

Article Review: Paul's Use of Deuteronomic Tradition by James M. Scott

James M. Scott's 1993 article *Paul's Use of Deuteronomic Tradition* seeks to analyse Paul's appropriation of the themes found in the Hebrew Bible. Building off the advances of narrative criticism spearheaded by Richard Hays, Scott reiterates Odil Steck's six elements of a "Deuteronomic" view of Israel's history within early Jewish literature: (1) Israel's negligence and stiff-necked disobedience, (2) the sending of messengers to warn Israel off their current path, (3) Israel's continued resistance to God's message, occasionally resulting in the killing of the prophets, (4) the wrath of God against Israel resulting in a continuous exile, (5) the continued chance for repentance by Israel during this prolonged exile, and (6) the restoration of Israel if the people do repent.¹ From here, Scott seeks to identify this tradition in the works of Paul with particular emphasis in Galatians and 1 Thessalonians.

A substantial portion of Scott's article is the application of Paul's appropriation of Deuteronomic tradition in the highly problematic passage in 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16. This passage has long been suspected of being an interpolation due to the accusation of killing Jesus levied against the Jews (vv. 14-15) and that the author appears to gleefully look back upon the destruction of the temple in 70 C. E. (v. 16), thus precluding Paul's authorship. Although many arguments against its authenticity on form-critical and linguistic grounds have lost favour in recent years,² ideological arguments continue to gain support: Birger Pearson first argued for the case in 1971, asserting that "It is somewhat surprising to find the characteristic Gentile charge of "misanthropy" against the Jews reflected in the Pauline correspondence."³ These arguments were been taken up by numerous scholars, most notably William O. Walker Jr. who similarly says on the basis of "ideational considerations, a strong

¹ James M. Scott, 'Paul's Use of Deuteronomic Tradition', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112/4 (1993), pp. 647-50.

² For a semi-recent summary of the debate, see Matthew Jensen, 'The (In)authenticity of 1 Thessalonians 2.13-16: A Review of Arguments', *Currents in Biblical Research* 18/1 (2019), pp. 59-79.

³ Birger Pearson, '1 Thessalonians 2:13-16: A Deutero-Pauline Interpolation', *The Harvard Theological Review* 64/1 (1971), p. 83.

case has been made for viewing 1 Thess. 2.13-16 as a non-Pauline interpolation.”⁴ Under these analyses, the Thessalonian passage appears to be an anti-Semitic interpolation injected into the letter following the destruction of the temple for the sake of polemicising against Jews of the late first century and establishing a “united Christian front.”⁵

Scott, however, adds some much-needed nuance into this discussion. He observes that a key feature of the Jewish “Deuteronomic perspective” is where “the violent rejection of the prophets is seen as symptomatic of the continuing guilt and obduracy of the Jews.”⁶ Paul sees in the hostile conduct of the Jews that the wrath of God has come to completion. Because the precedent of this view can be found in Second Temple Literature, with what is referred to as the “Sin-Exile-Restoration” motif,⁷ there is no need to posit an interpolator and the passage fits comfortably with what Paul could have written.

Scott’s view has since been taken up (albeit indirectly) by more recent interpreters. John Weatherly, in his classic defence of the passage’s authenticity, agrees that 1 Thess 2:13-16 is merely an “inner-Jewish polemic.”⁸ More recently, Sarah E. Rollens affirms that Paul’s harsh comments in the suspect Thessalonian passage are an “‘already in place’ framework”⁹ that has its roots in Jewish literature prior to Paul. The Jew’s violent rejection of the prophets, as well as the “filling up of wrath” is rooted in the prophetic tradition found in both the Old Testament (Nehemiah 9:26, 2 Chronicles 36:16, Daniel 8:23) and Second Temple literature (Wisdom of Solomon 19:4; 2 Maccabees 6:14; Pseudo-Philo, Biblical Antiquities 26:13).

