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Use of Old Testament in John 12:13-15

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Introduction. Peter assures believers who did not experience God's perfect revelation in Christ (Heb 1:1-3) that written revelation is "more sure" (II Pet 1:16-19). The reason for the reliability of written revelation is "that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (II Pet 1:20-21).¹ The process of inspiration determined the product of inspiration. The Holy God as the ultimate source and the Holy Spirit as the guiding source produced written revelation that is wholly reliable and trustworthy. The process of inspiration produced a verbally and plenary inspired product. Although men were used to write Scripture, Scripture is not the product of either man's scholarship or man's imagination. Scripture is the product of God. The process of inspiration determines the product of inspiration.

On the other hand, the product of inspiration reveals something about the process of inspiration. Many questions about the process of inspiration could be asked: How were Scripture writers "moved by the Holy Spirit"? What is involved in being "moved by the Holy Spirit"? Were writers so controlled that their talents and skills and personalities were totally overshadowed? Were writers only controlled in a more general way so that literary forms, structure, research sources, and style completely reflect individual writers or contemporary practices? A study of the product of inspiration helps answer questions about the process of inspiration.

One area of Scripture where the evidence of the product is most revealing concerning the process of inspiration is the use of OT quotations by NT writers. Understanding how the OT is used

by a NT writer will help us understand what it meant to be "moved by the Holy Spirit." Due to the extent of OT quotations in the NT, this investigation will be limited to two OT quotations in Jn 12:13-15. By investigating the product of John's use of the OT at the Triumphal Entry, the process of John's use of the OT may be more clearly understood.

Background to John's Use of the OT in John 12:13-15

A survey of the cross-reference system of Aland's second edition of *The Greek New Testament* produces 121 OT quotations, allusions or parallels in the Gospel of John. Of these, eighteen are printed in bold face type in the text to indicate direct quotations from the OT.² Archer and Chirichigno, on the other hand, without explanation or qualification, list fourteen direct OT quotations in John's gospel.³ Edwin Freed lists eighteen with the explanation that "by the term 'quotation' is meant those passages in the gospel which are apparently meant to be direct citations and are so indicated by the use of some introductory formula."⁴ Merrill Tenney finds 47 OT references in John of which eighteen are direct quotations and 29 are allusions or general references. But he does so only after noting that,

Identification of quotations is not always easy. Seldom did the authors give the exact derivation of the texts that they quoted, and still less often did they quote verbatim. Very frequently they made only a casual allusion, so that one may not always be certain whether the writer intended to recall a specific passage or whether he were simply using general Biblical language that had become part of ordinary parlance. . . . The exact number of references to the Old Testament in John is debatable.⁵

For the purpose of this study Archer and Chirichigno's list of fourteen quotations is being used. Of these fourteen quotations, seven are only in John and four others are found only in John and the Synoptics.

Introductory formulas employed by John. All of the fourteen OT quotations, with the possible exception of John 12:13, have introductory formulas. John's use of the introductory formula is far more extensive than any other Gospel writer.⁶ A survey of his quotations reveals that of ten different formulas all are distinct to John. "Not one of John's formulas occurs in exactly the same way anywhere else in the N.T." observes Freed.⁷ John consistently marks his direct quotations of the OT with formula introductions.

The process of inspiration determined the product of inspiration.

Extent and Nature of John's use of the OT. A survey of quoted OT material in the Gospels is deceptive, leading one to believe that John used the OT far less frequently than the Synoptic writers. A more accurate comparison of usage must consider more than quoted material. Tenney claims that "in comparison with the other Gospels, John uses the Old Testament extensively."⁸ Then to illustrate that claim he offers Scroggie's analysis of OT references in the Gospels. In his analysis Scroggie found 63 references in Mark, 90 in Luke, 129 in Matthew and 124 in John. Based on the length of each book, John's use appears to be quite extensive.

A true comparison must go beyond bare statistics if one is to appreciate fully John's use of the OT. Tenney understands the numbers to show "that OT concepts were basic in the message of the Evangelist, and that his teaching was intended to be an interpretation of them."⁹ Beyond that he notes that "the Fourth Gospel draws its organization, some of its imagery, and its fundamental theological concepts from the Old Testament."¹⁰ Richard Morgan sees the fabric of the OT woven even more finely into the text of the Gospel. He points out that John not only records the events of his gospel record around the framework of OT feasts but also that at every crucial moment in the development of his gospel the OT is present. He also notes that "further evidence of the OT foundation of the Fourth Gospel is witnessed by the way in which the *Messiah repeatedly manifests himself in situations where Hebrew history and hope are most evident.*" (author's emphasis)¹¹

John's use of the OT appears to be far from simple, far from a 'cut and paste' approach. John apparently like a skilled craftsman has woven the OT throughout the strands of his work. Barrett notes the complexity of John's use of the OT stating:

To draw, however, from the small number of explicit quotations the conclusion that John had less interest in and a smaller knowledge of the Old Testament than the other evangelists would be a serious mistake. Closer examination of the gospel shows that the Old Testament themes, often crudely set forth in the earlier gospels, have thoroughly permeated John's thought, and appear, often without reference to particular passages of the Old Testament, again and again."¹²

Morris, quoting K Stendahl, attributes this complexity to John's scholarship. He states, "Thus the Johannine method is not

what is usually meant by loose citations, or those more or less freely quoted from memory. It is rather the opposite since the form of John's quotations is certainly the fruit of scholarly treatment of written OT texts."¹³

Freed, after surveying all fourteen quotations extensively, would allow for "the factor of memory" to account for some differences in John's quotations, but concludes that "in reality . . . the writer adapts each quotation to his context, to his literary style, and to the whole scheme of composition."¹⁴ He further explains that John's "method presupposes and reveals a thorough training in the Jewish scriptures and tradition and a thorough knowledge of their context."¹⁵

John's use of the OT appears to be far from superficial and simple. It is not truly reflected in quotations and numbers alone. It is not only foundational but vitally joined to each thread of the narrative John has woven in his Gospel account. John's work appears to be that of the skilled craftsman and not that of the school boy.

