



**Gutenberg College Summer Institute 2015
REUNION: Tanakh and the Gospel of Matthew**

**Talk 8: Background to Jeremiah 31:15 and Matthew 2:18
Jack Crabtree**

I. Jeremiah 31:15

A. Ramah

1. Ramah in Benjamin (there were other villages named Ramah—in Gilead, in Asher, in Naphtali, and in the Negev) was situated near the border of Benjamin and Ephraim along the main road running north from Jerusalem into the hill country of Ephraim. (Joshua 18:21-25)
2. Deborah held court under a palm tree between Ramah and Bethel. (Judges 4:5)
3. Ramah was the home of Samuel. It was in Ramah that the elders asked Samuel to appoint a king over them. (1 Samuel 8:4-6)
 - a) David fled to Samuel at Ramah and was pursued there by Saul. (1 Samuel 19:18-20:1)
4. Baasha, king of the northern kingdom (Israel), fortified Ramah in order to prevent anyone from entering or leaving Judah, as he sought to isolate Judah. (1 King 15:17; 2 Chronicles 16:1)
5. Ramah was the place where the Babylonians kept the captives from Judah and Jerusalem before they were deported to Babylon. (Jeremiah 40:1)
6. Ramah is also mentioned in Judges 19:11-13, Isaiah 10:29, and Hosea 5:8.

B. Rachel

1. The second wife of Jacob (Israel)—the third of the great patriarchs of Israel—the wife that Jacob had originally and always loved. (He had been tricked by Laban into marrying Leah, Rachel's older sister, first.)
2. Rachel bore two sons: Joseph and Benjamin. Joseph had two sons: Manasseh and Ephraim.
3. Rachel died while giving birth to Benjamin as Jacob was journeying from Bethel to Bethlehem (Ephrath) while there was still some distance to go to Bethlehem. Jacob set up a pillar to mark the location of Rachel's tomb there. We don't know exactly where Rachel's tomb (at Zelzah [1 Samuel 10:2]) is, but Ramah is situated on the road between Bethel and Bethlehem. Hence, it is possible that Rachel's tomb is somewhere in the vicinity of Ramah. (The traditional site of Rachel's tomb is just outside of Bethlehem, but it is likely that the traditional site is wrong. According to 1 Samuel 10:2, her tomb is likely further north than that. [The traditional site is in Judah. 1 Samuel 10:2 locates it in Benjamin.] Hence, it could indeed be nearer to Ramah than it is to Bethlehem.)
4. Last clause of the cited verse: "because they are not."

5. אֵינְנִי פִי
6. ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν

C. Jeremiah 31:22

1. The last rhetorical statement of this prophesy may shed significant light on the fundamental meaning of this prophesy. In the Hebrew text it reads: "For YHWH has created a new thing in the land (earth) [*eretz*], a woman [*neqebah*] will encompass [*sabab*] a man [*geber*]."
 - a) *neqebah* = a female
 - b) *geber* = a grown, adult male
 - (1) *gabar* = to prevail, to be greater or stronger
 - c) *sabab* = circle around, circumnavigate, circulate, turn, bring back, bring around, go back, circumvent, rotate, circle, surround, enclose, change, or transfer.
 - (1) Could a female enclosing (*sabab*) a *geber* be a way of describing a pregnant woman in gestation with a *geber*??

D. Questions

1. Why Ramah? What is the significance of Ramah being the location of the weeping in this prophesy?
2. Why Rachel? What is the significance of having it be Rachel who is "weeping for her children" in this prophesy?
3. Who exactly are the "children" that Rachel is weeping for in this prophesy? Why is she weeping for them? (What does "because they are not" mean?)
4. What does "your work will be rewarded" mean? (See Jeremiah 31:16.)
5. What does "they will return from the land of the enemy" mean? (See Jeremiah 31:16.) Who will return from what land? To where will they return?
6. What light does Jeremiah 31:17–19 shed on the meaning of this prophesy?
7. Does the last statement of the prophesy (Jeremiah 31:22) shed any light on the essential point of the prophesy? If so, what? What is meant by "a woman [*neqebah*] will encompass a man [*geber*]?"

