

GEORG A. WALSER

Old Testament Quotations in Hebrews

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

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Mohr Siebeck

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Georg A. Walser

Old Testament Quotations in Hebrews

Studies in their Textual and
Contextual Background

Mohr Siebeck

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To Anna and Anton

Preface

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Gothenburg, 1st June 2013

Georg A. Walser

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Abbreviations

ANF	The Ante-Nicene Fathers
CCL	Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
FC	The Fathers of the Church
MPG	Migne Patrologia Graeca
MT	The Masoretic text
NA28	Nestle-Aland's 28 th edition of the Greek New Testament
NETS	New English Translation of the Septuagint
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
PL	Patrologia Latina
SC	Sources Chrétiennes

Chapter 1

Setting the Scene

1.1 Rationale and Background

The *New Testament* already in its name presupposes an *Old Testament*. Moreover, the new covenant¹ implies an old covenant, but is not introduced before the end of the Gospels (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). Hence it could be argued that the bulk of the Gospels actually took place during the time of the old covenant. Further, as Guillet argued: “He [Jesus] never moves outside of Scripture [the Old Testament]. All that he does and is aims only at giving the Scriptures their true dimension ...”² Hence, throughout the New Testament the Old Testament³ is referred to in quotations and allusions, and it is presupposed in most of the theological argumentation. Consequently, the importance of the relationship between the two testaments for the understanding of the New Testament cannot be overestimated. This is especially manifest in the Letter to the Hebrews, and any investigation on Hebrews has to deal with the fact that the text abounds in quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament, not to mention that the issues discussed in Hebrews are totally Old Testament centred. Hence understanding the exegesis of the Old Testament in the New is of critical importance to any analysis of the epistle, as pointed out by Guthrie: “Simply stated, the uses to which Hebrews has put the Old Testament are the book’s bone and marrow.”⁴ This issue can be addressed

¹ Covenant and testament are, of course, translations of one and the same Greek word διαθήκη, which in turn is a rendering of the Hebrew term בְּרִית.

² Jacques Guillet, “The Role of the Bible in the Birth of the Church” in Paul Blowers (ed.), *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 36.

³ The term “Old Testament” is used in a common sense to refer to the texts of the old covenant, whether or not including any apocryphal or deuterocanonical books. For a general discussion of terminology, see Karin Finsterbusch and Armin Lange (eds.), *What is Bible?* (Leuven, Paris and Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2012).

⁴ George Guthrie, “Hebrews’ Use of the Old Testament: Recent Trends in Research”, *Currents in Biblical Research* 2 (2003), 272. Cf. J. van der Ploeg, “L’exégèse de l’Ancien Testament dans l’Épître aux Hébreux”, *Revue Biblique* 1 (1947), 190: “Il est donc clair qu’on ne saurait comprendre les idées et la doctrine de l’épître aux Hébreux sans connaître à fond l’idée que l’auteur se faisait de l’Ancien Testament et de ses rapports avec le Nouveau.” Cf. also Barnabas Lindars, “The Place of the Old Testament in the Formation of New Testament

in various ways, but it is the intention of this particular investigation to focus on certain aspects of the question which up to now seem to have been somewhat neglected. Thus, the main emphasis here will be on seeking to establish the textual basis for Old Testament quotations and on the context(s) in which they were interpreted both before and after they were used in the New Testament. Given the great and obvious importance of the Old Testament for the Letter to the Hebrews, the epistle will be used for the present investigation, and serve as a test case for further investigations on the New Testament.⁵