John's sources for OT quotations. If indeed John's use of the OT is that of the craftsman, it might be assumed that he relied on more than one text from which to weave his Gospel. Archer and Chirichigno in their work classify nine of John's fourteen quotations as agreeing equally with the MT or LXX; two as agreeing more closely with the MT against the LXX; one as agreeing with the LXX against the MT; and two as uncertain.¹⁶ Not all writers would agree with the ambiguity of this survey. Freed concludes that "where John agrees exactly with the OT text it is always with the LXX and we can be certain of this in only 4 places: 2:17; 10:34; 12:38; 19:24 . . . In no place does John agree exactly with the reading of the MT."¹⁷

Two other minor sources are also sometimes claimed as possibilities for John's use. One such source is the Targums. Freed after claiming evidence for John's possible use of the Targums "in several clear cases" lists 6:31, 6:45, and 7:42 as showing "some affinities to the texts of the Targums."¹⁸ Barrett sees a possible connection between John 12:41 and the targum of Isa 6:5.¹⁹ The other source attributed to John's use is the Synoptic writers. Freed suggests that "in the composition of his gospel John may have used his OT texts and his Synoptic sources simultaneously."²⁰ On the other hand, Freed in his discussion of John 12:13 claims "that the direct source . . . was the Synoptics rather than the OT."²¹

In the light of the limited number of quotations in John and the apparent complexity of his use of the OT, perhaps it is better to accept a more general conclusion concerning his sources.

John manifests a thorough knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures.

Westcott arrives at a very general conclusion stating that "these show at least . . . that the writer was not dependent on the LXX, and they suggest that he was acquainted with the original Hebrew."²² Barrètt feels that "John regularly used the LXX, but that he was able to use, and on occasion did use, the Hebrew."²³ Even Freed concedes that "for all other quotations it is impossible to tell whether they were made definitely from the Hebrew or Greek texts. In most places a stronger case can be made for the use of the Greek than for the Hebrew."²⁴

John's presentation of Christ as king. Although the theme of Christ's kingship may not occupy a major place in the narrative of John's gospel, it is important to realize that John's presentation of Christ as king in chapter 12 is not an isolated incident. John's presentation of Christ as king at the Triumphal Entry is best understood in light of John's overall presentation of Christ as king.

Freed points out that:

Jesus is spoken of as king at regular intervals in John's gospel. Nathanael confesses that Jesus is 'King of Israel' (1:49). After the feeding of the five thousand . . . Jesus himself perceives that 'they were about to come and seize him in order to make him a king' (6:15). Then 'the great crowd' proclaims Jesus as king in the Lazarus episode (12:12-19). Even in the narrative of the trial and crucifixion references to the kingship of Jesus are much more numerous than in the Synoptics.²⁵

Even though John lacks the birth accounts of the Synoptics with their angelic proclamations (Luke 1:32-33; 2:10-11) and their record of the Magi's worship (Matt 2:2-6, 11); as well as the kingly genealogies of Matthew and Luke, he still presents Christ as king.

Problems in the OT quotations of John 12:13-15. As this study narrows down to the two OT quotations in John 12:13-15, several unusual features of each quotation could be pointed out. Some of these features are merely interesting while others are problematic. Instead of noting each individual problem and feature at this point, a general overview will be noted. In general the quotations in verses 13 and 15 cause problems that are exactly opposite. Although there are some real difficulties with the form of the quotation in 13 the real problem lies in its use. The source of the quotation does not appear to be Messianic in itself while John's use of the quotation is definitely Messianic. On the other hand, the use of the quotation in 15 causes few difficulties, while the

form of the quotation causes a problem. John's application is clear but the source(s) of the quotation and its construction are not so clear.

The aim of this study is not only to survey both quotations in John 12:13-15 for their form and use but also to determine their OT sources and context as the basis of John's use in presenting Christ as king at the Triumphal Entry.

John's Use of OT Quotations at the Triumphal Entry

At no other point in John's presentation of Christ as king does he use OT Scriptures in as explicit a way as he does at the Triumphal Entry. In this passage two OT quotations are directly linked together with Christ's actions and the crowd's reactions to portray Him as king. This passage is perhaps the apex of John's presentation of Christ as king.

The Cry of the Crowd (v 13)

For the second time in his gospel (6:31) John records the direct quotation of OT Scripture by a multitude. Although the form of their quotation has some unusual features and difficulties, it is the use of this quotation that presents the greater problem.

The form of the quotation

The absence of an introductory formula. The most noticeable feature concerning the form of this quotation is its apparent lack of an introductory formula. As has already been noted, John systematically uses introductory formulas with OT quotations. However, on this occasion there apparently is no introductory formula. Technically, John 12:13 may not have an introductory formula in the normal sense but before that can be concluded several things have to be considered.

First, the multitude needs to be considered. Although John also quotes the multitude in 6:31, the circumstances of their use of the OT in that case were quite different from 12:13. In John 6, following the feeding of the 5,000 (vv 1-14), the multitude followed Christ to Capernaum (vv 22-24). When they found Christ, they engaged in a conversation (vv 25ff). It was during this conversation that they quoted Scripture to support their request for a sign (vv 30-31). Thus Scripture is quoted in the course of a thoughtful discussion as support for their request. However, in John 12 Christ meets the multitude with little warning (v 12).