Scott’s case here has strengths and weaknesses. For the former, it is massively bolstered by the view that Paul sees himself as a legitimate continuation of the Jewish

⁴ William O. Walker Jr., *Interpolations in the Pauline Letters*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series Vol. 213 (New York/London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), p. 220.

⁵ Pearson, ‘1 Thessalonians 2:13-16,’ pp. 91-94.

⁶ Scott, ‘Paul’s Use of Deuteronomic Tradition,’ p. 652.

⁷ See David Lincicum, ‘Paul’s Engagement with Deuteronomy: Snapshots and Signposts,’ *Currents in Biblical Research* 7/1 (2008), p. 47 who abbreviates this motif to “SER.”

⁸ John Weatherly, ‘The Authenticity of 1 Thess 2.13-16: Additional Evidence,’ *Journal for the Study of Biblical Literature* 42 (1991), p. 9.

⁹ Sarah E. Rollens, ‘Inventing Tradition in 1 Thessalonica: An Appropriation of the past in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16,’ *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 46/3 (2016), p. 124.

prophetic line. His use of Elijah motifs and the recurring prophetic theme of “zeal” in his letters (Galatians 1:14, Philippians 3:6; cf. 1 Kings 19:10, 14); his travel to Arabia following his visitation from Jesus mimics that of Elijah (1 Kgs 19:8); his description of himself in prophetic terms (e.g., being set apart or called from his mother’s womb in Gal. 1:15; cf. Isaiah 49:1 and Jeremiah 1:5). These factors set a natural precedent for Paul to use prophetic language, much of which was obviously not positive towards the people of Israel.

Scott’s view has also been backed up by other studies: Frank Gillard argued that v. 14 is a restrictive clause due to the presence of articular participles which would help confine the identity of Paul’s Jewish opponents to only a few that were doing things that he found to be reprehensive.¹⁰ Jeffrey Lampe also added to Scott’s case with an analysis of The Testament of Levi that uses the term *eis telos* to speak of the totality of the Jews’ destruction,¹¹ something which Scott initially thought would be detrimental to his case.¹² In totality, 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 seem to hold up well and present a compelling interpretation that absolves the problem of interpolation theories.

One problem with Scott’s approach however, is whether his conclusion is necessitated by his analysis. Pearson, in his original article against the authenticity of 1 Thess 2:13-16, concurred that the “charge of killing the prophets is a reflection of a Jewish tradition widespread in New Testament times.”¹³ Pearson would appear to agree with Scott that the passage is transmitting a tradition rooted in Judaism, but interprets this is a post-70 construction by an anti-Semitic gentile author. In Pearson’s view, the best way to explain the passage is via a Deuteronomic interpretation, but one that has been hijacked by a later Christian interpolator.

¹⁰ Frank D. Gillard, ‘The Problem of the Antisemitic Comma Between 1 Thessalonians 2.14 and 15’, *New Testament Studies* 35/4 (1989), p. 482; see also Stanley E. Porter, ‘Translation, Exegesis, and 1 Thessalonians 2.14–15: Could a Comma Have Changed the Course of History?’ *The Bible Translator* 64/1 (2013), pp. 82-98.

¹¹ Lampe, J. S. ‘Is Paul Anti-Jewish? Testament of Levi 6 in the Interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16’, *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 65/3 (2003), pp. 408-27.

¹² Scott, ‘Paul’s Use of Deuteronomic Tradition,’ p. 655.

¹³ Pearson, ‘1 Thessalonians 2:13-16,’ p. 83.

