

Paul and the Jewish Scriptures: Unit Notes 2

In the previous document the subject of Paul's engagement with the Jewish Scriptures was introduced by delineating a number of the exegetical techniques identifiable in Paul's use of explicit scriptural quotations, as well as attempting to identify some of his hermeneutical principles or assumptions, in so far as they can be gleaned from individual statements in his various letters. Paul's engagement with the Jewish Scriptures, it appears, is underpinned by his christological-eschatological perspective, a perspective that enables him to interpret Scripture as finding its present fulfilment in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. At the beginning of the letter to the Romans Paul sets out his understanding of the gospel as the revelation of the righteousness of God, which, he claims, was 'promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures' (1:2). In Galatians, moreover, he declares that God's promise to bless all the nations through Abraham, the paradigm of faith leading to righteousness, was also declared beforehand in Scripture (3:8) and is fulfilled in Christ, the seed or offspring of Abraham. Scripture, for Paul, is a witness to the gospel concerning Jesus, and this is what enables him to state in Romans 3:21 that 'now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets'. Here the use of the present tense 'is attested' highlights the role of scripture as a living witness, a principle that he applies at various points in Romans: God through agents like Moses, Isaiah and David continues to speak (*legei*) (9:25; 10:8, 19, 20; 11:9; 15:12).

Admittedly Paul in his letters does not offer an extended treatment of his view of Scripture, but the interpretative comments already noted, many of which accompany his explicit quotations, do provide valuable clues about his understanding of the purpose and significance of the testimony of Israel's Scriptures. The aim in these unit notes is to broaden the discussion by considering how and the extent to which he actually *uses* Scripture. A series of questions need to be posed: What modes of scriptural reference does Paul employ in his letters? There is abundant evidence of direct appeal through explicit quotations, but how does one identify more veiled references (otherwise known as allusions and echoes)? Furthermore, what light is thrown on Paul's theological arguments by the discovery of these less overt modes of reference? Such questions inevitably lead

us to enquire about the function of various modes of scriptural reference with a view to the readers/hearers of Paul's letters. It is one thing to speak of Paul's profound engagement with Scripture both as a theologian and exegete (for which his explicit quotations are merely the tip of the iceberg), but if this engagement possesses far more scriptural depth how does it relate to Paul's role as a communicator through his letters?

It is only during the last decade or so that these questions have been seriously discussed in the debate on Paul's use of the Jewish Scriptures. For this reason, examining the findings of some important recent studies on this subject can act as a springboard in an attempt to address these important issues.

Paul's Engagement with Scripture as a 'Hermeneutical Event'

One study in particular has had a major impact on recent discussion of Paul's use of scripture, namely Richard Hays's book *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (1989). Hays's search for scriptural 'echoes' in Paul's letters marks a significant departure from the traditional approach of focusing on the explicit quotations. By working from a literary-critical perspective Hays seeks to demonstrate that the Jewish Scriptures played a far more decisive role in the formation of Paul's writings than is often acknowledged. In sharp response to the tendency in scholarship to view the explicit quotations merely as proof-texts (as separable components from Paul's theological discourse), he argues that Scripture in fact pervades Paul's writings from beginning to end in the form of allusive references.

Hays is to be credited, in this respect, with the introduction of the term 'intertextuality' into discussions of the Jewish Scriptures in the New and, for that purpose, he adopts the methods developed by literary theorists like John Hollander (*The Figure of Echo* 1981), although he uses the term far more loosely than the explanations attached to the term in semiotics. In many cases his 'intertextual' method of determining the extent of the influence of an older text (in this case a scriptural passage) in a newer text (a Pauline passage) begins with the undisputed presence of a marked or explicit quotation. This then leads him to search for more subtle echoes of the source text in its new Pauline context. Hays thus argues that 'the most significant elements of intertextual correspondence between old context and new can be implicit rather than voiced, perceptible only within the silent space

framed by the juncture of two texts' (p. 155). Thus, having identified verbal correspondence between two texts, Hays undertakes an elaborate examination of the broader literary and theological context of the scriptural passage and traces its influence on Paul's language and theological expression.