Their reaction is more spontaneous than in chapter 6; apparently with little forethought they cry out repeatedly (note the imperfect verb) with this OT quotation. Under such circumstances with no apparent intended appeal to Scripture to support their exclamation, the crowd would not be expected to use an introductory formula to claim scriptural authority. The lack of an introductory formula can be understood as due not only to the spontaneity of their cries but also to the repetition of their cries.

A second consideration concerning the lack of an introductory formula with this quotation is the fact that it is closely linked to the quotation in v 15. Freed includes these two with several other quotations in John which are used close together without being compound quotations.²⁶ This concept is strengthened by John's commentary in v 16. After Christ was glorified "then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him." In this context the last clause can only refer to the actions of the multitude on that day, since John records nothing about the disciples' activity at the time. Thus the things that "were written" could and would refer to both quotations. This would not be the only time John follows a quotation with its formula (1:23).

A third consideration is the fact that although all three Synoptics also have the same quotation on the lips of the multitude not one of them uses an introductory formula with it. The use of quoted material without a formula is not unusual in the Synoptics.²⁷ As a rule when the Synoptics share an OT quotation with John they usually supply an introductory formula. However, not one of the gospel writers supplies one for the first quotation used at the Triumphal Entry.

Although the quotation in 12:13 does not technically have an introductory formula, it would be unfair to say that John did not give it the same standing as his other quotations. In light of its close use with v 15 and John's commentary in v 16, the quotation in 12:13 has adequate introduction for the circumstances.

The formulation of the quotations. For analysis the quotation can be divided into three parts — the first word, the core, and the last phrase. Although it is generally accepted that the source of the quotation is Ps 118:25-26, it should be noted that these verses are not used in their entirety. Also, some would add the possibility that portions of Ps 20:7, 10 are included or at least alluded to, perhaps because of the obvious Messianic nature of this psalm.²⁸

A comparison of v 13 with the LXX shows a word for word correspondence between the core of John's quotation ("Blessed is

John frequently presented Christ as king.

He who comes in the name of the Lord”) and the first line of LXX Ps 117:26 except for a difference of case endings with *kyrios*.²⁹ A comparison with the MT of this portion of the quotation also offers a favorable correspondence. Thus no variation between the three versions appears in the core portion of this quotation.

The opening word of the quotation (“Hosanna!”) does present problems. Freed considers this word to be “the main problem in the quotation.”³⁰ A comparison of John’s quotation with the LXX and MT would indicate a closer correspondence with the Hebrew than the Greek. John has apparently transliterated the Hebrew phrase *hosi’ah na’* of v 25. The LXX has translated the phrase with *sozon de*.³¹ Because John’s form is not an exact transliteration of the Hebrew, some have posited an Aramaic source.³² The difference between the Hebrew and Aramaic forms is the infix of the Hebrew Hiphil stem element (*i*) which is retained with the imperative suffix *-ah*.³³ Without the imperative suffix the form of the Hiphil imperative is the same as the Aramaic (cf Jer 31:7; Ps 86:2). However, the only time in the MT that the Hiphil imperative is followed by the particle *na’* is in Ps 118:25 where the augmented form of the imperative is found. Unless a separate source or no source whatever can be posited, Freed’s conclusion seems correct when he says, “since the Hebrew *hosi’ah na’* occurs only in Ps 118:25 in the OT, it is the most likely original source of the quotation.”³⁴

The last phrase of John’s quotation (“even the King of Israel”) is unique to John. It is without parallel in the Synoptics.³⁵ It is unsupported by either the MT or LXX of Ps 118. John apparently records this portion of the crowd’s exclamation to support his presentation of Christ as king (cf 1:49).³⁶

In viewing the form of this first quotation it is apparent first of all that John’s use of Ps 118, as recorded from the lips of the crowd, was selective. He used only portions of both verses 25 and 26, translating or transliterating where appropriate to his purpose. Secondly, it is apparent that although John’s primary source may have been the LXX he must have had a knowledge of the Hebrew from which “Hosanna!” appears to have been transliterated.³⁷

The use of the quotation

The problem with John’s use of Ps 118 from the lips of the multitude is two-fold: Primarily, it is that Ps 118 by itself does not

appear to be Messianic while its application in John is distinctly Messianic. Secondly, the problem includes the use and meaning of "Hosanna!"

The Messianic application of Ps 118. A simple reading of Ps 118 as it stands in the Psalter seems to give little indication of a Messianic nature. The psalm begins with thanksgiving for the Lord's lovingkindness (vv 1-4). The specific application of His lovingkindness which produces this thanksgiving is a deliverance wrought in the life of the psalmist (vv 5-14). The natural outpouring of praise for his deliverance flows from the lips of the psalmist (vv 15-21). Finally, the psalm closes with a prayer for continued deliverance and prosperity (vv 22-29).

Dahood characterizes this psalm as "a king's thanksgiving for delivery from death and for a military victory."³⁸ Briggs describes it as a temple festival of victory.³⁹ Mowinckel calls it a "thanksgiving psalm."⁴⁰

The question becomes: If Ps 118 is not Messianic, how can John use it Messianically? This difficulty is stressed by Thayer,

It may be doubted whether the rejoicing multitude in the evangelic story were consciously indebted to the Psalm or its use at the feast of Tabernacles either for the cry 'Hosanna' or the festive demonstration with palm and other branches. . . . The language of the psalm is supplicatory, that of the Gospels is jubilant.⁴¹

Before an answer can be given several things need to be considered. First, it must be remembered that Ps 118 is part of a larger group of psalms known as the Hallel or Praise Psalms (113-118). Johnson states, "It is true that the king is not specifically mentioned, but the language and thought of the psalm as a whole are obviously in harmony with the other psalms in this series which centers in the person of the Messiah."⁴²

