

# Gezerah Shawah as Analogy in the Epistle to the Hebrews

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## Abstract

This article argues that the Jewish exegetical technique of *gezerah shawah* should have its definition reconsidered as it is used in the epistle to the Hebrews. The general consensus views the technique as a mere verbal analogy. This study seeks to re-frame it as a multi-dimensional analogy with verbal, theological, and social aspects. A brief survey examines five occurrences in the epistle to the Hebrews. As an analogy it is argued that *gezerah shawah* relies on verbal relationships. When two verses with an identical word or words are connected, the rest of the quotation is relevant to the New Testament writer's interpretation. As a social analogy the study points to the differences between pre-70 CE and post-70 CE rabbinical techniques. Lastly, the theological aspect of the analogy demonstrates that Old Testament passages are not cited ad hoc.

Various exegetical principles were used by New Testament authors such as Paul and the author of the epistle to the Hebrews to establish textual congruities within the history and progression of redemption in the New Testament. The Jewish exegetical or midrash principle of *gezerah shawah* is a term that means "equal category" also *gezera*; also *sawa*, *shawa*, *sawah*, and *shawah* (DeMoss: 64). It is most often referred to as a "verbal analogy" or a "verbal parallel" (DeMoss: 64; Guthrie 2003: 282). Richard Longenecker's definition is representative of most when he defines *gezerah shawah* as "a verbal analogy from one verse to another; where the same words are applied to two separate cases, it follows that the same considerations apply to both" (20). While there is a great deal of discussion about what defines midrash itself (McNamara: 137–47; Guthrie 2003: 279), I follow George Guthrie's definition: "The citation of a text, or texts, followed by exposition, often with reference to secondary texts" (1994: 124).

The origins of *gezerah shawah* lie in the history of Jewish approaches to scripture and tradition (Longenecker: 20). These Jewish exegetical principles or *middoth* predate Christianity by about forty years, and *gezerah shawah* was one of the seven original principles attributed to Rabbi Hillel (Longenecker: 20; Ellis 1957: 41; Juel: 41). Although a clear consensus has not formed, the explicit principle of

*gezerah shawah* seems to have become solidified around the rules of Rabbi Hillel.

Many discussions of *gezerah shawah* have been plagued by reductionism and ambiguity. This study examines the function of *gezerah shawah* and seeks to understand its application as an analogy within the epistle to the Hebrews. The argument set forth here seeks to advance the definition of *gezerah shawah* beyond its general consensus as a mere verbal analogy and toward a re-framing of it as a multi-dimensional analogy. It is argued here, in light of the epistle to the Hebrews, that a functional understanding of *gezerah shawah* consists of verbal, theological, and social aspects.

## Instances of Gezerah Shawah in Hebrews

In the epistle to the Hebrews, there are five OT citations that are argued to be instances of *gezerah shawah*. Though not all agree that there are as many as five instances, the

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purpose of this brief survey is to provide a reference point for discussing the nature of *gezerah shawah* in broad terms.

The first instance of *gezerah shawah* is in Hebrews 1:13 in conjunction with Hebrews 2:8 (Guthrie 1994: 108; contra DeSilva: 108). In this instance Hebrews 1:13 quotes Psalm 110:1 (109:1 in the LXX) and Hebrews 2:8 quotes Psalm 8:6 (8:7 in the LXX) so that the *Stichwort* is “feet.” In this instance, Hebrews 1:13 makes a fourteen-word citation of Psalm 110:1, and Hebrews 2:8 makes a six-word citation of Psalm 8:6.

Here, the use of *gezerah shawah* clearly functions as a verbal analogy. This first occurrence takes place as a transition point from one major section to the next (Guthrie 1994: 126). The *Stichwort* of “feet” functions as a way to move logically between propositions and within the flow of discourse.