His method is not, however, always controlled by the use of an explicit quotation as his starting point. Hays can also search for 'echoes' on the basis of what he claims to be evidence of thematic correspondence between Paul's text and a scriptural passage. To determine whether this correspondence amounts to an echo, he tests it against seven criteria (pp. 29-33): **availability** (was the scriptural source of the echo available to the author and/or original hearers); **volume** (what is the degree of verbal correspondence between the echo and the source text and prominence in Paul's argument); **recurrence** (how often does Paul elsewhere cite or allude to the same scriptural passage; cf. Hab. 2:4; Gen. 15:6); **thematic coherence** (how well does the proposed echo accord with the argument developed by Paul); **historical plausibility** (could Paul have intended the alleged effect in view of the historical and cultural context, particularly first-century Judaism); **history of interpretation** (have other readers, ancient and modern, heard the same echoes); **satisfaction** (does the proposed reading make sense of Paul's larger argument).

To cite one example, attention can be drawn to Hays's examination of the key thematic verses in Romans 1:16-17: 'I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith"'. Usual attention is given to the quotation of Habakkuk 2:4, and, in particular, how Paul may have used this verse differently from its original context. But Hays broadens the discussion by examining how Paul is drawing on the language of additional scriptural texts (LXX) to communicate his message. Echoes of other texts, he claims, can be identified. First, he interprets the language 'I am not ashamed' (1:16) as an echo of the 'shame' language in Isaiah and Psalms and which appear to have influenced Paul's understanding of the righteousness of God. He draws attention in particular to Isaiah 50:7-8: 'I know that I will not be ashamed, because the one who justifies me is near'. The presence of the language of 'shame' and 'righteousness' makes this verse, according to Hays, a probable source of Paul's

language. Furthermore, he has transformed the tense of the verb from future ('I will not be ashamed') to present ('I am not ashamed') to emphasize that the one who justifies is not only near but has been revealed on the cross and is presently revealed in the gospel.

Hays proposes, moreover, that other passages (Ps. 97:2-3; Isa. 51:4; 52:10) have shaped Paul's language about salvation (in 1:16) and about the righteousness of God being revealed (in 1:17). Among them are Psalm 97:2 (LXX) which reads: 'The Lord has made known his salvation; in the presence of the nations/Gentiles he has revealed) his righteousness'. Paul, argues Hays, echoes the psalmist's language because he shares his eschatological vision: his hope is that God's vindication of Israel will serve as a demonstration to the whole world of the power and faithfulness of Israel's God, and will bring even Gentiles to acknowledge him. Paul seeks to demonstrate that the gospel must be understood as the fulfilment of the promise, in Psalm 97:2, that God's righteousness will be revealed in an act of deliverance for the Jews first and also for the Gentiles. 'The reader, signalled by the echoes, is required to grasp together old text and new' (p. 38).

The overall 'hermeneutical event' identified by Richard Hays in Paul's letters is the emphasis on Israel's Scriptures as God's address to the church, his eschatological people, in the gathering together of both Jews and Gentiles (ecclesiocentric). Paul's aim is to establish a line of continuity between Scripture's understanding of Israel as the people of God and the church as the eschatological people gathered in Christ. His rigorous search for scriptural echoes thus leads Hays to draw the important conclusion that Deuteronomy and Isaiah are, in many respects, Paul's hermeneutical precursors: he follows their method of reading the history of God's past dealings with Israel as prefiguring a much larger eschatological plan.

His methodology for identifying scriptural echoes in Paul does, nevertheless, raise questions about the parameters of his enterprise. Virtually every section of Paul's letters, he claims, is soaked in scriptural language. This may well be true, but was this Paul's conscious perception of what he was doing or is it rather the outcome of an academic exercise undertaken by a learned scholar like Richard Hays who has access to useful tools like concordances and a single volume copy of the Septuagint? Hays's interest in and commitment to the exercise can be

demonstrated by his following statement: 'If I, having learned something about Paul's historical circumstances and having read the same Scripture that Paul lived in so deeply, discern in his language echoes of that Scripture, it is not improbable that I am overhearing the same echoes that he and his earliest readers might have been able to hear' (p. 28). There is a sense in which Hays's method allows Paul to echo any passage of the Jewish Scriptures, be it intentionally or unintentionally, which raises the question why it is necessary to bring Paul into the equation at all if he is no more than the vessel through which the texts flow.

