

Midrash

by Jacob Prasch

Understanding Jewish hermeneutics is crucial for understanding the Bible and the Jewish roots of Christianity, and midrash is a key literary form that involves interpreting and explaining the Bible using typology, symbolism, and allegory.

Duration: 30:11

Scripture: Isaiah 44:3, Galatians 4:24, Ephesians 5:18

Topics: "Midrash"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the characteristics of certain individuals in the church who are described as 'twice-fed bachelors.' These individuals were once dead in their sins but were born again. However, they have now become spiritually dead again and are like wandering stars. The preacher also mentions the importance of the Holy Spirit, referred to as living water, in the lives of believers. The sermon emphasizes the need for Christians to understand the entire Bible and its different forms of literature in order to fully grasp its teachings.

Transcript

Hello, my name is Jacob Franz. I'd like to address a subject today that a lot of people inquire about. Jewish hermeneutics.

The way Jewish people interpreted the Bible, not today, but... We have to remember that Jesus himself was a Jewish Rabbi. His real name was not Jesus Christ, but one that people came to call Yeshua HaMashiach. Jesus, the Anointed One, or the Messiah.

In his own day, however, people would have known him as Rabbi Yeshua Bar Yosef Minetzeret. Rabbi Yeshua Bar Yosef Minetzeret. That is what Jesus would have been called by people in his own day.

St. Paul, the Apostle, similarly. His name was Rabbi Saul of Tarsus. Rav Sha'ul Shel Tarsus.

I'd like to read a verse from his epistle to the Romans, chapter 11, verse 18. Do not be arrogant towards the branches. But remember, if you are arrogant, it's not you who supports the root, but the root who supports you.

Do not become arrogant towards the natural branches, who are the Jews. Jewish Christians or the first Christians. And the word in Greek here for root is reza, reza.

The root of the church is Jewish. We cannot, therefore, understand the New Testament unless we understand it as a Jewish book. Once again, Jesus and Paul were rabbis.

They taught the way other rabbis did. And they wrote the way other rabbis did. Every writer of the New Testament, except for Luke, was Jewish.

And even Luke had been a Gentile proselyte or convert to the Jewish faith. Let's begin understanding the subject of Jewish hermeneutics. The ways that rabbis taught in the day of Jesus was known as midrash.

Midrash, meaning inquiring into, in Hebrew. Midrash. Now, St. Paul, we read in the book of Acts, of another rabbi called Gamaliel in Acts chapter 5. And St. Paul himself had been a disciple, or what we call in Hebrew a talmid, of Rabbi Gamaliel.

Rabbi Gamaliel was the leader of the rabbinic school or academy of Terel. Named after Rabbi Gamaliel's grandfather, Rabbi Hillel. There were two kinds of Pharisees in the days of Jesus, which we call the Second Temple Period.

The time period in which Jesus lived and ministered was called the Second Temple Period. One school of Pharisees was called the school of Shammai, but the other was called the school of Hillel, from where St. Paul came. Rabbi Gamaliel had a number of famous students.

One was a rabbi called Amplio, who did a Targum, or an Aramaic translation of the Bible called the Targum Amplio. He was a classmate of St. Paul's. Another classmate of St. Paul's would have been Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai.

He convened the Council of Yavne, where the Jewish authorities agreed on the final canon of the Old Testament at a place called Yavne, near the modern city of Tel Aviv, after the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. And it was in fact at Yavne where rabbinic Judaism in its current form had its origin once the Temple no longer existed. In this school of Hillel, St. Paul would have been educated in what we call in Hebrew the seven Middot, or the seven principles of interpreting the Bible, attributed to Rabbi Hillel, the grandfather of Paul's teacher Gamaliel.

Now, these principles form the basis of Jewish exegetical approach, or Jewish exegesis interpretation of Scripture. You see, if a Jewish Christian, at the end of the first century, was reading St. John's Gospel, which he would have called HaBesorah Be'er Teh Yochanan, he would have read John chapter 1, chapter 2, and chapter 3. HaBesorah Be'er Teh Yochanan, Terech Alef, Bet Vigimel, as he would have called it. And if he read John 1, 2, and 3, he would have said, John 1, 2, and 3 is a midrash on the creation.