The second instance of *gezerah shawah* occurs between Hebrews 4:3 and Hebrews 4:4. The idea of “rest” is central to the phrases that are used to make the connections between these passages. This particular instance is unique in comparison to the others within Hebrews because it prefaces the quotations in Hebrews 4:3 with a statement regarding rest that is not a direct quotation of the OT itself. In other words, the quotation in Hebrews 4:3 of Psalm 95:11 refers to “rest” and Hebrews 4:4 directly quotes Genesis 2:2 referring to God’s “rest.” What is exceptional is that the author of Hebrews intensifies the connection for the rest with the statement “For we who have believed entered that rest” (ESV). The reader is thus tipped off to look for the idea of rest connecting the two OT citations between Genesis and Psalms. There is an indication that the author of Hebrews edited the quotation from the Septuagint in order to further his hortatory (homiletic?) purposes. Randall Gleason notes that where the Septuagint reads “I was angry with that generation,” the NT quotes it as “I was angry with this generation” (NAS; but compare ESV, NIV, KJV) with a totally different pronoun (283). While this type of minor emendation may have been a midrashic practice, it does not nullify or set the verse at odds with the thrust of the analysis of *gezerah shawah* set forth here because as Gleason notes, it creates a rhetorical effect “without altering the meaning of the original verse” (283).

The third instance of *gezerah shawah* is used as a transition between the theme of sonship and the theme of high priest in Hebrews 5:5 and 5:6 (Guthrie 1994: 125). Hebrews 5:5 quotes from Psalm 2:7 and 5:6 quotes from Psalm 110:4. The relationship between the two OT passages is built upon the word “you” rather than a longer phrase. A comparison of the English (5:5 // 5:6) demonstrates the

crucial role this key-word plays: “You are my Son, today I have begotten you” // “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek” (ESV). Graham Hughes argues that the identification of the Son as “you” is a hinge, but the lexical connection functions so as to point to the eternity of Jesus’ priesthood. He states, “The key term in the biblical description of Melchizedek, for our author, is the psalmist’s phrase “forever” or “into the age” (14). Is the key term in this passage different from the *Stichwort* upon which the analogy hangs? Against Hughes, a strong case can be made for the eternity of his priesthood being secondary to the idea of Christ being “appointed” by another in Hebrews 5:5b. The second person “you” in Hebrews 5:5–6 gives the evidence for the assertion made in Hebrews 5:5a “Christ did not exalt himself.”

The fourth instance of *gezerah shawah* occurs in Hebrews 6:20 in conjunction with the *inclusio* of 7:1 and 7:10. Though not many recognize this, Victor Pfitzner holds that this technique “links Genesis 14:17–20 with Psalm 110:4 (Psalm 109:4 LXX) by way of the common element of Melchizedek” (104). This particular instance relies heavily upon the name “Melchizedek” but also involves longer quotations between Hebrews 7:1 and Genesis 14:18 and Hebrews 7:10 and Genesis 14:17.

The fifth instance of *gezerah shawah* occurs in Hebrews 10:6–7 in conjunction with Hebrews 10:37–38 (Guthrie 1994: 141). This occurrence is somewhat unique in that it uses two key-words to create a literary transition. Guthrie notes that the present tense “I am coming” in Hebrews 10:7 parallels the future tense “I will come” in Hebrews 10:37, and the aorist tense “had no pleasure” in Hebrews 10:6 parallels the present tense “is having no pleasure” in Hebrews 10:38 (1994: 141). The references are as follows: Hebrews 10:7 quotes Psalm 40:7 (Psalm 39:8 LXX) and Hebrews 10:37–38 quotes Habakkuk 2:3–4. The quotation of Psalm 39:7 in Hebrews 10:6 is another case where a word is quoted differently from the Septuagint to the epistle. However, the difference in meaning is only slight: “desire” in Hebrews 10:6 vs. “demand” in Psalm 39:7. Variants within the copies of Septuagint are also possible as Ellingworth notes (501).

### Gezerah Shawah and Salvation History

To frame accurately the problem that *gezerah shawah* poses to NT studies, it is helpful to consider some broader discussions surrounding intertextuality. Ardel Caneday recognizes that within the arena of Pauline studies, either the topic of *gezerah shawah* is neglected or the relationship

is reduced so that it "offers little or no explanation for the apostle's use of the selected texts beyond an ad hoc appropriation (187). This could equally be said for the epistle to the Hebrews. This statement by Caneday is essentially a response to Barnabas Lindars, who views the NT authors as reacting to the Christ-event by employing the OT "in an ad hoc way" (as quoted by Caneday: 190). The result of this, Caneday notes, is that "Paul's warrant or authorization for employing the chosen texts (arising first from those texts and then from his theological framework) is largely passed over without discussion" (187).

