

## Handout for

### RECYCLING THE BIBLE

Congregation Beth Israel - SESSION 3 - March 1, 2009 - Dr. Walter Ziffer

#### **EXAMPLE # 1**

(Supersession)

#### **THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD**

In the TaNaKh - Isa. 5:1-7

Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard:

My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

He digged it and cleared it of stones,, and planted it with choice vines.

He built a watchtower in the midst of it and hewed out a wine vat in it.

And he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,

Judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard.

What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it?

When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard.

I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured:

I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

I will make it a waste; It shall not be pruned or hoed;

And briars and thorns shall grow up;

I will also command the cloud, that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts, is the house of Israel,

And the men of Judah are his pleasant planting;

And he looked for justice, but behold bloodshed;

For righteousness, but behold, a cry!

#### **Jesus's Parable of the Wicked Tenants of the Vineyard**

In the New Testament, (Matt. 21:33-46)

“Hear another parable. There was a householder who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a winepress in it and built a tower, and let it out to tenants, and went into another country. When the season of fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit; and the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first; and they did the same to them. Afterward he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ And they took him and cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruit in their seasons.”

(supersession theology)

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

*'The very **stone** which the builders rejected*

*Has become the head of the corner;*

*This was the Lord's doing,*

*And it is marvelous in our eyes.'* (**Quote from Ps. 118:22**)

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation (Gk. *ethne*, Heb. *goy*) producing the fruits of it."

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. But when they tried to arrest him, they feared the multitudes, because they held him to be a prophet.

**Psalm 118 (Stage 1.)**

(Vs. 1) "O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,  
His steadfast love endures for ever."

(Vs. 5 f.) "Out of MY distress, I call on the LORD;  
the LORD answered me and set me free." etc. etc.

(This is a personal prayer.)

**Psalm 118 (Stage 2.)**

vss. 2,3,4 are later inserted:

"Let Israel say, 'His steadfast love...etc.'"

"Let the House of Aaron say, His steadfast love...etc.'"

"Let those who fear the LORD say, His steadfast love...etc.

(This is a communal prayer of Israel.)

Vs. 21 "I thank thee that thou hast answered me,  
And hast become my salvation."

(This is a personal prayer.)

Vs. 22 "The **stone** [Israel] which the builders rejected,  
Has become the head of the corner (the cornerstone).

(This is a communal prayer.)

**Back to the New Testament meaning of the Psalm 118 portion:**

"**The stone**" - in the Hebrew text of Ps. 118 referred to Israel. In the gospel quote it points to Jesus Christ and the Church, previously humiliated and looked down upon, has become the cornerstone of the world, thanks to God.

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## EXAMPLE # 2.

### THE ELECTION OF ISRAEL and its SUPERSESSION by Christianity

#### IN THE HEBREW BIBLE Exodus 19:5-6

“Now therefore, **IF YOU WILL OBEY MY VOICE AND KEEP MY COVENANT (BERIT), YOU SHALL BE MY OWN POSSESSION** among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

#### IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

##### I PETER 2:9-10

(vs. 4) Come to him, that living **stone**, rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious; (5) and like living **stones** be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a **holy priesthood** to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

(vs. 6) For it stands in scripture:

*Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious,*

***AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM*** will not be put to shame... (quote based on Isa. 28:16)

**Comment:** Isa. 28:16 in the Hebrew Bible reads,

*Therefore, thus sayeth the LORD God,*

*'Behold I am laying in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone,*

*A precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation.*

***HE WHO BELIEVES*** will not be in haste.

*And I will make justice the line,*

*And righteousness the plummet.*

(vs. 7) To you who therefore believe, **HE** is precious, but for those who do not believe, *The very stone which the builders rejected, has become the head of the corner...etc.* (quote based on Ps. 118:22)

**Comment:** The “very stone which the builders rejected, etc.” was discussed previously. In the Hebrew text of the Psalm 118, this stone is Israel. Lowly regarded by the surrounding nations, now has become *the* very basis for the world’s existence by means of Israel’s Torah.

(vs. 9) **BUT YOU [CHRISTIANS] ARE A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, GOD'S OWN PEOPLE**, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

**Comment:** Now God’s “election” of Israel is transferred to the “New

Israel,” the Christians Church, i.e., the Christian people.

