

Araphat, Powell and Biblical Context

Article Three, "Why Emphasize Hebrew"

A friend of mine recently was watching some old news reels of peace negotiations in the Middle East and told this story. Luke spoke of a news clip which contained a meeting between Colin Powell and Yasar Araphat. In this seemingly congenial visit Yasar Araphat walked over to Colin Powell to show his cozy relationship with the American dignitary. He pleasantly smiled at the camera and reached out to shake Colin Powell's hand. Grasping Powell's right hand with his right hand Araphat further emphasized his friendship by grabbing Powell's right hand with his remaining left hand giving the big Texas, "I am really glad to see you," double hand shake. I am sure Colin Powell felt warmly received as he should have--Or should he? Luke relayed this story to me because he knew the implications. Do you know whether Colin Powell should be pleased with this gesture or not?

With a little understanding of the Arab culture and practice one might get a completely different picture from our American cultural understanding. In Arab culture, as in most Moslem countries, you should never offer anything to anyone with the left hand. If you do so, it would be a terrible insult. Please forgive me for being so crude as to tell you about this, but this will show a need expressed in the rest of the article. Toilet paper is practically unheard of in the Arab world. There is no substitute. The practice is to use the left hand for the necessary clean up and not use it for anything else. It is called the profane hand. No Arab would eat with his left hand, nor would he ever take something handed to him by someone's left hand. For Yasar Araphat to use this hand was a way he could appear on Arab TV to be giving the worst insult possible to Colin Powell, while in the Western world appear to be very co-operative. The smile at the camera appeared to be a sly smirk to the Moslems since it was followed with a foul gesture, but looked like a congenial sincere act of kindness to the American audience since it was followed by a hardy handshake. Needless to say, the practice of the culture affects the understanding of the viewer.

In like manner the practice of the Biblical culture affects the understanding of the Bible. Passages of Scripture take on new meaning when the Hebraic context is removed. When someone mentions "*keeping it in context*" it is often thought to mean that the previous few verses should be considered when interpreting the text, but the above story emphasizes that context can also involve culture. I wish to introduce another part of context that is often overlooked in the New Testament scholarly community. It is probable that they do not yet perceive the importance. If their paradigm does not require taking Hebrew into account, it would even more so overlook ancient methods of preparing a scriptural argument. The New Testament is really a book of exegesis (interpretation). It uses the passages of the Law, Prophets and Psalms to explain why Yehoshua should be considered Messiah.

In the previous articles in this series, we discussed the ancient schools of Biblical studies found in Jerusalem. There were two schools, one being the school of Shammai and the other being the school of Hillel. Hillel in his attempt to teach the next generation of scholars developed seven rules by which he believed his students could safely extract information from the Biblical texts. Many of these rules could be derived from the Scriptures themselves. These rules were taught as acceptable methods for developing a good theological argument. This becomes even more important when one recognizes

that Paul the most prolific writer in the New Testament studied under Gamliel,¹ Hillel's grandson and third generation school master for the School of Hillel. Paul most likely was a graduate of the school of Hillel. If this were the case, a good student might use the seven rules extensively throughout his writings.

This must be the case since Paul uses the rules of Hillel over and over again. Especially when he is developing an argument for a doctrinal position. The book of Hebrews goes from one rule of Hillel to another in order to develop the position and accomplishments of messiah. Considering this, let us review a rule of Hillel and look to see if it adds any previously unknown context.

The first rule of Hillel is called "Light and Heavy." Calling this a rule may be an overstatement. The Hebrew language did not have a series of words for the sequence of good, better, best. They had words for good, and for bad, but no specific words which were recognized as giving a progression of good or a progression of bad. To compensate for the absence of a specific word there were several phrases developed to generate the same idea. One such phrase was, "king of kings," meaning, this king is greater than all other kings. From this one example you might recognize other phrases that were written in a similar manner. To develop another way of presenting the same concept, Hebrew speakers used a comparison phrase, "how much more," to show a progression of importance. Hillel recognized that a progression of importance is a proper way to develop an argument and to make applications concerning God's judgments. For example, If king David, God's beloved, was punished for adultery, then *how much more* should we expect to be punished for the same offense. An example from the Tenakh (Old Testament) where this phrase is being used to show a progression of importance follows.

^{NKJV} **2 Kings 5:13** And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, "My father, *if* the prophet had told you *to do* something great, would you not have done *it*? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?"

In the New Testament this takes on a new dimension. It is used as a way to determine application of Scripture. The reason for this change came from the fact that Hillel had developed the rules and New Testament writers were using the best accepted methods for presenting their teachings. Yehoshua (Jesus) and Shaul (Paul) used this technique often. A review of the New Testament will expose this rule being used over and over again. Below is one example, but you may also look in Luke 12:28, Rom 11:12 & 28, 1Cor 6:3, Phi 1:16, Heb 8:6 & 9:14.

^{NKJV} **Luke 12:24** "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?"

