

# Jewish Hermeneutics in the New Testament Period

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Too often, believers in Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah, including some Latter-day Saints, have historically viewed him and his earliest followers as standing outside of and apart from Judaism. Likewise, Jesus's modes of teaching and dialogue as described in the New Testament Gospels have too often been treated as having no precedents or analogues within Judaism. The textual evidence of the New Testament itself, viewed within the historical, cultural, and religious context of first-century Judaism, confirms that the opposite is true in both cases.

Jesus may not have enjoyed (or needed) a traditional pharisaic or scribal education ("How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" John 7:15),<sup>1</sup> but he taught, discoursed, and debated using rhetorical and hermeneutical (interpretive) methods commonly used among his contemporaries. Jesus's earliest disciples and interpreters also employed contemporary Jewish hermeneutics. Luke preserves Paul's assertion that though he was a Jew of the diaspora ("born in Tarsus [of] Cilicia"), he had been "brought up in this city [Jerusalem] at the feet of Gamaliel, and [had been] taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" (Acts 22:3) as a Pharisee.<sup>2</sup> We should thus expect to see Paul using these hermeneutical methods, and indeed we see him doing so.

In this chapter I will explore Jesus's use of several traditional Jewish modes of scriptural exegesis, argumentation, and interpretation as preserved in the New Testament Gospels, as well as the inclusion of these hermeneutical modes by early church leaders and writers such as Paul, Peter, James, and the author of Hebrews. I will begin with the hermeneutical and ar-

gumentation methods sometimes called the seven *middôt* or “rules” of Hillel. As Strack and Stemberger point out, these “seven *middôt* of Hillel were not invented by Hillel but constitute a collation of the main types of argument in use at that time.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, although the codification of these “rules” is sometimes attributed to Hillel by tradition, they represent some of the most important ways that the scriptures were being used and means by which arguments were being made within intra-Jewish religious discussions. To conclude, I will cite several important examples of *māšāl* (parables), paronomasia, and gematria, which also surface in significant instances in the New Testament.

### “Lighter and Weightier” and “Weightier and Lighter” (*Qal wāḥômer* and *ḥômer wēqal*, Hillel Rule #1)

The Gospels record that Jesus frequently employed a form of what was described in the latter rabbinic period as *qal wāḥômer*, a form of *argumentum a minore ad maius*, or an argument from the “light” (or lesser) to the “heavy” (or greater). In other words, one begins from a minor premise and moves to a major one. By Jesus’s time this mode of argumentation already enjoyed a long history of use within the Hebrew Bible. For example, Deuteronomy records Moses as stating, “Behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the Lord; and *how much more* after my death?” (Deuteronomy 31:27; emphasis added).

Matthew records several outstanding examples of Jesus’s use of “lighter and weightier” and “weightier and lighter.” His use of this method of reasoning often emphasized the value of human life. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus described the Father’s providence thus: “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. *Are ye not much better than they?*” (Matthew 6:26; emphasis added). Jesus also extends this line of argumentation to the Father’s power to clothe the disciples as they ministered to the people.<sup>4</sup> “And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, *shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*” (Matthew 6:28–30; emphasis added).<sup>5</sup> The fowls of the air and the grass of the field represent the “lighter” (*qal*) in these analogies, while Jesus’s disciples represent the “weightier” (*ḥômer*). If the Father takes care to provide food for birds, his disciples must know that he will provide them needed food as they do his work. If the Father clothes the lilies and the grass, the disciples can further rest assured that they will have sufficient clothing while they proclaim the gospel: “Wherefore, seek not the things of this world but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness, *and all [such] things shall be added unto you*” (JST Matthew 6:38; emphasis added).

Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus returns to lighter and weightier argumentation to emphasize the Father’s accessibility and willingness to answer prayers: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. . . . Or

what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*” (Matthew 7:7–11; emphasis added). Jesus’s disciples, being comparatively “evil,” represent the lighter, while the Father, the supreme embodiment of goodness, represents the weightier. Even evil human beings know how to give good gifts to their children. The Father’s good gifts, as a manifestation of his supreme goodness, are beyond compare. Luke’s interpretive rendition of this lighter and weightier argument replaces “good things” with “the Holy Spirit” (Luke 11:13), suggesting that the gift of the Holy Ghost constitutes one of the greatest of the Father’s good gifts. Luke records that Jesus gave a similar but even more elaborate lighter and weightier explanation of God’s willingness to answer the prayers of the elect in the parable of the unjust judge (18:1–8). If an unjust judge, because of a widow’s persistent “troubl[ing]” him, would “avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary [him],” how much more will “God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?” (18:6–7).

In yet another lighter and weightier argument, Jesus extols the value of human life—and thus the lives of his disciples—as of supernal value: “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father [“and not one of them is forgotten before God,” Luke 12:6]. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, *ye are of more value* than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:29–31; emphasis added; compare Luke 12:6–7).

Two additional examples of the lighter and weightier method revolve around the value of human life. These, however, are relative to the daily application of Torah. Matthew, utilizing Mark’s record, illustrates that questions regarding proper Sabbath observance followed hard on Jesus throughout his ministry. Jesus boldly uses the healing of a man in a synagogue in Capernaum<sup>6</sup> to clarify that alleviating human suffering did not violate Mosaic Sabbath restrictions—quite the contrary. Jesus’s words and actions as preserved in Matthew 9:2–8, Mark 2:1–13, and Luke 5:18–26 constitute as visible and emphatic an example of this method as one could wish for to assert his divine “power” or (better) “authority” (Greek *exousia*).

In that episode, Jesus begins by declaring that the man’s sins are forgiven, knowing full well that this will immediately raise questions of “authority” (*exousia*) among the religious leaders present. When the scribes question this action, Jesus makes it the *qal* (“lighter”) aspect of his forthcoming analogy with the question, “For whether [which] is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, and walk?” This sets up the imminent healing as the *hōmer* (“weightier”) aspect of his argument. Of course, anyone can say “thy sins be forgiven thee,” a statement that requires no immediate, demonstrable proof. However, the validity of a statement like “Arise, and walk” rests on proof following. The sick man “rising” and “departing” to his house confirms not only Jesus’s command “Arise, take up thy bed, and go,” but also his assertion that the man’s sins were forgiven. This miracle also makes a powerful statement about the purpose of divine authority and the Sabbath: both are given to humankind to improve the quality of human life (compare John 10:10).

One of Jesus's most significant uses of lighter and weightier and weightier and lighter arguments in the interpretation of scripture occurs following his good shepherd sermon in John 10, in a debate with religious leaders, perhaps within the precincts of the temple. The religious leaders intend to stone Jesus for the allegedly blasphemous claim "I and my Father are one" (10:30). The crux of Jesus's argument in verses 32–36 centers on his quotation and interpretation of Psalm 82:6 ("Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High").<sup>7</sup> Psalm 82, like all the Psalms, presumably constituted a temple hymn—a hymn sung or performed in the Jerusalem temple. Whoever its original addressees (i.e., divine beings, rulers, etc.), Jesus's circumlocution "them . . . unto whom the word of God came" reflects an anthropological interpretation of the psalm—that is, its addressees were human beings, perhaps Israelites (compare the "noble and great ones" of Abraham 3:22; compare also Doctrine and Covenants 138:55). Jesus's argument runs thus: the weightier claim is to be a "god" or "gods" (Hebrew *'ēlōhīm*; Greek *theos, theoi*) rather than to be a/the "son of God" (the lighter claim). Psalm 82:6 addresses certain human beings as gods. If the unbreakable scripture called those human beings gods, Jesus cannot be rightly charged with blasphemy. On the surface Jesus's argument is weightier and lighter, yet on another level it represents a lighter and weightier argument: any humans that might be called gods are subordinate to Jesus as Son of God, if that title is rightly understood. But Jesus may have also hinted at the exalted view of humanity that John makes explicit at the outset of his Gospel: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons [*tekna*, "children"] of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, Jesus intended (and intends) his disciples to become "even as I am" (3 Nephi 28:10), as additional lighter and weightier examples emphasize. Matthew records Jesus saying to his disciples: "It is enough for the disciple that he be [become, *genētai*] as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house *Beelzebub*, how much more shall they call them of his household?" (Matthew 10:25; emphasis added). The name *Beelzebub* ("Lord of the flies") constitutes a dysphemism<sup>9</sup> for *Beelzebul* ("Lord of the lofty abode").<sup>10</sup> In other words, if the contemporary religious leaders in Judea and Jerusalem have labeled Jesus "Satan," they can hardly label his disciples anything worse. Yet they are to become as he is. According to John, Jesus offers similar lighter and weightier counsel to his disciples on the final night of his mortal ministry (John 15:18–20).