(vs. 10) Once you were no people but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.”

**Comment 1.** The quote, “once you were no people but now you are God’s people, etc“. is a direct quotation from the prophet Hosea 2:23 and was addressed by Hosea to his fellow Israelites. It suggested that God had elected Israel from among the many peoples to be “God’s people.” (*bakhar banu mi kol ha-amim*).

## SUPERSESSION IN THE QURAN

### Surah 4:47 (

“O People of the Book, believe in what We have revealed, confirming what you already possess...”

### Surah 6:92

“And this is a Book which We revealed. [It is] blessed and confirms what preceded it, that you may warn therewith the Mother of Cities [Mecca] and those around it...”

### Surah 2.79

“Woe unto those who write the Book with their hands, then they say that it is from Allah in order to sell it for a small price. Woe unto them for what their hands have written and woe unto them for what they have earned.”

### Surah 3:78

“And there is a group of them who twist their tongues while reading the Book, so that you may suppose it is part of the Book, where it is not part of the Book. They also say: ‘it is from Allah’, where it is not from Allah; they only speak falsehood against Allah knowingly.”

### 5:19

O People of the Book, Our Messenger has come to you to make clear to you [the religious tenets] after a cessation of Messengers, lest you should say: “No bearer of good news or warner has come to us.” So now, a bearer of good news and a warner has come to you; and Allah has power over everything!

### Sura 5:18

The Jews and the Christians have said: “We are Allah’s children and His beloved.” Say: “Why then does he punish you for your sins? You are rather human beings, part of those whom He has created. He forgives whom He pleases and punishes whom He pleases.” And to Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and what is in between and unto Him is the final return!

## EXAMPLE # 3

### CIRCUMCISION

IN THE HEBREW BIBLE - TORAH - Gen. 17:9-14

Gen. 17:9-14

“And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised (Hebr. *la-mol*). You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins (Hebr. *'orlah*), and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised; every male throughout your generations... So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant.”

Deut 10:16 (Deut. 30:6 parallel)

“Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart (Hebr. *u-maltem 'et 'orlot levavkhem*), and be no longer stubborn.”

Jer. 4:4 (Jer. 9:25 parallel)

“Circumcise yourselves therefore to the LORD, remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your doings.”

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Galatians 5:2-3 (This is the apostle Paul writing)

“Now I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law.”

Rom. 2:29 (This is also the apostle Paul writing)

“He is a Jew who is so inwardly, and [real] circumcision is a matter of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter.”

PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

(Jewish philosopher 20 BCE - 50 CE)

Commenting on circumcision in his “Special Laws” (1,6), he discusses both hygiene and allegory. Here is the allegory:

“Thirdly, there is the resemblance of the part that is circumcised to the heart; for both parts are prepared for the sake of generation; for the breath contained within the heart is generative of thoughts, and the generative organ itself is productive of living beings.”

Also, circumcision represents excision of pleasure “which bewitches the mind...thus making circumcision the figure of excision of excessive and superfluous pleasure.”

TALMUD

Tb *Nedarim* 32a

“It was taught, Rabbi said, great is circumcision, for none so ardently busied himself with [God’s] precepts as our Father Abraham, yet he was called perfect only in virtue of

circumcision...Another version [of Rabbi's teaching] is this: Great is circumcision, for it counterbalances all the other precepts of the Torah, as it is written, For after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel."

#### MAIMONIDES (1135-1204)

Jewish Philosopher, biblical scholar, Talmudist, physician

Circumcision both quiets lust and perfects what is defective morally. The "diminution" of the penis is not performed to correct a congenital problem but to diminish the pleasure principle through the painful surgical process. It alters the sensibilities of the male in ways commensurate with the optimal moral life of the Jew. Maimonides's ascetic attitude to sexual relations seems to inform his rationale for circumcision. This type of logic was NOT adopted by the majority of legal scholars (Yad, milah).

#### ZOHAR (Radiance)

One of the basic works of Jewish mysticism

In Jewish mysticism, the Zohar suggests that only one who has been circumcised can fully commune with or see God. One of the kabbalistic concepts concerning circumcision is that it [circumcision] is the "inscription" of the name of God in the flesh and the viewing of the Divine Presence or connection to the *shekhinah* through the physical *berit milah*.

#### THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH FATHERS

(2<sup>nd</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> c. CE)

JUSTIN MARTYR (b. ? ; d. 167, beheaded in Rome)

"For the circumcision according to the flesh which is from Abraham, was given for a sign, that you may be separated from other nations and from us, and that you alone may suffer that which you now justly suffer and that your land may be desolate and your cities burned with fire, and that strangers may eat your fruit in your presence and not one of you may go up to Jerusalem" (Ruether, p.148)

DIOGNETUS (3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE)

"...and is it not ridiculous to boast of a mutilation of the flesh as a sign of a chosen people, as though on account of this they were particularly loved by God?"

LACTANTIUS (b. ca. 250; d. ?)

Lactantius adds the bright idea that the tip of the penis resembles a heart, and so the rite itself was intended by God to symbolize its inward meaning. (Ruether, p.154)

#### QURAN and HADITH

"Then we inspired you: 'Follow the religion of Ibrahim, the upright in faith'"

(Quran 16:123)

Hadith The prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "The prophet Ibrahim circumcised himself when he was eighty years old and he circumcised himself with an axe" (related by Bukhari, Islam and Ahmad).

## EXAMPLE #4

### ASCENSIONS

IN THE HEBREW BIBLE - TORAH

#### ENOCH

Gen. 5:22, 24 and 21:85

**Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him.** (*kiy eynenu. Kiy lakach 'oto 'elohim.*)

(He died at the age of 365. (Note: Methusaleh, his son, made it to 969 years!)

#### JEWISH APOCRYPHA

3 Enoch (5<sup>th</sup> c. CE)

Enoch ascends to heaven in a storm chariot. Becomes the angel Metatron. He is enthroned in heaven.

#### NEW TESTAMENT

Jude 1:14-15

It was of these also that Enoch of the 7<sup>th</sup> generation from Adam prophesied, saying, "Behold the Lord came with his holy myriads, to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness which they have committed....etc."

The text suggests that Enoch prophesied the flood from which only Noah and his family would be saved.

#### IN ISLAM

Quran, Surah 19:56

And mention in the Book Idris [Quranic/Arabic name for Enoch]; he was truthful and a Prophet. And We [Allah] raised him to a high place.

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#### ELIJAH

II K 2:9-12

Elisha said, "I pray you, let me inherit a double share of your spirit." And he [Elijah] said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if you do not see me, it shall not be so." And as they still went on and talked, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up, by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it and he cried, "My father! My father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more."

This Elijah will return according to

Malachi 4:5-6

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the heart of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse."

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## JESUS OF NAZARETH

### Acts 1:6-11

So when they [the disciples] had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

### Mark 16:19 (a late addition to the end of the gospel of Mark):

So then, he Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God..."

### Heb. 1:3

[Jesus] reflects the glory of God and bears the stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs..."

## APOSTLE PAUL

### II Corinthians 12:1-5

"I must boast, there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven - whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know, God knows, And I know this man was caught up into Paradise - whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know, God knows - and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter..."

## IN RABBINIC LITERATURE

The ascent to PARDES by the sages Shimeon ben Azai, Shimeon ben Zoma, Elisha ben Avuya and R. Akiva.

## IN ROMAN CATHOLICISM

The Virgin Mary, based on a Dogma promulgated by Pope Pius XII. This is based on John 14:3, "And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and I will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also." (Words of Jesus of Nazareth.)

## IN ISLAM (*Night Journey & Ascent of the Prophet*)

### Quran 17:1

"Glory be to Him Who caused His servant [the Prophet] to travel by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, in order to show him some of Our signs. He [Allah] is indeed the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing."

Hadith by Abu Said al-Khudri: because of length, to be abbreviated and read by lecturer.

## EXAMPLE # 5

### THE AKEDAH The Binding of Isaac

#### Gen: 22:1-14 (abbreviated)

After these things God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he [Abraham] said, "Here am I." He [God] said, Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, <sup>(only - יִצְחָק)</sup> and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I shall tell you. So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac... and went to the place of which God had told him... When they came to the place of which God had told him Abraham built an altar there... bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. Then Abraham put forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he [Abraham] said, "Here I am." He [the angel] said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God..."

And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son..."

### IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

#### Hebrews 11:17-20

"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named." He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back."

