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EISEGESIS: The interpretation of a text (as of the Bible) by reading into it one's own ideas – *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1986.

INTRODUCTION

For at least 1800 years, Christianity and Judaism have been two separate religions. In its infancy, Christianity was dependent upon Judaism, and needed to assert its legitimacy and credentials. This was done by stating that everything in Jesus' life was foretold in the Tanakh, and that his career was a fulfillment of these prophecies. This was the basic assumption of early Christians and the writings of the Christian Scriptures. If Christianity were to disappear, Judaism could continue unaffected. If everything Jewish were deleted from the Christian Scriptures, they would become unintelligible. It is this dependence of the Christian Scriptures on Judaism and the Tanakh that we wish to consider.

Before proceeding, some basic facts are necessary. The *Torah* was translated into Greek between 300 BCE and 100 BCE. It is not known whether *Neviim* [Prophets] or *Kethuvim* [Writings] were also translated at this same time. This translation, known as the Septuagint,¹ was done by Jews for the Jews of Alexandria. When early Christians referred to the Scriptures, it is probably to the Septuagint, rather than the Hebrew original. The Christian Scriptures had not yet been written.

The Christian Scriptures (New Testament), were written in first and second centuries CE. Of the 21 Epistles or Letters, the seven (possibly nine) by Paul were written about 50 CE. They were intended as instructions to the various early Jewish-Christian congregations, at a time when Christianity and Judaism had not yet totally separated.

The remainder of the books were written over many years, with the sequence of authors and approximate dates: Mark, 70 CE; Matthew, 80; Luke, 90; Acts, 95; John, 100; the other epistles up to 150, ending with 2 Peter. The names of the authors of the Gospels are unknown, but about the year

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200² the names Mark, Matthew, Luke and John were given to them. For convenience, we will use those names.

Neither Paul nor the writers of the Gospels knew Jesus personally. The question then becomes: How is it possible to write four biographies of Jesus, when there were no written documents, and the subject had been long dead? By the time that the biography of Jesus became important to early Christians, it was too late to gather biographical data. The Gospel-writers may have had some traditions, but they had no evidence.

Nevertheless, they began with the fundamental belief that everything in Jesus' life was foretold in the Hebrew Bible (probably in the Septuagint version), and he fulfilled all the prophecies. Sometimes the words "as it is written," "to be fulfilled," or "spoken by the prophet" indicate ideas borrowed from the Tanakh/Septuagint (hereafter "T/S"). However, rather than proving that Jesus was a fulfillment of Judaism, the "fulfillment" events only prove that the Gospel-writers were good at eisegesis; the interpretation of text by reading into it one's own ideas. Instead of proving that Jesus fulfilled all the "prophecies," the "fulfillments" only prove that the Gospel-writers were good copyists.

Many scholars have tried to determine why there are so many parallel passages. Some consider that there may have been testimonies, lists of passages from the Hebrew Bible that the early Christians used for proof-texting. One fourth-century fragmentary papyrus has survived that contains: Isaiah 42:3-4, 52:15, 53:1-3, 6-7, 11-12, and 66:18-19. Genesis 26:13-14, II Chronicles 1:12, and Deuteronomy 28:8, 11.³

In order for the Tanakh to be used as source for Jesus' life, it was necessary to use ideas selectively, usually out of context. Here we wish to consider some of these out of context interpretations.

The large number of scriptural verses which can be referenced back to the Tanakh, well over 600, is evidence that many of the scriptural events were copied from the T/S. In this article we primarily limit ourselves to instances where the Gospels use the word "fulfilled."

The Gospels may be divided into three parts: the birth of Jesus, his ministry, and the betrayal, trial, crucifixion and resurrection. We will review material from each portion. The word **fulfill** and the parallel passages are in boldface print to guide the reader.