II. Matthew 2:18

A. Questions

1. What does Matthew mean when he suggests that what the prophet Jeremiah said was "fulfilled" by the event in question?

- a) What exactly does the word "fulfill" mean?
 - b) What sort of relationship is Matthew suggesting exists between the prophesy of Jeremiah and the events being described by Matthew? (See separate handout, "The New Testament Use of Hebrew Scriptures: Three Issues.")
2. Exactly what aspect or aspects of the event in question constitutes a "fulfillment" of the prophecy of Jeremiah?
- a) Is it the grief and mourning of the murdered babies' mothers?
 - b) Is it because the murdered babies "were not"?
 - c) Is it because the babies were murdered in an attempt by an enemy of God to thwart God's purposes?
 - d) Is it because the murdered babies' mothers were rewarded for their sorrow?
 - e) Or, is it something else? What is it? What is it about the event that "fulfills" the prophesy made by Jeremiah?
3. What does Matthew intend to accomplish by pointing out the fact that the events he is describing "fulfill" Jeremiah's prophecy?
- a) Does he mean to offer evidence that Jesus is the Christ?
 - b) Does he mean to underline the accuracy and inspired authority of the Scriptures (the prophets)?
 - c) Does he mean to point to the fact that every aspect of the birth of Jesus happened—down to the last detail—in conformity to God's will and design?
 - d) Does he mean to highlight something about the significance of this baby that was being born?

III. Relationship of Matthew to Jeremiah

(See separate handout, "The New Testament Use of Hebrew Scriptures: Three Issues.")



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**The New Testament Use of Hebrew Scripture: Three Issues
Jack Crabtree**

I. Relationship of a Hebrew Scriptural Text to Its New Testament Citation: The "Fulfillment" Relation

A. What are the logically possible relationships that could exist between a text of the Hebrew Scriptures and some event or truth described by a New Testament author?

1. Prediction > Event Predicted

a) The Hebrew text could predict a specific future event X; the New Testament text could narrate that very event X.

(1) In this case, the event narrated by the New Testament text can be said to "fulfill" the Hebrew text.

b) Hypothetical example: If a prophet predicted that Jesus of Nazareth would first ride a donkey at his third birthday party (A), and a New Testament author narrates an account of Jesus' third birthday party where he rides a donkey for the first time (B), then B fulfills A in the sense that A is the prediction of B.

2. Prediction > Necessary Concomitant of Event Predicted

a) The Hebrew text could predict a specific future event X; the New Testament text could narrate an event which constitutes a necessary concomitant of X—that is, an event that, in some way, requires that X will occur (or that X has occurred).

(1) The event described by the New Testament text (=Y) could be a sufficient condition or necessary consequence of X, such that if Y has occurred, then X must necessarily occur or must necessarily have already occurred.

(2) In this case, the event narrated by the New Testament text can be said to "fulfill" the Hebrew text.

b) Hypothetical examples:

(1) If a prophet predicted that God would appoint a Son to reign over Israel in the coming kingdom of God (A), and a New Testament author narrates the birth of the one whom God has created to be that Son (B), then B fulfills A in the sense that, since B is true, it must necessarily follow that A will be true.

(2) If a prophet predicted that God would assign his Son to suffer and die (A), and a New Testament author narrates the story of the Son's resurrection from the dead (B), then B fulfills A in the sense that, since B is true (that is, B has occurred), it must necessarily follow that A is true (that is, that A has already occurred).

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The New Testament Use of Hebrew Scripture: Three Issues

