

AN OVERVIEW  
OF THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS'  
HERMENEUTICAL METHOD

With a Focus on Peter's Quotation of Joel 2:28-32  
on the Day of Pentecost

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## Introduction and Methodology

The majority of my own experience as a devoted Christian has been within Pentecostal and Charismatic<sup>1</sup> circles. As a relatively new disciple, I was surprised and concerned when some Christian acquaintances leveled the charge that taking Scripture out of context was an unfortunate characteristic of my denominational affiliation. Seeking clarity and comfort, I asked a respected friend who was a fellow Charismatic (and less of a neophyte than I was) about this problem of “proof-texting.”

“Well, you know,” came the dismissive reply, “Jesus and the Apostles *did* occasionally quote Scripture out of context.” In other words, if proof-texting was good enough for Jesus and his followers (who, after all, were inspired by the Holy Spirit), it ought to be good enough for modern Christians as well.

At the time, I nodded assent, deferring to one who ostensibly had more knowledge of the Bible and matters of faith than I did. Inwardly, however, I was not satisfied with the answer—the notion that there was no discernable rhyme or reason to the hermeneutic employed by Jesus and the human authors of the New Testament (NT) other than an *ad hoc* whimsy directed by a mystical sort of Spirit-inspiration did not seem to ring true.

On the surface, the manner in which the NT writers handled the Old Testament (OT) does appear at times “disturbingly creative”<sup>2</sup> and “a highly subjective enterprise.”<sup>3</sup> For example, Jeremiah’s prophecy concerning Rachel “weeping for her children . . . because they are no more” clearly looks forward to the impending invasion, destruction, and exile of Judah at the hands of

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<sup>1</sup> I use this term in the colloquial sense, referring to Christians who emphasize the necessity of the Holy Spirit’s power as a part of everyday Christian salvation experience well as the practice of the *χαρίσματα* as listed in I Cor. 12. Given Paul’s use of the term to describe the gift of salvation in Rom. 6:23 and gifts of marriage and celibacy in 1 Cor. 7:7, I feel the need to define terms when discussing the “charismatic movement.” All Christians are charismatic in some respect. See D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Cor. 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, “The Use of the Old Testament in the New,” in *New Testament Criticism & Interpretation*, ed. David Alan Block and David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 410).

<sup>3</sup> Christopher D. Stanley, “The Social Environment of ‘Free’ Biblical Quotations in the New Testament,” in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals*, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 18.

Babylon (Jer. 31:15). According to Matthew's gospel, however, Jeremiah's prophecy was "fulfilled" when Herod murdered infant boys "in Bethlehem and in all its environs" in an attempt to destroy Jesus (Mt. 2:16-18). Why did Matthew appropriate Jer. 31:15 in this manner? Furthermore, in the second Petrine address in Acts (Ac. 3:12-26), why is an OT text that was not originally intended to be messianic (Deut. 18:15) suddenly understood and applied messianically (Ac. 3:22-23)? Have the NT writers deliberately bent the Jewish scriptures in order to "Christianize" them? Alternatively, is there an underlying hermeneutic which prompted this seemingly unorthodox use of the OT? This is an important issue for two reasons:

1. It speaks to the aforementioned issue of proof-texting. If there is a knowable science of biblical interpretation behind the NT authors' use of the OT, then it follows logically that simple proof-texting in a purely *ad hoc* fashion is not an acceptable method of explicating Christian doctrine.
2. Any hermeneutical approach to the OT used by Jesus and the NT writers should guide and inform our own understanding of the OT and how it relates to the NT.

The purpose of this study is to explore the exegetical principles that guided the NT writers. An overview of these principles will be presented and then applied to an instance of the NT using and interpreting the text of the OT; since it figures prominently in the theology of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement, I have chosen to focus specifically on Peter's use of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:17-21.

