

## CONFERENCE PROCEEDING

### *Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans*

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Two of Krister Stendahl's major scholarly interests were the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament and Pauline theology. In his doctoral dissertation on *The School of St. Matthew*, Krister was one of the first biblical scholars to use the newly discovered Dead Sea scrolls as a help toward clarifying how some early Christians interpreted the Old Testament. And, of course, this conference is devoted to assessing and celebrating his contributions to Pauline scholarship and carrying forward the new perspectives on Paul that his work has brought to the biblical field. Against this background, I want to discuss Paul's use of the Old Testament, with reference especially to the letter to the Romans.



What Christians call the Old Testament was a very important theological resource for Paul. Besides hundreds of allusions or echoes, his letters contain almost one hundred explicit quotations of it, roughly one-third of all the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament. These quotations come from sixteen different books, with the bulk of them from the Pentateuch (33), Isaiah (25), and the Psalms (19). They appear primarily in what are regarded as Paul's most important letters: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians. They are taken mainly from the Greek Bible, and their wording is closest to the textual tradition preserved in the Alexandrian (A) manuscript of the Septuagint.

While most of Paul's biblical quotations come from the Greek Bible, we cannot be sure whether in citing these texts he was working from memory or whether he (or an assistant) was checking them against some kind of written version. Moreover, the four letters in which he makes extensive use of the Old Testament (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians) were addressed originally to Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians. This fact raises some interesting questions: How much did those Gentile Christians know about the Old Testament? Where did they get their knowledge of it? What authority did they give to the Old Testament?

As a first-century Jew, Paul certainly regarded what we call the Old Testament as possessing great authority. Nevertheless, Paul's primary authority was his own encounter with the risen Christ whom he believed he had experienced on the road to Damascus. That event changed everything for Paul, so much so that he looked back on his pre-conversion and pre-call life in Judaism as "rubbish" (Phil 3:8). And yet in his letters meant mainly for Gentile Christians, Paul took freely from the Old Testament examples and illustrations, as well as quotations from texts that eventually became part of the Jewish and Christian Bibles.

According to Paul in his most positive statements, the Bible (or what Christians call the Old Testament) is a witness to the revelation of God's righteousness in Christ (Rom 3:21) and thus is "holy and just and good" (Rom 7:12). He found in it the revelation of God's will for his people. The very early summary of Christian faith that he received from the apostles and that he handed on to the Corinthians declares that Christ died for our sins "in accordance with the scriptures" and that he was raised "in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4).

While in Paul's view the Scriptures of Israel were "fulfilled" in Christ, he also believed that Christ was the key that opened up the possibility of their correct interpretation. Such an approach has many parallels in early Judaism. As the Pesharim and many other Dead Sea scrolls show, the Qumran community regarded their community's history and life together as providing the key to understanding many Old Testament prophecies and psalms. The Jewish apocalyptists looked forward to the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel preserved in the Scriptures in the near future. Likewise, the rabbis considered Israel's existence as God's holy people to be the key to the Jewish Scriptures. So also Paul and other early Christians took Jesus of Nazareth to be the key that opened up the Scriptures of Israel.

The topic of Paul's use of the Old Testament has drawn great attention recently among biblical scholars. For an excellent overview and survey of the issues along with a thirty-page bibliography, see Stanley E. Porter and Christopher D. Stanley [eds.], *As It Is Written: Studying Paul's Use of Scripture* (Symposium Series 50; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008.)

In this paper I do not want to survey scholarship or debate with other scholars. Rather, I want to look at specific Pauline texts, that is, six different examples of Paul's use of the Old Testament in his letter to the Romans, a text especially dear to Krister Stendahl. While not a theological treatise, Romans is the most extensive and profound statement of Paul's theology. In it Paul made abundant use of the Old Testament in confirming his basic thesis (Rom 1:16-17), in clinching his case that both Gentiles and Jews needed the revelation of God's righteousness in Christ (3:10-18), in developing his argument about justification by faith with reference to Abraham (4:1-25), in constructing his comparison between Adam and Christ (5:12-21), in meditating on the place of the remnant in the mystery of salvation (9:1-11:36), and in giving the love commandment as his summary of the biblical commandments (13:8-10). Then I want to draw six general conclusions about Paul's use of the Old Testament.