3. Truth > Ordinary Instantiation of This Truth
 - a) The Hebrew text could contain a specific Truth; the New Testament text could contain that very same Truth.
 - (1) The truth in view could be any element of the truth about God, mankind, history, God's purposes, God's promises, or any other aspect of reality.
 - (2) In this case, what is asserted by the New Testament text can be said to "fulfill" the Hebrew text.
 - b) Hypothetical example: If a Hebrew text reflects the truth that God is merciful (A), and a New Testament text also—in an entirely different set of circumstances—reflects the truth that God is merciful (B), then B fulfills A in the sense that B embodies exactly the same truth earlier embodied in A.
4. Truth > More Significant Instantiation of This Truth
 - a) The Hebrew text could contain a specific Truth; the New Testament text could contain that very same Truth, but contain it in such a way that it more fully, more perfectly, more dramatically, and/or more significantly reflects that Truth than does the Hebrew text.
 - (1) Again, the truth in view could be any element of the truth about God, mankind, history, God's purposes, God's promises, or any other aspect of reality.
 - (2) In this case, what is asserted by the New Testament text can be said to "fulfill" the Hebrew text.
 - b) Hypothetical example: If a Hebrew text reflects the truth that God is merciful (A), and a New Testament text—in an entirely different set of circumstances—reflects, in an even fuller, more significant, and more dramatic way, the truth that God is merciful (B), then B fulfills A in the sense that B embodies even more fully or more perfectly the same truth that was earlier embodied in A.
5. Event > Less Significant Foreshadowed Event
 - a) The Hebrew text could narrate a very significant historical event that the divine author of reality planned to recapitulate in some less significant future event; the New Testament narrates the particular future event that the divine author planned as a recapitulation of the earlier event. In this case, the event narrated by the New Testament Scriptures is significantly less important than the event narrated by the Hebrew scriptures.
 - (1) In such a case, the event narrated by the New Testament derives its meaning and significance from the fact that it recapitulates the event narrated by the Hebrew text.
 - (2) In this case, the event described by the New Testament text can be said to "fulfill" the event described by the Hebrew text.

b) TWO QUESTIONS:

- (1) Does this relationship allow a person to anticipate the event narrated by the New Testament on the basis of the event narrated by the Hebrew Scripture? Or, can it be observed only retrospectively?
- (2) How do I know whether I have discovered the creativity of the divine author rather than having exercised my own creativity as an intelligent observer?

c) Hypothetical example: If a Hebrew text narrates the event of God liberating his people from slavery in Egypt (A), and a New Testament text—in an entirely different set of circumstances—narrates an event about an individual being delivered from his bondage to a demon (B), then B perhaps fulfills A in the sense that B recapitulates the more important event A.

6. Event > More Significant Foreshadowed Event

a) The Hebrew text could narrate a historical event that the divine author of reality planned to recapitulate in some more significant future event; the New Testament narrates the particular future event that the divine author planned as a recapitulation of the earlier event. In this case, the event narrated by the New Testament Scriptures is significantly more important than the event narrated by the Hebrew Scriptures.

- (1) In such a case, the event narrated by the Hebrew text derives its meaning and significance from the fact that it foreshadows the event narrated by the New Testament text.
- (2) In this case, the event described by the New Testament text can be said to "fulfill" the event described by the Hebrew text.

b) TWO QUESTIONS:

- (1) Does this relationship allow a person to anticipate the event narrated by the New Testament on the basis of the event narrated by the Hebrew Scripture? Or, can it be observed only retrospectively?
- (2) How do I know whether I have discovered the creativity of the divine author rather than having exercised my own creativity as an intelligent observer?

c) Hypothetical example: If a Hebrew text narrates the event of God rescuing individuals from the bite of a serpent sent to judge them for their unbelief by some means of deliverance that God has provided for them (A), and a New Testament text narrates an event wherein God provides a means of deliverance whereby an individual can be rescued from eternal condemnation (B), then B fulfills A in the sense that A foreshadows and is recapitulated by the more important event B.