In other words, John 1, John 2, and John 3 tells us the story of the new creation. John 1, 2, and 3, in John's Gospel, tells us the story of the new creation. But to a Jewish Christian, at the end of the first century, it would have been a midrash on the creation in Genesis.

Genesis 1, 2, and 3, which he would have called Be'er Teh Yochanan, Terech Alef, Bet Vigimel. So he would have seen a midrash and a parallel relationship between the story, or the narrative, or the account of the creation in Genesis 1-3, and the story of the new creation in John 1-3. We read in John 1, the word became swesh, the Greek word being logos, the Greek word being sarx.

But he's actually drawing here logos, being simply the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic term mamre, and the Jewish term dvar, the creative word of God that was a person, and that was the creative and

redemptive agent of God. Its Greek equivalent being logos. But its Aramaic term, people speaking mainly Aramaic in the day of Jesus, would have called it mamre, but the Hebrew being dvar, which essentially becomes the modern Hebrew word for thing.

Nonetheless, God becomes a man to bring forth the new creation. So this Jewish Christian in the first century, he would have said, well, let's look at the creation and the new creation in light of each other. God walks the earth in the creation in Genesis, Adam hears him walking in the garden.

Now God walks the earth in the new creation in John. Jesus, God becomes a man and walks the earth. He would have said, God comes to separate the light from dark in the creation in Genesis.

But now God comes to separate the light from dark in the new creation, in the gospel according to Saint John. He would have said, in the creation in Genesis you have the account of the small light and the great light. But now in the new creation, in John's gospel, you have, he would have called, Yohanan ha-Masbil, John the Baptist, the small light, and Yeshua ha-Mashiach, Jesus the Messiah, the great light, in the new creation in John.

He would have said, in the book of Genesis, in the creation, the spirit moves on the water and brings forth the creation. But then he would have looked at John chapter 3 and said, born of water and of spirit, the spirit moves on the water and brings forth the new creation in John. He would have seen this relationship.

Now, mythologically, in the Jewish literature, in the ancient writings of the rabbis, they understood that the tree of life, which appears in the creation story in Genesis, and which appears in a millennial context in Ezekiel 47, and reappears at the end of the book of Revelation, the tree of life, was represented by a fig tree in rabbinic literature. Now, in John chapter 1, in the story of the new creation, Jesus meets someone called Nathanael, in whom there is no Gael. Nathanael's name actually means Nathanael, God has given or given by God.

And Nathanael asked Jesus, how did you know? He said to him, how do you know me in John chapter 1, verse 48? And Jesus answered and said to him, before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you. And Nathanael answered him, Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel.

And Jesus said to him, because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these. Nathanael called him Rabbi. He was a rabbi.

How did you know? Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree. Understand the Midrash. With our Western way of looking at the Bible, because we've lost sight of the root, which St. Paul said we shouldn't, we simply think that means that Jesus saw him under a literal fig tree.

In fact, Jesus did see him under a literal fig tree. But he was saying much more than that. Midrashically, in Jewish metaphor, what Jesus, Rabbi Yeshua, was saying to Nathanael was, I saw you from the garden, from the creation, from the foundation of the world.

You think of Philip. We see here in this verse 48, Philip called you. But before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree.

Those whom he foreknew, even from the foundation of the world. Jesus already knows who's going to be saved. When we call someone to Jesus, when we witness, when we evangelize, when we give our testimony, and someone comes to be saved, we're like Philip.

We call them to Jesus. For Jesus himself already has seen that person from the foundation of the world. Now with our Western way of looking at the Scriptures, our Western Protestant thoughts of exegesis, we are only seeing a part of the truth.

We're not seeing all of the truth. It's not to say that it's wrong what we do see. It's just to say we see the tip of the iceberg.

There's much more underneath it. We are reading a Jewish book with a Gentile mind. We are reading Hebraic literature with a Hellenistic worldview.