Paul, an erstwhile Pharisee, also frequently employed lighter and weightier arguments. For example, Paul extols God's love and the power of Jesus Christ's atonement before and after we apply it: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. *Much more then*, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, *much more*, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Romans 5:8–10; emphasis added). If the love of God is evident in the formulation (and foreordination) of the plan of salvation and the provision of Jesus Christ as our Savior, even before we have faith in him or repent ("when we were yet without strength," Romans 5:6), how much more that love

becomes evident as we activate the blessings of Christ's atonement by obeying his doctrine (Articles of Faith 1:4).

Paul employs a lighter and weightier analogy again a few verses later to push this argument even further, this time using Adam and the Fall: "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, *much more* the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many" (Romans 5:14–15; emphasis added). Paul compares Adam with Christ on a lighter and weightier analogy to again extol the power of Christ's atonement and the grace made available thereby—the *weightier*. Paul considers it a foregone conclusion that physical and spiritual death came upon the whole human race through Adam's transgression or offense—the *lighter*. If Adam's "disobedience" (Romans 5:19), a human act, had that kind of power and efficaciousness on "many," how much more must Jesus's atonement, a divine act, have upon "many."<sup>11</sup>

Paul later applies the lighter and weightier method to Israel and those Jews who had not yet accepted Jesus as Messiah: "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; *how much more* their fulness?" (Romans 11:12; emphasis added); "For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted [grafted] contrary to nature into a good olive tree: *how much more* shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted [grafted] into their own olive tree?" (Romans 11:24; emphasis added). As Joseph Fitzmyer notes, "Israel's disbelief is only temporary" and partial.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, "Israel has stumbled over Christ but it has not fallen down completely so that it cannot regain its footing."<sup>13</sup> He further observes, "Paul hints at the untold benefits of the world that would come with the full acceptance of Jesus as Messiah by the Jews; if their action has so far resulted in such incredible benefits, then what will their full acceptance mean?"<sup>14</sup> Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, Zenos, Isaiah, and many other prophets had some idea.<sup>15</sup>

In 2 Corinthians 3:7–11, Paul uses lighter and weightier reasoning to argue that if the heavenly ministrations that were concomitant with the institution of the law of Moses were glorious, how much more so Christ's heavenly ministrations. The author of Hebrews argues much the same thing in the same way in Hebrews 9:11–14 and 12:18–26.

Some additional examples of Paul's use of lighter and weightier methods occur in Paul's analogy of the church to the body (1 Corinthians 12:22), in his plea to the Philippian saints to "work out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12), and in his efforts to persuade Philemon to allow his use of Onesimus, an escaped slave, for the furtherance of the work of the gospel (Philemon 1:16). The author of Hebrews, too, appeals extensively to this mode of argumentation (Hebrews 2:1–4; 9:11–14; 10:28–29; 12:9, 18–26).

## "Equal Statute" (*Gězērâ šāwâ*, Hillel Rule #2)

Arland Hultgren cites Paul's use of "the so-called *Gezera Shawa* principle, which became codified in later rules for biblical interpretation."<sup>16</sup> "According to that principle," he states,

“two texts using the same word can be brought together, and what is taught in the one can be applied to the other as well.”<sup>17</sup> We see Jesus, Paul, Matthew, Mark, and others make extensive use of *gězērâ šāwâ* (“equal statute”) throughout the New Testament.

Though not one of the original twelve, Mark was one of Jesus’s early disciples, an early church leader, a possible tradent and interpreter of Peter,<sup>18</sup> and probably a Jew. Mark wrote to a largely gentile and Roman audience, as evident in his explanation of Jewish customs and inclusion of Latinisms.<sup>19</sup> However, Mark uses the equal statute exegetical technique to fashion a very Jewish introduction to his Gospel, which begins with Jesus’s baptism by John the Baptist: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; as it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall *prepare thy way* [*kataskeuasei tēn hodon sou*] before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, *Prepare ye the way* [*hetoimasate tēn hodon*] of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Mark 1:1–3; emphasis added).

Using equal statute, Mark first quotes a portion of Malachi 3:1: “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall *prepare the way before me* [*ûpinnâ-derek lipānāy*, clear the way before me]: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.” He then joins part of Isaiah 40:3: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, *Prepare ye the way of the Lord* [*pannû derek yhw̄h*], make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (emphasis added).

Mark’s use of equal statute transforms Isaiah’s and Malachi’s separate prophecies into a single prophecy that he applies to—or is fulfilled in—John the Baptist. This equal statute on the specific term *prepare*—the same in Hebrew, though differing in Greek—and on the expression *the way* to describe John the Baptist’s mission, including the baptism of Jesus, takes on particular significance because the way *is* the doctrine of Christ,<sup>20</sup> and repentance and baptism is the gate. Mark thus appears to suggest what Nephi makes more explicit after his father saw and described “a prophet who should come before the Messiah, to prepare the way of the Lord” (1 Nephi 10:7; compare 10:8): “For he is the same yesterday, today, and forever; and *the way is prepared* for all men from the foundation of the world, if it so be that they repent and come unto him” (1 Nephi 10:18; emphasis added).

Matthew and Mark offer a climactic example of Jesus’s use of equal statute during the last week of the Savior’s life. Matthew, clearly writing to a Jewish audience, depicts Jesus using this method in an exchange between a lawyer of the Pharisees and Jesus after the latter had defeated the Sadducees on a question about marriage designed to entrap him (Matthew 22:23–33). Jesus’s equal statute response, as recorded in Matthew 22:36–40, adjoins the apodictic commandment from Deuteronomy, “And thou shalt love [*wě ’āhabtâ*] the Lord thy God with all thine heart” (Deuteronomy 6:5), to the lesser-quoted apodictic commandment from the priestly Holiness Code, “but thou shalt love [*wě ’āhabtâ*] thy neighbour as thyself” (Leviticus 19:18). Jesus then declared that “on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:40). Luke 10:27 tells this account or the account of a similar encounter differently, attributing the joining of the two Torah passages to the lawyer who

was testing Jesus and describes the exchange as a setup for Jesus's parable of the good Samaritan.

Regardless of whether the two accounts represent the selfsame event or two entirely separate events, the juxtaposition of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 on the equal statute principle unquestionably constitutes the foundation of both accounts. If Luke's account in Luke 10 depicts a separate event, it would suggest that this particular equal statute constituted something of a commonplace in the discourse of the religious leaders in Jesus's time. Matthew's and Mark's accounts are clear in their attribution of this equal statute to Jesus himself.

