ARGUING WITH SCRIPTURE

The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul

CHRISTOPHER D. STANLEY

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To Jeremy and David

*May they always wrestle
with the meaning of scripture*

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Preface

    This book owes its existence to two moments of insight that seem rather obvious in retrospect, though neither seemed so at the time. The first concerns methodology. While working on an article for a volume of essays several years ago, I ran across a number of studies by scholars from different fields (literary studies, philosophy of language, linguistics, and rhetorical studies) that examined the rhetorical and literary effects of the quotation process. These studies raised important methodological questions that had been neglected by scholars engaged in the study of early Christian appropriation of the Jewish Scriptures. Over time, the insights offered by these studies profoundly reshaped my understanding of the use of Scripture in Paul's letters. My initial reflections on the relevance of these materials appeared in a 1997 article entitled, "The Rhetoric of Quotations: An Essay on Method," in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigation and Proposals* (ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997, 44–58). This article was refined and expanded to form chapter two of the present volume. My quest for a framework to integrate these new insights eventually led me to Eugene White's "configurational" model of rhetoric (described in chapter one), which serves as the methodological backbone of the present study.

    The second moment of insight occurred while I was attending a conference on the use of Isaiah 53 in the New Testament. As I listened to several days of presentations and sometimes heated discussions, I was struck by the number of ungrounded historical assumptions that the various parties were making about the availability and use of Scripture in the early Christian churches. Having recently finished William Harris's magisterial work, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), and Harry Gamble's equally prescient study, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), I was keenly aware of the high levels of illiteracy in the ancient world, including the early Christian movement. Yet the participants in this conference were talking as though everyone in the early Christian community would have known and recognized the literary context of the many explicit quotations and indirect allusions to the Jewish Scriptures that fill the pages of the New Testament. This experience gave rise to the question that lies at the

heart of this study: Why did Paul (and many other early Christian authors) quote so often from the Jewish Scriptures when writing to predominately illiterate Gentile audiences who would have been unable to read the biblical text for themselves? The question was fleshed out (but not answered) in a 1999 article entitled, "'Pearls Before Swine': Did Paul's Audiences Understand His Biblical Quotations?" (*Novum Testamentum* 41 [1999], 124–44). This article became the basis for chapter three of the present volume.

Some of my early attempts to piece together these new insights can be found in papers that I presented at various professional meetings. This book represents my first attempt to offer a coherent statement of the problem and my own thoughtful response.

I would like to express my appreciation to the many people who offered critical and constructive feedback after hearing some of the early papers that I presented on the issues addressed in this book. Special thanks are due to a few individuals who had the interest and patience to maintain the dialogue over longer periods of time, particularly Ross Wagner, Bruce Fisk, and Richard Hays. Their criticisms helped me to sharpen my thinking in a number of areas. I hope that I have returned the favor. Additional thanks are due to my editors at T & T Clark, Henry Carrigan and Amy Wagner, who accepted my manuscript with enthusiasm and published it with utmost professionalism. Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Laurel, and my sons Jeremy and David for their patience as I have struggled with this book over the last several years. My sons have grown to maturity along with this book. I dedicate this book to them in the hope that it will inspire them to wrestle seriously with the words of Scripture as they formulate their own adult identities.

List of Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
AnBib	Analecta biblica
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BFT	Biblical Foundations in Theology
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
BIOSCS	*Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies*
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CRINT	Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
HTKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
Neot	*Neotestamentica*
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
NTM	New Testament Message
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

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Introduction

The apostle Paul labored for most of his adult life to establish Christian house-churches in the towns and cities of the northeast Mediterranean basin. Some of his followers were Jews, but most came from non-Jewish backgrounds. Why, then, did Paul quote so often from the Jewish Scriptures in his letters to these churches? Did he have reason to believe that his predominately Gentile audiences were capable of following his often obscure arguments from specific biblical texts? Or was he so steeped in the language of Scripture that he naturally lapsed into "Biblespeak" whenever he felt compelled to address questions of faith and practice?

