

‘Do you Understand what you Are Reading?’ (Acts 8.30): Current Trends and Future Perspectives in the Study of the Use of the Old Testament in the New

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Abstract

This article provides a response to the contributions included in this special edition of *JSNT* devoted to the use of the Old Testament in the New. It offers some reflections on the common themes and key issues emerging from these articles which appear to be particularly significant for current and future study in this field. The major developments and concerns considered here include: the impact of the Qumran discoveries, the increasing influence of literary theory on research in biblical studies, textual plurality and text-form, and exegetical methods and axioms. The article stresses particularly the need to situate New Testament interpretation of scripture within its early Jewish context, and to aim for precision in both methodology and terminology.

Keywords

Use of Old Testament in New Testament, early Jewish exegesis, Qumran, Septuagint, textual pluriformity, intertextuality

1. Introduction

This special edition of *JSNT* provides an illuminating insight into the current state of the sub-discipline of the use of the Old Testament in the New, intentionally reflecting aspects of contemporary research in a variety of geographical

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settings, including the USA, the UK and South Africa. The articles contained within it both address overarching methodological issues and offer fresh perspectives on the interpretation of scripture in specific New Testament texts. The long history of previous scholarship in this field has been greatly enriched in recent years by some important developments, with which all the contributors engage closely, not least the discoveries at Qumran and the application of literary theory to biblical studies. These papers naturally reflect the diversity of their authors, who bring to their work different questions, approaches and priorities. Nevertheless, several common themes do emerge across all of them. In these concluding reflections, then, I seek to draw out these key issues, highlighting any which have particular significance for the study of the Old Testament in the New at this present time, or which appear to have the greatest potential to influence the direction of future research.

2. The Impact of the Qumran Discoveries

The significance of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls for an understanding of all aspects of early Judaism and early Christianity, including the whole field of biblical studies, can hardly be overstated. These manuscripts are of particular value to those working in the area of the use of the Old Testament in the New since they provide a wealth of new evidence about the ways in which another group of Jews interpreted the scriptures at a time immediately prior to and contemporary with the New Testament authors. This has been widely recognized ever since their publication, and is reflected, for instance, in studies from Joseph Fitzmyer's early investigation of possible parallels between the citation of scripture in the New Testament and at Qumran (Fitzmyer 1961) right through to the recent incisive work of George Brooke.¹

The contributors to this issue, therefore, regularly draw on the Scrolls, with, for example, Gert Steyn referring to them throughout his article to clarify questions of text form. Craig Evans also draws attention to notable correspondences in the use of scripture between the New Testament and the Qumran texts, such as an apparent preference for the same scriptural books, especially Genesis, Deuteronomy, Isaiah and the Psalms, and a shared sense that the Psalms should be interpreted as prophetic. These observations have important implications for future New Testament scholarship. They offer, for example, a more plausible explanation for the frequency with which citations from the Psalms occur in the writings of the New Testament than the suggestion that this reflects nothing more than their familiarity to communities steeped in Jewish and Christian worship.² Since appeal to some of the books of the Pentateuch is a common feature of the

1. Brooke 2005; see also Lim 1997.

2. For an example of this position, see, e.g., Kistemaker 1961.

two corpora, the Qumran evidence also calls for a re-evaluation of the place of the Torah in early Christianity. Thus, several recent studies have drawn attention to the centrality of texts from Genesis for the development of important aspects of New Testament theology,³ and commentators such as James Crossley now argue for a greater recognition of the significance of the law and its interpretation in the thought of both Jesus and Paul.⁴ Furthermore, the Scrolls highlight the presence of a strong apocalyptic strand within late Second Temple Judaism. In his article, for example, Timothy Lim points to the eschatological hermeneutic common to both the Qumran interpreters and the New Testament authors. Rikk Watts's close investigation of the citation of Isa. 53.4 in Mt. 8.17 provides a concrete example of this interpretative stance, as he argues that the evangelist is using scripture here in order to persuade his audience of the eschatological import of Jesus' healings. There may well be merit, then, in revisiting the emphasis placed by an earlier generation of scholars, notably Klaus Koch,⁵ on the eschatological dimension of New Testament thought.