## Six Examples

### 1. Biblical Confirmation of Paul's Thesis: Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17

In Romans 1:16-17 Paul formulates what is generally regarded as his thesis statement about the revelation of God's righteousness in Christ and justification by faith. Paul's roots his thesis in a quotation from Habakkuk 2:4. A literal translation of Paul's version would be, "the righteous (or, just) person from faith will live." While the wording of the Septuagint text is the same, the contexts are different and so are the meanings.

In the Hebrew text God promises survival in a Babylonian attack against Jerusalem around 600 B.C. to those who trust in God and remain faithful to him: "the righteous by my faith (or, by faith in me) will live." Here "faith" is primarily trust in God, and life is physical survival from the attack. In the first century A.D. Paul used the same words to refer to God's promises of salvation and eternal life ("will live") to those Jews and Gentiles who accept the gospel or good news about

Christ (“from faith”). From Paul’s perspective, the words found in Habakkuk 2:4 had not been really fulfilled around 600 B.C. He contended that they were being fulfilled in his own day in the first century A.D. because Christ was the key to the Jewish scriptures, the one who solved the mystery of what had seemed to be God’s unfulfilled promises to his people.

## 2. All Are under Sin: The Catena in Romans 3:10-18

Having stated his thesis in Romans 1:16-17, Paul in 1:18—3:20 tries to show that all people, Gentiles and Jews alike, needed the revelation of God’s righteousness in Christ. To summarize his argument, Paul in 3:10-18 uses the device of the chain or catena of biblical quotations. With this device he seeks to prove that apart from Christ every person in every part of his or her body stood under the domination of Sin and Death. Paul could not imagine a human person without a lord or master. His point was that without Christ humankind found itself under the lordship of Sin and Death. He clinches his argument by appealing to Israel’s Scriptures.

In Romans 3:10-18 Paul provides an anthology of biblical texts. Familiar from the Qumran scrolls and other early Jewish texts, the catena or chain brings together biblical quotations from various sources that pertain to a particular theme. Here the theme is Sin’s domination over humankind, and the quotations are from the Writings and the Prophets (but not the Torah).

The first two quotations establish that “there is no one who is righteous, not even one” (Rom 3:10b = Eccl 7:20), and that “there is no one who has understanding...no one who seeks God...no one who shows kindness...not even one” (Rom 3:11-12 = Pss 14:1-3/53:2-4). While most of Paul’s first readers in Romans were Gentile Christians, Paul uses the Old Testament to forestall the objections of both Gentiles and Jews that they might be exempt from Sin’s domination.

The remaining biblical quotations in Romans 3:13-18 single out various parts of the body and affirm their corruption by Sin: throats and tongues (3:13ab = Ps 5:10), lips (3:13c = Ps 140:4), mouths (3:14 = Ps 10:7), feet (3:15-17 = Isa 59:7-8 and Prov 1:16), and eyes (3:18 = Ps 36:2). The effect of the catena is to show the total corruption of humankind by Sin and to suggest that the only way out was the revelation of God’s righteousness in Christ and humankind’s appropriation of it through faith. The use of biblical texts to establish this point was not only an example of Paul’s rhetorical skill but also an indication of his continuing respect for the authority of the Old Testament.

## 3. The Case of Abraham: An Argument Based on Genesis 15:6

Still another way that Paul used the Old Testament in Romans is in constructing an argument on the basis of a biblical text. Having shown that all peoples, Jews and Gentiles alike, were under the domination of Sin and Death, Paul in Romans 4 appeals to what the Old Testament says about Abraham as the father of all who believe (4:16). The proofs that Paul offers are a series of biblical passages that he uses to show that his thesis about justification by faith is consistent with God’s will revealed in the Scriptures of Israel.