## **Overview of Apostolic Hermeneutic**

### ***The New Testament's Dependence on the Hebrew Scriptures***

The NT itself clearly declares its reliance upon the OT. According to the teaching of Jesus, none of the Hebrew scriptures can be set aside (Mt. 5:17-20). Consequent to this assertion, Jesus repeatedly complained to the Jewish authorities that they had egregiously supplanted God's commands with their own traditions (Mk. 7:8-9, 13; Mt. 15:3); thus, Jesus emphasized the primacy of the Word. In addition, the risen Christ claimed that all three sections of the Hebrew scriptures

(law, prophets, and writings) find their fulfillment in him (Lk. 24:44-45).<sup>4</sup> It was in this context that Jesus “opened” the disciples’ minds to the scriptures, stating that the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection he had endured were written about (γεγραπται) therein. With respect to the scriptures, Jesus’ overriding concern (both before and after the resurrection) was for the correct interpretation and understanding of the OT.<sup>5</sup> The NT writers also express the importance of the OT in various ways:

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope (Rom. 15:4).

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating . . . . It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you . . . (1 Pet. 1:12).

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (II Tim. 3:16).

There can be little doubt that Jesus and his followers had high regard for the OT and viewed it as relevant for the NT saint.

The above statements concerning the OT reveal something of the rationale behind the NT writers’ hermeneutic when interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures. However, they do not yet evince a concrete methodology of Biblical interpretation. To uncover that we must first delve into two background issues:

1. The NT writers brought a presuppositional framework to the text of the OT, which helps to explain some of the OT citations that seem unnatural or arbitrary to the modern reader.
2. The Jewish roots of Christianity make it “likely that the exegetical procedures of the [NT writers] would resemble to some extent those of then contemporary Judaism.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Snodgrass, 411.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 411.

We will discover that the NT writers' presuppositional framework and Jewish exegetical methodologies find parallels in the way the NT writers handled the OT.

### ***Exegetical Presuppositions of the New Testament Writers***

#### **Corporate Solidarity**

The first presupposition concerns the Semitic view of man as existing both individually and corporately.<sup>7</sup> An “oscillation or reciprocal relation” exists between individual and community (family, tribe, or nation), i.e., the individual can represent the community and vice versa.<sup>8</sup> This view of man has been termed *corporate solidarity*, and it is a prevalent theme throughout the Bible. A prime example is the sin of Achan in Jos. 7. As Israel proceeded to conquer Jericho, Achan coveted some of the city's treasure (which was explicitly forbidden according to Jos. 6:18-19) and hid it in his tent (Jos. 7:20-21). Consequently, when Israel attempted to conquer the city of Ai, they were routed and 36 Israelites were killed (Jos. 7:5). Jos. 7:1 clearly expresses the idea of corporate solidarity—Achan committed the trespass individually, but all of Israel is said to have sinned before God and ultimately suffers for Achan's actions. Corporate solidarity is also seen in Isaiah, where the “servant” can collectively refer to and represent the entire nation (Isa. 44:1), the remnant (Isa. 49:5), or an individual.<sup>9</sup>

To the highly individualized Western mindset, such a notion may seem strange or, in the case of Jos. 7, even unjust. It should be noted, however, that corporate solidarity is an important aspect of Christianity.<sup>10</sup> Faith in Christ “involves an incorporation into him: It is to eat his flesh (Jn. 6:35, 42), to be his body (I Cor. 12:27), to be baptized into him (Rom. 6:3), or into his name (I Cor. 1:13, Ac. 8:16), to be identified with him (Ac. 9:41), to exist in the corporate Christ (2 Cor.

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<sup>6</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 205.

<sup>7</sup> E. Earle Ellis, “How the New Testament Uses the Old,” in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1977), 212.

<sup>8</sup> Snodgrass, 416.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 416.

<sup>10</sup> It forms much of the basis for Paul's understanding of universal sin and atonement. In Rom. 5, Adam and Christ are juxtaposed in a type/anti-type manner. Through Adam, sin reigned, resulting in condemnation and death even for those who had not sinned in the same manner as Adam (vv. 12-14). Similarly, through Christ's one act of righteousness, grace is extended to the many who are counted righteous in him (2 Cor. 5:21).