### RABBINIC LITERATURE

#### Tj Ta'anot 2:4 [65c-d] (abbreviated)

"Since Isaac was redeemed it is if all Israel were redeemed. R. Bibi bar R. Abba said in the name of R. Yochanan (3<sup>rd</sup> c.) "Abraham said before the Holy One, Blessed is He: "Master of the worlds, it is eminently clear to You that when you told me to offer up my son Isaac I had what to say before you. Yesterday you said to me, 'for in Isaac shall seed be called to thee' (Gen. 21:12) and now you say "offer him there for a burnt offering' (ibid. 22:2)! I dared not do so but rather I overcame my nature and did Your will. In the same way may it be desirable before You, Lord my God, that when the sons of Isaac my son, become troubled and there is no one to speak in their defense, You shall speak in their defense. 'God will see' (ibid. 22:8). You will remember for them the Binding of Isaac their father and You will be filled with compassion for them." What is written after that? "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked [literally, "and saw"], and behold behind him a ram [literally, "a ram after," *ayil 'achar*] caught in the thicket by his horns" (verse 13). What does "after" [in the literal text] mean? R. Judah son of R. Simeon [late 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> c.] said: "After" all the generations your sons will inevitably be "caught" up in sin and ensnared in troubles, and finally they will be redeemed with the horns of the ram."

## PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

Philo interpreted the Akedah as a protest against the ancient heathen practice of sacrificing a firstborn son or other child, especially in times of emergency.

## MIDRASH

There are two versions of the Akedah in Midrash: In Lev.R. 29:8 Abraham is the hero. In Gen. R. 56:11 Isaac is the hero. Though 37 years old he makes no protest.

## AKEDAH IN THE CHURCH FATHERS

Tertullian (ca. 190 CE) in *An Answer to the Jews*

“the world is freed in baptism by the “wood” of Christ, that is, his passion; in order that what had formerly perished through the “tree” in Adam, should be restored through the “tree” in Christ... This “wood” again, Isaac the son of Abraham, personally carried for his own sacrifice, when God had enjoined that he should be made a victim to Himself. But because these had been mysteries which were being kept for perfect fulfillment in the times of Christ, Isaac, on the one hand, with his “wood” was preserved, the ram being offered which was caught by the horns in the bramble; Christ, on the other hand, in His times, carried his “wood” on His own shoulders, adhering to the horns of the cross, with a thorny crown encircling his head. For Him it behoved to be made a sacrifice on behalf of all Gentiles...etc.”

Clement of Alexandria (150-215) from *The Instructor's Book I*.

“the King who is Christ, beholds from above... His Church... And where then was the door by which the Lord showed Himself? The flesh by which He was manifested, He is Isaac, who is a type of the Lord, a child as a son. For he was the son of Abraham, as Christ the Son of God, and a sacrifice as the Lord, but he was not immolated as the Lord. Isaac only bore the wood of the sacrifice, as the Lord the wood of the cross... Furthermore, there is an intimation of the divinity of the Lord in his not being slain. For Jesus rose again after his burial, having suffered no harm, like Isaac released from sacrifice....”

## AKEDAH IN THE QURAN

Quran, surah 37:100-113

“...and he [Abraham] said, “I am going to my Lord; He will guide me.”

“Lord, grant me a righteous child.”

So, We [Allah] announced to him the good news of a prudent boy.

Then, when he attained the age of consorting with him, he [Abraham] said: “My son, I have **seen in sleep** that I am slaughtering you. See what you think.” He [the son] said: “**My father, do what you are commanded**; you will find me, Allah willing, one of the steadfast.”

Then, when they both submitted and he [Abraham] flung him [the son] down upon his brow;

And We [Allah] called out to him [Abraham]: “O Abraham, you have believed the

vision." Thus we [Allah] reward the beneficent.

This, indeed, is a manifest trial.

And we ransomed him with a large sacrifice.

And We [Allah] left with him [Abraham] for later generations:

"Peace be upon Abraham."

Thus, We [Allah] reward the beneficent.

He [Abraham] is indeed one of our believing servants.

And We [Allah] announced to him [Abraham] **the good news, of Isaac, as a Prophet,**  
one of the righteous.

And We [Allah] blessed him [Abraham] and blessed Isaac; and **of their progeny some  
are beneficent and some are wronging themselves manifestly...**

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