Lim was specifically invited to explore for this edition the question of the significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls for the study of the use of the Old Testament in the New. His contribution both considers general issues, such as the extent of textual plurality in this period (see further Section 3 below) and the development of the canon, and also deals with the interpretation of particular scriptural passages. Through detailed analysis, for example, he demonstrates how the same texts (Jer. 31.31-34 and Hab. 2.4) are understood quite differently at Qumran and in the New Testament.⁶ His stress on the need to look beyond surface similarities in scriptural exegesis is very welcome, and will lead to a deeper understanding of the areas of belief and practice over which the early Christians differed from other contemporary Jews. However, the frequent overlap between the New Testament and the sectarian writings in terms of the choice of scriptural citations is also significant, as it indicates the long history of interpretation which lies behind many of these texts. The urgent exegetical questions which such passages apparently raised for early Jewish interpreters are sometimes explicitly stated within the New Testament: who is the second lord addressed in Ps. 110.1 (Mk 12.35-37), for instance? Is the prophet Isaiah talking about himself or someone else as 'the sheep led to the slaughter' (Isa. 53.7-8; Acts 8.32-34)? Will anyone inherit God's promised rest (Ps. 95.7-11; Heb. 3.16-18)?⁷ The Qumran scrolls

3. See, e.g., the various studies collected in Moyise and Menken 2012.

4. Crossley 2004 and 2010; see also the contributions in Tait and Oakes 2009.

5. Koch 1972 and 1999.

6. See also the discussion of the interpretation of these texts at Qumran and in the New Testament in Docherty 2015.

7. Current rabbinic scholarship similarly emphasizes the fact that midrashic exegesis was usually prompted by a concern to address a perceived problem within the scriptural text, and was

have, therefore, contributed greatly to a renewed appreciation of the influence on the first followers of Jesus of the early Jewish interpretative tradition. This has brought about a pronounced shift in scholarly thinking over the last 50 years, one which will continue to impact on future study. Terms such as ‘Christological exegesis’ will have to be used with more caution than was sometimes the case in the past, for example. The way in which the New Testament authors read their scriptures is, of course, shaped by their convictions about the person and significance of Jesus. Nevertheless, neither the selection of texts nor the various hermeneutical methods applied to them are necessarily specifically ‘Christological’; rather, both the early Christian interpreters and those at Qumran were able to draw on a common pool of exegetical traditions and techniques. This acknowledgment of the early Jewish context of the New Testament serves, then, as an important reminder of the Jewish roots of Christian theology and practice.

Lim takes this issue of the impact of the Dead Sea discoveries further than previous studies by asking a distinctive new question about how contemporary Qumran scholarship might usefully inform methodological approaches to the investigation of the use of the Old Testament in the New. This leads him to engage in particular with the latest research into the historical development and diversity of the Qumran-Essene group. John Collins’s recent work, for example, emphasizes the fact that sectarianism – whether early Jewish or early Christian – is a more complex phenomenon than is often recognized.⁸ Lim, therefore, helpfully draws attention to the potential benefit for New Testament commentators of the highly nuanced historical perspective which leading Qumran scholars bring to their work.

3. Scriptural Pluriformity in Early Judaism

Perhaps the most important contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls to New Testament studies lies in the evidence they provide of the extent of textual pluriformity in the late Second Temple period. A real appreciation of the multiplicity of forms in which the scriptures circulated for several centuries, in both Hebrew and Greek, among all Jewish groups and not simply within ‘sects’, has now become an established tenet of scholarship, as noted by David Allen in the introduction to this issue. This has impacted significantly on the methodology of those working in the field of the use of the Old Testament in the New, and is exemplified particularly in Gert Steyn’s contribution here. Together with

not primarily an exercise in importing the interpreter’s own free-floating theological agenda; see, e.g., Boyarin 1990 and Samely 1992 and 2002.

