

Paul and the Jewish Scriptures: Unit Notes 1

There is no doubt that many key aspects of Paul's thinking are underpinned and shaped by his scriptural heritage. Much of what Paul has to say about subjects like eschatology, law and wisdom find their basis and draw their vocabulary from Jewish Scripture and tradition. Indeed, the 'narrative' of Paul's theology (a perspective that is increasingly receiving attention in Pauline studies) is founded on the 'narrative' of Scripture: this narrative begins with God's act of creation and is followed by the fall of Adam, whom Paul views as the one responsible for bringing sin and death into the world. It is from this slavery of sin, which sets people in opposition to God, that humanity needs salvation. Thus Abraham, for Paul, is a paradigm of faith leading to righteousness, while the promise to bless all the nations through him finds its fulfilment in Christ, described as the 'seed' of Abraham. For Paul, like other early New Testament writers, Jesus' death and resurrection are the decisive fulfilment of God's promises of old.

A fairly substantial outline of Paul's theology could therefore be provided if we were to focus on his engagement with the Jewish Scriptures, and many aspects of this engagement will undoubtedly feature prominently in other units in this module on Paul and his letters. My aim, however, is to focus on one particular aspect of Paul's use of the Jewish Scriptures, namely his appeal to Scripture through the use of explicit quotations. With the aid of this mode of scriptural reference Paul sets out many of his significant theological arguments and attempts to settle a variety of disputes in his communities on issues of belief and practice.

Explicit Quotations

A study of the explicit scriptural quotations included in Paul's letters does, nevertheless, raise some important methodological questions. Statistical evidence is frequently cited to highlight the significance of scriptural quotations in Paul's letters, but some caution is required when using this evidence. Some quotations are more crucial for Paul's argument than others, while it is also possible to offer various definitions of what actually constitutes a quotation. If one adopts a fairly broad definition (that is, the inclusion of a series of words that reproduce fairly accurately the wording of a scriptural passage), the list of quotations in Paul's

letters is certainly impressive (these are known as unmarked quotations). If one follows the statistics offered by John Court in his useful compendium, it is possible to identify over a hundred quotations in the authentically Pauline letters alone: Romans (71), 1 Corinthians (23), 2 Corinthians (16), Galatians (16). The list would even include a few scattered quotations in Philipians (1) and 1 Thessalonians (4). However, if one adopts a narrower definition of an explicit quotation (that is, it must also be accompanied by some kind of marker, such as an interpretative comment, or a citation formula like 'it is written' or 'Scripture says'), the number of quotations in Paul's letters decreases slightly and is restricted to four letters: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians. Philipians and Thessalonians then disappear from the list.

Admittedly, a narrower definition of an explicit quotation (marked quotation) does not necessarily diminish the importance of Paul's use of the Jewish Scriptures. The numbers are still high since Paul does generally tend to signal his use of Scripture. Furthermore, it does not hide the fact that the bulk of Paul's quotations are drawn from four books: Isaiah, Psalms, Genesis, and Deuteronomy. Certainly the scripturally literate reader/hearer of Paul's letters would be able to identify his quotations with or without a signpost such as 'as Scripture says'. But would all these quotations have been recognizable to less well-versed hearers or readers, particularly if the quotations were deeply embedded in Paul's argument and were not accompanied by a marker to alert the reader or hearer to their presence? This is a question of some importance when assessing the use of the Jewish Scriptures in any New Testament writing, but it is particularly relevant in the case of Paul since the majority of the recipients of his letters would have been Gentiles with more limited knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures.

Another issue to be considered, one that has tended to dominate earlier studies on the use of the Jewish Scriptures in the New Testament, is the nature of the scriptural text (or texts) used by Paul as the source of his quotations. In a number of cases they are drawn from the Septuagint (Greek Bible), but sometimes they agree with the Hebrew text over the Septuagint, and in others he departs from both (1 Cor. 15:54 // Isa. 25:8; Gal. 3:10 // Deut. 27:26; Gal. 3:13 // Deut. 21:23). How should these deviations be explained? Is Paul drawing from memory, or deliberately adapting the Hebrew or Greek text for the purpose of his argument, or

is he drawing from manuscripts no longer known? In the middle of the first century CE the Septuagint was far from being a uniform and fixed collection. It consisted of a series of diverse translations stemming from different translators over the course of two centuries from a wide variety of circumstances. Discoveries among the Dead Sea Scrolls have also revealed striking textual diversity within Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts of the same biblical books (for example, the two major scrolls of Isaiah). The Septuagint renderings attested in Paul's letters could therefore have been derived from a Hebrew base text (what is known as a *Vorlage*) different from that of the Masoretic text. Such factors complicate the task of assessing the deviations in Paul's quotations from known source texts.