The lead text in Paul’s argument is Genesis 15:6: “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Rom 4:3). Paul had previously developed a similar argument with an even more extensive recourse to biblical texts in Galatians 3:6-29. In the context of his letter to the Romans, Paul wants to argue that because Abraham believed God’s promise that he would have a son (Isaac) despite his advanced age and that of Sarah, and that he would thus become

the father of many nations, "it was reckoned to him as righteousness." The verb "reckoned" carries a business connotation, and the passive voice suggests that the bookkeeper is God (the divine passive). The point that Paul wants to make is that the heavenly books are being kept on the basis of faith like that of Abraham and not the works of the Law. That means that the right relationship with God made possible through Jesus' death and resurrection (justification) is a gift rather than merely just payment for good works performed. To cap off his argument, Paul invokes the authority of David and the Psalms, with the quotation of Psalm 32:1 to the effect that those who have been freed from the domination of Sin deserve to be declared "happy" or "fortunate."

One of the "works of the law" was circumcision. In Romans 4:9-12 Paul notes that while Abraham was reckoned to be righteous in Genesis 15:6, he was circumcised only twenty years later according to Genesis 17:10-27. Therefore Abraham's justification took place long before his circumcision and so had nothing to do with it. Paul prefers to view Abraham's circumcision as "seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised" (4:11).

Moreover, in an argument from "the light to the heavy" (*qal wehomer* in Hebrew), Paul contends that God's promise to Abraham and his declaration of Abraham's righteousness took place many centuries before the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19–24. The implication is that doing the works of the Law was not the way to right relationship with God in the case of Abraham and (by *qal wehomer*) in the case of all humankind. In 4:15 ("the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation") Paul alludes to his controversial idea that the Law can and does function as a conspirator with Sin and Death to keep humankind in slavery.

From Paul's perspective, Abraham's call to be the father of many nations foreshadowed the spread of the good news of Jesus Christ to non-Jews. For their part, Gentiles became part of God's people by imitating Abraham's faith (or trust) in God's promise (the gospel for them). Just as Abraham's faith was the basis for his justification (Gen 15:6), so the Gentiles' acceptance of the gospel could mean right relationship with God (justification) for them (4:22).

Paul insists that the words "it was reckoned to him as righteousness" in Genesis 15:6 were written not "for his [Abraham's] sake alone but for ours also" (Rom 4:23-24). In Paul's view the God whose promise Abraham believed is the one who raised Jesus from the dead. The proper response to this good news should be that of Abraham (faith) so that the result might be the same (justification). Paul concludes his argument based on the interpretation of Genesis 15:6 with what sounds like an early Christian confession of faith in the power of Jesus' death and resurrection: "who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification" (4:25).

#### 4. Adam and Christ: Typology in Romans 5:12-21

The first three chapters in the book of Genesis are dominated by the figure of Adam. His name means "the man," and clearly he is meant to be a representative figure. He is portrayed as the progenitor of all humans and also as the cause of most of our problems. His disobedience to God's command not to eat from the fruit of the tree (Gen 3:3) results in the banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. It is largely to the depiction of their sin in Genesis 3 that we owe our concept of original sin.

While Adam and original sin have figured prominently in Christian theology, it is surprising how little attention is given to Adam and his sin in the rest of the Old Testament. Adam's place in Christian theology is due in large part to Paul's comparison between Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12-21.

In Romans 5:14 Paul describes Adam as "a type of the one who is to come." The Greek word here is *typos*, the origin of our English word "type" and the basis of the term "typology." According to my dictionary, the first definition of typology is "a doctrine of theological types, esp. one holding that things in Christian belief are prefigured or symbolized by things in the Old Testament." In Romans 5, Paul views Adam as a "type" of Christ insofar as both figures are bearers of a fate or destiny that affects all of humankind. In that sense Christ is the second or new Adam. Whereas Adam's sin had repercussions for us all, so Jesus' life, death, and resurrection have repercussions for us all, Jews and Gentiles alike.

While Paul is interested in the similarities between Adam and Christ, he is even more interested in the different results or effects that they have brought upon us all. His fundamental point is stated in Romans 5:15: "But the free gift is not like the trespass." That is, the positive effects of Jesus' saving death and resurrection far outweigh the negative effects of Adam's sin. According to Paul, Adam's sin brought disobedience, sin, condemnation, and death upon humankind, whereas Christ's sacrificial fidelity opened up the possibility of obedience, righteousness, justification/acquittal, and eternal life. The result of Adam's sin was the reign of Sin, Death, and the Law. The result of Christ's saving death and resurrection is the reign of grace (divine favor) and eternal life.