8. See, e.g., Collins 2010.

European-based commentators such as Martin Karrer and Maarten Menken,⁹ Steyn has long been at the forefront of efforts to bring a greater precision to the study of the *Vorlage* of the scriptural citations in the New Testament.¹⁰ Thus he draws distinct conclusions in his article about the form of every quotation in Rom. 9–11, differentiating carefully between citation and paraphrase, without assuming that Paul will have treated all his texts alike, even those taken from the same Old Testament book. Lim also addresses this question in some detail in his article and elsewhere in his work. It is now becoming more widely recognized, therefore, that proper investigation of an author's scriptural source(s) requires detailed analysis of each individual citation, because it is no longer possible to rely on general premises about either his use of a standard and settled LXX text or his freedom to adapt his *Vorlage*.

However, as both Steyn and Lim underline in their articles, the vast majority of scriptural citations in the New Testament occur in a Greek form which is attested elsewhere, and they very often agree with the MT version as well as with the LXX. This fact is not always sufficiently recognized by commentators, who may sometimes be led to overemphasize the influence of the Septuagint on New Testament theology. Furthermore, as Lim explains, the fact that a passage is quoted in Greek from a Greek version of the scriptures does not mean that an author was using a Septuagintal form of the text. The Qumran manuscripts illustrate that a copy of the Bible written in Hebrew (such as 4QJer^a) may be Septuagintal in type, so there is a need for sounder distinctions to be drawn between language and text-type in classifying the quotations of the Old Testament in the New.

The Dead Sea Scrolls can also help to illuminate the unusual form of some of the individual scriptural citations in the New Testament. Lim makes the interesting suggestion, for example, that a textual variant of 1 Sam. 1.22, attested in 4QSam^a, may explain the puzzling reference to a 'Nazorine' at Mt. 2.23. The textual variety in evidence at Qumran thus prompts a greater caution about assumptions that the early Christians were freely adapting their scriptural sources in order to make them fit better with their argument. This situation does, however, raise a new problem for commentators, who now need to be more alert to the possibility that the New Testament writers may have made a deliberate choice among several textual forms known to them of the one which best suited their purposes.¹¹

Finally, the Qumran evidence has led to a re-evaluation of the significance of other ancient textual witnesses. In their articles, for instance, both Evans and Watts note the relationship between some of the citations in the gospels and the

9. See, e.g., Karrer 2010 and Menken 1996; cf. Moyise 2003.

10. See, e.g., Steyn 2000, 2003 and 2004.

11. This point is discussed in more detail in Docherty 2015: 3-7.

targum versions, and Watts also discusses a variety of Septuagint translations of Isaiah, notably Aquila. Similarly, Steyn takes seriously the suggestion that a collection of scriptural excerpts, reflecting an independent textual tradition, may underlie Rom. 9.25–10.15. This is an area of study which is likely to increase in importance in the future, as there is considerable scope for further research into the form of the quotations and allusions in, for example, the writings of Philo and the Pseudepigrapha.

4. Methodology and Intertextuality

The second major development in the field of the use of the Old Testament in the New in the last three decades has been the widespread appropriation of methodological tools and approaches from outside the world of biblical studies, most notably the employment of literary theory. This has become especially important following the publication of Richard Hays's ground-breaking study *Echoes of Scripture* (1989), and so two of the contributors to this issue, Leroy Huizenga and Paul Foster, engage closely with the methodological issues which have become most pressing for practitioners of the sub-discipline in the post-Hays era.

The term 'intertextuality' was imported into biblical studies in the 1980s from literary and cultural theory, and has since become widely used by scholars to refer to the use of the Jewish scriptures in the New Testament. It has provided a particular framework for discussion of scriptural allusions, which are often more contentious to identify than formal citations. This concept of intertextuality is the particular subject of Huizenga's essay. He provides a useful survey of the subject in its historical context, and then introduces the more recent and perhaps less well-known theoretical models developed by Stefan Alkier. His discussion of Donald Juel's major publication on 'Christological exegesis' (Juel 1988) is also a helpful counter-balance to the emphasis placed in much current scholarship on Hays, and serves as a reminder of Juel's pioneering work on the Jewish context of the New Testament. Huizenga concludes by arguing for a retrieval of an early Christian allegorical sense of scripture which, although neglected in the Reformation and post-Reformation era, can now be reconfigured for the modern period, partly through engagement with the semiotic theory of Alkier.

