

## THE USE OF ISRAEL'S SCRIPTURES IN EPHESIANS<sup>1</sup>

Thorsten Moritz

This thesis argues that the use and influence of the Jewish Scriptures in Ephesians pertains directly to our (and the originally intended readers') understanding of the letter and that this influence is rather greater and more deliberate than has been suggested. It examines those instances where the author manifestly made use of wording which can be directly or indirectly traced to the Jewish Scriptures. I have therefore focused on quotations and allusions (1:20-3; 2:13-7; 5:14; 5:31; 6:2f.; 6:10, 14-7) and on what I believe to be deliberate reformulation of a Biblical text in the light of its perceived misuse by the author's, or his community's, opponents (Eph. 4:8). In addition there is a chapter on the cluster of Old Testament phraseology in Ephesians 4:25-30.

Ephesians has a similar amount of Old Testament material (some mediated, some direct; some by way of quotations, some in the form of allusions) as Galatians. While the presence of such material in Galatians has occasioned numerous studies, the very opposite is true of Ephesians. This has partly to do with the unresolved authorship question in the case of the latter, and partly with the fact that scholars generally chose to concentrate on Ephesians as a hunting ground for non-Jewish traditions. Yet there are about a dozen instances where a study of the underlying Old Testament tradition yields significant results. I have traced these traditions in the literary context of Ephesians and, where fruitful, in their original Old Testament contexts as well as examining the influence of their history of effect on this letter where appropriate.

---

<sup>1</sup>T. Moritz, *The Use of Israel's Scriptures in Ephesians* (Ph.D. thesis, King's College, University of London 1994); supervisor: Professor G. Stanton.

This study attempts to plug a gap in Ephesian scholarship. In doing so, it interacts significantly with the most recent monographs on Ephesians and seeks to develop further and to refine some of the insights of the important recent book *Ephesians: Power and Magic* (1989) by C. Arnold, which throws new light on the long debated issue of the epistle's religio-cultural background. The study also responds to a forthcoming book on the famous crux Ephesians 4:8 by W. Harris (*The Descent of Christ*) and the relatively widespread 'targumic solution' to the problem of this verse reiterated there. In contrast I suggest a fresh interpretation which acknowledges the author's alleged 'mishap' or 'memory lapse due to a targumic version of Psalm 68' as a deliberate manoeuvre which has its roots in early Christian polemic against Judaizing tendencies. In Ephesians 4 the author reminds his readers of this conflict and his understanding of the relationship between Christ and Torah. He does this by utilising a Christian reformulation of Psalm 68:18—which originated as a deliberate Christian response to the relatively common Jewish re-appropriation of Psalm 68 for elevating the Torah—and by supplying it with a 'midrashic' comment which prepares the ground for following the ecclesiological section.

The other main contributions are first, the combination of material from Psalms 8 and 110 in Ephesians 1:20-3 does not represent a taking over of common early Christian exegetical stock, but implies greater acquaintance by the author with the underlying texts than is commonly recognised. In particular this includes the recognition of the likely intertextual relationship between Psalm 8 and the creation motifs of Genesis and its typological exploitation for christological purposes.

Second, the so-called *double structure* evidenced in Ephesians 2:13, 17 (the combination of 'vertical peace' and 'horizontal peace') ought to be explained as the hermeneutical extension of a principle detected by the author of Ephesians, not as evidence of an underlying early Christian 'hymnic' source. This makes it likely that ἐλθὼν (v. 17) should be interpreted as evidence of the author's understanding that the Christ event, which likely refers to the whole of Christ's earthly ministry, culminating in the cross, forms the decisive salvation-historical extension of a principle implied in the

Prophet's vision: non-Jews will have access to God's people on equal terms. Ephesians 2 relates this message explicitly to the role of the Jewish Law and examines the ecclesiological relevance of the abrogation of the latter.

Third, Ephesians 4:8ff. extends this line of argument and applies it to the question of the role of individuals in Christ's church. The explicit (2:13–7) and tacit (4:8–10) pre-occupation with the abrogation of the Law somewhat qualifies Käsemann's well-known thesis regarding the primary purpose of Ephesians, *i.e.* to call Gentile Christians back to a deeper appreciation of their Jewish foundation. The least that can be said is that such an assessment needs to be balanced by an awareness that the author also felt the need to confront Judaising tendencies among his intended readership which may well have included former godfearers if not proselytes.

Fourth, Ephesians 5:14 again involves evidence of the use of traditional early Christian material. However, the verbal overlap of verse 14b with the two closest parallels (from the Book of Isaiah) suggests that this material in turn resulted from a Christian adaptation of the underlying Old Testament text. As in Ephesians 4:8, the author of Ephesians utilised a piece of tradition which was mediated to him not via general Jewish ethical teaching (as many commentators assume), but via early Christian adaptation of specific Old Testament motifs. Interpretatively it emerged that we should be careful not to read verse 14b as an example of an early Christian baptismal liturgy, although this cannot be ruled out, but primarily as an affirmation of the Christian dimension of the ethical transformation in the life of a believer. It is likely that the underlying early Christian tradition used Isaiah 28 and 60 to this end and that the writer of Ephesians reinforced this understanding.

Fifth, Ephesians 5:31 is similar in that here the writer is at pains to affirm the ethical teaching contained in the Jewish Scriptures, but not without bringing out the specifically Christian dimension of marriage as well. I suggest that yet again the author is trying to show that Christian ethical teaching is compatible with, and in no way

inferior to, that of Jewish Torah. His implied argument appears to be that there is no reason to suspect Christianity of ethical libertinism.

Sixth, in Ephesians 6:2-3 the writer re-employs the fifth commandment for the purpose of stressing the importance of honouring one's parents. The attached promise is quoted not with the purpose of literal re-application, but in order to underscore the significance of the commandment. There is a shift of emphasis from the responsibility of adult children for their ageing parents (Dt.) to the need for children to be receptive and obedient to the teaching of the father, whose responsibility it was to hand down the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Seventh, the famous panoply passage in Ephesians 6:10, 14-7 has traditionally been understood as a reflection of the Roman military metaphor. I have argued that an equally if not more plausible alternative is to interpret the passage against the background of arena fighting. Given that much of the imagery employed is likely to originate from the Book of Isaiah, the partial overlap of the armoury list with lists of Roman weaponries should not be overestimated. This is not to rule out the possibility of a secondary allusion to the Roman military metaphor, but in view of the technical term *πάλη* (v. 12) and the repeatedly defensive thrust of the passage, the metaphorical background may well be that of arena fighting (presumably against better equipped humans) as a means of punishment for religious dissenters in first century Western Asia Minor. The somewhat unusual phrase *πρὸς αἷμα καὶ σάρκα* is best interpreted as follows: what matters in the end, is not the believers' possible defeat in the arena, but victory in Christ, that is *ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις* (*cf.* 2:6).

Despite all the close parallels between Ephesians and Colossians they differ greatly in the use of Old Testament traditions, as in Ephesians, or the neglect of them in Colossians. Given the subtle way in which such traditions are employed in Ephesians, it could be argued that contrary to common opinion it is Ephesians, not Colossians, which was intended for an at least partly Jewish minded audience, whether it was ethnic Jews, proselytes, or ex-God-fearers. This has major ramifications for the interpretation of passages such as Ephesians 2:11ff. on the relationship of Jews and Gentiles.