5:1) in the heavens, God’s eschatological temple.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, corporate solidarity helps us to understand Jesus and the way the NT writers applied OT texts to him. Given the representative nature of his ministry, it is no surprise that terms such as “Servant,” “Son of Man,” and “Son of God”—terms which are applied first to Israel in their original prophetic context—become Christological titles in the NT. Jesus represented Israel and was “in solidarity with her.”<sup>12</sup> Since “God’s purposes for Israel were now taken up in [Jesus’] ministry,” what had previously described Israel applied also to him.<sup>13</sup>

### **Correspondences in History**

The second presupposition is that of *correspondences in history*, which sees “a unity in [history’s] parts, which is there by divine ordination.”<sup>14</sup> This view implies that historical events conform to a pattern that emerges from God’s overarching purpose for all of creation.<sup>15</sup> In its unfolding from start to finish, salvation history expresses divine intent—it follows logically that correspondences can be found between God’s activity in people and events, both past and present.<sup>16</sup>

This is why some Scriptures which describe a person or event in history may not be “used up” by that historical figure or event.<sup>17</sup> For example, the Exodus was a pivotal event in Israel’s history through which God delivered his people. Later Biblical writers employ “exodus terminology” to describe God’s saving activity in current or future events, e.g., Israel’s deliverance from Assyria (Isa. 11:15-16).<sup>18</sup> In the NT, “the suffering of a righteous person (Ps. 22) finds correspondence in the crucifixion of Jesus (Mt. 22:39-46).”<sup>19</sup> In some instances, if a text finds fulfillment in Jesus, it has further correspondence to his followers. For example, since Jesus is the light to the Gentiles (Lk. 2:32, Isa. 28:16), the same applies in some degree to the ministry of Paul

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<sup>11</sup> Ellis, 213.

<sup>12</sup> Snodgrass, 416.

<sup>13</sup> Snodgrass., 416.

<sup>14</sup> Longenecker, 94.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>17</sup> Snodgrass, 416.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 416.

(Ac. 13:47).<sup>20</sup> The overall result is a sort of “inner-Biblical exegesis,” whereby Scriptures describing people and events may be applied to later events or key figures in order to interpret or understand them in terms of divine purpose or activity.<sup>21</sup>

### **Age of Eschatological Fulfillment**

The third presupposition is aptly expressed by Paul’s statement in I Cor. 10:11 concerning Israel’s wanderings in the desert:

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written *for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come* (Italics added).

Paul’s words here demonstrate the eschatological dichotomy through which history was viewed: the present age, and the age to come.<sup>22</sup> This view had its background in the OT prophets, who spoke of “the last (*’ah<sup>e</sup>rit*) days’ and ‘the day of the Lord’ as the time of ultimate redemption of God’s people and the destruction of their enemies.”<sup>23</sup> Apparently, it was a view shared to some degree by the larger Jewish community, the Jewish sect at Qumran, and early Jewish Christians. What distinguished the Christian viewpoint was the conviction that the messianic era had been realized and inaugurated in Jesus Christ.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the OT texts that were eschatological in nature described the present reality of the NT writers.

Out of this conviction springs a Christological view of the OT within the early church. Certain texts had achieved a life within Judaism of specific eschatological hope—“general [Scriptural] statements about the nation, prophets, priests, or kings were often idealized in anticipation of God’s end-time deliverer who would fill [these] categories as no one else had.”<sup>25</sup> The NT writers capitalized on such texts, demonstrating how they described Jesus. This explains how a non-messianic text such as Deut. 18:15 (see earlier discussion on p. 4) was applied

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<sup>19</sup> Snodgrass, 416.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 417.

<sup>21</sup> Stanley, 21-22.

<sup>22</sup> Ellis, 209.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>24</sup> Longenecker, 95.

messianically in Peter's second sermon in Acts 3:12-26. The promise of another prophet like Moses had been "idealized . . . so that hope emerged for an eschatological prophet."<sup>26</sup> In Snodgrass's words, Moses had been "the [prophet] *par excellence*, but one day there would be another [prophet] like him, only better."<sup>27</sup> This traditional Jewish use of Deut. 18:15 prompted Peter to apply it to Christ in Acts 3:22-23.