Where Huizenga points to the possibilities and ongoing value of an intertextual approach, Foster, both in this article and elsewhere in his work, sounds a note of warning about the excesses of some recent applications of it. He calls, therefore, for more controls on the search for scriptural echoes in the New Testament writings, and for greater methodological precision. The seven tests for detecting an allusion devised by Hays were an attempt to introduce some clarity into this area of study, but, as Foster ably demonstrates, they have failed to prevent commentators from reaching entirely different conclusions about the same New Testament texts, or from creating a whole picture of an author's theology

out of a fleeting and uncertain scriptural allusion which had remained unnoticed for two millennia. Three elements of Foster's appraisal would seem to have particular importance for future scholarship. First, he underlines the need to be alert to the differences as well as the similarities between the supposed source text and its new context in determining whether a genuine echo may be present. Second, he establishes through specific examples (such as the creation of humans 'in the image of God') that concepts became detached over time from their original scriptural location and circulated independently, so their use does not necessarily imply that an author was drawing on a passage of scripture. Finally, he brings a charge of supersessionism against some of the post-Haysian practitioners of an intertextual approach, whose work can be read as implying that the sacred texts of Judaism find their real and necessary meaning only when viewed through a Christological lens. Foster's forceful but timely critique should, then, lead to a re-evaluation of the achievements and potential pitfalls of this methodology, and more restrained and nuanced applications of it in the future.

5. New Testament Exegetical Techniques in their Early Jewish Context

A further key focus of current study of New Testament scriptural interpretation, to which Allen also draws attention in the introduction to this issue, is the identification of the exegetical techniques employed by the authors. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, these have often been fruitfully compared with early Jewish interpretative methods, especially those in evidence in the Qumran manuscripts¹² and the midrashim.¹³ These parallels are reflected in several of the contributions included here. Thus, as we have already noted, Lim and Evans highlight some hermeneutical approaches common to the Qumran scrolls and the New Testament, and Steyn also observes that Paul follows rabbinic practice in Rom. 9–11 in his use of *Stichwörter* to connect scriptural passages to one another, and in his efforts to establish his argument through the citation of a text from both the Torah and the prophets. This question of exegetical methods is not in itself the main focus of any of the articles in this issue, but several of them do make observations which are pertinent to this question. In his analysis of the citations attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of Mark, for instance, Evans notes the operation of a number of specific techniques, such as a change to the original referent of a scriptural verse, and inversion of the order of quoted phrases, a feature also of Paul's exegesis discussed by Steyn. Watts, who was invited to explore in detail one particular New Testament use of the Old,

12. See, e.g., Fitzmyer 1961, Lim 1997 and Brooke 2005.

13. See, e.g., Ellis 1957, Alexander 1984 and Docherty 2009. See also more generally on early Jewish exegesis: Schröger 1968, Longenecker 1975, Patte 1975 and Brewer 1992.

demonstrates how our understanding of Mt. 8.17 is deepened by an appreciation of the way in which scriptural texts are used there to interpret one another, as Isa. 53.4 is read in the light of the covenant curses uttered in Deut. 28.59-61.

Recent scholarship has been marked by a growing trend to attempt to introduce a more precise terminology to the description of the interpretative methods used by the early Christians. Further inspiration for this important enterprise is likely to come from closer engagement with contemporary research in the field of Jewish studies. Alex Samely, for instance, has made extensive use of linguistic theory in his analyses of the full range of exegetical techniques employed in the *midrashim* and *targumim*.¹⁴ Both the results of this work and the methodological rigour which underpins it have the potential to advance New Testament studies, since he offers a highly sophisticated language for explaining the different ways in which scripture can be re-used in later interpretation. Samely also seeks to identify the axioms about scripture and about the nature of the exegetical task which underpin early Jewish hermeneutics, emphasizing, for instance, the rabbinic commitment to the idea that every single word of scripture is true and relevant to an infinite variety of people and situations. This important question of underlying principles is addressed in Huizenga's article, as he contrasts the patristic reading of the whole Bible as an overarching and interconnected narrative of salvation history with the more atomistic interpretation of scriptural texts which is widely held to be characteristic of the New Testament and much of the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period. Samely, and previous commentators like Juel (1988), are surely correct to argue that early Jewish and early Christian exegesis operate primarily at the level of the sentence, although it should be noted that this does not always produce an atomizing reading, since context can be a factor in interpretation. Nevertheless, this hermeneutical stance does shape the exegetical methods applied to scriptural passages, resulting, for instance, in a focus on short segments of text, and on individual words or even letters.¹⁵ Detailed investigation of the view of scripture and exegetical axioms of the New Testament writers in the light of recent work in Jewish studies is at a relatively early stage, and so promises to be a very fruitful area of future development.