This is typology with a twist. For Paul, Adam is like Christ and thus foreshadows Christ as the bearer of a fate or destiny. But even more important for Paul is how Adam is unlike Christ, when one compares the results or effects of what each one has done. Paul's negative assessment of Adam and the effects of his sin is echoed in the late first century A.D. Jewish apocalypse known as *Syriac* or *Second Baruch* 54:19: "Each of us have become our own Adam."

##### 5. The Mystery of Salvation: Prophecies Fulfilled.

The first time I heard Krister Stendahl lecture was in 1964. His topic was Paul's letter to the Romans, and his revolutionary thesis was that Paul's major concern was with explaining how Gentiles could be part of the people of God. The section of Romans that received special attention was, of course, chapters 9 through 11, Paul's long and often difficult meditation on the mystery of salvation.

Though often neglected because of its difficulty, Romans 9–11 represents a kind of "eureka" moment for Paul. At this point in his argument, Paul was trying to fit together three different groups in the divine plan: Jewish Christians like himself, Gentile Christians to whom he was sent as an apostle, and Jews who had not accepted the gospel.

In explaining his solution, Paul in Romans 11 took the olive tree as a symbol for Israel as the historic people of God. He identified Jewish Christians like himself as the root of the olive tree, and Gentile Christians as the branches cut off from a wild olive tree and grafted onto the olive tree representing Israel as God's people. Those Jews who did not accept the gospel he described as branches now cut off from the olive tree but capable in the future of being grafted back on. Paul summarized his "eureka" moment near the end of his argument in this way: "a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of Gentiles has come in. And so all

Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:25-26). Unfortunately for us, Paul did not define “all Israel” or explain exactly when and how all Israel will be saved.

In making his case and arriving at his conclusion, Paul frequently appeals to Old Testament texts. Given the topic of the mystery of salvation, this procedure is not surprising. And given the constraints of our time, we can only look at a few examples. But these examples illustrate nicely the broad outlines of Paul’s approach.

According to Romans 9:24, the present but provisional goal of salvation history is the church made up of Jews and Gentiles. With reference to the biblical prophets Hosea and Isaiah, Paul in 9:25-29 aims to show that the present state of the church is related to God’s promises to Israel, and that the church’s inclusion of Jews and Gentiles stands in accord with God’s plan revealed in the Old Testament.

The first set of biblical quotations in 9:25-26 grounds the inclusion of Gentiles among God’s people. The key expressions are “not my people” and “not beloved” in Hosea 2:25 and “not my people” in Hosea 2:1. In the book of Hosea these epithets apply to ancient Israel in moral rebellion against God. However, Paul takes them as references to Gentiles and uses them to defend the inclusion of Gentile Christians in the church as now “beloved” and as “children of the living God.”

The second set of biblical quotations in 9:27-29 explains the presence of some (but not all) Jews in the church. With reference to Isaiah 10:22-23 Paul identifies Jewish Christians like himself as the “remnant” within Israel as opposed to the majority of Israel. Then with the help of Isaiah 1:9 he insists that God has not abandoned Israel to destruction (“like Sodom...like Gomorrah”) but preserves Israel through the participation of Jewish Christians like himself in the church.

Thus Paul provides a biblical foundation for his insight about the relationships among Jewish Christians, Gentile Christians, and other Jews. Paul and other Jewish Christians fulfill the biblical prophecies about the remnant within Israel, and Gentile Christians have become part of God’s people through God’s mercy.

#### 6. Summarizing the Torah: Love Your Neighbor (Rom 13:9)

One of the tasks set before early Jewish teachers was to give a summary of the 613 commandments in the Torah. According to *b. Sabbath* 31a, Shammai dismissed his Gentile questioner without an answer. However, Hillel gave a response that is a version of Jesus’ Golden Rule and so is often called the “Silver Rule”: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor.” According to Matthew 22:34-40, in response to the same question, Jesus combined Deuteronomy 6:5 (love of God) and Leviticus 19:18 (love of neighbor). We can assume that for Hillel, Jesus, and Matthew the idea was that if you keep perfectly the Silver Rule or the biblical love commandments, you will surely give perfect obedience to the rest of the commandments.