We're taking a Jewish faith and an Eastern faith and turning it into a Westernized faith. We have to understand how these errors came about. Under the influences of Masticism in the early church and the teachings of someone named Philo who began combining Jewish ideas with Greek ideas, particularly at a place called Alexandria, the church began to Hellenize the Scriptures.

Biblically, in Midrash, we use typology, symbols, allegories to illustrate and illuminate doctrine. We never base doctrine on it. Once you begin to base doctrine on symbolic interpretation, that is known as Masticism.

The Bible never does that. For instance, the Scriptures tell us that Jesus is the Passover Lamb. The Passover Lamb was the symbol of Him.

If we were to set up a Jewish Passover table called a Seder meal and demonstrate how the Last Supper was a Jewish Passover meal, we would understand the doctrine of Atonement and the Lord's Supper by which we remember the Lord and look forward to His coming much clearer than we do. We are using the symbolism to illustrate, to illuminate doctrine, to explain it and understand it on a deeper level. That is perfectly biblical.

Once, however, people begin to claim some kind of a Gnosis, a mystical subjective knowledge or revelation into symbolism and reinterpret the plain meaning of Scripture and that light. This is known as Masticism. It is Hellenistic and pagan.

Well, as things developed through the centuries and particularly into the Middle Ages, this Masticism began to blossom. It reached its apex with something known as Scholasticism in the aftermath of the Renaissance. And it was against this that the Reformers and the predecessors of their Reformers called humanist scholars, not modern secular humanists, but Christianized humanists, people like Erasmus of Rotterdam, Lefebure in France, John Coward in England, that is those who influenced Luther, Calvin and Zwingli.

They reacted against this hyper-allegorization and the misuse of symbols. And they went back emphasizing the literal meaning and reduced exegesis of Scripture to what we call today grammatical historical method. So to understand the Word of God we simply read it at face value and understand its historical context and its grammatical construction.

This is not wrong as far as it goes. The problem is, because they were reacting against the misuse of allegorical typology, the humanist scholars and the Reformers threw the baby out with the bathwater. They did a lot of good things and said true things.

But there was also much they got wrong. They kept Christianity a Hellenistic, Westernized, Gentile faith instead of going back to its Jewish roots. For instance, Martin Luther realized when he began studying the Scriptures in the original Greek under the influence of Laissez-Dieur, a French humanist, that the Greek word metanoia did not mean to do penance, as in to go to confession and confess your sins to a priest.

That essentially was formalized in the 12th century. He realized that metanoia meant to repent, to turn from sin towards God. It was the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word teshuva, turning from sin towards God.

Hence, he understood things like justification, repentance. He came to discover, or re-discover, the simple truths of the Gospel which had been clouded by the medieval church. Fair enough and good enough.

The problem is he was afraid of any kind of deeper insight into Scripture involving allegory or typology or symbolism. The baby went out with the bathwater. Now, in fairness, we have to point out that we can understand why the Reformers made these errors.

When we understand what they were reacting against, it was a pendulum effect. They went to the opposite extremes to try to bring a correction to this gross imbalance. At the same time, we must always interpret Scripture in light of Scripture.

One simply needs to look at John Calvin's secular work, his commentary on Seneca's De Clementia, a pagan classic Latin work. The same rules of exegesis or grammatical historical interpretation with which John Calvin interpreted secular, paganistic, classic literature, were the same rules of interpretation he applied to understanding the Word of God. Now, let me say, it is crucial that we look at the Word of God in its Witzamneben, as we would say in German, that is, its own historical setting and cultural context.

But it goes beyond that. What I'm saying is, grammatical historical exegesis has its value, but it is sort of like dealing with a polynomial or a quadratic equation. You solve the first two steps of the equation and you forget there's another 10 or 12 steps to be solved afterwards and you pretend the equation is solved when you've only done the first few steps.

We have different forms of literature in the Bible. We have Hebrew poetry, like the Psalms. We have apocalyptic literature, like Revelation, Daniel, Ezekiel.

We have narrative, stories, like the Gospels. And we have, among other things, Witzam literature, Proverbs. But we have epistles, which are basically letters.