Second, Jewish use must be considered. In the midrash on Ps 118 two allusions are made to its Messianic understanding. First, in the explanation accompanying v 4 both II Sam 7:2 and Ps 89:29-30 are quoted in part.⁴³ The importance of these two passages is that they contain the Davidic Covenant which culminates in the Messiah. Second, throughout the discussion on verses 12 and 13 reference is made to "Gog and Magog."⁴⁴ The significance of this is realized when it is understood that "Gog and Magog" introduces the coming of Messiah in Jewish literature.⁴⁵

Even more revealing is the use of Ps 118 to explain other passages. In the midrash on Ps 26 it is used twice. First, in 26:5 Ps 118:25 is mentioned briefly being linked to Sukkot and palm branches. However, its use with 26:6 is more extensive and revealing. In part it reads as follows:

The end of the verse, *And tell of all Thy wondrous works*, refers, according to R Adin, to the recitation of the *Hallel* Psalms which tell of God's wondrous works in the days gone by, in present times, in the days of the Messiah, in the times of Gog and Magog, and in the time to come. . . . (Ps 116:1) tells of God's wondrous works in the days of the Messiah; the Psalm which contains . . . (Ps 118:10) tells of God's wondrous works in the times of Gog and Magog; in the same Psalm . . . (Ps 118:28) tells of God's wondrous works in the time-to-come; finally in the same Psalm . . . (Ps 118:29) tells of God's wondrous works in the life of the world-to-come.⁴⁶

Ps 118, then, contains a description of the times of the Messiah as well as the times which precede and follow. Werner in discussing this passage points out two interesting things. First, the *Hallel* was concluded "with a formula of (Messianic) redemption," that formula being the end of Ps 118 including both v 25 and 26. Second, the repetition of Ps 118:25 liturgically is very ancient pre-dating the Mishnah.⁴⁷ Schnackenburg comments that "the hymn is one of the *Hallel* psalms which were used in Jewish liturgy, especially at Tabernacles and Passover. The verse is therefore in the context of messianic expectations."⁴⁸

The targum to Ps 118 also indicates a Messianic context. To quote in part:

The lamb, which the builders rejected, became the descendants of Jesse and became worthy of appointment to majesty and rule . . . 'Blessed in the name of the Lord be he, that cometh,' say the builders; 'they shall build you from the Temple of the Lord,' says David. . . . 'bind the lamb with chains for the sacrifice of the festival, until you offer it up and sprinkle its blood at the horns of the altar.'⁴⁹

Werner points out that this targum contains "four Christological-Messianic motives: a. The lamb; b. the stone which the builders rejected; c. Blessed be in the name of JHVH he who cometh; d. the constant reference to David and his house."⁵⁰

The Talmud also uses Ps 118 in contexts that indicate or at least allow a Messianic understanding. *B. Pesah.* 117a says, "And who recited this *Hallel*? The prophets among them ordained that Israel should recite it at every important epoch . . . and when they are redeemed they recite it (in gratitude) for their redemption."⁵¹ Surely the entrance of the Messiah into Jerusalem would be viewed as both an 'important' time and a time of 'redemption' for the nation.

Also *b. Pesah.* 119 a-b has a lengthy passage including a mnemonic rule which refers to the whole *Hallel* as well as to Ps

118:25-26 specifically.⁵² Werner's comment on this passage is that "the Talmud shows that the interpretation given in the Targum was familiar to all." In the targum he is referring to, he had concluded that the Davidic-Messianic implication was unmistakable.⁵³

The connection of Ps 118 with Messianic concepts is not foreign to Jewish thought. From Targums to Talmud and beyond⁵⁴ the Hallel Psalms as a whole and Ps 118 specifically are found in and supporting Messianic contexts. Werner plainly states, "In Jewish sources Ps 118 is likewise interpreted Messianically."⁵⁵ He further states:

The very fact that we have at least three traditional interpretations of Ps 118, which agree with each other in both the dramatic form and the Davidic-Messianic spirit, shows beyond doubt that this was a generally accepted tradition, common to all Jews, trained in Scripture."⁵⁶

Schnackenburg agrees:

The words quoted come from Ps 118:25-26, a liturgy of thanksgiving sung by a crowd of pilgrims as they enter the Temple. The hymn is one of the Hallel psalms which were used in the Jewish liturgy, especially at Tabernacles and Passover. The verse is therefore in the context of messianic expectations.⁵⁷

John's Messianic use of Ps 118 at the Triumphal Entry is within the context of Jewish thought.⁵⁸

The use and meaning of 'Hosanna!' A second problem with this quotation is John's understanding of 'Hosanna!' from the lips of the multitude. As has already been pointed out 'Hosanna!' is a transliteration of the Hebrew of Ps 118:25. Several writers find this fact significant. Freed states, "The Hebrew 'hosanna' was given a new meaning by the invention of a new Greek word through deliberate transliteration of that Hebrew."⁵⁹ Brown is more specific, "The fact that the Gospels do not translate the Hebrew term, as does LXX, probably indicates that in this usage of 'Hosanna' is not a prayer of petition but a cry of praise."⁶⁰

In Hebrew the phrase carries the idea of "Save now!" or "Help now!" as in a prayer or supplication. Although the exact form occurs only in Ps 118:25, other Hiphil imperatives are used consistently in the Hebrew OT in the sense of appeal or supplication.⁶¹ However, the idea of appeal or supplication is apparently not present in the NT where the Synoptic uses of 'Hosanna!' are followed by phrases of praise and exclamation (Matt 21:9, Mark 11:10). The fact that the meaning of 'Hosanna!' shifted, if conceded, leads to the problem of understanding the new usage. Morris summarizes possible usages:

It is easy to see why words which have meaning in connection with supplication should be used in this way of acclamation. It is possible that we should take the expression as addressed to Jesus. He is then being implored as Messiah to bring salvation. . . . Others have suggested that the words should be understood as a prayer addressed to God for His Messiah (cf 'God save the king'), or that it had become conventionalized and meant something like 'Hail' or 'Praise' . . . , i e it is an interjection.⁶²

The use of 'Hosanna!' as an independent element in the quotations of the Gospels, along with its use with accompanying phrases seems to indicate that the Gospel writers understood it as an interjection of joy and praise. Whatever the specific meaning might be, 'Hosanna!' definitely contains Messianic significance. TDNT states "the Messianic hope was probably echoed in the hosanna which the Jewish community raised in the pre-Christian period."⁶³

John's use of OT quotations augments if not anchors his kingly-Messianic context described as being situated outside Jerusalem, the city of the king (II Sam 5:3-9; 7:1ff; Ps 2:6; 48:1ff); filled with a multitude carrying palm branches;⁶⁴ and engulfed in the joyful, festive mood of the crowd that day.⁶⁵ It is apparent John has not only selected the content but also the form of Ps 118 that will best present Christ as king.

The Prophecy of the Colt (v 15)

Unlike the previous quotation, John in this verse is not recording someone else's words but is giving his own commentary. The difficulty with this OT quotation is not primarily its use but its form.

The form of the quotation

Although John follows his normal pattern of introducing this quotation with a formula, it still presents several difficulties. Generally this quotation is attributed to Zechariah (9:9) with little recognition of the difficulties involved. In order to properly understand the complications of this use of the OT, John's quotation will be dealt with in three segments.

The core of the quotation. The main portion of John's quotation is "Behold, your king comes" to which we might also add the preceding words "Daughter of Zion" for this analysis. A comparison of John's quotation with the LXX of Zech 9:9 reveals an almost exact word for word correspondence. The only significant difference between the two is that the LXX has the

word *soi* ("to you") at the end of the phrase. It should be also noted that another phrase intervenes between the two phrases that John quotes. The differences with the LXX are due to its reflection of the Hebrew of the MT. In the portions quoted, there does not appear to be any significant difference between the three versions. It cannot be conclusively determined which version John used for his quotation; however, it is quite apparent that the text of this quotation was Zech 9:9.

The closing phrase of the quotation. The final phrase of John's quotation ("sitting on a donkey's colt") presents a little more difficulty. Like the core of the quotation, this phrase apparently is taken from Zech 9:9. But unlike the core phrase, this phrase is not only condensed but also contains some different wording.

The first noticeable difference in John's use of Zechariah in this phrase is the verb he chose to use. While John has *kathemenos* meaning 'to sit,' both the LXX (*epibebekos*) and MT (*rokeb*) use verbs meaning 'to ride.' The immediate explanation of John's choice is found in v 14 which records the act of Christ mounting the animal. Several other things favor John's choice of terms. First, John uses *kathemai* again in Rev 19 of Christ and the army from heaven mounted on horses.⁶⁶ Second, *kathemai* is used to translate *rakab* in the LXX (Isa 19:1) though not of riding on an animal. Third, six of the thirteen words in the LXX that are used to translate *rakab* at least imply sitting.⁶⁷ Fourth, the MT uses *rakab* in contexts which can only mean sitting (Lev 15:9; II Sam 19:27; II Kings 4:24). Freed justifies John's use of this term from another line of reasoning. He states, "John clearly thinks that Jesus' mere sitting on the ass fulfills the prophecy of kingship: 'He sat on it, as it is written' (v 14). This factor is enough to account for the use of the word *kathemenos* in the quotation."⁶⁸ Although John has chosen to use a different verb from either the LXX or MT, it is in essence synonymous in meaning — all three refer to the act of being mounted on an animal. John's choice appears to be based on his use in context.

The second difference in John's use of Zechariah is his condensing of the quotation. Essentially John uses only two words from Zechariah's phrase, choosing to eliminate the lengthy description of the ass by simply calling it a 'donkey's colt' (*poloneon*). Where Zechariah fills out his description of the animal with a poetic parallelism, John simply uses the beginning and end of the description to make his point. But John's use goes beyond a mere editing. His description of the animal matches neither the LXX nor MT in his choice of words. At the same time, all three agree as to their sense — MT "the foal of a donkey" (*ben 'atonot*); LXX "a young

foal" (*polon neon*)' John's "donkey's colt" (*polon onou*). Bernard thinks John's quotation is "a more literal rendering of the Hebrew than the LXX."⁶⁹ The least that can be said is that John has used those parts of the quotation in a fashion that suits his context and purpose.

The opening phrase of the quotation. The most problematic portion of John's quotation is the first phrase: "Fear not, daughter of Zion." It is readily apparent that this phrase is not contained in Zech 9:9. Barrett says of the first two words, "The source of John's version is obscure, and there is *no evidence* of its earlier existence whether in full translation of the Old Testament or in a Testimony Book" (emphasis added).⁷⁰

Morris practically sidesteps the issue:

In any case it is hardly necessary to find a Scriptural source for so simple an expression or to imagine that John is using a text different from any known to us. It is quite natural to prefix such words, words moreover which were frequently on the lips of Jesus, to a prophecy telling how Jesus comes as the Prince of Peace.⁷¹

Both reactions are a bit premature.

Archer and Chirichigno offer Isa 35:4 as a possible source of the initial two words.⁷² Although this passage does contain the same verb root (*phobeo*) in the LXX as in John and an adequate correspondence in MT (*yara'*), the reference in Isa 35:4 is in the plural while John uses the singular. Freed notes several passages in Isaiah where the words 'fear not' occur both in the singular and plural imperatives.⁷³ However, it is doubtful that a two word correspondence (one being a negative particle) can point to a source with much certainty.