In Romans 13:8 Paul echoes Leviticus 19:18 and Jesus when he says, “Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” He goes on to list various commandments from the second part of the Decalogue, and concludes that loving the neighbor is “the fulfilling of the law” (13:10). But does Paul mean what Jesus and Matthew meant?

While Paul's original audience in Rome probably contained both Jews and Gentiles, it appears that he was primarily addressing Gentile Christians. In several of his letters (including Romans), Paul was adamant in his conviction that Gentile Christians did not have to observe the Torah. Given what Paul had said in Romans 2:14 about Gentiles who "do instinctively what the law requires," he probably meant that those who truly love the neighbor may do what were the deepest intentions of the Law without embracing full Jewish Torah observance. He may be going so far as to say that if Gentile Christians love their neighbors, they will naturally do whatever good the Law demands.

## Six Conclusions

1. Paul had become convinced that Jesus was the key to interpreting the Jewish Scriptures. Given what we know from Paul's own testimony and the witness of Acts and the Deuteropauline letters, this was an unexpected and remarkable development. The one who had persecuted the early Christian movement became its champion. The many modern attempts at psychoanalyzing Paul have not gotten us very far. Perhaps the most satisfactory explanation remains the one Paul himself gives: It was due to his encounter with the risen Christ. In Paul's view that encounter was so real and so powerful that it changed everything. And it led Paul to find Christ everywhere, and especially in the Jewish Scriptures
2. Although Paul had discovered Christ as his new key to interpreting the Jewish Scriptures, he continued to use Jewish methods in interpreting those Scriptures. As we have seen, these methods included using biblical texts to confirm an argument, gathering various biblical texts into a chain or catena, using biblical texts to construct a theological argument, typology, fulfillment of biblical prophecies in the present, and summarizing the Torah by one biblical text (love of neighbor).
3. The fact that Paul made such abundant use of the Jewish Scriptures in his most substantial letters indicates that for him and his first readers these texts continued to possess great authority. But how much and what kind of authority is difficult to specify. Terms such as "innerancy" and "cannon" are anachronistic when applied to Paul and his contemporaries. Nevertheless, it is striking how influential and thus authoritative in some way these writings had become for many Jews in the late Second Temple period as they sought to express their religious, political, and cultural experiences. A similar phenomenon appears in the Dead Sea scrolls.
4. How much Paul's first Gentile Christian readers (or better, his first hearers when his letters were read aloud to them) understood and evaluated his appeals to the Jewish Scriptures is still another difficult question. Although his language is strongly biblical, Paul in writing to the Philippians and Thessalonians and to Philemon makes few explicit appeals to the Old Testament. But in his major letters—especially in Romans and Galatians, and to a lesser extent in 1 and 2 Corinthians—there is much more use of the Jewish Scriptures. We must assume that Paul's first readers had enough familiarity with these Scriptures to appreciate what Paul was saying. Perhaps these Gentiles had been associates of the Jewish synagogues, the kind of persons whom Luke calls "God fearers" in Acts, and so had exposure to the Jewish Scriptures in that setting.
5. In interpreting and applying these biblical texts, there are not many commonalities between Paul's approach and the modern historical-critical method. Paul shows little interest in

determining what these texts meant in their precise ancient historical setting. What interested him more, as Krister Stendahl has taught us, is what they mean, at least what they meant in the context of what we call the first century A.D. From Paul's perspective what once may have seemed like unfulfilled prophecies had at least found their meaning in Christ as the key to the Scriptures.

6. What do we learn about Paul from his use of the Old Testament? We learn that Paul continued to regard the Scriptures of Israel as important and in some way authoritative. We learn that Paul found in those Scriptures pointers toward the Christ event and regarded the promises contained in them as somehow fulfilled in Christ. And we learn how deeply Paul's experience of the risen Christ shaped his person and his thinking, and in particular how he read and used the Jewish Scriptures.