The epistles of the Apostles, the Johannine epistles, the Pauline epistles, the Petrine epistles, that was written by James, Paul, John, etc., Peter, Jude, Hebrew. The epistles are inspired commentary. They're the Word of God, but they're that component, or that part of the Word of God, which explains other scriptures.

They are the apostolic interpretation of the rest of the Bible. The epistles of Hebrews, for instance, is an inspired commentary in the Book of Leviticus. Romans and Galatians are inspired commentaries on Torah, what the law means, how it points to the Messiah, Yeshua, Jesus.

He's the teleos of the law. Not the end of or finish of the law, but the target, the aim of it. Its purpose is to point people to Him.

Because the epistles are themselves commentary in other scriptures, because the epistles are straightforward letters, we do not need midrash in reading the epistles. We might say that the epistles are the prism through which we read the rest of the Bible. However, look at the epistles.

How do the apostles explain other scriptures? Do they use grammatical, historical exegesis in the epistles? No. When the apostles explain narrative, or Hebrew poetry, or apocalyptic, they use midrash. They always did.

Let's look at the Book of Galatians as one example, and see how the New Testament handles the Old. In the Book of Galatians, we read this. Galatians 4, verse 24.

This is allegorically speaking for these two women, Sarah and Hagar, or two covenants. One proceeding to Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves, she is Hagar. Now, this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

But the Jerusalem above is free. She is our mother. For it is written, Rejoice, barren one, who does not dare break forth and shout, You who are not in labor, for more are the children of the desolate one than the one who has a husband.

And you, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But, as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say? Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman.

So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free. Now, here he takes two main Scriptures, the story of Sarah and Hagar in Genesis, but he also comments on Isaiah chapter 54. Rejoice, O barren one.

And he takes these Old Testament passages, showing how they're fulfilled in Christ and what they mean for the Church. But he does not use grammatical historical exegesis. He interprets the figurative meaning.

That's not to deny the literal historicity of what happened with Sarah and Hagar. But it is to say there's a spiritual meaning on back of it, which he arrived at with Jewish midrash. Midrash, however, goes beyond this.

It, in itself, is a literary form. A sort of genre. The clearest example of midrash as a literary form we have in the New Testament is Ha'igaret V'Yehudah.

The Epistle of Jews. Turn with me, please, to the Epistle of Bibles, and let's read how he handles it. Verse 11.

Wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever. Et cetera. Now, the Epistle of Jude, his central theme, is the phenomena of backsliders in the Church.

He says they are blemishes on our agape, that is our love team, our fellowship meals where the Lord's Supper was taken in the early Church. This relates to 1 Corinthians 11, of course. But he describes them midrashically.

They are trees without fruit. Jesus said you know them by their fruit. They're trees.

The trees of the field will clap their hands. We shall be trees of righteousness. Trees are figures of men, in certain contexts in the Bible, and particularly of Christians.

When Jesus healed the blind man, he saw men walking as if they were trees. The trees of the field, trees of righteousness, et cetera. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree good fruit.

And here it says they are trees without fruit. They're so-called Christians, but they don't have the fruit of the Spirit. They're twice dead.

That is their backslidden. They were dead in their sin, born again, now they're dead again. Uprooted.

Wandering stars. Remember the sentence of Abraham, it would be like the stars of heaven. They wandered around.

They're waterless clouds. We're told in Ephesians that there's a cloud of witnesses. Water, living water, which falls down from the sky and becomes moving water.

We're told in John chapter 7 that this living water, and in Isaiah 44, verse 3, is the Holy Spirit. This he will give living water. So they're witnesses, but they have no power of the Spirit in their witness.

It describes these kinds of backslidden people in the church. And it uses Midrash to do it. Repeatedly we have this same kind of phenomenon.

Look at how the New Testament handles the Old. True, we do not need Midrash to read the Epistles. Because the Epistles themselves give us the Midrash.

They tell us what these other scriptures mean. However, when we interpret the rest of the Bible, should we not interpret other scriptures the way the Bible does? Now again, the danger is basing doctrine on type or allegory. This is Gnostic and it's dangerous and it's false.