What aroused my interest for this particular study was a short monograph by Adrian Schenker *Das Neue am neuen Bund und das Alte am alten: Jer 31 in der hebräischen und griechischen Bibel* published in 2006. Here Schenker states that: “The promise of a new covenant in the prophet Jeremiah in the version of the Greek Bible of the Septuagint has never been systematically compared with the Hebrew version ...”.⁶ The fact that the differences between the two versions of Jeremiah 31 only occasionally have been discussed before in the scholarly literature, and that these divergences rarely have been taken into account in the interpretation of the quotation in Hebrews, is surprising.⁷ This issue is made even more complex by the fact that there are substantial differences between the text of the Septuagint⁸ and the text of the Hebrew version. Furthermore, these differences appear to be caused not by the process of translation, but rather because the text of the Septuagint is a translation of a different *Vorlage*, which appears to be older and more original than the version preserved in the Masoretic Hebrew text. Moreover, both versions are found in most modern translations of the Bible, since Jeremiah is usually translated from the Hebrew text, while the quotation in Hebrews is a quotation from the Greek text. Naturally one asks which text did the author of Hebrews use and why, and further, how did the particular version of the text

Theology” in G.K. Beale (ed.), *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994).

⁵ Cf. Natalio Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in context: introduction to the Greek version of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 327, where he states that: “The letter to the Hebrews is an important document for checking the biblical text used since it includes very long quotations and it is likely that these seeped in from memory.”

⁶ Adrian Schenker, *Das Neue am neuen Bund und das Alte am alten: Jer 31 in der hebräischen und griechischen Bibel, von der Textgeschichte zu Theologie, Synagoge und Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 11. For a longer quotation and the German text, see below.

⁷ It is for instance not discussed in Radu Gheorghita, *The role of the Septuagint in Hebrews: an investigation of its influence with special consideration to the use of Hab 2:3-4 in Heb 10:37-38* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

⁸ The term “Septuagint” is used in its wider sense to refer to the Greek Old Testament. For more general discussions of the use of this term see, Tim McLay, *The use of the Septuagint in New Testament research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), and Finsterbusch and Lange (eds.), *What is Bible?*

used interact with his argumentation.⁹ Hence these questions will be dealt with in the present study, which will focus not only on Jeremiah 31 in Hebrews, but on two additional Old Testament texts quoted in Hebrews, for which there existed various versions of the source text. Moreover, the text of Hebrews was not composed in a vacuum, but rather in a continuum, in which Hebrews is neither the beginning nor the end, but only a point on a line of interpretations. Hence this interpretative line of the Old Testament will be followed and explored as far back as possible and until the first centuries of the present era to see how these texts were interpreted in a historical perspective. The findings of this part of the investigation will be used when examining the quotations in Hebrews to find out if and how they relate to the interpretations found in other sources. In short, this study aims to investigate two aspects of Old Testament quotations in Hebrews, namely the *text* and the wider interpretative *context*. The importance of these two aspects has, of course, been widely recognized before, but nonetheless this knowledge does not seem to have been carried into effect to any extent.

As far as the first of these aspects is concerned, most investigations of Hebrews point out that the majority of the quotations are taken from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, usually known under the name Septuagint (LXX). Unfortunately, these investigations, with very few exceptions, do not take the discussion about the text any further. Thus it is implicitly taken for granted that there actually existed one Greek translation (usually practically identical with Rahlfs' 1935 edition)¹⁰ of one Hebrew text (usually practically identical with *Biblica Hebraica* being a diplomatic text based on the medieval manuscript Codex Leningradensis dated to AD 1008 or possibly 1009),¹¹ as Tov notes:

Before an interest in the early or original shape of the biblical text developed, the biblical text was considered to have existed originally in the same form as that known from the medieval MT [MT], considered the *textus receptus*.¹²

Such an attitude towards the source text of the quotations utterly neglects the results of the very flourishing Septuagint research of the last hundred years or

⁹ Cf. Susan Docherty, *The use of the Old Testament in Hebrews: a case study in early Jewish Bible interpretation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 3.

¹⁰ Alfred Rahlfs (ed.), *Septuaginta: Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979).

¹¹ Hans Rüger et al. (eds.), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990).

