

Joel 2:28-32a in Acts 2:17-21

The Discourse and Text-Critical Implications of Variation from the LXX

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0 Introduction

The text of Acts 2:17-21 is generally regarded a quotation from the Septuagint (LXX). However, the number and nature of the departures from the LXX reading have lead many to conclude that more is going on here than simple quotation.¹ Ruis-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger state, "More than simply citing the passage of Joel 2:28-32a LXX word for word, Peter will interpret and adapt it to [sic] so as apply it to the current situation" (2004:181).² In terms of textual criticism, several significant variants are attested between the Western text and the Alexandrian, with the former having a *shorter* reading rather than a longer one. Efforts to resolve these problems have followed traditional lines, arguing either for original adaptation by the writer, or some kind of correction by a later scribe.³

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the practical impact that these changes and variations have on the quotation's meaning in the textual context of Acts 2. What practical difference do they make? What would motivate these changes that have no textual basis in the LXX? My purpose is not to resolve the text-critical issues, nor to argue for a preferred reading. Rather, I will focus on explaining the meaningful differences that the various attested readings would bring about from the standpoint of discourse grammar. Research in the field of discourse grammar and text-linguistics has demonstrated in recent years that many issues typically described as 'stylistic variation' in fact reflect meaningful choices made on the part of the writer-editor. Thus, my goal is to demonstrate the practical benefits to be gained from attending to discourse considerations, using the citation of the LXX Joel 2:28-32a in Acts 2:17-21 as an illustration.

Since this paper is not intended to exhaustively discuss all textual variants, I have necessarily limited my discussion to the issues most influencing the overall exegesis of the passage. These issues are:

- 1) the change from μετὰ ταῦτα to ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις in Acts 2:17a;
- 2) the insertion of the prophetic formula λέγει ὁ θεός in Acts 2:17a;
- 3) the insertion of γε in Acts 2:18, and its impact on the information structure;
- 4) the insertion of ἄνω, σημεῖα and κάτω in Acts 2:20.

¹ Cf. Marshall (1980:73); Lenski (1961:73-75);

² Cf. Conzelmann (1987:18); Barrett (1994:136); Polhill (1992:109); Metzger (1975:295).

³ For a good overview of these approaches cf. Porter (2006:104-122).

Each one of these issues will be discussed in turn.

1 Change of the temporal frame of reference from generic to specific in Acts 2:17a.

The two critical LXX texts and Codex Vaticanus read a rather generic temporal expression ἔσται μετὰ ταῦτα, very much in keeping with that observed in the Hebrew Bible (BHS) (וְהָיָה אַחֲרָיִךְ). Barrett comments that “μετὰ ταῦτα simply looks forward and declares that the events in question will happen at some time in the future. Ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις points to the last act of history and claims that they are part of God’s final act of redemption” (2004:136). Similarly, Conzelmann states that the reference to the ‘last days’ “has become a stereotyped expression (cf. 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1) and no longer expresses an expectation of an immediate end” (1987:19). The insertion of a more detailed temporal expression has the effect of recasting the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit from some point in time after the events of Joel 2, to an eschatological time, one which Peter is announcing the arrival of in Acts 2.⁴ Thus, most have analyzed this variation from the LXX as intentionally motivated to better contextualize the following quotation to the events of Pentecost. From the standpoint of the manuscripts evidence, most would conclude that the reading of NA²⁷ says more about the adaptation of Joel to the context than it does about some undocumented recension of Joel (cf. Metzger 1975:295). The fact that Sinaiticus maintains disparate readings in Joel and Acts would seem to offer tacit support for this view.

2 Insertion of the Prophetic Formula in Acts 2:17a

The insertion of λέγει ὁ θεός has been described by Barrett as something of a semantic necessity in the context of Acts, to identify the intended speaker of the quotation.⁵ However, it is important to consider whether this formula is even necessary, and second, to consider its location within the overall clause.⁶ To begin with, λέγει ὁ θεός is attested only four times⁷ in

⁴ Polhill states, “Joel’s prophecy was originally given after a locust plague had ravaged the land, creating a severe famine. Joel called the people to repentance, promising the restoration of their prosperity and going on to foresee the coming of the Day of the Lord, the dawn of the messianic age, when the Spirit would be poured out on all of Israel. Peter could not miss its applicability to Pentecost. Joel began his prophecy by saying ‘and afterward.’ Peter’s version refers more specifically to ‘in the last days,’ reflecting his conviction that the messianic age had already dawned in the resurrection of Christ, that we are indeed already living in the final days of God’s saving history.” (2001:109).