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FROM THE BIRTH STORY

Matthew and Luke both contain the story of Jesus' birth. Jews believed and continue to believe that the Messiah will be a descendant of David. Davidic descent is required as a fulfillment of: *'I have sworn by My holiness, once and for all I will not be false to David. His line shall continue forever'* (Ps. 89:36-37), and *'In those days. . . I will raise up a true branch of David's line'* (Jer. 33:15). (See also, Isaiah 11:10, 55:3, Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15, and Psalms 132:11.)

Because of this belief, Matthew and Luke contain extensive genealogies of Jesus. Matthew has 41 generations from Abraham to David to Jesus; Luke has 57 generations. In addition, both consider him to be of virgin birth, basing themselves on Isaiah 7:14-16:

Assuredly, my Lord will give you a sign of His own accord! Look, the young woman [alma] is with child and about to give birth to a son. Let her name him Immanuel For before the lad knows to reject the bad and choose the good, the ground whose two kings you dread shall be abandoned.

This is reflected in Matthew 1:22:

All this took place to **fulfill** what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel (which means, God with us).

These much-discussed verses are a prime example of reading out of context. It is now accepted by many Christian translators that the proper translation of "*alma*" in Isaiah is "young woman," and there is no reference to Jesus. These verses refer to events hundreds of years before Jesus, at a time when Judah is being invaded. Isaiah is saying to King Ahaz that a woman is pregnant, a child will be born, and before it matures, the invaders will be destroyed.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE

In Jeremiah 31:15 we find: *Thus said the Lord: A cry is heard in Ramah – Wailing, bitter weeping – Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted.* At this time, Israel is going into exile, and Jeremiah is telling the people to be comforted for the exile will end.

But, this is how Matthew 2:16 interprets the verse:

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under . . . Then was **fulfilled** what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more.

The passage in Matthew has nothing to do with Jeremiah. There is no historic record of Herod's attempt to have all the male children two years and younger killed. The entire birth story is a recapitulation of the travels of the children of Israel to Egypt, and the birth of Moses. Herod's alleged attempt to have the young Jesus killed is patterned on Pharaoh's desire to limit the growing population of the children of Israel by having the new-born infant boys killed.⁴

HIS MINISTRY

From the perspective of the Gospel-writers, Jesus was identified with some chapters of Isaiah, endowing him with the Divine spirit and status to be the Messiah:

*The spirit of the Lord **God** is upon me, Because the **Lord** has anointed me; He has sent me as a herald of joy to the humble, To bind up the wounded of heart to **proclaim release to the captives, Liberation to the imprisoned** (Isa. 61:1).*

In Luke 4:17, where Jesus proclaims that he is the subject of Isaiah 61:1:

He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to **preach good news to the poor**. He has sent me to **proclaim release to the captives** and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." And he closed the book, . . . he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been **fulfilled** in your hearing."

Isaiah 41-45, 48, 49, 52 and 53 are the famous Servant Songs. Careful reading shows that these chapters refer to Jacob/Israel. Christians see Jesus as the Servant in these chapters, often referring to him as the "Suffering Servant of

the Lord." However, Isaiah 53 is in the past tense, and therefore it cannot possibly refer to Jesus.

*Behold My servant, whom I uphold, My chosen, in whom My soul delights; I have put My Spirit upon him, he will bring forth **justice to the nations**. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; **a bruised reed** he will not break . . . (Isa. 42:1)⁵*

Matthew 12:15 makes Jesus into the Servant mentioned in Isaiah 42. He ignores the Heavenly remonstrances towards Jacob/Israel when it is wayward.

And many followed him, and he healed them all, and ordered them not to make him known. This was to **fulfill** what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: Behold, My servant whom I have chosen, My beloved with whom My soul is well pleased. I will put My Spirit upon him, and he shall proclaim **justice to the gentiles**. He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will any one hear his voice in the streets; **he will not break a bruised reed** or quench a smoldering wick, till he brings justice to victory; and in his name will the Gentiles hope.

Isaiah 53:4: *The God of Israel is your rear guard. "Indeed, My servant [Israel] shall prosper.*

Isaiah 52:12: *Yet it was our sickness that he was bearing, Our suffering that he endured.*

Matthew 8:16: That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. This was to **fulfill** what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases."

Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law. Matthew takes this as a re-enactment of God's healing of the Suffering Servant. Though Jesus' personal suffering and eventual death on the cross seem like the re-enactment of Isaiah's Suffering Servant, many Christian scholars now agree that it is Jacob/Israel whom Isaiah portrays.

CONCERNING THE BETRAYAL, TRIAL AND CRUCIFIXION

Jesus' death on the cross is critical for Christianity. There are many Christian Scripture statements that allegedly prove that his betrayal and crucifixion were foretold by the prophets and he fulfilled the prophecies.

Judas agrees to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. At the Last Supper, Jesus prophesizes that Judas will betray him, but does nothing to avoid it. After the meal, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas identifies Jesus with the infamous "Judas kiss." Jesus is tried before a Jewish council and turned over to the Romans. (The Gospel does not say it was a Sanhedrin trial.) Pilate, the Roman prelate, tries Jesus on Friday morning, reluctantly finds him guilty, and has him crucified at noon.

In order to understand the story of Judas' betrayal and the Jewish trial, it is necessary to review the timeline. Mark, the earliest Gospel, was written about the year 70 CE. The Temple had fallen. The Jewish revolt had failed. The Romans were persecuting Jews and Jewish-Christians alike because they could not tell the difference between them. The Jewish-Christians' leader had, about 30 CE, been crucified by the Romans. He must have done something terribly wrong. By introducing Judas' betrayal and the Jewish trial, the responsibility for the crucifixion was transferred from the Romans to the Jews. There probably was no Judas, no betrayal, and no Jewish trial. The story of the betrayal was based on the revolt of Absalom against King David.

The story of the betrayal of Jesus was developed after Paul wrote his letters about 50 CE. Paul wrote: "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was **betrayed took bread**, . . ." (I Corinthinans 11:23)

Most Christian Bibles use **betrayed** in this verse, but it is an incorrect translation. The critical Greek word is *paredidoto*, and the correct translation is **delivered up**. The Interlinear Translation of the Greek New Testament, a word-for-word translation of the Greek into English, uses "**delivered up**."⁶ The Revised Standard Version, The New International Version, The King James Version, and The American Standard Version, all use "**delivered up**" as the equivalent of *paredidoto* in Romans 4:25 and 8:32, and Galatians 2:20. Only in I Corinthians 11:23 do they translate it "**betrayed**." Consistent translation of *paredidoto* indicates that Paul meant: Jesus on the night when he was **delivered up took bread . . .**

This casts doubt upon whether Paul knew of any betrayal of Jesus. Rather, it appears that for Paul, Jesus was turned over to the Romans in some manner, for some reason in connection with a meal. Paul never tells us why or how. He also does not tell us that Jesus was turned over to the authorities at

Passover. The theological implications are important. The story of the betrayal of Jesus by Judas at Passover, together with a Jewish trial, did not appear until 70 CE when Mark, the first Gospel, was written. Although these are arguments from silence, they are powerful. The betrayal and its occurrence just after the Last Supper, and the Jewish trial, have always been important in Christian theology. Their absence from Paul's early letters tells its own story.

The incident of the kiss was borrowed from II Samuel 20:9: *Joab said to Amasa, 'How are you, brother?' and with his right hand Joab took hold of Amasa's beard as if to kiss him. Joab then killed Amasa.*

The incident of Judas' betrayal is badly confused by the Gospel-writer. One source is Jeremiah 32:9-10:

So I bought the land in Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel. I weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. I wrote a deed, sealed it, and had it witnessed; and I weighed out the silver on a balance.

Jeremiah purchased this land as indication of his faith that Babylon will be defeated eventually and he will regain possession of the land which he just purchased.

In Matthew 27:8. After the arrest of Jesus, Judas has remorse:

Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

Then was **fulfilled** what had been **spoken by the prophet Jeremiah** saying, "And they took the **thirty pieces of silver**, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

Matthew quoted Jeremiah incorrectly. The Jeremiah passage has nothing to do with Jesus. There are no 30 pieces of silver in Jeremiah. Here the Gospel-writer tells us explicitly that he is borrowing the material from the Hebrew Bible and from where, but he has given us an incorrect reference.