The response of Caneday to the idea of rabbinical techniques in the NT is to create a dichotomy between midrash techniques and *heilsgeschichtlich* (187). Assuming that all *middoth* entail an ad hoc technique, Caneday asks the question, "[Is Scripture] wrenched from its OT context for the particular purpose at hand without further considerations? Or, does Paul find authorization in the OT text validated by his contemporary context that gives his argument credibility?" (187–88). The problems Caneday finds and his approach could be applied to the discussions about the use of *gezerah shawah* in the epistle of Hebrews. However, Caneday's question is tainted by a false dichotomy as it assumes midrash techniques are incommensurable with *heilsgeschichtlich* because of their ad hoc nature.

The assumption that an ethical approach to scripture has been compromised appears also in broader discussions regarding midrash techniques. Walter Kaiser, like Caneday, assumes that every case of rabbinic midrash is antithetical to sound principles of interpretation. Kaiser asks, "Does the method of interpreting Scripture that Jesus and the apostles taught us differ from the principles that contemporary interpreters regard as sound exegesis? Or, are the methods of Jesus and the apostles of the NT closer to the practices of rabbinic midrash and Qumranian pesher? (17).

Cuthrie's discussion of *gezerah shawah* in his monograph on the structure of Hebrews theoretically presents the same problem that Caneday sees within Pauline studies: does a verbal analogy function merely in an ad hoc fashion? (1994: 67; also 108, 125, 126, 141). Once the problem has been framed, it is apparent that a priori judgments play an important role in approaches to midrash. The a priori judgment that midrash techniques are universally ad hoc or that they force a wedge between salvation-history and ethical appropriations of the Old Testament needs to be questioned. This essay seeks to demonstrate that in the epistle to the Hebrews, a functional understanding of *gezerah shawah* consists of verbal, theological, and social aspects and that

this paradigm is not incommensurable with salvation-history and an ethical appropriation of the Old Testament.

### **Gezerah Shawah as Verbal Analogy**

As has been stated above, in the Introduction, the almost universal description of instances of *gezerah shawah* is as a "verbal analogy" or "verbal parallel." The greatest problem for understanding *gezerah shawah* as a "verbal analogy" is that of terminology because the level of description rarely goes beyond this. An analogy is defined as an argumentation of an inductive nature—but it is not entirely inductive. In other words, the definition of *gezerah shawah* as a verbal analogy is incomplete because it does not consider the deductive aspects that are necessary to any analogous relationship. It is simply not possible for the technique of *gezerah shawah* to depend entirely upon key-words or phrases.

One could conclude from the terminology of "verbal analogy" in conjunction with "key-word" that the analogy rests entirely upon single key-words. This assumption would be plausible given the commonplace definition, but it would be misleading to apply it to instances of *gezerah shawah* in Hebrews without further elaboration. The first indication from the brief review above is that instances of *gezerah shawah* include quotations of phrases as well as of single key-words. Argumentation may rely upon a single word, but this must not be taken to imply that a random identical word was chosen from the Old Testament. In sum, the general use of the term *Stichwort* in conjunction with the "verbal analogy" description may obscure proper understanding of the way *gezerah shawah* functions in Hebrews.

Even describing *gezerah shawah* as an argument of inference based on "the similarity of words or phrases" may become a source of angst among those who fear ad hoc appropriations of the Old Testament (Passamanek: 130–31). The relationship is not based on similarity of words or phrases alone. As we will see, this is too reductionistic and ignores other crucial components.

Each instance of *gezerah shawah* in Hebrews has an implicit hierarchy of value in each quotation from the Old Testament. Each argumentation bases lexical relationships on a single key-word creating a word with higher value. The surrounding words are not meaningless, nor are they functionless in the analogical relationship; they are however, secondary. And the value of this wider context can be demonstrated by the fact that while slight textual variants exist between the text of Hebrews and the Septuagint, there has been no attempt to force aberrant relationships and "the text

itself stands largely untouched” (Ellingworth: 501).