### **Charismatic Exegesis**

Finally, there is the presupposition of *charismatic exegesis*. The NT writers "proceed from the conviction that the meaning of the OT is a 'mystery' whose 'interpretation' can be given not by human reason but only by the Holy Spirit."<sup>28</sup> This is the basis of the NT writers' confidence in the correctness of their Biblical interpretation—it is "where the ultimate appeal and authority of their interpretation lie" (see Mt. 22:29; II Cor. 3:14ff.).<sup>29</sup>

### ***Jewish Methods of Biblical Exegesis***

#### ***Midrash***

The first Jewish exegetical method that finds parallels in the NT is *midrash*. The word stems from the Hebrew verb *דרש*, meaning "to resort to," "to seek," and in a figurative sense, "to read repeatedly," "to study," or "to interpret."<sup>30</sup> In essence, *midrash* was an interpretive exposition of Scripture for the purpose of applying it to the contemporary situation. *Midrash* varied in form from interpretive translations of the Hebrew text (such as the LXX or the Aramaic Targums) to rabbinic commentaries, where the text is followed by an exposition.<sup>31</sup> Ellis contends that the "proem" *midrash* most resembles NT expositions of the OT. It typically had the following form:

- The (Pentateuchal) text for the day.
- A second text, the proem or "opening" for the discourse.

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<sup>25</sup> Snodgrass, 418.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 419.

<sup>27</sup> Snodgrass., 418.

<sup>28</sup> Ellis, 214.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>30</sup> Longenecker, 32.

<sup>31</sup> Ellis, 202.

- Exposition containing additional Old Testament citations, parables, or other commentary, and linked to the initial texts by catchwords.
- A final text, usually repeating or alluding to the text for the day.<sup>32</sup>

Paul's discussion of his concern for unbelieving Israel in Rom. 9:6-29 closely resembles the form of the "proem" *midrash*:

<b>Verses</b>	<b>Description</b>
6-7	An <i>a priori</i> statement, "They are not all Israel who are descended from Israel," is supported with a citation from Gen. 21:12.
9	The <i>a priori</i> statement is reinforced by a second text: Gen. 18:10.
10-28	Further exposition on the <i>a priori</i> statement with additional citations which are linked to the initial texts by the catchwords <i>καλειν</i> and <i>υἱος</i> (vv. 12, 24ff., 27).
29	A final text alluding to the initial text with the catchword <i>σπέρμα</i> . <sup>33</sup>

### ***Pesher***

Another Jewish method of exegesis (attested particularly in the writings of the Jews at Qumran) with parallels in the NT is *pesher*.<sup>34</sup> The word *pesher* is from the Aramaic פִּשְׁרָא, which means "interpretation" or "solution."<sup>35</sup> *Pesher* presupposes that a given text "contains a mystery communicated by God that is not understood until the solution is made known by an inspired interpreter."<sup>36</sup> Two formulae marked an OT citation in *pesher* interpretation: פִּשְׁרוֹ עַל ("the interpretation is")<sup>37</sup> and an equivalent, *hû'h* ("this is").<sup>38</sup> Both also occur in varying forms in the OT, with the latter being translated οὗτος or οὗτος ἐστίν.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>33</sup> Ellis, 204.

<sup>34</sup> Snodgrass, 420.

<sup>35</sup> Longenecker, 38.

<sup>36</sup> Snodgrass, 420.

<sup>37</sup> Longenecker, 39.

<sup>38</sup> Ellis, 206.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 206-207.

The presupposition of *peshet* — that a mystery inherent in the text is revealed by God through a charismatically endowed individual — lends itself to an eschatological mindset. In fact, it closely parallels the eschatological usage of the word μυστήριον in the NT, which refers to a secret revealed (see Paul's usage in Rom. 16:25; Eph. 1:9, 3:3-4; Col. 1:24-27).<sup>40</sup> A number of OT citations in the NT conform to the *peshet* formula:

“Through Isaac your descendants will be named” (Gen. 21:12).  
That is (τοῦτ' ἐστίν) . . . the children of the promise are regarded as  
descendants. For this is (οὗτος) the word of promise, “. . . and  
Sarah shall have a son.”

Rom. 9:7-9

Jesus Christ the Nazarene . . . He is (οὗτος ἐστίν) the stone which  
was rejected by you (Ps. 118:2) . . . .

Ac. 4:10-11<sup>41</sup>

### **Testimonia**

The NT also contains *testimonia*, which are collections of OT Scriptures that have been “grouped thematically for apologetic, liturgical, and catechetical purposes.”<sup>42</sup> I Peter 2:6-10 and Rom. 9:25-33 both employ Hos. 2:33 as well as Isa. 8:14 and 28:16. Rather than copying from one another, Peter and Paul most likely had access to the same “stone” *testimonia* that had been circulating through the church.<sup>43</sup>

### **Joel 2:28-32 in Peter's Pentecost Sermon**

Now that the presuppositions and exegetical methods which the NT writers held in common with the Jewish hermeneutical practice have been explored, we can better evaluate and understand how Peter applies Joel's prophecy to the Pentecost event.