Thus, in the context of first-century-AD Judaism, the Pharisee lawyer's question and Jesus's response about the great commandment in the law represent an intra-Jewish attempt to better understand the Torah and its ethical application in daily Jewish life. The "first and great commandment" to wholeheartedly "love the Lord thy God" in Deuteronomy 6:5 constitutes a part of the so-called Shema (*šēma'*), which begins in Deuteronomy 6:4 ("Hear [*šēma'*], O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one"). Indeed, Mark's account includes a part of Deuteronomy 6:4 ("The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord"). To this day, the Shema remains one of Judaism's most important creedal texts.

We should note in addition that Jesus's citation of Leviticus 19:18 in Matthew 22:34–40 and Mark 12:28–34—as a commandment summarizing the whole law (Torah)—may originate with Hillel the Elder, a noted Jewish religious authority who lived during the time of Jesus's adolescence (ca. AD 10). Hillel is reported to have said, "Whatsoever is distasteful to you, do not do to your neighbor: this is the whole Law altogether [*d'lk sny lhbrk l' t'byd zw hy' kl htwrh kwlh*]" (Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 31a, my translation). Hillel's declaration constitutes a precedent for and a probable basis of the Savior's Golden Rule: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law [Torah] and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12; compare Luke 6:31). Consequently, when Jesus added Leviticus 19:18 as the "second [great commandment] like unto" Deuteronomy 6:5, he imported or invoked contemporary Jewish discourse on the ethical weight of Leviticus 19:18.

All of the foregoing helps us better understand the significance of James's description of the commandment to love thy neighbor as thyself as the "royal law," which if we fulfill, we "do well" (James 2:8). Paul, too, writing to a mixed Jewish and gentile audience at Rome, declared adherence to Leviticus 19:18 to be the fulfillment of Torah in Romans 13:8–9 (see further below).

Jesus's use of equal statute to place the vertical cultic dimension ("Love the Lord thy God") atop the horizontal ethical obligation ("Love thy neighbor," as emphasized by Hillel) thus suggests the means par excellence of demonstrating love of God: to love one's neighbor. Or, as King Benjamin put it: "When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17). *Service* (Hebrew *ʿābōdā*) is a temple word in the foregoing context,<sup>21</sup> and the most important temple service that can be rendered is that rendered on behalf of someone who cannot act "in their own *propria persona*" (Doctrine

and Covenants 128:8)—that is, for and in behalf of themselves. Notably and appropriately, Mark and Matthew situate Jesus’s teaching, of which this *gězērâ šāwâ* constitutes a part, in the temple. Love of God and neighbor—pure charity—stands at the heart of all appropriate temple activity.

Jesus’s equal statute involving Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 thus implies what Nephi’s declaration makes explicit: “The Lord God hath given a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is love. And except they should have charity they were nothing. Wherefore, if they should have charity they would not suffer the laborer in Zion to perish” (2 Nephi 26:30). Or as Paul summarizes it: “Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” (1 Timothy 1:5).

Mark and Matthew also both preserve an exchange with some of the Pharisees over the traditional hand washings stipulated in the oral law wherein Jesus used equal statute to criticize the contemporary traditional practice of Corban, a perversion of temple service (Mark 7:9–13; Matthew 15:1–9). Jesus’s critique joins the apodictic Decalogue commandment “Honour thy father and thy mother” (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16) to the casuistic penalty for cursing one’s parents, “he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death” (Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9). Jesus does this on the basis of the words *father* and *mother* and probably secondarily on *honor* and *curse* as binary antonyms. In so doing, Jesus emphasizes that through the tradition of Corban—the practice of declaring the service that one might render to parents a temple gift—the Pharisees were at once failing to honor their parents, a grievous sin of omission, and actively cursing their parents, an even worse sin of commission and a capital offense. Jesus cites this as an outstanding example of the hypocrisy of some contemporary traditional practices among some Pharisees and their adherents (“many such like things do ye,” Mark 7:13).

For his part, the apostle Paul, a self-described “Israelite [from] the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, [and] as touching the law, a Pharisee” (Philippians 3:5), employs equal statute in several instances. Arguably the most significant of these occurs in Romans 4, where Paul expounds the doctrine of justification and why Abraham was justified—set in a right relationship with God—by faith rather than by works (Romans 4:3–8).

There Paul brings together Genesis 15:6 (“And he [Abraham] believed in the Lord; and *he counted it* [Hebrew *wayyahšēbehā*; Greek *elogisthē*] to him for righteousness”; emphasis added) and Psalm 32:1–2 (“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord *imputeth* [Hebrew *yaḥšōb*; Greek *logisētai*] not iniquity,” 31:2 LXX; emphasis added) on the basis of the Hebrew word *hāšab* or Greek *logizō*. Joseph A. Fitzmyer writes, “Thus both witnesses, Abraham and David, show that the OT itself supports Paul’s thesis of graced justification through faith. In this way his teaching ‘upholds’ the Law.”<sup>22</sup>

Paul uses another equal statute that sees two prophecies of Isaiah as fulfilled in Jesus Christ and his rejection by some of his Israelite contemporaries: “For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (Romans 9:32–33). This equal stat-



ute joins Isaiah 8:14 (“And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel”) to Isaiah 28:16 (“Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste”). Paul brings Israel’s past rejection of Jehovah, the stone of Isaiah 8:14, into the present as the rejection of Jesus as Messiah and identifies him with the Zion stone—that is, “the stone laid by Yahweh in (the eastern hill of Jerusalem on which the Temple was built) [and] a symbol of salvation for those who trusted in him.”<sup>23</sup>

Peter taught the need to become “lively [living] stones” coming to Christ to be built as part of a spiritual temple (1 Peter 2:6–8). In so teaching, he uses an equal statute that is very similar to Paul’s. Peter’s equal statute joins together Isaiah 28:14 (“Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone”), Psalm 118:22 (“The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner”), and Isaiah 8:14 (“he shall be . . . for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence”). Paul and Peter mutually interpret these passages and apply them to Jesus on the basis of words translated as “stone.” Luke cites Jesus using Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14–15 together in Luke 20:17–18, again on the basis of *stone* (Greek *lithos*; Hebrew *’eben*) as a shared term (see further below). Taken together, these examples suggest that these Old Testament passages were linked together by Jesus’s earliest followers, who saw their fulfillment in him. Jacob’s use of these passages in Jacob 4:15–17 further suggests that this interpretive scriptural reading well preceded New Testament times.<sup>24</sup>

The author of Hebrews uses equal statute christologically in several instances. For example, he creates an equal statute in Hebrews 1:5 as a part of a larger “building of a family” (*binyan ’āb*) in Hebrews 1:3–8 (see below). Hebrews joins Psalm 2:7 LXX and 2 Samuel 7:14 LXX together to emphasize Jesus’s divine sonship. Hebrews 1:6–7, quoting Deuteronomy 32:43 LXX and Psalm 96:7 LXX on the basis of “angels” (Greek *angeloi*), is another example. Apart from Jesus’s parables and use of the lighter and weightier method, equal statute is arguably the most prominent Jewish hermeneutical/rhetorical mode in the New Testament.

The related hermeneutical method of *heqes* (“comparison”), which Strack and Stemberger describe as a “less strictly controlled *topical analogy*,”<sup>25</sup> juxtaposes and mutually interprets scriptures on the basis of shared concepts or contents, rather than strictly on a lexical basis. Paul’s “stringing together” Psalm 14:1–3 (53:2–4), 5:10, 140:4, 10:7, 36:2, and Isaiah 59:7–8 in Romans 3:10–18—all “linked by the mention of parts of the body: throat, tongue, lips, mouth, feet, [and] eyes”<sup>26</sup>—might constitute an example of this practice (Romans 9:12–19). Jesus’s implicit linking of Isaiah 56:7 to Jeremiah 7:11 might constitute equal statute, comparison, or something in between: “And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? [Isaiah 56:7] but ye have made it a den of thieves [Jeremiah 7:11]” (Mark 11:17).