A partial answer, supported by several recent studies, is that Paul remained deeply engaged with the Jewish Scriptures throughout his life, so that his thinking and mode of expression were continually shaped by the symbolic universe of the Bible and the language of specific passages.[1] As a devout and educated Jew, Paul labored mightily to convince himself and others that the Christian message was consistent with the testimony of Scripture regarding the nature and activity of Israel's God, including the prophets' assurances that God would show mercy to Israel in the "last days." When writing to his churches about matters of faith and practice, Paul simply followed his habitual practice of grounding his teaching and exhortation in specific passages of Scripture.[2]

Surely this scenario is valid as far as it goes. There is ample evidence that Paul regarded himself as a more or less faithful Jew to the end of his life, and his letters demonstrate how thoroughly his thinking was molded by his

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1. The term "Jewish Scriptures" is used here (and throughout this study) in place of the Christian term "Old Testament" not only because the latter term is anachronistic when applied to Paul's day, but also to emphasize three points: (1) these were the holy texts of the Jewish ethnoreligious community; (2) Paul read these texts as a member of that community; and (3) people outside this community normally had little or no knowledge of the content of these texts (see chapter 3). The importance of these points will become clearer as the study progresses.

2. On the central place of Scripture in Paul's theology, see Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Dietrich-Alex Koch, *Die Schrift als Zeuge des Evangeliums: Untersuchungen zur Verwendung und zum Verständnis der Schrift bei Paulus* (BHT 69; Tübingen: Mohr, 1986); J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Paul and Isaiah "in Concert" in the Letter to the Romans* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

ancestral Scriptures. But the fact remains that Paul quotes explicitly from Scripture in only four of his assured letters (Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans), and he often treats weighty issues of belief and practice without adducing any particular biblical text in support of his argument (e.g., Gal 3:19–4:7, 5:16–26; 1 Cor 7:1–8:13; 2 Cor 5:1–21; Rom 1:18–32, 5:1–8:30, 12:1–16; cf. Phil 3:1–21; 1 Thess 4:1–12; 2 Thess 2:1–12). Moreover, many of his quotations appear in contexts that bear little relation to those "central issues of the faith" that are said to have motivated Paul's studies in the Jewish Scriptures (e.g., 1 Cor 2:16, 9:9, 14:21; 2 Cor 4:1, 8:15, 9:9; Rom 14:11, 15:21). These examples suggest that we must look beyond Paul's own theological interests to understand why he chose to quote a specific verse of Scripture at a specific point in his developing argument.

Another common explanation for Paul's frequent quotations from Scripture, cited often in conjunction with the first one, is that Paul expected his Gentile converts to understand his biblical citations because he had taught extensively from the Jewish Scriptures when he was with them and had impressed upon them the importance of continuing in the Scriptures in his absence. Paul knew that the non-Jews in his churches could not fully understand the Christian message without a proper biblical foundation, so he took pains to lay such a foundation when he was with them. After he left, he expected the Jewish Christians in his churches to continue this pattern of instruction and answer any further questions that might arise. Thus, Paul could reasonably expect even the Gentiles in his churches to understand and appreciate his many quotations from the Jewish Scriptures.

This scenario, like the first one, appears plausible, though our knowledge of Paul's oral instruction of his churches remains fragmentary at best. At several points in his letters Paul alludes to biblical ideas and/or characters with the clear expectation that his audiences will understand the references, perhaps from earlier teaching (e.g., Gal 3:6–9, 16–18, 4:21–31; 1 Cor 9:13, 10:1–10, 15:45–49; 2 Cor 3:7–18, 11:3; Rom 1:3, 3:25, 4:1–22, 5:12–21, 9:4–17, 25–29, 10:16–21, 11:1–4). Moreover, some of his explicit quotations would have made little sense unless the recipients were familiar with the broader context from which the quotation was extracted. These facts have convinced most interpreters that Paul's Gentile readers were in fact conversant with the Jewish Scriptures.

But questions remain: (1) Why does Paul quote and allude to Scripture so extensively in his letter to the church in Rome, which he had never visited, when he includes no explicit quotations in his letter to the Philippians, with whom he had a long-standing relationship? How could he know what pas-

sages the Roman Christians did or did not know from the Jewish Scriptures? (2) Why does Paul so often quote the Scriptures in a way that strains any sense of "original context" (e.g., 1 Cor 14:21; 2 Cor 4:13; Rom 2:24, 9:25–26, 10:5–8, 18), if in other places he expects his audience to know and supply the original context of his quotations? Was he not concerned that his arguments might be rejected in these cases? (3) Why should we assume that the recipients of Paul's letters, particularly the non-Jews, possessed the literary capacity to understand his quotations as he intended them? Literacy levels were low in antiquity, access to books was limited, and most non-Jews had little or no prior knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures.[3] Is it not possible that Paul simply misjudged, or failed to consider, the level of biblical literacy in his churches?