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<sup>40</sup> Günther Bornkamm, “μυστήριον,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. IV, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 822-824.

<sup>41</sup> Ellis, 208.

<sup>42</sup> Snodgrass, 422.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 423.

### ***The Original Historical Milieu of Joel's Ministry***

Joel himself has left no clues as to when his ministry occurred—no dates relative to the reign of any Samarian or Judahite king are given in the prophetic superscript. As a result, there is very little agreement among Biblical scholars about what was the historical context for Joel's prophecies. The extremes range from making him the first of the writing prophets to placing him after Malachi.<sup>44</sup> Stuart, while leaning toward a pre-exilic date (i.e., prior to 588-589 B.C.), leaves open the possibility that Joel prophesied in the wake of the final exile to Babylon.<sup>45</sup> While it is difficult to date Joel with any degree of certainty, VanGemen notes that it may be a tertiary issue given the universality Joel ascribes to his own message:

Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children,  
and their children to the next generation (Joel 1:3).<sup>46</sup>

### ***The Message of Joel 2:28-32***

While the theme of the Spirit's power in prophecy appears frequently in the OT, this charismatic activity is most often limited to certain individuals, viz., prophets, kings, and priests.<sup>47</sup> In an atmosphere of the promise of covenant renewal (Joel 2:17-27), Joel foresees a democratization of the Spirit amongst all the people of God—in the coming age of restoration, the entire covenant community “will possess and act via the empowering of the Spirit.”<sup>48</sup> Yahweh will pour out his Spirit “upon all flesh” (עַל-כָּל-בָּשָׂר), irrespective of age, social status, gender, or (ostensibly) nationality. The only stricture on this universal availability of the Spirit is stated in v. 32a: such promise is only for those “who call upon the name of Yahweh.”

The “wonders” or “omens” placed by Yahweh in the skies and the earth (vv. 30-31) are “supernatural portents” associated with the Day of the Lord—they herald Yahweh's coming to

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<sup>44</sup> Willem VanGemen, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 120.

<sup>45</sup> Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 31, ed. John D.W. Watts and James W. Watts (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 226. Cf. Nahum's judgement oracle against Nineveh (Nah. 1:1-8), where cataclysm in nature accompanies and heralds Yahweh's saving/judging activity.

<sup>46</sup> VanGemen, 120-121.

<sup>47</sup> Stuart, 229.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

deliver his people and “dispense with the wicked.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, this passage is thoroughly eschatological in scope, looking for fulfillment in the age to come. Not surprisingly, Joel 2:28-32 achieved an eschatological life in rabbinic tradition, which regarded the passage as a reference to “the final intervention of God in the last times . . . .”<sup>50</sup>

### **Acts 2:17-21**

Peter’s explanation of the Pentecost event (the Spirit’s coming and the subsequent speaking in tongues in v. 4) begins with the characteristic *peshet* formula (τοῦτο ἐστίν). The use of the verb ἀποφθεγγοεσθαι (“to address”) in v. 14 seems to indicate that Peter’s speech is divinely inspired. The same verb has already been used in 2:4 to describe Spirit-inspired utterance, and is used in the LXX of prophesying (see I Chron. 25:1.)<sup>51</sup> This fits with the requirement of *peshet* that a charismatically endowed individual is given revelatory insight into the hidden meaning of a text.

The replacement of the LXX’s “after this” (μετὰ ταῦτα, אַחֲרַיִךְ in the Masoretic Text) with ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις (“in the last days”) demonstrates the eschatological significance of the Pentecost event—“with the outpouring of the Spirit, the ‘last days’ have come.”<sup>52</sup> The fulfillment of the democratization of the Spirit promised by Joel had begun.

In his “*peshetic*” treatment of Joel 2:28-32a, Peter makes some additional alterations to the text:

1. To his insertion of ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις in v. 17, he adds λέγει ὁ θεός (“says God”), perhaps to underscore the divine inspiration of his *peshet* interpretation of Joel 2:28ff.
2. The language in v. 17 concerning young men seeing visions and elders having dreams reverses the order that appears in the LXX and the Masoretic Text (where elders are mentioned first). Bruce suggests that this is because “those on whom the Spirit first fell at Pentecost were all young.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Stuart, 261.