¹² Emanuel Tov, *Textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 161.

so.¹³ Here, it is especially important to take account of the investigations into the *Vorlage* of the Septuagint, which are based on the findings from the Judean desert, and Qumran in particular, since they show that the Greek text sometimes translates a different Hebrew text from the one today preserved in the Masoretic text (see further below). In short, at the time when Hebrews was composed, the Old Testament in Hebrew was not as uniform as is usually taken for granted, and thus the Greek rendering, or rather renderings, of the Hebrew texts were equally differentiated. This aspect of the present investigation mainly deals with textual matters, which usually are discussed in investigations focusing on the use of the Old Testament in the New, or more specifically the use of the Old Testament in Hebrews. However, although some of these earlier investigations touch upon the textual aspect in focus in the present investigation, they only rarely go into any details.¹⁴ Hence it appears that more attention has to be given to this particular aspect to fully understand the textual background of the quotations. Moreover, since the author of Hebrews is generally quoting the Greek text of the Old Testament rather than the Hebrew, Septuagint research provides an important basis for this study.

The second aspect deals with the context in which Hebrews was composed. It has been a trend for some time among scholars in the field of New Testament exegesis to point out that the context in which the early Christian texts were composed was a Jewish context.¹⁵ If this is correct (and it is the assumption of the present investigation that this is the case), it has far-reaching consequences for the exegesis of the New Testament, and especially for a text such as Hebrews, which is soaked in Old Testament quotations and allusions. If the Letter to the Hebrews was written in a Jewish context, this means that the author was familiar with Jewish Old Testament exegesis as well. Consequently, it is likely that there are affinities between the Jewish interpretations of Old Testament passages and those found in Hebrews, and that knowledge about Jewish exegesis could help shed some light on how the author understood the texts he quoted.

Both of these aspects, text and context, are crucial for the understanding of Hebrews and especially of its Old Testament quotations. However, there is also one methodological aspect which is of great importance to the present investigation, namely that most studies of Old Testament quotations in Hebrews tend to end at the time when Hebrews was composed. It is the aim of the present investigation to go one step further, taking the reception of the Old

¹³ Cf. e.g., Benjamin Kedar, "The Latin Translations" in Jan Mulder (ed.), *Mikra: text, translation, reading, and interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in ancient Judaism and early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 306.

¹⁴ For an evaluation of earlier investigations, see below.

¹⁵ Docherty, *Old Testament in Hebrews*, 1.

Testament texts in the post Second Temple Jewish community and in the Early Church into consideration. This methodological approach is based on the assumption that the Old Testament texts were not handed down in isolation, but that they were accompanied by interpretations. Hence, when the texts were read in the post Second Temple Jewish community as well as in the early Church, they were not interpreted anew from scratch, but the understanding of the text was based on earlier interpretations, which were handed down together with the texts themselves.¹⁶

It should be noted here how these two aspects, text and context, interact with each other. Since there existed different versions of Old Testament texts, it is likely that not only one of the texts was interpreted within Judaism, but several. It is also likely that at least some of these interpretations were known to the author of Hebrews. Hence at the time when Hebrews was composed, the author did not only have access to several versions of the text, but most certainly also to a number of different interpretations. Whilst the first aspect tries to contribute to the field of New Testament exegesis by investigating the textual basis, the second aspect does so by studying the interpretational background of the texts. Hence this part of the present investigation provides important information for the reception history of the Old Testament, of which Hebrews is but one example.

1.1.2 Basic assumptions of this study:

1. There existed several versions of the OT text at the time when Hebrews was composed.
2. There existed several interpretations related to these versions.
3. Hebrews was written in a Jewish context where these interpretations were known and used.
4. These interpretations continued to be used in the early Church and in post Second Temple Judaism
5. An investigation of these interpretations in the early Church and within Judaism can help shed some light on how the texts were understood by the author of Hebrews.