### “Building of a Family” (*Binyan ’āb*, Hillel Rules #3 and #4)

“Building of a family,” or *binyan ’āb*, is a hermeneutical mode that, in the words of Aaron M. Gale, “entails using one Torah passage to reach a conclusion regarding another.”<sup>27</sup> In other

words, this interpretive mode allows one scriptural passage to serve as an authoritative lens for interpreting and applying another. Gale identifies the expression “have ye not read” as a “rabbinic formula”<sup>28</sup> pertaining to the “building of a family.” Jesus’s use of this formula signals that an authoritative ruling using scripture—usually a “building of a family”—is forthcoming.

*“Building a family from a single scripture” (Binyan ’āb mikkātūb ’eḥād)*

Strack and Stemberger gloss the simplest form of this hermeneutical mode, *binyan ’āb mikkātūb ’eḥād*, as literally the “‘founding of a family’ (*ab* short for *bet ab*) ‘from a single Scripture text.’”<sup>29</sup> All three Synoptic evangelists offer a possible example of “building a family from a single scripture.” Jesus uses a vineyard parable clearly based on Isaiah’s song of the vineyard (Isaiah 5:1–7) to criticize the contemporary religious leadership in Jerusalem (Matthew 21:33–46; Mark 12:1–2; Luke 20:9–18). He then offers an interpretation of this Isaiah-based parable: “And *have ye not read* this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?” (Mark 12:10–11; emphasis added).

Jesus offers an interpretation of his vineyard parable (and thus also a contemporary application for Isaiah 5:1–7) by quoting Psalm 118:22–23 from the Hallel (Psalms 113–118), one of ancient Israel and Judah’s most important temple hymns. Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts go even further, with Jesus turning the building of a family from a single scripture into an equal statute, with Jesus also invoking Isaiah 8:14–15 on the basis of the shared word *stone* (Hebrew *’eben*; see Matthew 21:42; Luke 20:18), a homonym of the Hebrew word *bēn*, “son.” The power of Jesus’s teaching, using this parable and Psalm 118:22–23 (and Isaiah 8:14–15), must have been amplified by its temple setting.

All three Synoptic evangelists preserve an even more lucid example of this interpretive method (Matthew 22:24–33; Mark 12:18–27; Luke 20:27–38). The Sadducees, who rejected the doctrine of a physical resurrection<sup>30</sup> and anything beyond the Torah (or Pentateuch, the five books of Moses), challenged Jesus with a question involving the Deuteronomic statutes regarding levirate marriage. The scenario, wherein seven brothers marry the same wife, was an attempt at *reductio ad absurdum*. Daniel J. Harrington writes: “The Sadducees based their rejection of the resurrection on the silence of the Pentateuch about it. They cite a passage from Deuteronomy 25:5–10 that they think will be irrefutable proof for their position and attach to it an application designed to reduce to absurdity those who favor belief in the resurrection.”<sup>31</sup>

Jesus responds by building a family from a single scripture using Exodus 3:6, 15–16. As recorded by Mark, the Savior states: “And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err” (Mark 12:26–27).<sup>32</sup> Earle Ellis writes: “God is not the God of the dead, and yet in Exodus 3:14 he affirmed a continuing covenant

relationship with dead Abraham. Therefore, he must intend to raise Abraham out of death, and from this conclusion one may infer the resurrection of all the dead who have a similar covenantal relationship.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, Abraham is not dead, but his spirit lives. As Bruce Chilton, Darrell Bock, and Daniel Gurtner’s appendix notes: “from this one text one further may infer as Jesus did (Mark 12:16; Matthew 22:31; Luke 20:37) the truth of the general resurrection.”<sup>34</sup> This accords well with JST Mark 12:32 (emphasis added): “He is not therefore the God of the dead, but the God of the living; *for he raiseth them up out of their graves.*” Harrington further observes, “Exod 3:6, 15–16, where Yahweh is identified as the God of the fathers of Israel, is from the Pentateuch and so must be taken seriously by the Sadducees.”<sup>35</sup> Jesus thus adroitly and powerfully builds a family from a single scripture to teach and testify of the reality of a literal bodily resurrection.

*“Building a family from two scriptures” (Binyan ’āb miššēnê kētûbîm)*

Regarding this second form of building a family, Wilhelm Bacher writes: “By means of this exegetical norm, a specific stipulation found in only one of a group of topically related biblical passages is applied to them all. Thus, the main passage bestows on all others a common character which combines them into a family.”<sup>36</sup> Arguably the best example of this extended hermeneutic from the Gospels is Jesus’s exchange with the Pharisees about his disciples’ Sabbath observance. Notably, Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 (“For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings”) at least twice as the doctrinal or theological basis for using contemporary hermeneutical modes. The first of these occurs in Matthew 9:13, where Jesus uses Hosea 6:6 to reinforce the parable of the physician. Matthew 12:1–8 records that he uses “building a family” again when asserting his own authority with regard to the Sabbath in another intra-Jewish debate with the Pharisees.

Regarding the events depicted in Matthew 12:1–8, Gale explains Jesus’s “building a family from two scriptures” thus: “Jesus responds by arguing that other Jews violated Sabbath laws when they were in need. Matthew makes the need clear in 12.1 by adding to Mark 2.23 that the disciples were hungry. Matthew’s Jesus is thus depicted as utilizing Jewish exegetical methods to create new authoritative rulings.”<sup>37</sup> Jesus uses the example of David and others eating the bread of the presence (shewbread) in need in 1 Samuel 21:6 (and Leviticus 24:7–8) and the offering of Sabbath sacrifice in Numbers 28:9–10 to build the principle that humanitarian considerations supersede normal Sabbath rules.

Another clear example of Jesus’s building a family from two or more scriptures emerges in Matthew 19:3–8 when the Pharisees test Jesus on the Mosaic legislation regarding divorce. Gale observes that here “Jesus cites Genesis 1.27 [and] 2.24 to issue an authoritative decision regarding another [passage], Deut 24.1–4.”<sup>38</sup> Jesus builds a doctrine from Genesis 1:27 (“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them”) and Genesis 2:24 (“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh”) that God intended marriage to be permanent. When the Pharisees respond by invoking Deuteronomy 24:1–4, Jesus explains

that Moses gave the divorce provision. The pre-Mosaic historical context of the first marriage makes it weightier than the Mosaic divorce provision (see further below). Latter-day Saints should appreciate the power of the Savior's teaching here: if God regards marriage as ideally permanent, death and hell will not prevail against it in eternity (Matthew 16:16–19).

In 1 Corinthians 9:9–14 Paul, too, builds a doctrine or principle regarding full-time ministers of the gospel from two unrelated scriptural passages. Ellis explains Paul's building a family from two scriptures thus: "From the commands to unmuzzle the working ox (Deut 25:4) and to give the temple priests a share of the sacrifices (Deut 18:1–8) one may infer the general right of ministers of the gospel to a living (1 Cor 9:9, 13)."<sup>39</sup> Ellis additionally sees James, often thought to be James the brother of Jesus, building on the examples of Abraham in Genesis 22:9–19 and Rahab (Joshua 2:1–16) "to establish the general principle that genuine faith is manifest by works" in James 2:22–26.<sup>40</sup> James may have been responding to Paul's *dābār halāmēd mē'inyānō* ("argument from the context") on justification in Galatians 3 that also rests on Genesis 22 (see below).