Exegetical Techniques and Hermeneutical Principles

What is confirmed by a comparison of Paul's letters with translations like the Septuagint and the Qumran biblical scrolls, as well as Jewish writings such as the commentaries (*pesharim*) found among the Dead Sea Scrolls and early rabbinic texts, is this: Paul, as a scriptural exegete, was greatly influenced by a whole range of exegetical principles and methods also employed by his Jewish contemporaries. Such methods include his use of allegory, as in his allegorical interpretation of Sarah and Hagar as representative of two covenants (Gal. 4:21-31). This can be compared with the use of allegory in the *Damascus Document* 7:14-21, where the threat of Amos (5:25-26) that Israel will be exiled to Damascus is transformed into a promise and is allegorized in order to predict the origins of the community.

Furthermore, Paul's exegetical arguments are often developed through the stringing together of scriptural quotations drawn from diverse contexts, but which Paul is able to link together because of the presence of common words or expressions in the quotations in question. The outcome of this kind of interdependent reading, with its underlying principle of the *unity* of Scripture, is that one quotation can now be interpreted with reference to another. Among such examples are Romans 11:8-10 where he quotes Deuteronomy 29:3 ('God gave them a sluggish spirit, eyes that would not see') and links it to Psalm 69 (68):23 ('Let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see') to explain why Israel 'failed to obtain what it was seeking' (Rom. 11:7). This exegetical technique is familiar from rabbinic writings (known as *gezera shawah*), but it is also frequently attested in the earlier exegetical commentaries discovered in Qumran.

There is no doubt that placing Paul within his Jewish heritage and context casts significant light on his citation of Scripture in his letters. Like the members of the Qumran community and the early rabbis he undertakes scriptural interpretation with the aid of well-established principles and techniques, and even for similar purposes such as ethical instruction. Paul, like the *pesharim* of Qumran or the *halakhah* of the rabbis, can apply individual commandments of the law to address specific problems in his communities, that is, as a binding force for their practices (cf. 2 Cor. 13:1). However, Paul does so in the light of his new situation (cf. 1 Cor. 9:8-10). In the light of the Christ event, and the demonstration of God's love in the cross (Rom. 5:8), the believer must view the Torah from a completely new perspective (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-15).

Fulfilment in the Christ Event

But what is this perspective? Paul, for example, shared with the Qumran community the conviction that the Jewish Scriptures find their fulfilment in a new event or in a series of events. Many of the Qumran documents demonstrate that they viewed themselves as a prophetic-eschatological community, as the goal of God's activity in history (cf. 1QpHab 7:1-5, 7-8). They even interpreted their movement as the sign for the future manifestation of God's salvation (cf. 1QS 8:13). However, Paul's christological perspective, as in the case of other New Testament writers, enables him to focus on the present eschatological fulfilment of Scripture through the death and resurrection of Christ. Thus, a Qumran text can describe the prophet Isaiah as 'the prophet for the last days' (4Q174 frgs. 1-2 15), which reflects the community's understanding of Isaiah as one whose promises of eschatological salvation are already in the process of being, or will in the future be, fully realized. What is distinctive about Paul's application of prophecies like Isaiah (one of his favourite texts) is his conviction that this future has now decisively arrived in the Christ event. He is a witness to the 'good tidings' (*euangelion* or 'gospel'; cf. Isa. 40:9; 41:27; 52:7; 60:6; 61:1) concerning the revelation of God's salvation in the life, death, and resurrection of his Son. Therefore, at the beginning of his letter to the Romans Paul can state that the gospel was 'promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures' (1:2). And when he quotes later in this opening section what is for him the decisive verse from Habakkuk 2:4 ('the one who is righteous will live by faith'), it serves as a concrete expression of

how the truth of the gospel (the manifestation of the righteousness of God) has already been declared in the Scriptures. Similarly in the early verses of 2 Corinthians, Paul announces: 'For in him [Christ] every one of God's promises is a 'Yes' (1:20). This is one, if not the most formative, of Paul's hermeneutical principles in his use of Scripture.