Perhaps the best suggestion is that John's opening phrase finds its source in Zeph 3:14-17. The first thing that would suggest Zeph 3:14-17 as the source of John's opening phrase is vocabulary. Zephaniah uses several of the same terms found in John's quotation. Although the words *me phobou* do not appear in the LXX they do correspond to the MT of v 16.⁷⁴ This imperative is directed to 'Zion' by Zephaniah in v 16, who specifically mentions 'daughter of Zion' in v 14. Zephaniah, also, like John gives the imperative as a response to the presence of the 'king.'

Brown suggests another link to Zephaniah as the source of John's quotation. That link is the phrase "even the king of Israel" in John 12:13 which apparently lacks OT textual support. Brown states, "The import of this passage in Zephaniah is to assure Jerusalem that 'the king of Israel, the Lord' (iii 15) is in her midst. This may well be the source of "the king of Israel" which John 12:13 has added to the citation of the psalms."⁷⁵

Freed suggests the link by another approach. Based on his understanding that the overall context is one of joy and exultation he states,

If our suggestion about *hosanna* conveying the feeling of joy or praise is correct, it is conceivable that John's *me phobou* is the equivalent of *chaire* in Zeph 3:14 or Zech 9:9. The coming of the messianic king is a time of rejoicing without fear. This argument is strengthened by the fact that 'Sing (LXX, *chaire*), daughter of Zion' and 'Do not fear (*tharsei*), O Zion' are parallel twice in Joel 2:21-23. The words 'do not fear' in the sense of 'rejoice' used with *hosanna* in v 13 give excellent balance and variation to John's style.⁷⁶

Freed's explanation that *chaire* is an equivalent to *me phobou* is more easily stated than applied. John uses *me phobou* in his quotation, but the LXX does not use it in either Zech 9 or Zeph 3. The LXX does use *chaire* in Zech 9:9 and Zeph 3:14, but to translate two synonymous terms for 'joyful shouting.'⁷⁷ Nowhere does the LXX use *chaire* (rejoice) to translate *yara'* (fear). The MT has '*al tira'i* (fear not) in Zeph 3:16 but the LXX interprets more than translates the Hebrew by using the term *tharseo* (be of good courage) and then it places it into the mouth of the Lord (*erie kyrios*). If Freed's idea is correct John's use of *me phobou* may be explained not only on the basis of the apparently mutually exclusive terms 'praise' and 'fear' at the Messiah's coming but also on the basis of the LXX's interpretive translation of Zeph 3:16.

John in his quotation uses *chaire* rather than the rarer *tharseo* to better suit his purpose in context. Or perhaps he replaces the *tharseo* in the context of either Zechariah or Zephaniah with *chaire* to suit his purpose. Whatever the reason, Freed prefers the Zephaniah passage as John's source "because it contains the phrase 'king of Israel,' which he had just applied to Jesus in v 13 after the quotation from Ps 118."⁷⁸

Another thing that would suggest Zeph 3 as the source of John's quotation is its use in Jewish literature. In the midrash on the Psalms Zeph 3:14-15 is used to explain Ps 95:1. The call to "sing for joy to the Lord" and to "shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation" is equated with the singing and shouting of Zeph 3 in the explanation of the psalm. Particular emphasis in the explanation is given to victory over darkness.⁷⁹ This as in other instances is often a characteristic of Messianic times.

Zeph 3:15-16 is used in the midrash on Ps 138:2. In explaining the praise "give thanks unto Thy name" the Zephaniah passage is quoted. But the midrash goes on to place this in the time "after the wicked have withered away," "when the Temple and its holy shrine are rebuilt" or in Messianic times.

The midrash of Ps 147 which actually begins with Ps 146:10, goes into a lengthy explanation of 146:10-147:2. The setting of this discussion is Messianic; it is a time when "the Lord will reign," "when the Holy One, blessed be He, reigns," when "everything will belong to the kingdom of the Holy One."⁸⁰ This setting is filled not only with 'peace' but also 'praise.' Zephaniah is used twice to explain the 'praise' of this Messianic time.

References to Zeph 3 in connection with Messianic times are also found in the *Pesikta Rabbati*. In "Piska 29/30 B," dealing with God's comfort, the discussion begins with Isa 40:1 a Messianic text.⁸¹ Following Nahum's discussion of the nearness of Zion's deliverance and the coming of good tidings, Zeph 3:14-20 is introduced. The emphasis in the use of Zeph is the comfort that will come, reflected in the singing of the 'daughter of Zion' and the 'ingathering of the exiles.'⁸²

In the Talmud three references are made to Zeph 3:14-17. In *b. Sabb.* 139a Zeph 3:14 is used to support the statement "Jerusalem shall be redeemed only by righteousness." In part, according to Zeph, this righteousness will be reflected in the casting out of the enemy.⁸³ This idea of the destruction of Israel's enemies is supported by Zeph 3:18 in *b. Bek.* 28a also.⁸⁴

Zeph 3:15 is used in almost the same context in *b. Sanh.* 98a. Once again Zeph 3 is quoted to support the idea that Israel's enemies will be destroyed. However, the context here is distinctly Messianic. The repeated refrain that leads up to the Zeph passage is "The Son of David will not come until . . ."⁸⁵

In Jewish literature Zeph 3 had a distinct Messianic flavor. Thus it would not be unusual for John to use Zeph 3 in connection with Zech 9 to support his presentation of Christ as the Messianic king. Zeph 3 not only fits well into John's theme but also fills out the quotation of v 15 and perhaps v 13 also.