While the key-word functions as primary identifier of *gezerah shawah*, the importance of the rest of the phrase or quotation can be best placed under the rubric of the social aspect below.

### ***Gezerah Shawah* as Social Analogy**

As was noted above, a proper understanding of induction requires examining all dimensions even if they are not as prominent. In the case of applying rabbinical argumentation, this requires that social relationships must be taken into consideration. The relationship could be stated thus: *gezerah shawah* is a social analogy insofar as it relies upon the reader and interpretive community to respect its line of argumentation. To describe *gezerah shawah* or any rabbinic argument as a social analogy may seem to be stating the obvious, but neglect of this aspect has proved to be misleading.

Although many assume that midrash necessarily entails a liberal use of sources that may or may not have been historically accurate, it has been pointed out that this does not take the various definitions of midrash into account (Carson: 82). The word *midrash* can be understood at least in the following senses: (1) an interpretation, (2) allusiveness to many sources, (3) a process in which texts develop, enrich or intensify Old Testament texts, (4) an attitude more than a method, (5) an identifiable literary genre, and (6) intertextual discourse” (82; compare with Longenecker: xv and xxiii). Debates over genre and midrash have arisen over other NT books such as Carson and Gundry’s debate over Matthew. Carson notes that Gundry does not even examine the diverse interpretations as to the nature of midrash. Ultimately, Carson undermines Gundry’s assertion that the essence of midrash “lies in [its] ability to stand loose from history and/or the literary sources on which they rely” (83).

This debate between Carson and Gundry highlights the large problems that one brings to the table if the presence of *gezerah shawah* in the epistle to the Hebrews requires that the entire epistle be analyzed as midrash in genre. In the debate highlighted here, it is clear that one’s understanding of midrash can drastically alter the perception of the author’s stance toward the Old Testament text. Following Miller, it seems best to “speak of a variety of literary genres to which midrash can belong” (43). Highlighting this debate helps to orient analysis of the epistle of Hebrews by eliminating the idea that its genre is defined by the presence of rabbinical techniques.

Having dealt with the problem of genre, we find that a second issue arises regarding the social nature of *gezerah*

*shawah*. Those who view *gezerah shawah* as functioning as merely a verbal analogy apart from other dimensions have raised questions about the reputation associated with such techniques. It is assumed that the mere presence of rabbinical techniques does not do justice to the dynamics involved in the appropriation of the OT by NT authors. This is compounded by the reputation that these *middoth* as accrued by Rabbis “produced conclusions far beyond the ‘reasonable inference’ of most minds” (Ellis 1957: 42). But is this poor reputation a product of our own understanding or the understanding of the original first century recipients?

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If we understand that quotations and allusions generally enhanced the authority of the author’s own writings, it would seem puzzling to use a midrash technique that is associated with superfluity rather than hermeneutical modesty. This “authority” is similar to the authority accompanying normative texts. As Francis Watson notes, the reading community that “acknowledges certain texts as normative . . . also concerns itself with the implications of that normativity” (Watson: 78). If the author of Hebrews was employing a rabbinical technique for the purpose of convincing his readers regarding a certain issue, the usage of subjective texts would clearly not advance the argument. Thus, concerns that midrash techniques such as *gezerah shawah*, if found to be in Hebrews, would be detrimental to the New Testament’s integrity and to the faith of the church can be allayed by understanding that the mentality of Judaism was oriented towards the words of the sacred texts (Miller: 38). And it is this mentality toward the sacred text that makes the phrase or quotation surrounding the keyword so important. It is what gives force to the argument as it locates it within the Word of God that was entrusted to Israel.

This concern regarding the hermeneutical modesty and ethics of *gezerah shawah* is somewhat alleviated in light of the social context of the epistle to the Hebrews. Further legitimacy to *gezerah shawah* should be granted in light of the general consensus that the epistle to the Hebrews should be dated with an upper limit of 70 CE, before Rome destroyed the Temple (Lane: lxii). After this point, a rival method of exegesis and a far wider set of *middoth* were proposed by Rabbi Akiba. Ellis notes that Akiba’s methodology became

dominant and was responsible for "many of the extravagances" we associate with midrash techniques (Ellis 1957: 42; see R. T. France for a contrasting view: 184). These post-70 CE methods should be seen in contrast to the pesherists of the Qumran community, who often interpreted the texts of the twelve prophets "in surprisingly straightforward ways" (Watson: 111). This is not to suggest a direct relationship between Qumran and the epistle to the Hebrews, but it gives further evidence that infamous rabbinical techniques were a result of developments that did not gain momentum until after the epistle to the Hebrews was written.