1.2 Aims

1.2.1 Research Questions

The aim of the present investigation is to answer a number of questions. The answers to these questions are expected to increase the understanding of the

¹⁶ Cf. James Kugel, *In Potiphar's house: the interpretive life of Biblical texts* (London: Harvard University Press, 1994), 266–268.

use of the Old Testament in the Letter to the Hebrews, as well as in the New Testament as a whole. The basis for these questions are the assumptions mentioned above, that there existed several versions of the Old Testament text at the time when Hebrews was composed, and that these versions were interpreted in the context where Hebrews was composed. Given the fact that there existed more than one version of the Old Testament text when Hebrews was composed, it is only natural that the first question to ask is which versions actually existed of the Old Testament texts quoted in Hebrews. Closely connected to this question is another one, namely which version of the Old Testament was used by the author of Hebrews in the quotations discussed in the present investigation. It is important to note here that the question about the versions is not limited to the consideration of whether the author of Hebrews quoted the Septuagint or not, but the origin and prehistory of the quoted text is taken into consideration as well. This means that the most recent research into the complex textual history of the Septuagint will be consulted, and, in particular, due attention will be paid to the possibility that the text of the Greek translation is based on a different Hebrew text from the MT. It is expected that the outcome of this study of the source text for the quotations in Hebrews will give a more detailed, but also a more balanced, perception of the author's use of the Old Testament. The answers to these two questions will also provide the solid foundation for the following investigation of the interpretation of the text. The two questions in focus here are also closely related, but whereas the previous ones deal with the *text* the following two deal with the *context*; how did the different versions of the text influence the interpretations of the text before and after the time of Hebrews, and how did the version of the Old Testament text quoted in Hebrews interact with the argumentation of the author? For these questions to be relevant it has to be assumed that the text actually was interpreted at the time before Hebrews, which is not always possible to show by references to extant texts. Hence the earliest sources available discussing the Old Testament passages quoted in Hebrews will be examined in an attempt to find traces of earlier interpretations that could shed some light on how the texts were interpreted at the time of Hebrews. The intended outcome of this part of the investigation is to find out if there could have been any interpretations prior to Hebrews that were the basis for the author's interpretation in Hebrews.

1.2.2 The "Parting of the Ways" Debate

In addition to the main questions that form the bulk of the present investigation there is one question that will be touched upon, namely the role of Scripture in the process of forming two separate communities, the Jewish and the Christian, out of the one community that existed before the rise of Christianity. Scripture was very central in Second Temple Judaism, and this was also

the case in the post Second Temple Jewish community as well as in the early Church. Therefore, one important factor in the process of forming these communities is the interpretation of Scripture. In the light of the present investigation there is one question that arises, namely if the use of different versions of texts was one factor in the forming of these separate communities. In other words: did the two communities interpret the same texts differently or did they in fact interpret different versions of the texts differently? In the first case the differences are based on different interpretations in the second on different versions of the texts.

1.3 Textual and Contextual Background

1.3.1 Introduction

The approach for this study has already been touched upon, and it will focus on two aspects that have attracted less attention than could have been expected, given their significance for the exegesis of the New Testament; namely text and context. Regarding the text it is especially the findings of the flourishing Septuagint research of the last decades that will be taken into account more fully than has hitherto been the case.¹⁷ This aspect will be discussed in some detail in the following section regarding the text. For the context it is the interpretative context of the Old Testament texts before they were used in the New Testament that will be taken into account. However, since the extant material predating the composition of Hebrews is often very scarce, later material is employed with the assumption that it draws on earlier sources, and hence can shed some light upon earlier but no longer extant material. This aspect will be dealt with in the two sections below on Hebrews and Second Temple Judaism, and Hebrews and the early Church, respectively. It should be noted here that although Judaism and Christianity are treated separately for practical reasons, this does not reflect the real relationship between the two thought communities, which appears to have been much more complicated than is reflected by the schematic presentation of the sources in this study. A more nuanced description of the relationship

¹⁷ Cf. Dieter-Alex Koch, "Die Überlieferung und Verwendung der Septuaginta im ersten nachchristlichen Jahrhundert" in *Begegnungen zwischen Christentum und Judentum in Antike und Mittelalter: Festschrift für Heinz Schreckenberg* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 215–244, and Docherty, *Old Testament in Hebrews*, 3: "The study of the Septuagint has progressed greatly in the past twenty years, partly impelled by the discovery of the Qumran biblical texts, yet much of this advance is not reflected even in recent studies of the New Testament."