⁵ “λέγει ὁ θεός (λέγει κύριος, D E latt Ir^{lat}, GrNy) is an addition to the text of Joel (3:5 has καθότι εἶπεν κύριος). An ascription is no doubt desirable in Acts; in Joel, after 2:27 (ἐγὼ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν) it was not necessary” (2004:136).

⁶ LXX^c and the MT join the temporal clause with the main clause using καί, whereas the LXX^G uses asyndeton. Whether the καί is original in LXX or not, its omission in any GNT manuscripts is most likely caused by the addition of this prophetic formula.

⁷ 2 Sa 23:3; Isa 40:1; 41:14; 44:6.

Rahlfs' edition of LXX, while the most likely Hebrew retroversion נְאֻם־אֱלֹהִים is unattested in BHS. These factors may have influenced the reading of $\overline{\omega\sigma}$ for θεός in Bezae.⁸ For the sake of discussion, I will look at the discourse function of the more widely attested collocation נְאֻם־יְהוָה in the MT in order to propose a discourse function for the presence of a comparable prophetic formula in Acts 2:17.

Watson notes that expressions like נְאֻם־יְהוָה and כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה, “even if [they are] later editorial insertions—can help show where major structural segments are demarcated”, stating on the following page that these introductions can also be used to arouse the reader’s interest (2001:164). Parunak, in attempting to provide a unified description of the discourse function of נְאֻם־יְהוָה, notes that its most basic function is to mark a disjunction in the text (1994:514). But he also claims that it is a focus marker, signaling “a highly local highlighting of a clause or phrase that merits the recipient’s attention” (1994:511).⁹

In the vast majority of occurrences of נְאֻם־יְהוָה in the Hebrew Bible, the formula is found at the end of a clause, rather than in the middle as here in Acts 2. Only fourteen out of the 65 (i.e. 22%) occurrences in the Book of the Twelve are clause medial, and the proportion is even lower for the entire Hebrew Bible, 39 out of 268x (i.e. 15%). Of the fourteen clause-medial occurrences of נְאֻם־יְהוָה in the Twelve, nine of them separate a temporal frame that is predicated (e.g. ‘It will come about in those days...’) from the disclosure of what will happen at that time. In other words, placing the formula clause-medially after the temporal frame has the effect of delaying the disclosure of what will happen, creating a greater sense of expectation than would have occurred with a clause-initial כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה, or a clause-final use of נְאֻם־יְהוָה.

I propose that the clause-medial prophetic formula used in the context of Acts 2:17 has the effect of highlighting the action that will come about in the last days, in a manner that is completely consistent with the usage of נְאֻם־יְהוָה observed in Jeremiah and the Twelve. In light

⁸ For a thematic motivation for the reading in Bezae, cf. Ruis-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger (2004:169): “Whereas $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ is a reference to God, $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ is potentially ambiguous since it can mean Yahweh, as in LXX, or Jesus. 2:33 will make clear that Jesus is intended”.

⁹ O’Connor attributes a similar function to oracle titles such as נְאֻם־יְהוָה, which he refers to as “discourse level focus-markings” (1997:356). Similarly, Revell notes that repeated speech introductions can often be best explained as “intended to draw attention to the following speech” (1997:109). Thus, most explanations either claim that it is structural or else accomplishing some sort of highlighting, but not both. I have argued elsewhere that these issues are more accurately described in terms of an entailment hierarchy, whereby one function is entailed within another (cf. Runge 2007, esp. chapter 6).

of this, the pouring out of the Spirit ends up receiving special prominence, the core point that Peter is attempting to make with the crowd regarding their misunderstanding of what they have seen. The writer could have just as easily (and perhaps more properly) used a clause-initial בְּהַאֲמַר יְהוָה , or perhaps no quotative formula at all, and the Jewish crowd would have understood that the intended speaker in the quotation was not the prophet himself. Alternatively, the formula could have been placed at the end of the clause, as would normally be expected from its usage elsewhere.

Regardless of the origins of the more specific temporal frame and the prophetic formula, they both contribute much to contextualizing the quotation from Joel 2 to the discourse context of Acts 2. The temporal frame recasts the promise for a generic later time into a specifically eschatological one. The location of the prophetic formula, whether semantically required or not, and regardless of one reads $\acute{\omicron}$ θεός or $\overline{\kappa\sigma}$, has the effect of adding prominence to the very point that Peter was attempting to make, viz. the outpouring of the Spirit.