The author of Hebrews elaborately builds a family from two (or more) scriptures using seven blocks of biblical passages in Hebrews 1:5–13<sup>41</sup> in order to establish the general principle or doctrine of Jesus's superiority to the angels. It begins with an equal statute involving Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 in Hebrews 1:5 on Greek *huios* ("son"),<sup>42</sup> then adds a second equal statute on a blending of Deuteronomy 32:43 LXX, Psalm 96:7 LXX [97:7] (that privileges the word "angels" [*angeloi*] over "sons of God" [*huios theou*] in the former and "gods" in the Hebrew MT of the latter), and Psalm 103:4 LXX all on the basis of the word *angels*. He then quotes Psalm 44:7 LXX [45:6], which addresses the Davidic king as "God," and then Psalm 101:26–28 LXX [102:25–27], which extols God's permanence. He crowns the whole building of a family with Psalm 109:1 LXX [110:1], which declares the Davidic king enthroned at God's right hand. This building of a family from two (or more) scriptures thus stands as an impressive rhetorical description of Jesus's status as Son of God to a believing Jewish audience.

### "The General and the Particular, the Particular and the General" (*Kēlāl ūpērāt ūpērāt ūkēlāl*, Hillel Rule #5)

The hermeneutical method *kēlāl ūpērāt ūpērāt ūkēlāl*—"the general and the particular, the particular and the general"—is the "qualification of the general by the particular, and the particular by the general."<sup>43</sup> Returning to Jesus's exchange at the temple with other Jewish religious authorities, we should note how Matthew reports that Jesus appended to his equal statute on Deuteronomy 6:5 ("Thou shalt love the Lord thy God") and Leviticus 19:18 ("thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself") the statement "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Jesus thus "summed up in one 'general' commandment all of the 'particular' commandments (Mark 12:38–34; Matthew 22:34–40)."<sup>44</sup> In so doing, he makes his equal statute into an example of the particular and the general as well.

Similarly, Paul wrote to the Roman saints: “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Romans 13:8–9). Here too, as Ellis notes, “the particular commandments are apparently regarded as illustrative examples of the general.”<sup>45</sup>

### “Something Similar to This in Another Passage”/“Exposition by Means of a Similar Case” (*Kayyôṣē’ bô bēmāqôm ’aḥēr*, Hillel Rule #6)

The name of the hermeneutical mode *kayyôṣē’ bô bēmāqôm ’aḥēr* denotes “something similar to this in another passage”<sup>46</sup> or “exposition by means of a similar case.”<sup>47</sup> It functions similar to *gēzērâ šāwâ*, “but it is less strictly limited.”<sup>48</sup> Jesus seems to use this tool as recorded in Matthew 19:16–22. When the rich young man asks what “good thing” will qualify him for eternal life, Jesus responds, “if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” (19:17). The rich young man then asks “which?” (19:18), and Jesus adumbrates the Decalogue commandments of Exodus 20:12–26 (“Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother”), adjoining the commandment “love thy neighbor as thyself” from Leviticus 19:18 (Matthew 19:18–19). When the rich young man responds, “All these things I have kept from my youth; what lack I yet?” (Matthew 19:20), Jesus adds an allusion to Jehovah’s commandments to Abraham in Genesis 17:1 (“walk before me, and be thou perfect [Hebrew *tāmîm*; *amemptos* LXX]), saying, “If thou wilt be perfect [Greek *teleios* = Hebrew *tāmîm*], go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me” (Matthew 19:21; compare 5:48). In so doing, Jesus not only sums up the meaning of the commandments of Exodus 20:12–26 in Leviticus 19:18 (a similar passage), but also infers that one becomes “perfect” in keeping all the commandments with an Abrahamic sacrifice (compare “the works of Abraham”; John 8:39; Doctrine and Covenants 132:32). Abraham proved himself willing to walk with God and even part with Isaac, but the rich young man would not part with temporal wealth for his neighbor to walk with Jesus.

Ellis sees Paul using something similar to this in another passage in Galatians 3:8 and 3:16<sup>49</sup> where he argues for the justification of the Gentiles through faith from the Abraham cycle: “And the scripture [Genesis 12:3], foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Galatians 3:8); “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made [Genesis 22:18]. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Galatians 3:16). Paul resolves and expounds the meaning of Genesis 12:3, “And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed,” by alluding unmistakably to Genesis 22:18: “And in thy seed shall

all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.” Ellis writes, “The prophecy in Gen[esis] 12:3 that all nations shall be blessed in Abraham may, in light of the analogous passage in Gen[esis], be understood of Abraham’s seed and thus of Messiah (Gal 3:8, 16).”<sup>50</sup>

### “Argument from the Context” (*Dābār halāmēd mē’inyānô*, Hillel Rule #7)

Strack and Stemberger describe *dābār halāmēd mē’inyānô* as “the ‘argument from the context’ of a biblical statement”<sup>51</sup> or, literally, “a word of instruction from its context.”<sup>52</sup> For example, after building a family, Jesus argues from historical context regarding the original meaning of the divorce statute in Deuteronomy 24:1 when he adds, “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives” (Matthew 19:8; compare 5:1). Israel during Moses’s time had been hardhearted (see, e.g., Psalm 95:7–11) like Jesus’s opponents.

In Romans 4:9–24, Paul extends the equal statute involving Genesis 15:6 and Psalm 32 into an argument from the context when he mentions Abraham’s circumcision as described in Genesis 17, which effectively situates his whole argument of justification by faith within a pre-Israelite and pre-Mosaic law time frame. In Galatians 3, probably written in roughly the same time period as Romans and wherein Paul also invokes Genesis 15:6 (Galatians 3:6), Paul makes a similar argument from the context in Galatians 3:17 when he states: “And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.” Regarding these two instances of “argument from context,” Ellis summarizes Paul’s argument thus: “That righteousness was reckoned to Abraham (Gen 15:6) before he was circumcised (Gen 17:10f.) enables him to be the father of both Jewish and (uncircumcised) gentile believers (Rom 4:10f.). Equally, because the covenant promise was established with Abraham (Gen 22:18) before the Mosaic Law (Exod 12:40), it has validity independent of that law (Gal 3:17).”<sup>53</sup>

### “Parable” (*Māšāl*)

Parables, proverbs, taunt-songs, and allegories fall under a single Hebrew term—*māšāl*: a “likening” or “comparison.”<sup>54</sup> The Hebrew Bible contains a substantial number of these, whether or not each is formally called *māšāl* in the text. Nathan’s juridical parable<sup>55</sup> against David in 2 Samuel 12 constitutes one of these. The text designates Isaiah’s taunt-song or proverb against the king of Babylon (“Lucifer”) in Isaiah 14:4–20 a *māšāl*, but Isaiah 5:1–7, 27:2–6 (2–11), and 28:23–29 would also fit that designation. Ezekiel uses the *māšāl* in Ezekiel 17:2–20 and 24:3–5. Jotham’s parable of the trees in Judges 9:7–20 represents another excellent example. The canonical Proverbs have been collectively labeled with the incipit title *mišlê* (i.e., *mišlê šēlômô*, “Proverbs of Solomon,” Proverbs 1:1).