Hope do it. False Christianity does it. We should never do it.

But we do use typology and allegory in Midrash the way the Apostles did. And the way Jesus did. Let's understand this further.

Turn with me please to the Gospel according to Saint Matthew. Chapter 2. In verse 14 we read what happens when King Herod dies. Out of Egypt that I call my son.

An angel comes and tells Joseph that it's fair to come back now to the land of Israel because the wicked king is dead. And he quotes from the Book of Amos chapter 11 verse 1. Out of Egypt that I call my son. Usually the New Testament quotes the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, not the Hebrew.

Matthew however is often closer to the Hebrew Masoretic text. Let's look at Hosea chapter 11.1 at its original source and see how the context comes across in the original Old Testament text. The Tanakh.

When you turn to Hosea 11.1 it says when Israel was a youth I loved him. And out of Egypt I called my son. Now in its context in its historical setting Hosea is talking about the Exodus with Moses.

My son being Israel, the people of Israel coming out of Egypt with Moses. It's talking about the Exodus. But Matthew says it's about Jesus coming out of Egypt when King Herod dies.

We would have to say that Matthew by our Western grammatical Protestant exegesis mishandles the Old Testament. He takes it out of all reasonable context. It's unscientific.

It's not even rational. He's taking it out of context. That is by our Western way of looking at the Bible.

However mythologically when we interpret it within its Jewish parameters when we read this as a Jewish book instead of a Western Protestant book Matthew is not taking it out of context at all. It's perfectly in context. Let me explain.

With our Western minds and our Western Protestant way of misunderstanding the Bible we say prophecy is a prediction and a fulfillment. Well some prophecy is. But messianic prophecy and eschatological prophecy about the last days is not a prediction and a fulfillment in Jewish terms.

It is a pattern. Multiple fulfillments. But each fulfillment is a type or a shadow of the final ultimate one.

Let's take this subject of coming out of Egypt and look at it in terms of Jewish Midrash and how the church gets it wrong. It begins with Abraham. He's the father of all who believe.

Abraham and a fireman goes into Egypt. God's judgment comes on Pharaoh and Abraham comes out of Egypt taking the wealth of Egypt with him. Pharaoh gives him wealth and he comes out of Egypt into the Promised Land.

What happens to Abraham happens to his physical descendants, the Jewish people. They go in a famine, the sons of Jacob to Egypt. Once again God judges Pharaoh, this wicked king and just as Abraham came out of Egypt so the children of Israel come out of Egypt taking the wealth of Egypt with them going through the water into the Promised Land.

But then in 1 Corinthians 10 Saint Paul tells us when sisters are born again we come out of Egypt. Egypt is a figure of the world. Pharaoh is a figure of Satan, the god of the world.

The Egyptians deified him. He is also a major and important type of the Antichrist as we'll see in a moment. So Christians come out of the world.

The way that Moses went to a mountain made a covenant with blood and sprinkled it on the people so Jesus went to a mountain made a covenant with blood and sprinkled it on the people. And as Moses led the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt through the water into the Promised Land is the way Jesus leads us out of the world through baptism into heaven. One a shadow of the other.

Multiple fulfillment. The ultimate and final coming out of Egypt however is the rapture and resurrection of the church. The same judgments you see in the book of Exodus are replayed in the book of Revelation.

Darkness in Hebrew choshek and the blood on the water dam and so on, the pestilences the kinim and all these things are replayed. The way that Pharaoh's magicians counterfeited the miracles of Moses and Aaron are the way the Antichrist and false prophets will counterfeit the miracles of Jesus and his witnesses. Why did they bring Joseph's bones with them out of Egypt? Because the dead in Christ will rise first.

One a type of the other. Jesus, the seed of Abraham fits into this. The same pattern.

God again judges a wicked king like he did Pharaoh, only this time as Terence. Jesus the seed of Abraham comes out of Egypt. Midrash agrees from a Jewish perspective we can totally validate the way Matthew handles Hosea 11.1 but only if we read the New Testament as the Jewish book it is.

God bless you.

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