John's quotation in v 15 is apparently a conflation of Zeph 3:14-16 with Zech 9:9. Neither passage is used in its entirety, John uses and arranges the parts for his own purpose in context.

The use of the quotation

Far less problematic than the form of John's quotation is its use. John's quotation from Zechariah-Zephaniah in v 15 is directly tied to Christ's action in v 14 by the introductory formula "as it is written." John's quotation in v 15 is apparently designed as a commentary explaining the action of v 14 by stressing its significance.

The primary function of the quotation is to show that Christ's sitting on the "young donkey" was an indication of his Messianic

kingship. F F Bruce in commenting on Zech 9-14 states, "One dominating principle — here, the portrayal of the shepherd-king — is discerned throughout the whole section of prophecy, and becomes determinative for the application of any part of it."⁸⁶ In fact, Bruce sees the application as so obvious that he states,

While the Old Testament passage is not quoted by the other two Evangelists, it seems very probable that Jesus' decision to ride into Jerusalem on a colt (Mark 11:1-7; Luke 19:29-35) was understood as a fulfillment of Zechariah 9 even in the absence of an explicit quotation.⁸⁷

But the function of the quotation is even more narrowly defined. It not only points out Christ's kingship but a definite aspect of that kingship. This narrower function is repeatedly pointed out by commentators. Morris observes, "The words of this prophecy point to a distinctive mark of Christ's kingship. The ass was . . . the animal of a man of peace."⁸⁸

Schnackenburg expands this point:

Zech 9:9 which describes the messianic king as a prince of peace . . . the late prophets are interested in the peaceful character of the expected saving king. The riding on a donkey . . . is a symbol of this. In the following verse (Zech 9:10) the peaceful nature of the Messiah's rule is again forcefully emphasized.⁸⁹

Bernard comments:

It is not to be thought that there is any suggestion of *humility* in riding upon an ass. On the contrary, the ass and the mule were animals used in peace by great persons. . . . The king, then, in the vision of Zechariah, rode upon an ass to signify that he came in peace . . . and the entry of Jesus to Jerusalem on an ass was understood by the populace, in like manner, as the entry of the Prince of Peace.⁹⁰

The interpretation of Zech 9:9 as referring to Messianic kingship is readily evident in Jewish literature. *Midrash Rabbath* on Gen 32 specifically states that the "ass refers to the royal Messiah for it says of him, 'Lowly, and riding upon an ass' (Zech 9:9)."⁹¹ Again the midrash on Gen 49 uses Zech with a specifically Messianic understanding.⁹² The midrash on Deut 12 not only uses Zech 9:9 with Messianic understanding but also implies 'peaceful' times. According to this midrash, Messiah's time is characterized by "prosperity," "compassion," the rebuilding of "My house," and an "overflow with prosperity."⁹³ Finally the midrash on Eccl 1 states, "similarly will it be with the latter Redeemer as it is stated, 'Lowly, and riding upon an ass (Zech 9:9).'"⁹⁴ The comparison of Zech 9:9 with Moses in Exod 4:20 limits the emphasis to the riding on the ass.

In "Piska 34" of *Pesik. Rab.* Zech 9:9 is used to introduce the discussion on the advent of the Messiah. The tie with the Messiah is specific. Although 'peace' is not explicitly mentioned it is implied. The Messiah's advent will bring comfort to "the Mourners for Zion." It will give victory over Israel's enemies. It will initiate a period of Messianic kingship. It will bring about the bestowal of "all the good things" God had intended. It will be a time when the crown of Messiah "will shine upon himself, and also upon those who are at one with him." Interestingly Zeph 3 is also used in this discussion of the Messiah's advent.⁹⁵

John's use of the Zechariah-Zephaniah quotation explains Christ's action in v 14. The significance of Christ's mounting the young donkey is definitely to be understood messianically. It is to be understood as the fulfillment of these prophecies concerning the Messiah king. John anchors his presentation of Christ as king at the Triumphal Entry in two distinct and familiar OT quotations.

Conclusions from John's use of the OT at the Triumphal Entry

John's use of OT quotations at the Triumphal Entry is neither a simple nor a cut-and-paste approach. A review of John's two quotations reveals several factors in John's use of the OT. First, when John uses an OT passage he never uses it in its entirety. John chooses those portions of the OT passage which best fit his purpose in context. He brings together the appropriate pointed elements from the OT in a concise way to make his point. No doubt to the mind familiar with the OT even the mention of a phrase would recall to mind the whole passage and its context.

Second, when John uses an OT passage he never uses it out of its context. John's context and application are pointedly Messianic—Christ is king. The passages he uses to emphasize Christ as king are also Messianic in their immediate and greater contexts. This point is further supported by Jewish literature which also uses all the passages John quotes in Messianic contexts.

Third, John alters OT passages when necessary to better fit his purpose in the context in which he writes. John's alterations are never major — transliteration and substitution of terms with synonymous meanings. John's alterations fine tune the quotation to the circumstances he portrays and reflect the conciseness of his style.

Fourth, John blends OT passages together when necessary to fit his purpose and to make his point. The conflation of the

Messianic passages from Zechariah and Zephaniah serves to strengthen and to highlight the theme of Christ as king. His use is complementary to each passage and in no way detracts from either. John's concise blending no doubt pricked the memory to recall both passages in their fulness.

Fifth, John's source of OT quotations is more difficult to determine. He is apparently quite familiar with the Hebrew text from which he transliterates the 'Hosanna' of Ps 118; translates the 'fear not' of Zeph 3; and correctly describes the 'donkey's colt' of Zech 9:9. At no point does he depart far from the LXX. Most of his quotations correspond exactly with the LXX or use an appropriate synonym. In light of the familiarity of the passages quoted and their distinctive Messianic context in Jewish literature, it seems unnecessary to posit the varied Synoptic quotations as John's sources. John apparently used the OT in Hebrew and/or Greek as his source.