Charles W. Hedrick notes that “Rabbinic parables are considerably more numerous than the number of OT parables. Around 2,000 have been estimated to exist in rabbinic literature.”<sup>56</sup> Although most of these have been dated to centuries later than Jesus, it is interesting to note that many “are introduced similar to the ways parables in the NT are introduced. For example, ‘to what may the parable be likened to . . .’ or ‘I will set forth a parable; to what may the parable be likened, to . . .’ A very few use simply ‘as’ or ‘like.’”<sup>57</sup>

The latter observation is striking when we consider the Book of Mormon’s best example of a *māšāl* or parable—and may be the best example of an extended *māšāl* ever written—Zenos’s “allegory” in Jacob 5, which begins with the words “I will liken thee.” In Hebrew, that phrase would constitute a form of the verb *māšāl*. Nephi, perhaps using Zenos as his model, turns the scriptures themselves more broadly into parables by likening<sup>58</sup> them or interpretively mapping them onto himself and his people.<sup>59</sup> Jacob, the brother of Nephi, likens Isaiah 49:22–52:2 to the Nephites as an extended parable about their situation.<sup>60</sup>

As noted above, Jesus too sometimes formally designated his sayings as parables with the formula “whereunto shall I liken” (see, e.g., Matthew 11:16; Luke 7:31; 13:20). Jesus’s parables constitute an indispensable and incomparable aspect of his teaching. Since the criteria for what officially constitutes a parable are somewhat arbitrary, totals for the number of Jesus’s parables in the New Testament vary.

Paul uses the *māšāl* form when he likens the Hagar-Ishmael and Sarah-Isaac story to the Sinai covenant with the law of Moses and the covenant promises made available through Jesus Christ. He maps this story onto the early church Judaizers who wanted to make gentile converts (including Paul’s converts at Galatia) fully conform to the requirements of the law of Moses: “For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. *Which things are an allegory*: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all” (Galatians 4:22–26; emphasis added). To be clear, Paul is not privileging Christianity over Judaism—an anachronistic notion. As Mark Nanos states, “Paul saw himself wholly within Judaism, as one who was assigned a special role in the restoration of Israel and the nations (Rom 11.1–15; Gal 1.13–16).”<sup>61</sup>

Paul then employs *heqeš* (“comparison”) when he applies Isaiah 54:1 to Sarah, Abraham’s barren wife, and thus metaphorically to his gentile converts as well: “For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise” (Galatians 4:27–28). Paul views the Judaizers as “bondsmen” who want to put the gentile converts (“the children of . . . the free,” 4:31) into bondage and their demands as persecution: “But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now” (4:29). Paul also allegorizes or “likens” the Genesis story for the solution: “Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out

the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman” (4:30). As Fitzmyer puts it, “Paul bids the Galatians rid themselves of the Judaizers—and, ironically enough, obey the Torah itself.”<sup>62</sup>

One final example that we should mention here is Hebrews 9:1–9, wherein the author uses the wilderness tabernacle (including Holy Place and holy of holies), its appurtenances (the menorah, table, shewbread, cherubim, ark with its mercy-seat [Hebrew *kappōret*, place of atonement], etc.), its Mosaic ordinances (sacrifices, applying blood, etc.), and the ministrations of the Aaronic priests and high priest as a “figure for the time then present.” In other words, according to the author, it all constituted a kind of parable *prefiguring* Jesus Christ and his high priestly service, including his atonement, for the whole human family.

### Punning and Explanatory Punning (Paronomasia and Polyptonic Etiology)

The prophecy of Jesus’s birth in Matthew 1:20–21 echoes the form and content of two specific birth prophecies in the Hebrew Bible: the divine/angelic prophecies of the births of Abraham’s sons, Ishmael and Isaac. The biblical text uses wordplay to give etiological explanations (explanations of origin) for both names, both being divinely foreordained.

An angel instructs Hagar that she should give her son the name Ishmael: “And the angel of the Lord said unto her [Hagar], Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name *Ishmael* [*yišmā ‘ēl* = “May God hear” or “God hath heard”]; because *the Lord hath heard* [*šāma ‘ yhw̄h*] thy affliction” (Genesis 16:11; emphasis added). The angel explains Ishmael’s naming in terms of the Semitic/Hebrew verb *šāma* ‘, “hear,” “hearken,” “obey.” The divine onomastic element - ‘*ēl* is here identified with Jehovah.

God himself foreordains the name Isaac similarly: “Then Abraham fell upon his face, *and laughed* [*wayyishāq*], and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee! And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name *Isaac* [*yišhāq*]: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him” (Genesis 17:17–19; emphasis added).

The angel’s foreordination of Jesus’s name in Matthew 1:20–21 employs similar wordplay on cognate terms (polyptoton): “But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name *JESUS* [Greek *Iēsoun* (*Iēsous*) < Hebrew *yēšūa* ‘]: for *he shall save* [Greek *sōsei* = Hebrew *yōšīa* ‘] his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20–21; emphasis added). In explaining Jesus’s name in terms of “saving” or “salvation,” Matthew uses wordplay that works in Hebrew and Greek. The Hebrew/Aramaic form of Jesus’s name is *yēšūa* ‘, which derives from the same root as *yēšū ‘ā*, “salvation,” meaning to “save.” Jesus’s statement to the woman of Samaria, “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22)



may constitute an identification of himself with the servant “Israel” of Isaiah 49:6 (emphasis added): “I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be *my salvation* [yěsûatî] unto the end of the earth” (compare Isaiah 49:3).

Jeremiah 23:2 famously employs a pun on the Hebrew terms *rā ‘â* (to “feed” or to “pasture”)<sup>63</sup> and *rōa ‘* (“corruption, vice, evil”):<sup>64</sup> “Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel against *the pastors that feed* [hārō ‘im hārō ‘im] my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the *evil* [rōa ‘] of your doings, saith the Lord” (emphasis added; compare Jeremiah 22:22 and 1 Nephi 21:1). The initial pun is a play on cognate terms (polyptoton): “the *pastors that pasture* my people.” However, these same Hebrew consonants can be turned into a paronomasia—a play on sounds or meaning—and be read as *hārō ‘im hārā ‘im*, “the evil shepherds.”<sup>65</sup> Jesus appears to have this passage and pun in mind when he states: “I am the *good shepherd*: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep”; “I am the *good shepherd*, and know my sheep, and am known of mine” (John 10:11, 14; emphasis added). Jesus’s title “the good shepherd” creates a pun by inverting an older scriptural pun.

Most Latter-day Saint readers are at least passingly familiar with Jesus’s pun on the surname or nickname Peter, preserved in Greek as follows: “And I say also unto thee, That thou art *Peter* [Greek *petros*], and upon this *rock* [*petra*] I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18; emphasis added). Fitzmyer suggests, probably correctly, that “Peter” and “rock” would have both been *kêpā ‘* if Jesus spoke to Peter in Aramaic.<sup>66</sup> As Chrys C. Caragounis suggests, by using slightly different terms in Greek—*petros* and *petra*—“the author very neatly preserved the same stem and hence the ‘same’ general sense in the main elements, thus creating an elegant word-play, while at the same he markedly distinguished the two main terms as to their meaning and specific referents. The result was an exceptionally good and effective word-play.”<sup>67</sup>

Paul employs an elegant Old Testament-style wordplay in Ephesians 3:14–15: “For this cause I bow my knees unto the *Father* [*patera*] of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole *family* [*patria*] in heaven and earth is named” (emphasis added). In this case the word rendered family (*patria*) literally derives from the Greek word for Father (*pater*). The result is a pun that beautifully emphasizes God the Father’s universal fatherhood, including the entire human family. The pattern of God’s paternity can (or should be) evident in every “family.”