There are 30 pieces of silver cited in Zechariah (11:12) in an unrelated context.

*Then I said to them, 'If you are satisfied, pay me my wages; if not, don't.' So they weighed out my wages, **thirty shekels of silver** – the noble sum that I was worth in their estimation. The Lord said to me, '**Deposit it in the treasury.**' And I took the thirty shekels and deposited it in the treasury in the House of the Lord*

In Matthew 27:3: When Judas, his betrayer, saw that he was condemned, he repented and brought back the **thirty pieces of silver** to the chief priests and the elders, saying, 'I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.' They said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself'. **And throwing down the pieces of silver in the Temple**, he departed; and he went and hanged himself.

After Judas identified Jesus, in remorse he threw the 30 pieces of silver into the Temple and hanged himself. Notice that Zechariah deposits the money in the treasury but Judas throws it into the Temple, heightening the dramatic effect. Here, he is modeled on Ahithophel:⁷ *When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed. . . He set his affairs in order and then hanged himself* (II Sam. 17:23). Neither the "kiss" nor the "hanging" is related to the word "fulfill." Rather they are part of the patterning of Tanakh events pervasive in the Gospels.

Isaiah 50:6 reads: *I offered my back to the floggers, and my cheeks to those who tore out my hair. I did not hide my face from insult and spittle.*

Matthew 26:54, concerning the arrest of Jesus, reads:

'But how then should the scriptures be **fulfilled**, that it must be so?'

At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, 'Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But all this has taken place, that the scriptures of the prophets might be **fulfilled**.'

Jesus did not hide from the arresting party, which came with violence. He seems to say that his violent arrest is done in imitation of Isaiah's Servant.

OTHER EXAMPLES

Jonah 2:1: *The Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah; and Jonah remained in the fish's belly **three days and three nights**.*

Matthew 12:40: For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be **three days and three nights** in the heart of the earth.

Hosea 6:2: *In two days He will make us whole again; **on the third day He will raise us up**, And we shall be whole by His favor.*

Luke 24:44: 'These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to

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understand the scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus **it is written**, that the Christ should suffer and **on the third day rise from the dead.**'

This is a direct statement that everything in Jesus' life was foretold in the Tanakh and that he is a fulfillment of those prophecies. This was the basic assumption of the early Christians and the writers of the Christian Scriptures. Here Jesus directly states the theme of this article. There is nothing written about Jesus in the *Torah*, *Neviim* or *Ketuvim*. Finding Jesus in the scriptures is an extreme case of **eisegesis**, reading into the document what the author wishes to find.

The word "fulfill" and its variants occur 36 times in the four Gospels, most directly relating events in Jesus' life with Tanakh verses.

SUMMARY

Having no real biography of Jesus, the Gospel-writers began with the fundamental belief that everything in his life was "foretold" in the T/S. And that he "fulfilled" all the predictions. They assumed that his life was imbedded in the T/S, so they found it there, a case of eisegesis on a grand scale. Because the T/S was used as a source book for the "biography" of Jesus, it follows that there are many parallelisms and similarities. These simply show that the Gospel-writers were good copyists.

NOTES

1. Sir Lancelot Brenton, *Septuagint, Greek and English*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1851, 1986).
2. Stephen L. Harris, *Understanding the Bible* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co., 2000) p. 360.
3. Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, S.J., *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1971) p. 77.
4. Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1977) p. 113.
5. Translation from *Revised Standard Version*. The RSV often follows the Septuagint and may differ in spirit and content from the JPS Tanakh.
5. George Berry, *The Interlinear Translation of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1897, 1958, 1969).
6. John Barton and John Muddiman, eds. *Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) p. 880.

Author's note: I have prepared a book containing over 600 parallel passages relating the gospels and the Tanakh. It is available for the cost of reproduction, \$18 U.S. postage paid: 880 Fernshire Dr., Dayton, Ohio 45459 USA.

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