The solution to the problem of association does not rest entirely upon parallels with Qumran. David Brewer has recently challenged the long held assessment of G. F. Moore and R. N. Longenecker that the midrash techniques used before 70 CE were plagued by textual manipulation. Brewer analyzes the exegetical techniques such as *gezerah shawah* (and others) in rabbinic literature during the late Second Temple Period. By looking at the techniques and assumption of scribes before 70 CE as preserved in Tannaitic sources and Pharisee-Sadducee disputes as well as their contemporaries, Brewer makes two important conclusions that diverge from previous assessments. First, he concludes that they followed an "Inspirational" approach to Scripture, which viewed Scripture as a "living prophecy inspired by a Spirit" (Brewer: 222). Secondly, "they regarded every word of Scripture as consistent and equally important, to be interpreted according to its context and according to its primary meaning only, and recognised a single valid text form" (Brewer: 222).

Thirdly, it should not be taken for granted that the interpretive community to which the epistle to the Hebrews was addressed had teachers within it to sufficiently grasp the line of argumentation that *gezerah shawah* presents. This also finds some resolution in the social settings of the epistle. William Lane notes in his commentary that the location of the epistle's origin ranges from Spain in the West to Jerusalem in the East, while settling on Rome (lvii). But even if a location cannot be agreed upon, there are two factors that indicate that the community had a knowledge of rabbinic argumentation. First, in Acts 6:7 "a great company of priests" converted to "the Way." Ellis notes that these men would scarcely "have been unversed in Rabbinic teaching but may be supposed to have applied such learning as they had acquired to the service of the new Faith" (1957: 97; also Miller: 36). Secondly, the central problem the author is addressing is that of mixing Judaism with faith in Christ or apostatizing altogether. The addressees are clearly famil-

iar with the Levitical priesthood (chapter 7), the tabernacle (chapter 8) and the Holy of Holies (chapter 9). It is not too much to suppose that although they were in the Diaspora, they were familiar with patterns of argumentation such as *gezerah shawah*. According to Lane, a "close reading of the text [of Hebrews itself] suggests that both the writer and his audience had been nurtured through Scripture and the traditions of Hellenistic Judaism prior to their response to the preaching of those who had heard Jesus" (cxxvi).

The nature of *gezerah shawah* also makes it very suitable for the highly rhetorical nature of the writer's arguments. The paronomasia in the opening lines demonstrates the author's ability to craft speech that appeals to both readers and hearers (Cosby: 4). This appeal with repetition of words naturally assumes that the writer and the hearers are using the same Old Testament scripture. Lane argues in similar fashion, stating that "The writer read his Bible in Greek, as did those whom he addressed" (cxxvi). Thus, the idea of *gezerah shawah* as a social analogy is important because of its dependence upon similarities in the community's scripture-text. The function of keywords in a rhetorical argument would lose a great deal if a translation from the Hebrew was required. In the case of the epistle to the Hebrews, the use of this technique is dependent upon the readers' familiarity with the Septuagint, as most, if not all, his quotations used a form of it (Smith: 59).

As Merrill Miller surveys the issue of the Jewish exegetical tradition and the New Testament, he makes the following point:

It is insufficient to treat the presence of OT allusions and citations in a NT passage as isolated entities. One must ask concerning possible relationships between the citations and whether Jewish exegetical methods and traditions shed light on the passage as a whole [61].

While a survey of all the relevant traditions is outside the scope of this analysis, it is sufficient to note that they play a role in determining the nature of the analogy as found in citations based on the *gezerah shawah* method.

### **Gezerah Shawah as Theological Analogy**

The use of *gezerah shawah* also functions as a theological analogy. This cannot be strictly divorced from the verbal and social dimensions. By rejecting the a priori assumption that appropriation of Old Testament texts was ad hoc, it is possible to understand the function of this technique from



a theological vantage-point that is more inclusive of the options available to the author.