The above verse and the list of passages preceding it are all using an *explicit* form of light and heavy.

¹ ^{NKJV} **Acts 22:3** "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. (Gamliel is the Hebraic spelling while Gamaliel is a transliteration of the Greek texts)

When the phrase, “how much more,” is used we can easily determine that the author is using this method of explanation. Yet the phrase is not required for the use of this form. Anytime one is comparing two objects of similar nature and inferring one is greater than the other in order to make a specific application, they are using the method of interpretation called light and heavy.

Yehoshua (Jesus) uses the method of Light and Heavy in John 7:23 to argue that healing is not forbidden on the Sabbath. He uses the practice of circumcising a baby on the Sabbath as a basis to his argument that healing is not forbidden.

(John 7:23 NKJV) "If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath?"

In this case, Yehoshua neglects to use the tell tail phrase, “how much more.” He implies that circumcision is of lesser value than a complete healing since truly the young one could grow and function normally without ever being circumcised. You can see that Yehoshua expected his audience to understand his argument without much explanation. He was not attempting to make circumcision of no importance. The fact that circumcision was of such importance that the Sabbath law could be broken proved that there could be no forbidding of something even greater than circumcision. Now we are prepared to read a verse that is misunderstood by many because they do not recognize the method of Light and Heavy is being used.

(NKJV Col 2:16) So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, (17) which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

This takes the dietary laws, festivals, new moons and Sabbaths, and calls them *a shadow*. The term “shadow” is used to imply that they are a *light* in comparison to the “substance” which is a *heavy*. Christianity uses this as if it were good and evil. One would never compare a great thing to a thing of unimportance. The *light* must be of like nature with the *heavy* in order for the comparison to be significant. If you state, “the prison food is awful, how much more my wife’s cooking,” I doubt your wife will feel complimented.

Since Light and Heavy also works in the negative, when comparing a bad thing to any other thing the second object is considered worse. Therefore, your wife should feel insulted by the previous comparison. A proper compliment would be paid in the following scenario.

A business man and his wife are entertaining a client by taking the client and his wife to a very fancy restaurant. After the restaurant they go to a play on Broadway, then cap off the evening by going to the host’s home for a desert made by his wife. If the business man were to say, “Tiffany’s and The Music Man are a mere shadow of the good thing to come; my wife’s Chocolate Swirled Cherry Cake,” then the phrase would be properly used so that it would compliment his wife. This statement in no way degrades the previous experience.

Once we discover the use of “shadow” is an implied light and heavy, the phrase let no one judge you becomes more understandable. One cannot keep another from judging him. If someone were perfect, still he would be criticized. Take all the criticism of Yehoshua for example. This should idiomatically be understood as a command to “behave properly in regard to,” or “act as Torah has prescribed.” Thus, the verse used by some in Christianity to argue against keeping the dietary laws, the festivals and the Sabbaths are actually commanding us to keep them as prescribed by Scripture.

This shows how a passage can be completely reversed in meaning if we do not understand the Hebraic nature of its origin. This is precisely as was reported in the opening story. Those who knew the context knew the intent of Araphat. In the Colossians passage the Hebraic nature is discernable even in the Greek text, but it is necessary for one to properly expose that context in order to understand the passage. When reading Colossians it would be easy to understand it either way in the English, but when we recognize Paul as a Hebrew who studied under Gamliel, the grandson of Hillel, and who thought with Hebrew concepts and probably wrote everything in Hebrew to be translated into Greek, we can see that Paul truly was commanding us to keep the feasts properly because they spoke of Messiah and the work He was to do on this earth. The Hebrew origin and context to the Apostolic writings is of great importance to understanding the content of Scripture.

Hopefully this is sufficient to cause you to do some extra study of the Seven Rules of Hillel. We have only discussed one and the other six are just as helpful in understanding many New Testament arguments. To do a more extensive study of all seven of these rules there is an article called, "The Seven Rules of Hillel," found on Dry Bones Restoration Company's web site on the **Articles** page. It should help expand your understanding of these rules and find some references where most are used.

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Dry Bones Restoration Company is a ministry devoted to teaching methods of extracting the Hebraic origin from the New Testament and making strong connections to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. We teach a course in methods of research and exegesis called "Biblical Research Techniques," or a less stuffy title, "Bible Detectives." These seminars are available for congregations and study groups wishing to learn how to make such connections.

Frank Houtz, founder of Dry Bones Restoration Company, is also an author and has written several books including a book on the Sabbath "A Sign Between You and Me," designed to help new Sabbath keepers be equipped with good answers as to why the New Testament did not end Sabbath keeping. Other books and booklets published by Dry Bones Restoration Company and written by Frank Houtz include, "Authority," "Machanayim-The Two Camps of Israel," "Episunagoge-A Study

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Mary Lynn Houtz is an artist, musician and songwriter who devotes her talent to furthering the Hebraic understanding of the Scriptures. Her CD "Songs for Israel," put many significant passages to song. Other CDs will soon be available.