## Gematria

One of the best-known examples of New Testament *gematria* is attested in the genealogy for Jesus offered in Matthew 1. Matthew subdivides Jesus’s genealogy into three sets of fourteen generations: Abraham to David, David to the Babylonian exile, and the exile to Jesus. As numerous commentators have pointed out, the number fourteen can be written with the Hebrew letters *daleth* (4)-*waw* (6)-*daleth* (4)—i.e., DVD, or the consonants in the name David. Matthew has to play with the genealogy somewhat to arrive at the requisite number

fourteen. Gale writes, “The genealogy omits five kings (Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah, Jehoiakin, and Zedekiah) to make the numbers add up to fourteen.”<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, the numbers three and seven are also significant here. M. Eugene Boring notes that “after the number seven . . . in the Bible the number three is used most frequently in a symbolic or sacral sense.”<sup>69</sup> The number three in Hebrew numerology symbolizes completeness (compare the tripartite universe—celestial, terrestrial, telestial). Seven—Hebrew *šeba*<sup>70</sup>—also symbolizes completeness (*šeba*<sup>71</sup> is also a homonym of *šb*<sup>72</sup>, which denotes satiation, abundance, or fullness).

Later in Matthew’s Gospel, this symbolism emerges again in Jesus and Peter’s discussion of forgiveness that Jesus uses as a gematria: “Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:21–22). The number four hundred and ninety (490) is a gematria for *TMYM* (*tāmîm*), “perfect.”

Gale notes that Matthew uses “the same phrasing” as Genesis 4:24 LXX.<sup>70</sup> If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold (Genesis 4:24; Moses 5:48). That account (Genesis 4; Moses 5:16–59) tells how Cain committed the unpardonable sin and how Lamech follows in his footsteps as the master of murder for profit, as works of darkness spiraled out of control in the human family. If seven and seventy-seven constitute symbols of vengeance and an absence of forgiveness in that account, Jesus makes it a symbol of perfect forgiveness.

Far and away the most famous and lucid example of gematria in the New Testament occurs in Revelation 13:16. John’s gematria resembled what the Greeks called *isopsephy*.<sup>71</sup> The book of Revelation, which also abundantly uses the number seven as a symbol of completion,<sup>72</sup> uses the number six in a distinctly negative way: “Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six” (Revelation 13:16). The “number of the beast” totals “666,” or as some ancient witnesses have it, “616.”<sup>73</sup> Boring writes: “Of the numerous explanations, the most cogent is that the author is interpreting the current or soon-to-come Roman emperor in terms of the Nero redivivus myth and that 666 is a gematriac cryptogram for NERO using the numeric values of *nrwn qsr* [קסר נרון] = Nero Caesar in Hebrew: 50 = נ; 6 = ו; 200 = ק; 50 = נ; Q = 100; S = 60; R = 200, which total 666]. This understanding is supported by the fact that some manuscripts read 616.”<sup>74</sup> Therefore, this number should not be seen as constituting a prophecy to be fulfilled in any other person or entity (even our least favorite politicians). Boring thus also rightly notes that “later explanations referring the ‘number of the beast’ to figures present or expected in the interpreter’s time have no basis in the biblical text.”<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

Apart from Jesus’s extensive use of forms of the *māšāl* (“parable”), lighter and weightier and equal statute by far constitute the commonest hermeneutical modes and modes of argumen-

tation in the New Testament. However, as I have attempted to show here, the New Testament also attests strong examples of building of a family (in both forms) and the other rules or methods attributed to Hillel (the general and the particular/the particular and the general, something similar to this in another passage, and argument from context).

Even texts that are normally regarded as having been written to largely gentile audiences, such as Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians, employ distinctly Jewish hermeneutics (like equal statute, something similar to this in another passage, and argument from context). Ironically, in Galatians 3, as part of a letter to an audience largely composed of gentile converts and inveighing against Judaizing members of the church, Paul makes some of his most Jewish arguments. All of this probably suggests that early gentile members of the church became familiar with at least some of these modes of discourse, interpretation, and argumentation from the synagogue (which many attended as God-fearers) even if they had heard rhetorical techniques similar to those used in the wider Hellenistic world.

Recognizing these hermeneutical and argumentation modes and their use in the New Testament, we are better prepared to appreciate and understand the intra-Jewish debates and discussions not only ongoing throughout Jesus's mortal ministry, but also present in the texts of Acts, Revelation, and the New Testament epistles. Thus, we can truly describe the whole New Testament, with the so-called "Old" Testament, as, using Nephi's words: "the book [that] proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew" (1 Nephi 13:33–34). Recognizing and understanding these modes can also help us better "respect the words of the Jews," which Nephi mentions in the same verse as a prerequisite to eternal life (2 Nephi 33:14).



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## Further Reading

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- Hultgren, Arland J. *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011.
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## Notes

1. JST Matthew 3:25: "And it came to pass that Jesus grew up with his brethren, and waxed strong, and waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come. And he served under his father, and he spake not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him."
2. Paul offers his full Pharisaic credentials in Philippians 3:4–6 (compare also Romans 11:1).
3. H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. Markus Bockmuehl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 17.
4. Compare JST Matthew 6:25–27.
5. Or, "how much more will he not provide for you, if ye are not of little faith?" (JST Matthew 6:34; emphasis added).
6. Mark locates this miracle at Capernaum (near Nazareth, Jesus's hometown). Matthew prefaces the miracle with a general statement, "and [he] came into his own city." Luke does not offer a precise location, but does say that religious leaders were present "out of every town of Galilee," indicating the general location. All three Gospel writers place this miracle very early in Jesus's ministry.
7. For some recent Latter-day Saint treatments of John 10 and Psalm 82, see Daniel C. Peterson, "'Ye Are Gods': Psalm 82 and John 10 as Witnesses to the Divine Nature of Humankind," in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 471–594; David Bokovoy, "Ye Really Are Gods: A Response to Michael Heiser concerning the LDS Use of Psalm 82 and the Gospel of John," *FARMS Review* 19, no. 1 (2007): 267–313; and Daniel O. McClellan, "Psalm 82 in Contemporary Latter-day Saint Tradition," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15 (2015): 79–96.
8. Compare McClellan, "Psalm 82," 93.
9. Dysphemism = the deliberate pejorative (negative) alteration of a name. See, for example, Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Dysphemisms," *Insights* 31, no. 2 (2011): 2–3.
10. Compare Aaron M. Gale, "The Gospel According to Matthew," in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 20.
11. As a Hebraism, *many* can sometimes mean—or almost mean—"all" in some contexts. For example, Jesus states: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; emphasis added). This does not delimit the scope of the Savior's atonement. This idiom occurs in 2 Nephi 29:9: "And I do this that I may prove unto many that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever" (emphasis added).
12. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Romans," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 860.
13. Fitzmyer, "Romans," 860.
14. Fitzmyer, "Romans," 860.
15. See especially 1 Nephi 10:12–14; 15:12–20; 19:24–21:26; 2 Nephi 6–10; Jacob 4–6.
16. Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 182.

17. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 182.
18. Irenaeus in the second century (*Against Heresies* 3.1) wrote: "After [Peter and Paul's] departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter" (from Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, trans., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe [Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885], 1:414). Eusebius quotes Papias quoting John the Elder: "This also the elder used to say. Mark, indeed, having been the interpreter of Peter, wrote accurately, howbeit not in order, all that he recalled of what was either said or done by the Lord. For he neither heard the Lord, nor was he a follower of his, but at a later date (as I said) of Peter, who used to adapt his instructions to the needs [of the moment], but not with a view to putting together the Dominical oracles in orderly fashion: so that Mark did no wrong in thus writing some things as he recalled them. For he kept a single aim in view: not to omit anything of what he heard, nor to state anything therein falsely." Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.14–15 (in *Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine*, trans. Hugh J. Lawlor and John E. Oulton [London: SPCK, 1954], 1:101).
19. See, for example, Barry D. Smith, *Introducing the New Testament: A Workbook* (Moncton, NB, Canada: Crandall University, 2010), 58. See further Adam Winn, *The Purpose of Mark's Gospel: An Early Christian Response to Roman Imperial Propaganda* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 80–83.
20. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets," *BYU Studies* 31 (Summer 1991): 31–50; Reynolds, "The True Points of My Doctrine," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 2 (1996): 26–56; see also Reynolds, "How to Come unto Christ," *Ensign*, September 1992, 7–13; Reynolds, "The Gospel According to Mormon," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68, no. 2 (May 2015): 218–34; and Reynolds, "The Gospel According to Nephi: An Essay on 2 Nephi 31," *Religious Educator* 16, no. 2 (2015): 51–75.
21. Donald W. Parry, "Service and Temple in King Benjamin's Speech," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007): 42–47, 95–97.
22. Fitzmyer, "Letter to the Romans," 842.
23. Fitzmyer, "Letter to the Romans," 858.
24. See Matthew L. Bowen, "'I Have Done According to My Will': Reading Jacob 5 as Temple Text," in *The Temple: Ancient and Restored: Proceedings of the 2014 Temple on Mount Zion Symposium*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2016), 235–72; Bowen, "'He Shall Add': Wordplay on the Name Joseph and an Early Instance of *Gezera Shawa* in the Book of Mormon," *Insights* 30, no. 2 (2010): 2–4 (especially p. 3); and Bowen, "Onomastic Wordplay on Joseph and Benjamin and *Gezera Shawa* in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 255–73. Fitzmyer, "Letter to the Romans," 858, notes that "the Essenes of Qumran also applied Isa 28:16 to themselves looking upon their community as a temple."
25. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 19.
26. Fitzmyer, "Letter to the Romans," 839.
27. Gale, "Gospel According to Matthew," 2.
28. Gale, "Gospel According to Matthew," 35. For an outstanding example of building a family from one scripture, see Matthew 21:9–16.
29. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 19.
30. The Sadducees' rejection of the Resurrection is mentioned in Matthew 22:23, Mark 12:18, and Acts 23:8.
31. Daniel J. Harrington, "The Gospel According to Mark," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 622.
32. Matthew 22:31–33 records Jesus's response slightly differently: "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine."
33. E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in Light of Modern Research* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 88.

34. Bruce D. Chilton, Darrell L. Bock, and Daniel M. Gurtner, eds., "Appendix I," in *A Comparative Handbook to the Gospel of Mark: Comparisons with Pseudepigrapha, the Qumran Scrolls, and Rabbinic Literature* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2011), 538. Craig A. Evans, "Prophet, Sage, Healer, Messiah, and Martyr: Types and Identities of Jesus," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, ed. Tom Holmen and Stanley E. Porter (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2011), 1227, uses almost identical language: "From this one text and its inference one may further infer, as Jesus did (Mark 12:26), the truth of the general resurrection."
35. Harrington, "Gospel of Mark," 622.
36. Wilhelm Bacher, *Die exegetische Terminologie der jüdischen Traditionsliteratur*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1899–1905; repr., Nachdruck: Hildesheim, 1965), 1:9. Translation cited in Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 19.
37. Gale, "Gospel of Matthew," 2.
38. Gale, "Gospel of Matthew," 2.
39. Ellis, *Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 90.
40. Ellis, *Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 90.
41. For a lengthy treatment, see Herbert W. Bateman, *Early Jewish Hermeneutics and Hebrews 1:5–13* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), passim.
42. King Benjamin does something similar in Mosiah 5:7–9. See also Bowen, "Onomastic Wordplay on Joseph and Benjamin," 255–73; Matthew L. Bowen, "Becoming Sons and Daughters at God's Right Hand: King Benjamin's Rhetorical Wordplay on His Own Name," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21, no. 2 (2012): 2–13.
43. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 19.
44. Chilton, Bock, and Gurtner, "Appendix I," 530–31.
45. Ellis, *Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 90.
46. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 20.
47. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, "Some Techniques of Composition in Philo's Allegorical Commentary with Special Reference to *De Agricultura*: A Study in the Hellenistic Midrash," in *Jews, Greeks, and Christians: Religious Cultures in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honor of William David Davies*, ed. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly and Robin Scroggs (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1976), 50.
48. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 20.
49. Ellis, *Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 90.
50. Ellis, *Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 90.
51. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 20.
52. Craig A. Evans, "Midrash," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicolas Perrin, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 590.
53. Ellis, *Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 90.
54. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 28: *māsāl* as "'parable,' allegorical interpretation."
55. See Uriel Simon, "The Poor Man's Ewe-Lamb: An Example of a Juridical Parable," *Biblica* 48, no. 2 (1967): 207–42. For a recent treatment of Nathan's parable, see Joshua Berman, "Double Meaning in the Parable of the Poor Man's Ewe (2 Sam 12:1–4)," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 13 (2013): article 14, 1–17 (online).
56. Charles W. Hedrick, "Parable," *New Interpreter's Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 4:369.
57. Hedrick, "Parable," 369.
58. See 1 Nephi 19:23; 2 Nephi 11:8. In 2 Nephi 11:8, Nephi invites his audience to "liken" Isaiah 2–14 to themselves—that is, to make Isaiah 2–14 a parable of their own lives and that of the whole human family: "Now these are the words, and ye may liken them unto you and unto all men."
59. John Gee and Matthew Roper, "I Did Liken All Scriptures unto Us': Early Nephite Understandings of Isaiah and Implications for 'Others' in the Land," in *Fullness of the Gospel: Foundational Teachings of the Book of*

- Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003), 51–66.
60. For an excellent treatment of Jacob's speech in 2 Nephi 6–10 and his use of Isaiah material, see Daniel Belnap, "I Will Contend with Them That Contendeth with Thee": The Divine Warrior in Jacob's Speech of 2 Nephi 6–10," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* 17, no. 1–2 (2008): 20–39.
  61. Mark D. Nanos, "Paul and Judaism," in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 552.
  62. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Galatians," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 788.
  63. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 1256.
  64. *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 1256.
  65. Strack and Stemmer, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 29.
  66. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Aramaic Kepha and Peter's Name in the New Testament," in *To Advance the Gospel: New Testament Studies* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 112–14.
  67. Chrys C. Caragounis, *Peter and the Rock* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 90.
  68. Gale, "Gospel According to Matthew," 3. He further notes that "Matthew lists only thirteen generations for the last set."
  69. M. Eugene Boring, "Numbers, Numbering," *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 4:298.
  70. Gale, "Gospel According to Matthew," 34.
  71. Lincoln H. Blumell and Thomas A. Wayment, "The 'Number of the Beast': Early Christian Isopsephies and Revelation 13:18," in *Book of Seven Seals: The Peculiarity of Revelation, Its Manuscripts, Attestation, and Transmission*, ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Michael Sommer (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 119–35; and Lincoln H. Blumell, *Lettered Christian: Christians, Letters, and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2012), 46.
  72. See, for example, Revelation 1:4, 11–16; 2:1; 3:1; 4:7; 5:1–6; 8:1–6; 10:3–4, 7; 11:13, 15; 13:1; 15:1, 6–8; 16:1, 17; 17:1, 3, 7, 9–11; 21:9.
  73. Compare Blumell, *Lettered Christians*, 46.
  74. Boring, "Numbers, Numbering," 299. He continues: "Since John elsewhere uses names in Hebrew letters symbolically (9:11; 16:16), this explanation would have been understood by contemporary readers. Suetonius (*Nero* 39) had already used gematria in explaining Nero's name; its number in the Greek system is 1005, the total of the numerical value of the letters in *Nerōn idian mētera apekteine* (Νέρων ιδίαν μητέρα ἀπέκτεινε, meaning "Nero killed his own mother")."
  75. Boring, "Numbers, Numbering," 299.