that it points to Jesus as the divine Son of God.

Deuteronomy 6:4 "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love Adonai your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

The *Shema* meaning is expanded in the Glossary.

1 Corinthians 8:6 "...yet for us there is one God [Yahweh], the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord [Adonia], Yeshua Ha Maschiach, through whom are all things, and we exist through Him."

The *Shema* was at the heart of the confession of Jewish monotheism – the belief in one God. It was recited twice daily by every observant Jew. It was the

expression of the '*echad*' – the oneness – of God Himself. There are two divine names in the *Shema*: *Yahweh* and *Elohim*. In making the argument that Jesus is

part of the *echad*, the oneness of God, and that *Yahweh* and *Elohim* is also the Adonia, Jesus. Through Him Paul, argues, all things exist. Again, a reference to the

Jewish Scriptural understanding that God created all things. His argument is reflective of the Jewish John who also declares Jesus as Creator. (John 1). This is not

just Paul making a clever argument. guided by the Holy Spirit, using his sophisticated Rabbinic skill he refutes those who would challenge that Jesus did not fit

into God's prophetic plan. Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah who would become a human being to save the world. This is further confirmed to the

Philippians:

Philippians 2:6 "Who, though existing in the form of God, did not consider being equal to God a thing to be grasped."

His heart was also that his Jewish people would also understand these truths, from their own Scriptures.

How Much More?

This salvation brought by Jesus is another case of the Rabbinic Paul using the Middot of Hillel, his earthly teacher. In another place he uses *kal v'chomer*. If

something is true in a more difficult case, how much more must it be true in an easier case. Paul uses this pattern

constantly, usually signalled by the phrase 'how much more?'.

Romans 5:8-10 "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Messiah died for us. How much more then, having now been set right by His blood, shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him. For if, while we were yet enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved by His life."

This is a classic *kal v'chomer* argument. If God reconciled us while we were enemies — the much harder case — how much more will He save us now that we are reconciled — the much easier case. It has to be clearly understood, that Paul is not using worldly philosophical reasoning. This is Paul in his highly Rabbinic reasoning, using a formal Scriptural method that his Jewish readers would understand instantly. He continues the use of this principle as he continues in Romans 5:12-21. If one man's sin (Adam) brought death to all, how much more does one man's righteousness (Christ) bring life to all? This is a comparison between two representative

types, applied to the history of redemption.

The Seed

In the very matter of faith being necessary for salvation and able to be applied to those who turn to the Christ, Paul again demonstrates his superior Rabbinic knowledge and argument. This is the Rabbinic way of using the study of a single word, to demonstrate the application from one place in Scripture to another.

Galatians 3:16 "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. It doesn't say, "and to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "and to your seed," who is the Messiah."

Paul puts a great weight and emphasis on a single Hebrew word - זרע, (zera)'. He takes this word, meaning seed, and argues that the seed that was expected, was the Messiah. Jesus was to be that ultimate heir to the promised Messiah. Therefore, it was faith, not Torah observance, was always the design of God for covenant inclusion. Furthermore, Paul continues, with a *qal wahomer* assertion, that Abraham was justified before circumcision that came later.

Galatians 3:17 “What I am saying is this: Torah, which came 430 years later, does not cancel the covenant previously confirmed by God, so as to make the promise ineffective. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise. But God has graciously given it to Abraham by means of a promise.”

The Rock

We can also consider Paul’s midrashic typology in this passage:

1 Corinthians 10:2 “They all were immersed [baptised] into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. And all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink—for they were drinking from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the Rock was Messiah.”

We see again, Pauls great Rabbinic mind. Under the previous Scripture, the people were baptised into the Mosaic system of Torah. With the coming of the Messiah in Jesus, they were

baptised into Him.

In Jewish tradition, in places like the *Tosefta Sukkah* in chapter 3, there was created a legend of a miraculous rock that followed Israel through the wilderness. Paul adopts this midrashic tradition and identifies the pre-existent Christ as the spiritual reality behind it — using Rabbinic *haggadah* he applies it to his understanding of the Messiah. Jesus was the Rock in the wilderness, and is now the Rock of those that follow Him.

Conclusion

There are other examples throughout Paul's writing, of his Rabbinic style, but there is enough here to help us understand, how Paul not only reached out to Gentiles, but where ever he went in writing and speech, he would appeal to the Jewish people to realise their Scriptures continually pointed to Jesus as the promised Messiah and redeemer.

Let us end this study with considering Paul's understanding of why his Jewish people rejected the Gospel. His deep love for them. He, who would give up his own salvation for them, if that were possible (Romans 9:3), was deeply saddened by their refusal.

2 Corinthians 3:14-18 “But their minds were hardened. For up to this very day the same veil remains un-lifted at the reading of the ancient covenant, since in Messiah it is passing away. But to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart. But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Ruach Adonai is, there is freedom. But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory—just as from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

Let us use this study to pray for God's beloved people the Jews. Never forget this from the Rabbinic Paul:

Romans 9:4-5 “..who are Israelites. To them belong the adoption and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Torah and the Temple service and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs—and from them, according to the flesh, the Messiah, who is over all, God, blessed forever. Amen.”

God will be faithful to His chosen people. He has not rejected them. As Paul wrote:

Romans 11:1 “I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Romans 11:25 “For I do not want you, brothers and sisters, to be ignorant of this mystery—lest you be wise in your own eyes—that a partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer shall come out of Zion. He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”

Whilst we must preach the Gospel to all men, including the Jewish people, we cannot use human means to pressurise or condemn them. Jesus did not come to condemn but to save. God will bring about His purposes for His people in His way, by the Holy Spirit. In the meantime, let us show with loving acceptance that they have their journey and as we see in Revelation, God’s reveals the completion of His plans for

them. One day Jews and Gentiles will rejoice as the one eternal family of God.