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Most contemporary studies of Paul's use of Scripture have focused on the way this Jewish-Pharisee-cum-Christian-apostle understood and interpreted the biblical text. These studies have enhanced our understanding of the theological beliefs and methods of the apostle Paul. However, we must also keep in mind that Paul wrote his letters not to lay out a set of theological beliefs, but to motivate specific first-century Christians to believe and/or act (or stop believing or acting) in particular ways. The significance of this point for the study of Paul's quotations has often been underestimated. To quote from an outside text in order to lend support to an argument is a rhetorical act, and it should be studied as such. Quotations are meant to affect an audience; otherwise, there is no reason to include them in a literary work. What was Paul trying to accomplish by including biblical quotations in some of his letters? How might the recipients of Paul's letters have responded to these sudden intrusions from the Jewish Scriptures? How effective was biblical argumentation as a strategy for influencing the thinking and behavior of a first-century Christian audience? These are the kinds of questions that motivate the present study.

Chapter 1 explains what is meant by a rhetorical approach to Paul's quotations. The bulk of this chapter is devoted to a description of the theoretical model that undergirds the ensuing analysis of Paul's rhetoric,

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3. Of course, Gentile Christians who had been Jewish sympathizers (Luke's "God-fearers") would have been exposed to the Jewish Scriptures, but we have no reason to think that their literacy levels differed appreciably from their contemporaries. For more on the question, see chapter 3.

including his explicit appeals to Scripture. This model, developed by Eugene White out of Chaim Perelman's "New Rhetoric," provides a helpful framework for integrating the diverse materials on quotations that are presented in chapter 2.

Chapter 2 surveys recent studies of the quotation process from the fields of linguistics and literary studies. These materials have been broadly neglected in recent studies of Paul's use of Scripture. Taken together, these studies provide a valuable analytical perspective from which to conduct an audience-centered investigation of Paul's quotations.

Chapter 3 examines some of the assumptions that scholars typically bring to their study of Paul's biblical quotations.[4] Included here are ideas about the nature of Paul's first-century audiences (including their familiarity with the biblical text), the sources of his biblical quotations, his intentions in quoting the biblical text, and the way quotations "work" in a literary composition. Many of these assumptions will be shown to be highly questionable if not invalid. The chapter concludes with a proposal for a more historically sensitive approach to analyzing Paul's explicit appeals to Scripture.

Chapter 4 uses the insights of the first three chapters to develop a coherent method for investigating the rhetorical significance of Paul's biblical quotations. The goal here is to estimate how a first-century audience might have responded to the sudden appearance of material from the Jewish Scriptures at a particular point in Paul's developing argument. Unlike works that treat Paul's first-century audience as a monolithic entity, the method outlined here aims to imaginatively reconstruct the potential reactions of three hypothetical audience groups to Paul's biblical quotations.

Chapters 5–8 present a series of case studies that exemplify the approach set forth in chapter 4.[5] Chapters 5 and 6 examine the rhetorical effect of sev-

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4. As used in this study, the term "quotation" refers to "any series of several words that reproduces with a reasonable degree of faithfulness the general word order and at least some of the actual language of an identifiable passage from an outside text" (Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature* [SNTSMS 74; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 36). To qualify for inclusion in this study, a quotation must be "identifiable" not only to the modern reader, but also to ancient readers; that is, it must be marked by an explicit quotation formula (e.g., "as it is written"), an interpretive gloss, or a clear grammatical tension with the surrounding passage (see the discussion in Stanley, *Paul,* 31–39). Allusions, "echoes," "midrashic" commentaries, and other forms of reference to the biblical text are excluded from consideration in this study because it is audience-centered (see chapter 3).

5. To insure consistency, the present study is limited to the assuredly Pauline letters.

eral isolated quotations in the Corinthian correspondence. Chapter 7 looks at two key passages in Paul's letter to the Galatians. Chapter 8 investigates the role of quotations in the epistle to the Romans. Each of these chapters covers only a handful of passages; the aim is not to be comprehensive, but to exemplify how quotations "work" as rhetorical devices in a given letter. Chapter 9 sums up the conclusions of the study and offers a retrospective analysis of the rhetorical effectiveness of Paul's biblical quotations.

Scholars interested in Paul's work as a biblical theologian will find the results of this study rather meager. The following pages offer few if any new insights into the way Paul himself read and interpreted the biblical text. But for those interested in the rhetorical dimensions of Paul's letters—how Paul used language, symbols, and ideas to provoke a particular response from his first-century audiences—Paul's quotations offer a fruitful field for study.

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PART I
THE RHETORIC
OF QUOTATIONS

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