Paul applies the principle that the gospel is prefigured in the Scriptures in a variety of ways. It explains how he can interpret Adam as the type of the one who was to come (Rom. 5:14) and how Abraham becomes a paradigm of faith (Romans 4; Galatians 3), the one in whom the Gentiles are blessed. Furthermore, Scripture is interpreted by Paul as the key to the unfolding course of history in which God works out his purpose, expressed above all in his scripturally soaked passage on the relation between Israel and the Gentiles in Romans 9-11 (nearly half of Paul's explicit quotations in Romans are found in this extended passage). Paul here quotes a number of passages to demonstrate that those who regarded themselves as God's people have either stumbled (9:33 - Isa. 8:14; 28:16) or become obdurate and blind (10:21 - Isa. 65:2). This is why they failed to receive the gospel. If it the gospel is the fulfilment of God's promises, why can his own people not see it? This, however, is temporary and part of God's plan for the inclusion of the Gentiles; for this he uses the image of the wild olive shoot grafted into a natural olive root (unbelieving Israel). Just as God, therefore, has grafted that which is wild into that which is natural, 'how much more will these natural branches (Israel) be grafted back into their own olive tree'. And so, in the words of Isaiah 59:20-21: 'Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob' (11:26). This is the eschatological plan of the gospel to which the law and the prophets have borne witness.

Since the gospel prefigured in Scripture is the gospel of Christ, Paul also claims that Scripture cannot be properly understood in isolation from him. This finds its most explicit expression in 2 Corinthians 3:12-18, where, as part of Paul's exposition of Exodus 34, he understands the veil covering Moses' face (3:13) as having been removed by Christ: 'Only in Christ is it set aside' (3:14). This means that the veil over the Scriptures (3:15) is taken away. When the Scriptures are read (3:14-15), probably in the context of the synagogue, the veil remains if the hearers have not turned to the Lord (Christ) in whom the word is embodied (3:16). Thus,

the true meaning of the Scriptures has been hidden, only now to be disclosed in Christ whose glory is seen with unveiled faces (3:18).

In order to identify some of the techniques and hermeneutical principles employed by Paul in relation to Scripture, it proves necessary to search for clues in the different letters. It becomes apparent that Paul quotes the Jewish Scriptures in the light of his christological-eschatological perspective. Scripture can only be properly interpreted, for Paul, in the light of the Christ-event.

Galatians 3:6-16

For the remainder of this unit, I would like to focus on one particular passage in Paul's letter to the Galatians (3:6-16), where the Jewish Scriptures play a key role in his argumentation. This will enable us to explore in more detail how Paul puts some of his exegetical techniques and hermeneutical principles into practice.

Galatians 3:6-16 is a carefully crafted passage comprising seven explicit (marked) quotations in which Paul seeks to demonstrate, through the witness of Scripture, that the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's community is a fulfilment of God's promises. As in Romans 4, Paul adduces the figure of Abraham to link his faith with Christ-centred faith and uses some of the same quotations (Gen. 15:6; 18:18). The underlying scriptural argument in both texts is similar, although the central theme is developed in different ways. Paul begins this exegetical section with a quotation from Genesis 15:6 (LXX) to demonstrate that full participation as sons of Abraham is not dependent on physical descent (or circumcision), but on faith. In this respect he quotes one of the two available texts in scripture that combines the notion of faith with that of righteousness; the other text is Habakkuk 2:4, which he quotes in verse 11 (as well as in Romans 1:17). Paul adapts the wording of Habakkuk 2:4 (by dropping the word 'my' from the quotation in the LXX, where it denotes God's faith 'my faith'). By doing so he changes a statement about God's faithfulness into a proleptic reference to Christ-centred faith in God. The suitability of these texts to his central theme of righteousness by faith rather than works suggests that, in this series of counter arguments to those advanced by the Judaizers, these two quotations (Gen. 15:6 and Hab. 2:4) belong to Paul's selection of texts rather than to those cited by his opponents.