The current emphasis on situating New Testament use of the Old Testament in relation to early Jewish exegesis should not, however, as Foster reminds us in his article, detract from an appreciation also of the wider Graeco-Roman literary and religious context of early Christianity. Eminent scholars such as Martin Hengel and Philip Alexander have convincingly demonstrated the inaccuracy of drawing

14. See Samely 1992 and 2002. Samely is himself influenced by the work of the German rabbinic scholar Arnold Goldberg; for an introduction to his approach, see Goldberg 1990.

15. For an attempt to apply the insights of Samely to the New Testament, see Docherty 2009 and 2015.

too sharp a distinction between 'Judaism' and 'Hellenism' in the Second Temple period,¹⁶ and the interpretative practices of both early Christian and early Jewish exegetes are increasingly coming to be seen as part of a broader cultural framework. David Aune is one of the New Testament commentators to have taken this paradigm shift most seriously to date,¹⁷ but this is another area of study which is likely to expand in the future, with the potential for noteworthy parallels to emerge with, for example, ancient commentary on the works of Homer and other classical poets.

6. Theological Implications of the Study of the Use of the Old Testament in the New

The interpretation of scriptural texts is, of course, often central to the development of the argument within a New Testament work. The theological implications of New Testament exegesis are drawn out particularly in this issue in the articles by Evans, Steyn and Watts. Thus Evans demonstrates the way in which quotations from prophetic texts function to foreground the theme of eschatological judgment in Jesus' teaching in the Gospel of Mark, and to present Jesus as a particular kind of messiah. Steyn then argues that several passages from the Minor Prophets are carefully linked in Rom. 9–11 to support Paul's message that the good news of Christ is that God has loved, called and saved a people. Finally, Watts interprets the use of Isa. 53.4 in Mt. 8.17 as key to establishing the author's claim that Jesus' healing ministry inaugurates the long-awaited divine redemption. These readings are all rooted in a close and measured study of the text. On the other hand, Foster points to the dangers of reading a whole theological discourse into a New Testament writing on the basis of only a single vague allusion. Practitioners of the sub-discipline of the use of the Old Testament in the New have, then, a responsibility to analyse the textual evidence with discipline and circumspection, in order to establish a solid and accurate foundation for further theological reflection.

7. Re-evaluating Long-Standing Debates

It is interesting to see how often the contributions to this issue have touched on some of the most long-running debates in the field of the study of the New Testament use of scripture, such as whether the early Christian authors had in view the larger context of the passages they cited, and how far Jesus himself used the Old Testament in the ways ascribed to him in the gospels. The Qumran

16. Hengel 1989; Alexander 1990.

17. See, e.g., Aune 1983, 1987 and 1988; cf. Fotopoulos 2006. See also the work on Luke–Acts of Loveday Alexander, e.g. 2006.

manuscripts have provided valuable new information relevant to these questions, but this has not so far proved sufficient to definitively resolve them. As noted by my co-editor David Allen in his introduction, C.H. Dodd is the name most associated with the view that the citations of the Old Testament in the New carry with them the meaning of their wider scriptural context. Huizenga discusses Dodd's work in some detail, and Steyn is able to point to indications that Paul sometimes makes use of the original framework of his quotations, as in his appeal to the whole message of salvation surrounding Isa. 52.7 (cited at Rom. 10.15). As we have seen, however, Foster critiques an over-reliance on the assumption that a short citation is intended to evoke a larger scriptural passage, and he provides several examples of recent studies which he regards as making unsubstantiated claims for such contextual influence. Watts also makes a very strong case in his article for recognizing that the author of Matthew made a careful and considered judgment about how much of Isa. 53.4 he wished to quote, and thus that he was not seeking to draw on a whole 'suffering servant' motif in applying this verse to Jesus' healings. This debate illustrates the need for commentators to proceed with caution, reaching conclusions only on the basis of a careful examination of the evidence in each case.

