

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF JEWISH COMMENTARIES AND
PATRISTIC LITERATURE ON THE BOOK OF RUTH

by

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Summary

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This dissertation deals with two exegetical traditions, that of the early Jewish and the patristic schools. The research work for this project urges the need to analyze both Jewish and Patristic literature in which specific types of hermeneutics are found. The title of the thesis (“compared study of patristic and Jewish exegesis”) indicates the goal and the scope of this study. These two different hermeneutical approaches from a specific period of time will be compared with each other illustrated by their interpretation of the book of Ruth. The thesis discusses how the process of interpretation was affected by the interpreters’ society in which they lived. This work in turn shows the relationship between the cultural variants of the exegetes and the biblical interpretation.

Both methodologies represented by Jewish and patristic exegesis were applicable and social relevant. They maintained the interest of community and fulfilled the need of their generation. Referring to early Jewish exegesis, the interpretations upheld the position of Ruth as a heir of the Davidic dynasty. They advocated the importance of Boaz’s and Ruth’s virtue as a good illustration of morality in Judaism. Early Christian exegetes were also interested in the basic values of the social community. They maintained the important social value of marriage as an example of the emphasis on virtue. They also paid much emphasis on teaching morality. Concerning the doctrine and value of Judaism, the sage upheld the principle of monotheism and the legitimacy of Davidic dynasty. In turn, patristic fathers urged for the introduction of the gospel through the salvation of Jesus Christ in the process of interpretation.

From our investigation, we can formulate the thesis that both early Jewish and Christian exegetes did not explain the text for its inherent meaning, but rather

used the text for their own purposes. Normally, the main task and mission of an exegete should be to find the meaning inherent in the text. We clearly indicated that both exegetical schools of interpreters did not find meaning in the text of the book of Ruth, but rather read in some agendas and issues into the text from outside, from the exegetes themselves and their surrounding backgrounds. They tend to meet the requirement of the social and political expectations of their reader community. Interpretation was used as a tool for this purpose. They conducted an application rather than explanation. This thesis can be explained by the fact that the meaning of a text depends on the value and pre-set agenda of the exegete who interprets it. Both the text and its interpreters are part of a specific historical, political, social and cultural environment, which imposed influence on them.

Key terms: Oral Torah
Aggadah
“One Recension” theory
“Day of the Lord”
An “*amora*”
Middot
Exegetical and eisegetical
“Noahide Laws”
The Alexandrian School
The Antiochene School

Key terms

1. Oral Torah

It was transmitted from master to disciple, from God to Moses, Moses to Aaron, Aaron to Joshua, and so on down, until it was ultimately recorded in the documents produced by the rabbinic sages of the first six centuries CE. Rabbinic tradition holds that the Oral Torah contained a revelation of all possible interpretations of the written Torah to Moses.

2. Aggadah

Aggadah is those parts of Torah including written or oral sections that are narrative in nature. It is meant to include purported biography, theology, exhortation and folklore.

3. "One Recension" theory

It refers to a development that the whole range of variants leads to the simple recognition that all surviving codices are relatively late in relation to the *originals*. They all represent one recension and all stem from one source.

4. "Day of the Lord"

It is a term for the illustration of destruction of the world and Israel community in older prophecy and as day of salvation in newer prophecy. Apocalyptic group used the last view for interpreting Biblical text.

5. An 'amora'

He is a speaker or interpreter. The word originates from the root *amar*, "say", "name", or "explain" He is actually the interpreters or commentators on the Mishnah.

6. *Middot*

Middot are a number of principles of Jewish interpretation. They refer to the hermeneutic rules used to interpret the Bible in aggadic and halakhic texts so as to produce new religious laws and broaden the application of those already in existence.

7. Exegetical and eisegetical

The task of midrashic commentators may be seen as two-fold as both exegetical and eisegetical. The former involves drawing out the meaning implicit in Scripture and the latter reading meaning into Scripture.

8. “Noahide Laws”

“Noahide Laws” are incumbent upon all the descendants of Noah that is all of humanity. Originally, 606 commandments are incumbent only upon Jews. An additional seven, called by the sages the “Noahide Laws” is summed up as 613 commandments of the Torah.

9. The Alexandrian School

The Alexandrian School of exegesis consisted of fathers who expected to find different layers of meaning within a biblical text. It dealt with typological interpretation, whereby parts of the Hebrew Bible are read as a foreshadowing and prediction of the events of the Gospels.

10. The Antiochene School

The first representative of the Antiochene School was the apologist Theophilus of Antioch. The school promoted an environment well known for producing interpreters versed in careful textual criticism, philological and historical studies and the cultivation of classical rhetoric. The Antiochene School and its tradition reacted to the Alexandrian allegorists.

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