Having established his central premise concerning the identity of the true descendants of Abraham, he proceeds to the next stage of his argument by drawing attention in verse 8, for the first time in this letter, to what 'Scripture' says. When God called Abraham he promised him that 'all the Gentiles shall be blessed in you'. Hence, those who have faith are blessed in Abraham (3:9). The quotation is drawn from Gen. 12:3, but it differs from the Septuagint and the Hebrew text in its use of 'all the Gentiles' instead of 'all the families of the earth'. It is possible that Paul, at this point, has conflated the wording of Genesis 12:3 with that of Genesis 18:18 ('all the nations'), thereby using a form of the Jewish *gezerah shawah* technique to make the application of this verse to Gentiles more explicit.

One of Paul's central hermeneutical principles is also expressed in verse 8, the prefiguring of the gospel in Scripture ('declared the gospel beforehand'). That this possesses a christological-eschatological perspective is made clear at the end of the section, for it is through Christ's death that 'the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles' (3:14). The linking of the blessing 'in Abraham' (verse 8) to that 'in Christ Jesus' (verse 14) can also account for the apparent anomaly between the reference to believing Gentiles as the 'descendants of Abraham' in 3:7 and the christological argument which Paul develops in 3:16 based on the use of the singular term 'offspring' (*sperma*) of Abraham rather than 'offsprings' (plural) (in Gen. 13:15; 17:8; 22:18). This is interpreted as a reference to Christ. Paul of course would have known that this is a collective noun, but the logic of the scriptural argument must be that Christ is the fulfilment of the singular 'offspring', while Gentile Christians share that fulfilment by being 'in Christ'. They are not simply bound by faith, but through faith in Christ, 'the seed' of Abraham.

The argument in verses 10-14 is highly compressed and, as a consequence, rather difficult to untangle. From the point of view of Paul's use of Scripture, the four quotations are linked together by certain key words: both Deut. 27:26 and Deut. 21:23 contain the word 'cursed', while Hab. 2:4 and Lev. 18:5 are bound together by the identical verbal form of 'shall live' (*zēsetai*). Together they produce a chiasmic pattern (a-b-b-a), cursed-live-live-cursed, to demonstrate that what the Law cannot do is give life. The curse is of course the reverse of that promised to Abraham, the blessing. The precise application of Deuteronomy 27:26 is however difficult to

determine: 'Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law'. It bears some resemblance to the Septuagint version, but it introduces the words 'all the things written in the book of the law' (is this due to Paul's own modification of the text or his dependence on a different version of it?). The traditional interpretation is that no one can keep the law perfectly and so everyone is under a curse. Leviticus 18:5 then promises life to all who keep the law perfectly, but since no one can, all are under the curse pronounced in Deuteronomy 27:26. However, when Christ died on the cross the curse of Deuteronomy 21:23 ('Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree') fell on him. The result of this was that all who have faith (Hab. 2:4) are redeemed from the curse of the law.

The problem with this interpretation of Paul's quotation of Deuteronomy 27:26 is that the law does not require everyone to be perfect in order to be acceptable to God, because it contains provisions to make atonement for sin (furthermore Paul in Philippians 3:6 refers to himself as 'blameless under the law'). For this reason it has been proposed that Paul applies this verse specifically to the Judaizers; they are the ones who are cursed because they rely on 'works of the law', insisting that believers must show their obedience to God by keeping the Jewish law. They were actually going against God's will and were coming under the curse of Deuteronomy 27:26. It is therefore possible that Paul, at this point, is quoting the Scripture of his opponents, which was used as a threat to the Gentiles (they must observe the law otherwise they will come under a curse). The difficulty lies in the fact that the opening statement declares the exact opposite of the quotation: 'for all who do rely on the works of the law are under a curse' (v. 10).

This suggests that Paul is drawing on Deuteronomy 27:26 to provide scriptural evidence concerning the inability of human beings to do the law. If so, he parts company with most Jewish interpreters and this raises the question whether the Judaizers would have accepted the validity of his argument. Paul's argument, however, is directed to the Galatians themselves, to whom he appeals directly in the preceding chapters and reminds them that they have been empowered by the Spirit (3:3). He therefore sets out a variety of arguments through Scripture in this section; some of the quotations are severed from their original context, others are interpreted in a novel way (offspring), while others are read in a manner at odds

with other interpretations. What probably enables Paul to do this is the claim set out by Paul from the beginning of his letter: the gospel preached by him is a revelation from God (1:15-16), and Christ dwells in him (2:20), to the extent that this has transformed his perspective on the witness of Scripture. If so, Galatians 3 relates to the christological-eschatological perspective espoused elsewhere by Paul: it is only through Christ that Scripture can be properly interpreted.

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