<sup>50</sup> Richard F. Zehnle, *Peter’s Pentecost Discourse: Tradition and Lukan Reinterpretation in Peter’s Speeches of Acts 2 and 3*, ed. Robert A. Kraft (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 30.

<sup>51</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 60.

<sup>52</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 121.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

3. The possessive μου (“my”) is added to δουλος/δουλας (“male/female servants”) in v. 18, making them God’s servants, “not merely persons of low social status.”<sup>54</sup> This complements the stricture of Joel 2:32a (cf. Ac. 2:21)—the promise of the Spirit’s outpouring is for anyone (regardless of social status) who calls upon the name of the Lord.
4. και προφητευσουσιν in v. 18 does not appear in the LXX or the Masoretic Text (MT). The phrase recapitulates material appearing in v. 17. Zehnle argues that this insertion is Lukan in origin, and serves to underscore the interpretation of the Pentecost event.<sup>55</sup> Longenecker views it as a Petrine addition, which “[breaks] into the quotation to emphasize the fact of the restoration of prophecy.”<sup>56</sup> It should be noted that there is nothing conclusively precludes the possibility that it was part of Peter’s address as delivered on the day of Pentecost.<sup>57</sup>
5. In v. 19, ἄνω . . . σημεια . . . κάτω, are also unique to Peter’s address. ἄνω and κάτω (“above” and “beneath”) are “rhetorical additions,” and σημεια is probably added to complement τέρατα (“wonders” or “omens”), as they appear together later in vv. 22 and 43.<sup>58</sup> As previously noted, these “signs and wonders” are portents of God’s eschatological saving/judging activity. Here they may refer more directly to cataclysmic events surrounding Jesus’ crucifixion, which would have been only a little more than seven weeks prior to the day of Pentecost (Lk. 23:44-45 refers to a darkening of the sun, Mt. 27:51 describes a violent earthquake).<sup>59</sup> In any case, that Peter mentions them in this context signifies the advent of the eschatological Day of the Lord has come—it is “a day of judgment to be sure, but more immediately the day of God’s salvation to all who invoke his name.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ben Witherington, III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 142.

<sup>55</sup> Zehnle, 33.

<sup>56</sup> Longenecker, 100.

<sup>57</sup> On this point, there is a source-critical problem. In all likelihood, Peter delivered this sermon in a Jewish setting, probably in Aramaic, quoting Joel 3:1-5a (English 2:28-32a) from the Targum. Some suggest that Luke has “Septuagintalized” Peter’s sermon in order to adapt it for a Greek-speaking audience—on this basis the alterations and additions to the LXX citation are often presumed to be introduced by Luke at a late date. Cf. Witherington, 138 with C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The International Critical Commentary, ed. J. A. Fullerton and C. E. B. Cranfield (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1994), 131; and Zehnle, 32-33. One factor that may point in favor of Petrine authenticity for Ac. 2:17-21 is that *peshet* interpretation is attested in Peter’s epistles as well. See Longenecker, 201-202. Given the “*peshetic*” nature of Ac. 2:17ff., perhaps it is best to attribute the changes and additions in the Joel text to Peter and regard Luke as a sort of amanuensis who took the necessary (but limited) freedoms to adapt Peter’s sermon for Greek readers.

<sup>58</sup> Bruce, 121.

<sup>59</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 62.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

## Summary

The study of Biblical exegesis in the apostolic period provides us with a valuable glimpse into the inspired process that brought us the New Testament. The exegetical presuppositions help us to understand the mindset and rationale of the New Testament writers as they worked with the text of the Hebrew scriptures in order to explicate the meaning and significance of Jesus' life and ministry. A knowledge of the Jewish interpretive conventions with which the New Testament writers were familiar brings clarity to some of the "stylized" uses of the Old Testament within the New that might otherwise seem confusing or veiled. In light of such information, the distinct purpose and import of additions and alterations such as Peter makes to Joel 2:28ff. in his Pentecost sermon can be better apprehended and applied. In short, an acquaintance with the New Testament writers' hermeneutic can help us to be more informed, more responsible exegetes.

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