Admittedly, Hays has devised seven criteria for defining an echo, but some are too subjective to be viewed as viable and watertight guidelines (historical plausibility, satisfaction). He also fails to make a clear distinction between allusions (which point to a conscious mode of scriptural reference deliberately intended by Paul) and echoes (as that which resides in the subconscious mind of the author). Of course, to claim that scriptural echoes in Paul may not be as pervasive as Hays argues is not the same as saying that scripture, as a result, is not important to Paul's arguments. But if we move from an author-orientated perspective (what is the influence of scripture on Paul's language and theology) to an audience-oriented approach (how would Paul's audience have understood his use of Scripture), it is necessary to enquire about the communicative strategy of Paul's hermeneutic. In other words, how many of the scriptural echoes are solely in Paul's mind and how many does he presuppose would be heard by his readers, the majority of whom were of Gentile descent with varying degrees of exposure to the Jewish Scriptures?

Some appreciation is therefore required of what it meant to be a first-century Gentile reader of Paul's letters. Could his myriad allusions to, and echoes of, Scripture have been recognized by such a reader? The depth of prior scriptural knowledge required to appreciate such modes of scriptural reference seems to assume that Paul's audiences engaged in regular study (personal or communal) of the Scriptures. This assumption may be tempered somewhat by the likelihood that first-century Christ-believers had limited access to the scriptural texts; not only were they expensive, but they were probably still in circulation as separate scrolls (the codex of the Septuagint, for example, was not formed until the end of the first century). Furthermore, studies of literacy in the ancient world have demonstrated

that it is unlikely that more than 10 per cent of the population would have been able to read or write, making it probable that only a fairly small proportion of Paul's audiences, if they had access to the Scriptures in the first place, would have been capable of remembering the context and grasping the allusions and echoes contained in his letters. Communication would have been through the spoken word (cf. 2 Thess. 5:27 where Paul commands that his letter be read to all the members of the congregation). Of course, it does not necessarily follow that Paul did not include such allusions and echoes in his letters. According to the technical definition of an 'echo', Paul may not have always been fully aware of the fact that his mode of expression was inherently scriptural. He may not, moreover, have been overly concerned as to whether all his references to Scripture could have been heard by his audience. Alternatively, he may have set himself the task of appealing to a particular constituent among the recipients of his letters, namely those who were of Jewish descent and, if literate, had access to scrolls (thus depending on them to communicate the scriptural depth of his letters to their Gentile co-members).

Scriptural Quotations and their Rhetorical Effect

If Hays's study represents a maximalist approach to Paul's engagement with Scripture, a far more cautious method characterises the work of those who adopt an audience reception model and take very seriously the fact that most of Paul's readers were Gentile Christians. Such an approach is adopted in a study published by Christopher Stanley, entitled *Arguing with Scripture: The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul*. As the title of this study suggests, it focuses on the lowest common denominator, namely the explicit or marked quotations included by Paul, and which, due to the inclusion of citation formulas like 'it is written', would have been recognized as overt references to Scripture by all of Paul's audiences, regardless of whether they were of Jewish or Gentile descent. In an admirable attempt to enquire about the effect of these quotations on such readers/hearers, Stanley asks: why does Paul quote so often from the Scriptures in his letters if most members of the churches addressed came from non-Jewish backgrounds? What was Paul as a missionary and communicator trying to accomplish? Stanley analyses the quotations in their role as rhetorical devices, as a method of persuasion, intended to influence the thoughts and actions of the first-century audience (and in particular to dissuade them from their current course of action).

He is not concerned with the function of the quotations as windows into the theology or exegetical activities of Paul.

Stanley stresses throughout this book that an examination of Paul's strategy of scriptural argumentation must take seriously the limited capabilities of his audiences (such as low literacy levels and lack of access to the scriptural texts from which he quotes). Paul's method of citing Scripture also accommodates, according to Stanley, the diversity among the recipients of his letters. He often sets his quotations within a framework that signals to his readers/hearers, through explanatory comments, how he intends the quotations to be understood without it being necessary to know their original context. In other words, he framed his quotations in a way that their meaning could be determined from the context of his letter (this was demonstrated through an exegetical analysis of Galatians 3 in the previous set of unit notes). His audience may have included informed readers (those who were in a position to engage with the original context of the quotations and assess their application by Paul), as well as readers with only limited knowledge of scripture but who were, nevertheless, able to grasp the overall rhetorical effect of the quotations.