3 Insertion of $\gamma\epsilon$ and its Impact on the Information Structure in Acts 2:18

In v. 18, most NT manuscripts read $\text{καί } \gamma\epsilon$, whereas Cambridge and Göttingen editions of LXX simply read καί . BHS reads וְגַ , which is regularly rendered in the Old Greek of the Twelve using only the connective καί . Καί is most commonly used as a coordinating conjunction. Thus, it is most often construed as a conjunction unless some other coordinating conjunction is present to disambiguate the intended meaning, or unless it is used in a context where asyndeton is prevalent. It can also function adverbially, and is best understood as an ‘additive’ (cf. Heckert 1996:71-90). This function specifies that the clause element it modifies should be added to some preceding, similar element, usually translated into English as ‘also.’ Adverbial καί can also add something to itself, usually translated into English as ‘even.’ This adverbial function of καί as an additive is comparable to וְגַ in Hebrew.¹⁰ Thus, when καί occurs by itself, unless it is in a context of asyndetic clause connections or another connective, is most likely to be construed as a connective rather than as an adverbial additive.

In considering the context of the usage in the LXX of Joel 2:29, it is unclear whether the καί functions adverbially or not. Verse 29a is the fifth consecutive clause to begin with καί ,

¹⁰ Van der Merwe et al. state, “Speakers or writers give an explicit indication to their audience that a specific something or someone must be added to something or someone referred to in the preceding context: also, even, moreover, even more so” (1997:315).

making it difficult to construe it as an additive without making reference to the Hebrew reading. However, the presence or absence of an additive in this context has a significant effect on how the information structure of the clause is processed.

Verses 17c and 17d in Acts 2 begin with what have traditionally been called contrastive topics, which have the effect of establishing specific topical frames of reference for the clause that follows.¹¹ Each topic frame is followed by the object of the verb, which I construe as positioned before the verb for the sake of emphasis. Thus, two back-to-back clauses use a fronted subject to create a new topical frame, followed immediately by an emphasized element before the verb. This structure in v. 17 leads Lenski to state, “so the three predicates form a unit, each predicate saying the same thing with variation, as each subject is only a variation” (1961:75). In transitioning to v. 29 of LXX, the fronting of ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας could easily be construed as signaling another switch of topic, specifying yet another entity that will experience some manifestation of the Spirit. Similarly, an argument could also be made for construing it as fronted for emphasis, based on the previous context and the ordering of the components that follow. To one extent or another, its function is ambiguous as rendered in the LXX editions.

If we now consider what difference the presence or absence that γε would make, I contend that it effectively disambiguates the intended function of ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους μου καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας μου.¹² In BHS, the presence of καὶ indicates that rather than listing another contrastive topic, what follows indicates the extreme extent to which the outpouring of the Spirit will be experienced: *even on the menservants and maidservants*. The repetition of καὶ from Joel 3:1 adds support for the view that what is being asserted in v. 2 of BHS is *who else* will receive the Spirit, rather than *what* will happen to the menservants and maidservants. Thus, γε in Acts 2:18 has the effect of disambiguating the information structure of the clause, clarifying that the fronted element is emphatic, not contrastive. Though the reading in LXX is ambiguous, NETS has translated the καὶ adverbially. Thus, while γε may represent a plus reading with respect to the LXX, it plays a significant role in disambiguating the intended meaning of the clause, preserving the clarity that is observed in the MT.

¹¹ For a thorough introduction to the information structure observed in the Greek New Testament, cf. Levinsohn (2000).

¹² Most commentators understand the fronted prepositional phrases of v. 18a as emphatic (e.g. Lenski 1961:75; Fitzmeyer 1998:253; Barrett 2004:137; Newman and Nida 1972:44), however none discuss the difference that the presence or absence of γε has on this reading.

Codex Bezae departs from the other major manuscripts in reading εγω for γε. I will leave it to Ruis-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger (cf. 2004:170) to argue which is the better reading, and will focus on the effect that this reading would have on the information structure. As I stated, vv. 17c and 17d began with contrastive subjects that establish new topical frames of reference for the following clause. This could create the expectation that ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους μου καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας μου in v. 18 is serving a similar function. However, the presence of the explicit subject εγω in Bezae would be construed as yet another topic frame, establishing a contrastive switch from the topic of v. 17d. Hence, even without γε, the fronted prepositional phrase would still be analyzed as emphatic in Bezae since the question of whether it is a contrastive topic or not is settled by the presence of the personal pronoun. Bezae also omits the temporal phrase ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις, which further disambiguates that the motivation for fronting ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους μου καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας μου is for emphasis, not to establish a contrastive topic.