The product of John's use of the OT reveals more clearly the process of inspiration. John's narrative is not simply the product of contemporary scholarship, literary movements, or his own imagination. John's selection and use of OT passages is neither careless or haphazard. It is apparent in John's use of the OT at the Triumphal Entry that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit John used the OT skillfully. As a wise craftsman John wove the threads of OT praise and prophecy together with his narrative to present Christ as the long awaited Messianic king.

Notes

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the NASB unless otherwise noted.

² Of the 121 quotations 23 OT books are represented with almost equal use of Pent (39), Prophets (43), and Writings (39). The direct quotations are: 1:23; 2:17; 6:31, 45; 7:42, 42; 10:34; 12:13, 15, 38, 40; 13:18; 15:25; 19:24, 28, 29, 36, 37.

³ They list 1:23; 2:17; 6:31, 45; 10:34; 12:13, 15, 38, 40; 13:18; 15:25; 19:24, 36, 37.

⁴ Edwin D Freed, *Old Testament Quotations in the Gospel of John* (Leiden: E J Brill, 1965), p xii. Note that Freed's eighteen quotations do not correspond with Aland's.

⁵ Merrill C Tenney, "The Old Testament and the Fourth Gospel" *BSac* 120 (1963) 301

⁶ A survey of Archer & Chirichigno reveals the following ratio of formulas to quotations: Matt 39/60 (65%); Mark 13/31 (42%); Luke 17/30 (57%); John 13/14 (93%).

⁷ Freed, *OT Quotations*, 126

⁸ Tenney, *OT and the Fourth Gospel*, 302

⁹ *Ibid*, 301

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 308

¹¹ Richard Morgan, "Fulfillment in the Fourth Gospel" *Int* II (1957) 155-157

¹² Charles K Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978) 29

¹³ Leon Morris, *The New Testament and the Jewish Lectionaries*, (London: Tyndale Press, 1964) 57-58

¹⁴ Freed, *OT Quotations*, 129

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 129-130

¹⁶ See their explanation on pp xxv-xxxii and with each passage.

connection of JHVH (*yhwh*) and *hos'ah na'* as offered in Ps 118:25."

⁵⁵ Ibid, 114

⁵⁶ Ibid, 118

⁵⁷ Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 375

⁵⁸ Ps 118 is clearly understood as Messianic in the NT, cf Acts 4:11; I Pet 2:7; Matt 23:39; Luke 13:35; 19:38.

⁵⁹ Freed, "Entry into Jerusalem" 330

⁶⁰ Raymond F Brown, *The Gospel According to John (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1966)* 457

⁶¹ Compare Jer 31:7; Ps 12:2; 20:10; 28:9; 60:7; 86:2, 16; 108:7; II Sam 14:4; II Kgs 6:26; Jos 10:6 plus nineteen other occurrences with suffixes.

⁶² Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John, NICNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publ Co, 1971) 584

⁶³ Eduard Lohse, "*hosanna*" *TDNT* Vol 9, ed by Gerhard Friedrich, trans by Geoffrey W Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publ Co, 1967) 683

⁶⁴ Compare Lev 23:40; I Macc 13:51; II Macc 10:7; Rev 7:9. See also Morris, *Gospel According to John*, 584, "It is better to think of palm branches used in a spontaneous expression of joy as a royal Person is acclaimed." Bernard, *ICC: John*, 424, "a mark of triumphant homage to a victor or king." Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 374, "The shout 'Hosanna' was also associated in Jewish minds with the palm branch . . . the pilgrims are welcoming Jesus as a messianic king."

⁶⁵ Freed, "Entry into Jerusalem" 330

⁶⁶ Only John uses *kathemai* in the NT of riding on animals.

⁶⁷ Compare *anabainein* (Hos 14:4); *anabates* (Zech 10:5); *epibainein* (Zech 1:); *epikathesthai* (II Kgs 16:2); *kathesthai* (Isa 19:1); and *kathizein* (Lev 15:9).

⁶⁸ Freed, "Entry into Jerusalem" 337

⁶⁹ Bernard, *John*, 425

⁷⁰ Barrett, *Gospel According to St John*, 348

⁷¹ Morris, *John*, 586

⁷² Gleason L Archer and G C Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983) 130-131

⁷³ Freed, "Entry into Jerusalem" 336

⁷⁴ Brown, *John*, 458

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Freed, "Entry into Jerusalem" 336

⁷⁷ The two words are *gili* and *ranni* respectively.

⁷⁸ Freed, "Entry into Jerusalem" 336

⁷⁹ *Midrash on Psalms*, 136

⁸⁰ Ibid, 372

⁸¹ Compare Isa 40:1-8 with Matt 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:25.

⁸² *Pesikta Rabbati*, trans by W G Braude, *Yale Judaica Series* ed by Leon Nimoy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968) 583-585

⁸³ *Talmud*, 3:700-701

⁸⁴ Ibid, 31:170-171

⁸⁵ Ibid, 28:662-663

⁸⁶ F F Bruce, "The Book of Zechariah and the Passion Narrative" *BJRL* 43 (1961) 348

⁸⁷ Ibid, 339

⁸⁸ Morris, *John*, 587

⁸⁹ Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 376

⁹⁰ Bernard, *John*, 426

⁹¹ *The Midrash Rabbah*, trans by H Freeman (London: Soncino Press, 1977) 1:698

⁹² Ibid, 1:982-983

⁹³ Ibid, 3:100-101

⁹⁴ Ibid, 4:33

⁹⁵ *Pesikta Rabbati*, 2:662-669

*Context and application present the
Messiah as king.*