What is their intended rhetorical effect? In the four letters in which Paul does use explicit quotations, his integrity and apostolic authority are being called into question: Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans. And yet, at the same time Paul would have been aware that the recipients of these four letters, as converts to the early Christian movement, would have acknowledged and respected the authority of Scripture (although this is perhaps debatable). The rhetorical function of scriptural quotations is that they enable Paul to appeal to the higher authority of Scripture to give further weight to his argument and to reinforce his standing with the intended audience by highlighting their common bond. By aligning his own voice with the voice of God speaking in Scripture (cf. Rom. 1:2; 3:2; 12:19; 1 Cor. 9:10, 12:41), Paul points to God as the source of his arguments that his audiences might otherwise be tempted to reject. In the case of Romans he does so to demonstrate the consistency of his message (1:2; 3:31; 9:6), while the more polemical contexts of the other three letters in which he quotes Scripture (Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians) requires him to establish scripture as the voice of authority to counter the false teachings of his opponents. Thus, in the case of the

passage from Galatians, Paul begins to offer arguments with the aid of explicit quotations at this point in the letter to counter the teachings put forward by his opponents, but also to draw divine support that he, as an authoritative apostle (Gal. 1-2), offers a reliable interpretation of Scripture.

Clearly, it is necessary to distinguish at this point between a reader's detailed knowledge of the context of individual quotations and his or her more general acquaintance with the narrative of Israel's Scriptures. In the case of Galatians, Paul would surely have expected his readers to know the broad outline of the Abraham narrative - God's covenant with Abraham, Abraham's faith in God's promises, and the stories of Sarah and Hagar and their respective sons. Even broader knowledge of Scripture is presupposed by Paul in his letter to the Romans, assuming their familiarity with the story of Adam, Abraham, Esau and Jacob, the exodus story, Elijah's battle with Jezebel, even the authors of specific biblical books (Isaiah, Hosea, Moses) (Gal. 3:6-9, 16-18; 4:21-31; 1 Cor. 15:45-49; Rom 3:25; 5:12-21). In 1 Corinthians knowledge of Passover is necessary to make sense of references to the 'old yeast' and the 'paschal lamb' in 5:7-8, while the exodus and wilderness years of Israel are referred to in 10:1-10. In the case of the communities founded by Paul himself (Galatia and Corinth), Paul could have communicated such knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures while he was with them. This then raises the possibility that Paul may have offered instruction on the scriptural passages from which he draws his quotations and in particular his interpretation of them. It should also be borne in mind that Paul, with only a few exceptions, quotes from and alludes to the Septuagint. Could this be a strategy on his part to use a version that his Gentile readers (if they had access to certain texts) could verify? This is not an attempt to deny the validity of Stanley's arguments but to draw attention to the fact that so little is known about the communities' engagement with scripture before or after they received letters from Paul. Arguments from silence can move in opposite directions.

Furthermore, there are examples in Paul's letters where a quotation is not particularly meaningful at any level other than a rhetorical one if the hearer does not have some knowledge of the context from which the quotation is drawn. Exodus 16:18, as quoted in 2 Corinthians 8:15 in the call to give aid is one such example: 'The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had

little did not have too little'. This quotation, despite the silence, is meant to evoke the memory of God's provision of the same amount of manna for each individual in the wilderness. Without knowledge of this context of miraculous provision by God, Paul's citation leaves one with the uncomfortable message that there is excess for some and want for others rather than an emphasis on equality in supply.

This recent study offers several important insights into Paul's engagement with Scripture, although it should be emphasized that Stanley's interest lies in one particular aspect of that engagement, namely the *effect* of Paul's scriptural quotations on his readers/hearers. It should however be borne in mind that Paul can sometimes use unmarked quotations (1 Cor. 5:13; 15:32; 2 Cor. 10:17; 13:1). Since these leave open the possibility that his audience would not identify the words as a scriptural quotation, it demonstrates that Paul is not always interested in using knowledge of Scripture as a lever of power and authority. One can draw attention, in this respect, to 2 Corinthians 13:1 where Paul quotes Deuteronomy 17:7 ('Any charge must be sustained by evidence of two or three witnesses') and then proceeds to warn the Corinthians of his impending visit with the stark warning 'I will not be lenient' (v. 2). If Paul were so interested in using scriptural words for rhetorical effect as a tool of authority, he has missed here an ideal opportunity in verse 1 to alert his audience to the fact that he is drawing on the support of Scripture.

Focusing on the effect of Paul's quotations on his audience should not, in any way, diminish their role as expressions, if not the catalysts, of Paul's theology. When Stanley argues towards the end of his book that 'Paul's quotations simply reinforce a point that he has already made or intends to make in his own words' (p. 182), what he does not consider is that Paul's own words are often generated by the words of Scripture. Quotations are not simply prooftexts floating on the surface of Paul's argument; they are the most overt form of evidence that Paul's theology is underpinned and shaped by Scripture.

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