4 Insertion of ἄνω, σημεία and κάτω in Acts 2:20

In the LXX editions of the quoted text, the Göttingen and Cambridge editions differ in their understanding regarding the intended parallelism of the Joel 2:30. Based on the placement of the *atnach* accent in BHS, the text is to be read as a general statement about the giving of signs in the heavens and on the earth. This is followed by what would technically be called a right-dislocation, a syntactically independent appositional phrase that provides additional information about some referent in the main clause. In this case, the signs (and possibly the wonders too) are given greater specification: blood, fire and columns of smoke. This reading is adopted in the NETS version, exemplified in the use of a colon to separate the main clause from the right dislocation. The Göttingen edition uses a comma to disambiguate how the text should be read, in agreement with BHS and NETS.

There is an alternative reading reflected in the Cambridge edition, wherein there is a comma following οὐρανῶ. This has a rather significant effect on the verse structure, creating contrasting statements about what will happen in the heavens and on the earth.

³ καὶ δώσω τέρατα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῶ, καὶ ^{SP} ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς αἷμα καὶ πῦρ καὶ ἀτμίδα καπνοῦ,	And I will give wonders in the heavens , And ^{SP} on the earth , blood and fire and columns of smoke.
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Read in this way, the verse creates a chiasm with the prepositional phrase in the second colon, which creates a new spatial frame of reference to switch from ‘in the heavens’ to ‘on the earth’. The verb in the second colon would be construed as elided and thus dependent upon the first

colon. On this basis, it seems that the reading in the LXX editions evinces an ambiguity in the Greek, one which each clarifies through the use of punctuation.

On the other hand, the NT manuscripts nearly universally attest three pluses in Acts 2:19, unattested in the LXX or in the BHS: κάτω, σημεῖα, and ἄνω. The presence of these words effectively counters the possibility of the second reading found in Cambridge edition, essentially disambiguating the nature of the parallelism.

καὶ δώσω τέρατα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἄνω καὶ σημεῖα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς κάτω , ^{R-Dis} αἷμα καὶ πῦρ καὶ ἀτμίδα καπνοῦ·	And I will give wonders in the heavens above , And signs on the earth below : blood and fire and columns of smoke.
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Based on the pluses in the NT texts, what is punctuated as right dislocated in BHS and the Göttingen edition is outside the scope of the parallelism in the NT readings as well. Adding σημεῖα changes the parallelism of the first two cola from potentially chiasmic to directly parallel, juxtaposing ‘wonders’ with ‘signs’, and ‘above’ with ‘below’. Since the final colon is not in parallel with either of the preceding lines, it is understood as appositional to at least one of the preceding cola. Bezae omits the dislocated segment, but retains the pluses described above. The net result is to maintain the same parallelism as the other NT manuscripts, without providing the additional detail about the signs and wonders. In other words, the primary difference between Bezae and the other NT manuscripts is one of semantic detail, not syntactic relations.

Thus, I contend that the pluses attested in the NT manuscripts have the effect of disambiguating the nature of the parallelism intended by the LXX, specifying the exact relation of the lines to one another that does not necessitate the use of punctuation. Though the NT manuscripts attest several pluses in v. 19 compared to the LXX, I contend that the effect is to disambiguate how the lines are to be related to one another in the absence of punctuation.

5 Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to demonstrate the contribution of insights from discourse grammar to the process of understanding and resolving text-critical issues. Only one of the four significant variations from the LXX editions have been given much consideration within the literature, other than evaluating the manuscript evidence either for or against the reading. In the case of the prophetic formula, I demonstrated that its clause-medial placement has the effect of drawing greater attention to the proposition which follows. In the case of the other pluses in vv. 18 and 20, each one had the effect of disambiguating some aspect of the

grammar that is either left ambiguous in the LXX editions, or resolved through the use of punctuation.

Such discrepancies often raise questions about whether they represent some unattested LXX reading, or alternatively an adaptation of the original into some new and different message. Other than the change in temporal frame from generic to specifically eschatological in Acts 2:17, I have demonstrated that each variation plays a significant role in its context of *preserving* the original Hebrew meaning, at least as it is attested in BHS, by clarifying ambiguous readings. I contend that these variations should not be understood as evidence of unattested recensions, nor should they be rejected based on their absence from the LXX reading. Rather, the variations evince a consistent attempt to provide grammatical clarity to the message communicated. This study also illustrates the potential contribution that discourse grammar and text-linguistics can offer to text-critical analysis.

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