Additionally, John Simpson points out how Scott's interpretation could be a double-edged sword:

1 Thess 2:15a cannot be so easily separated from the old and widely-represented traditional Jewish motif of the killing of the Old Testament prophets by their fellow Israelites (e.g., Neh 9:26; Jub 1:12; Enoch 89:51), and this motif cannot stand apart from its function as a reference to the corporate sinfulness of the Jewish people.¹⁴

In other words, the Deuteronomic interpretation necessitates "the Jews" in this passage being *all* Jews. For consistency's sake, we are compelled to affirm that the author of v. 16 was speaking about the people of Israel as a collective, in the same manner of the prophets. Scott's article (as well as Gillard's early study advocating for the restrictive clause between vv. 14-15) is incompatible with this reading. Simpson even quotes the familiar passages in Nehemiah to bolster his point regarding the irreducibility of the relationship between the murder of the prophets and collective condemnation. Therefore, even if Paul was the author of this passage, it represents an emotional outburst from him against the entirety of the Jewish people, indicting all Jews for the death of Jesus.

Indeed, this criticism is made worse by the fact that the Thessalonians passage fails to qualify for the 2nd, 5th, and 6th elements of the Deuteronomic Perspective, an aspect which Scott readily admits to.¹⁵ He alternatively argues that Paul is actualising the negative aspects of the tradition and that it is intentional to portray a complete lack of hope for Israel's repentance *in the present*. It is thus intended by Paul for there to be no hope for Israel until such a time when God intervenes. While this response is cogent (and also aligns with Paul's references his prophetic self-conception), this does not fully address why three elements of the Deuteronomic perspective are absent from the passage.

¹⁴ John W. Simpson, 'The Problems Posed by 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 and a Solution', *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 12 (1990), p. 42.

¹⁵ Scott, 'Paul's Use of Deuteronomic Tradition,' p. 655.

More criticisms could be levied against Scott, including the observation that he is overly dependent on work preceding the advances made by the New Perspective on Paul. Steck's work was published in 1967, a full decade before Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Although this does not mean that Scott's (or even Steck's) work is inherently problematic, it does raise questions concerning whether Scott has taken into account the diversity of ancient Judaism. Only once does he refer to a plethora of "Judaisms," and only in tandem with the work of Jacob Neuser, one of the most prominent voices in Jewish-Christian scholarship in the late 20th century.¹⁶ Many conceptions of Judaism may demand a wide range of interpretations of the Torah. It would thus seem to nullify the idea that there was a singular traditional way of reading Israel's history and that Paul would merely represent a particular strain of interpretation.

Scott's article generated a range of responses, most of which were positive. Some criticised Scott's use of the Deuteronomic interpretation in that it does not explain why Paul no longer viewed the law as necessary for believers in Galatians. For others, the curse of the law in Galatians, therefore, is a result of polluting nationalistic influences: it is less an instrument of punishment than an instrument of exclusion. Other scholars have suggested it is debateable whether Galatians 3:10 refers to specifically and exclusively to the troublemakers in Galatia, a link which establishes an analogy between apostasy then and apostasy in scripture.¹⁷

In particular, Guy P. Waters observes that Scott's approach assumes that Paul was viewing Deuteronomy as a unified narrative and that such an approach represents the familiarity with narrative criticism and the secondary literature as opposed to Deuteronomy itself.¹⁸ Despite these debates, however, David Lincicum affirms that one need not accept Scott's use of the Deuteronomic view to accept that Paul is applying the curses of

¹⁶ Scott, 'Paul's Use of Deuteronomic Tradition,' p. 649.

¹⁷ In response to the work of Jeffrey R. Wisdom against Scott, see Florence Morgan Gillman. 'Blessing for the Nations and the Curse of the Law: Paul's Citation of Genesis and Deuteronomy in Gal 3.8-10,' *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64/4 (2002), pp. 784-785.

¹⁸ Guy P. Waters, *The End of Deuteronomy in the Epistles of Paul* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), p. 27.

Deuteronomy to his own opponents.¹⁹ He suggests that the range of disagreement between Scott and his rejoinders reveals that Paul's recourse to Deuteronomy requires further investigation.²⁰

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¹⁹ Lincicum, 'Engagement,' p. 50.

²⁰ Lincicum, 'Engagement,' p. 53.

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