II. The Stakes

- A. What is at stake with respect to how we understand the relation of a Hebrew text to its use by a New Testament author?
 - 1. What is at stake is the credibility of the New Testament author, the credibility of the Scriptures, and the credibility of the gospel itself.
- B. A New Testament author is making some claim about the meaning and significance of a text of the Hebrew Scriptures.
 - 1. Upon what is the New Testament author's claim based? It would appear that the New Testament author is appealing to the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures. Is his claim based on a rational and valid reading of those Scriptures? Or is it based on a contrived, artificial, and fallacious reading of those Scriptures?
 - a) If the former, then my acceptance of the New Testament author's claim is supported, reinforced, and encouraged by the fact that he is making a claim that is congruent with what the Scriptures themselves actually claim or teach.
 - b) If the latter, then my acceptance of the New Testament author's claim is completely and utterly dependent upon the New Testament author's personal credibility and authority.
 - (1) But, then, I must grant the personal credibility and authority to the New Testament author in the face of empirical evidence of his lack of credibility.
 - (a) Why would I accept any claim he might make when the New Testament author has demonstrated his willingness to advance a contrived, artificial, and fallacious interpretation of the Scriptures? How does that encourage me to find him credible with respect to anything else he might say? If he is willing to be tendentious in his reading of the Scriptures, why would I trust him not to be tendentious in any other fact claims or in any interpretation of facts that he might offer?
- C. Any interpretation of what a New Testament author is doing that involves him in a contrived, artificial, and/or fallacious reading of the text of the Hebrew Scripture undermines and destroys that New Testament author's integrity and the integrity of his whole account regarding Jesus and/or the gospel.
 - 1. Some are tempted to maintain that, while his interpretive method is contrived, artificial, and fallacious, it is alright because the New Testament author is simply engaging in exegesis that is culturally accepted by his contemporaries.

- a) This does not solve the problem. Being a method widely accepted by his culture does not make what the New Testament author is doing acceptable. If it is fallacious, it is fallacious. It does not matter that his whole culture trades in fallacious arguments. Wide acceptance does not make it valid. For the New Testament author to have any credibility with you and me, he must not advance fallacious arguments based on fallacious interpretations.
 - b) This suggestion will have currency with people who view the Bible as just a human artifact. But for anyone who grants divine authority to the Bible and believes it to be inspired and inerrant, such a claim makes no sense. *Ad hominem* argument is something we might expect in the context of fallible human discourse; but it is unacceptable in the context of inspired, authoritative Scripture.
 - (1) In other words, we can expect biblical authors to have used fallacious arguments that were accepted by their contemporaries if the Bible is nothing other than a fallible human artifact. But, if the Bible is a divinely-inspired, authoritative revelation from God, then it would be completely incongruous to maintain that its authors employed inherently fallacious arguments.
2. Some are tempted to maintain that, while his interpretive method is contrived, artificial, and fallacious, it is nonetheless not problematic because the New Testament author is divinely inspired. Due to its origin, what he is saying can be known to be true even though he grounds it in fallacious reasoning and interpretation. His arguments may be nonsense, but they are inspired, and therefore, authoritative nonsense.
- a) This is an absurd position. The very notion of "inspired nonsense" is absurd—and perhaps blasphemous. Not only does this suggestion misunderstand the workings of God, but it also ignores the epistemological needs of mankind.
 - (1) God never asks us to believe truly irrational, absurd things simply because he is telling us to believe it.
 - (2) Contrary to popular conception, to believe totally irrational and absurd things because God, allegedly, tells us to believe them does not constitute what the Bible calls "faith." Rather, to do so would constitute intellectually irresponsible (and, therefore, evil) gullibility.

III. Methodological Priority

- A. Which is more sacrosanct: our understanding of the Greek language or our grasp of the rhetorical structure and meaning of a passage?
 - 1. Do we take our English translation as a given and assume that the English idiom used in that translation rightly captures the relation between the content of the Hebrew text and the content of the New Testament text?
 - a) That is, are we to accept the validity of our English translation (and its understanding of the Greek language) and then construct an understanding of the relation between the New Testament text and the Hebrew text in such a way that the validity of our English translation is preserved? Is this so

important that, if necessary, we ought to violate commonsense rationality in order to do so?

2. Or, should we trust our ability to discern the connection that the New Testament author intends us to see between the Hebrew text and some New Testament event and then, as necessary, we modify our analysis of the Greek syntax, our understanding of New Testament Greek idiom, and our translation into English accordingly?
 - a) That is, are we to accept the validity of commonsense rationality (and what it requires with regard to how to understand the structure and meaning of a New Testament passage and its relation to the Hebrew Scriptures) and then derive an understanding of the language of the New Testament in such a way that the validity of our understanding of the structure and meaning of the New Testament passage and its relation to the Hebrew Scriptures is preserved? Is this so important that, if necessary, we ought to violate a traditional understanding of the Greek language (as reflected in grammars, lexicons, etc.) in order to do so?