The author of the epistle to the Hebrews has three options from which a theological construct can be made. The weight of a given theological construct can rest upon (1) the selection of passages quoted from the Old Testament, (2) emendations made to the quotation, and (3) the exposition in the pericope surrounding a given quotation. Although it is possible that one emendation (Hebrews 10:6) was made to a quotation from the Septuagint in order to further a *gezerah shawah* argument, the quotations reflect the Septuagint verbatim with the exception of omitting the definite article (Juel: 135). This leads to the conclusion that the theological weight of *gezerah shawah* arguments in the epistle to the Hebrews relies primarily on theological constructs formed from approaches 1 and 3.

This aspect could be described as a theological exegesis. Before *gezerah shawah* can be employed to link a keyword and phrase, a process of theological exegesis must be done beforehand. A reading of the text in its context must first take place. Lewis Donelson alludes to this, stating that when Melchizedek is referenced “Hebrews does not simply cite this one sentence and then imagine a theology based upon it” (Donelson: 23). He notes that the Melchizedek citations are far from ad hoc; rather, they are canonical in the sense that the author submits to the force of the text that is being appropriated (23).

That the theology of the underlying text was important to the writer is underscored by the fact that a quotation is usually long enough to be recognizable as a quotation. A single word may indeed be highlighted or used as a hinge, but it is accompanied by a longer phrase. One example of this is in Hebrews 1:13, where the correspondence or equivalency of the “feet” rests upon a prior theological judgment regarding the subject in view in both Psalm 8 and Psalm 110 (Psalm 109 LXX). The effect of this type of transition and argumentation is that both Psalms are made to speak in unison. Guthrie argues that this lexical relationship raises the theological question: “Have all things already been put under the Son’s feet as Psalm 8 suggests, or is the time of total subjection yet to come, as suggested by Psalm 110:1? The author’s answer is that all things have been subjected to Him, but believers do not yet see this reality (v. 8)” (1994: 108). Here, a theological agenda is pursued by virtue of the tie that the *gezerah shawah* argument has to the underlying text.

The theological approach, described as point three, refers to relationship between a *gezerah shawah* argument and the exposition surrounding it. For example, the instance of

*gezerah shawah* in Hebrews 4:3–4 demonstrates a large dependence between the argument and the surrounding exposition. And the theological exposition that relates to the issue of “rest” occurs as early in the epistle as Hebrews 3:7. Walter Kaiser notes that the topic of “rest,” which relies on Old Testament texts, does not require reinterpretation by the writer or even typology, but rather a theological perspective wherein a single divine “rest” exists, albeit with “related aspects” (172). Kaiser argues that a forced exegesis on the part of the writer would destroy the integrity of the message regarding the promise of divine rest (169). The theological approach of the whole argument is not ad hoc, and this should not be surprising if we reject the a priori assumption that *gezerah shawah* arguments consist of ad hoc appropriations. The context and exposition surrounding this instance of *gezerah shawah* bolsters the theological argument by defining the promise of rest from God and its relationship to the Old Testament. The theological aspect of *gezerah shawah* is important because the phrases quoted are not islands unto themselves.

## Conclusion

This analysis of *gezerah shawah* in the epistle to the Hebrews has sought to systematically examine the common description of this exegetical technique as a “verbal analogy” (i.e., Guthrie) or a relationship built on a single word (i.e., Hepner). By noting that an analogy must, by its very nature, entail more than inductive relationships, it is proposed here that the relationships to the social and the theological aspects be made explicit. Pfitzner hints at this when he notes that the instance of *gezerah shawah* in Hebrews 6:20 and Hebrews 7:1–10 “presupposes other hermeneutical principles” (Pfitzner: 104). The proposal this analysis suggests is admittedly modest in that it vaguely mirrors the three-dimension procedure outlined by Earl Ellis, who defines midrash as an “interpretive activity” that (1) is oriented to Scripture, (2) adapts it to the present, and (3) is for the purpose of instructing or edifying the current reader or hearer (Ellis 1991: 92). The proposal here is also three dimensional, suggesting that *gezerah shawah* be understood as an analogical argument consisting of verbal, social, and theological aspects.

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