The related issue of whether the New Testament authors had access to their scriptures via collections of excerpted passages rather than entire biblical scrolls is also raised by Steyn. He demonstrates how the form of the group of quotations from the Minor Prophets in Rom. 9–11 is sometimes shaped by Paul's own hand rather than exactly reflecting his *Vorlage*, and how they are carefully arranged in order to establish Paul's argument, which implies that he was not simply drawing on an excerpt collection. New life was breathed into the century-old idea of pre-patristic Christian use of 'testimony books'¹⁸ following the discovery at Qumran of a number of collections of scriptural passages from a time contemporary with the New Testament, such as 4QFlorilegium, 4QTestimonia and 4QCatena^a. In the light of this evidence, for example, Martin Albl has concluded that it is very probable that the New Testament authors did make use of written collections of scriptural excerpts (1999: 287). This discussion is important not only for understanding Rom. 9–11, but also other passages which include a catena of citations, such as Heb. 1.5–13.¹⁹ It also serves to further reinforce (see Section 3 above) the need to be alert to the great variety of forms in which the scriptures were available to the early Christians, so that judgments about when an author may have made intentional alterations to a well-established *Vorlage* become far more complex.

A further long-standing question, also raised first by Dodd (1952), to which Evans attends in this issue, is how far Jesus himself made use of scriptural

18. See Rendel Harris 1916 and 1920.

19. This point is discussed in Docherty 2009: 144–79.

interpretation in his teaching. Evans's conclusion is that Jesus did appeal to some of the texts which became important in early Christian tradition, and that the gospels at times reflect his creative hermeneutics, but that his followers felt free to go beyond him in both their selection of passages and their exegetical methods. This article serves as a reminder of the central place occupied by the Jewish scriptures throughout the New Testament, which is an important factor in the current scholarly emphasis on understanding early Christianity as a form of early Judaism, and not as something entirely different from the 'religion of the Old Testament'.²⁰

8. Final Reflections and the Way Forward

At the end of this special issue, then, two concerns have emerged as particularly significant for current study of the use of the Old Testament in the New and for the future development of the sub-discipline. The first is a clear recognition of the early Jewish context of New Testament scriptural interpretation. This is exemplified in the texts selected for citation, the exegetical methods employed, and the underlying views about scripture, all of which can be fruitfully compared with interpretation as practised at Qumran, among the rabbis, and more widely within early Judaism. This emphasis is part of a wider paradigm shift in New Testament studies occurring in the latter part of the twentieth century: no longer is any great chasm envisaged separating early 'Judaism' from early 'Christianity', or 'midrashic' from 'Christological' exegesis. The challenge for commentators moving forward will be to balance this important perspective with an appropriate appreciation of the larger Graeco-Roman culture in which both early Judaism and early Christianity were formed. Paul Foster has drawn explicit attention to this concern in this issue, reminding commentators not to ignore the potential Graeco-Roman influences on fundamental New Testament concepts such as *παρουσία* and *εὐαγγέλιον*.

The second feature characterizing all of the contributions to this issue is the drive to achieve a greater precision in all aspects of the methodology of the study of the use of the Old Testament in the New. Scholars are increasingly aware of the need to strive for accuracy in their attempts to identify the text form of scriptural citations and to describe exegetical techniques, for instance. Considerable scope remains for the commentators of the future to extend this search for more sophisticated methodology in two areas in particular: (a) through the development and careful application of clearer criteria for evaluating the plausibility of allusions and echoes; and (b) by unpacking more fully the axioms which govern New Testament interpretation of scripture. This will hopefully result in a richer

20. Commentators such as Dunn and Sanders deserve particular credit for effecting this shift in thinking within New Testament studies: see, e.g., Dunn 1991 and Sanders 1992.

understanding of the New Testament texts which will, in turn, provide a sounder basis for the theology which Christians seek to root in them.

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