

A Note on Paul's Use of Isaiah

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An analysis of Paul's citations from Isaiah reveals specific tendencies on the part of Paul with regard to both his theological appropriation of Isaiah and the distribution of his citations across a variety of Isaian contexts. The tendencies of Paul with respect to the distribution of his citations from Isaiah is particularly relevant to the discussion concerning the viability of the "testimony book" hypothesis. In this brief note we will examine both of these matters.¹

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I. THEOLOGICAL TENDENZ IN PAUL'S CITATIONS FROM ISAIAH

The single most striking aspect of the thematic grouping of Paul's citations from Isaiah is the concentrated use of the citations in Romans to deal explicitly with the issue of Jew and Gentile in Christ.² When we consider the heavy concentration of these citations in Romans relative to Paul's use of other OT books there, particularly his use of Isaiah in Romans 9-11, it becomes evident that as Paul explained the relationship between Jew and Gentile to the Roman church he was reflecting primarily on, and drawing primarily from, the book of Isaiah.³ Based solely on the number of times he cites Isaiah with regard to this issue, although there are other compelling reasons as well, it is reasonable to conclude that no other single OT book influenced Paul's theology of Jew and Gentile in Christ as much as Isaiah.

¹ This article is taken from my dissertation, "Paul's Use of Isaiah and Its Place in His Theology with Special Reference to Romans 9-11" (Ph.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, 1992). The inspiration and generous assistance of my advisor, Professor Moises Silva, are gratefully acknowledged. The citations identified in the present investigation differ from the lists in some other studies, a point that demonstrates the difficulty in certain instances of identifying citations. For a discussion of the methodological criteria used in identifying the citations used in this study see my, "Paul's Use," 8-12. In my dissertation I adopted the criteria suggested by Dan G. McCartney ("The Use of the Old Testament in the First Epistle of Peter" [Ph.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, 1989] 45-46). James W. Aageson ("Paul's Use of Scripture: A Comparative Study of Biblical Interpretation in Early Palestinian Judaism and the New Testament with Special Reference to Romans 9-11" [Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Oxford, 1983] 281-82) omits Rom 9:20 which does not have an introductory formula; and D. A. Koch (*Die Schrift als Zeuge des Evangeliums: Untersuchungen zur Verwendungen und zum Verständnis der Schrift bei Paulus* [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1986] 21-24) omits 2 Cor 6:17 for composition-critical reasons. Specifically, he holds that the entire section of 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 is non-Pauline, stating, "2 Kor 6,14-7,1 als unpaulischer Einschub erkannt ist und nicht zur Erhebung des paulinischen Schriftgebrauchs herangezogen wird" (45). Cf. also E. E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957) 150-52 (Appendix IA). According to our analysis, Paul cites Isaiah in twenty-six different instances (twenty-seven if one counts Rom 10:20-21 as two separate citations), using a total of thirty-two different verses from Isaiah (two verses are double-citations and counted only once: 28:16 and 40:13).

² Rom 14:11 may deal with an unrelated pastoral issue. However, this citation is used to address the judging of a brother over matters of diet and holy days. So, even here, we probably have the application of an Isaian text to a conflict over religious traditions between Jew and Gentile believers in the Roman congregation. Also, Paul's use of Isaiah to describe personal aspects of his own ministry (e.g., Rom 15:21) occurs within the larger context of his mission to the Gentiles; his call to the Gentiles is the reason for the delay in coming to Rome.

³ He cites the Psalms thirteen times in Romans, a not too distant second overall. But in chs. 9-11 he cites Psalms only three times. Moreover, his use of Psalms is not exclusively grouped around the same theme.

Paul cites Isaiah sixteen times in Romans, and eleven of these occur in Romans 9-11 where fifteen different verses from Isaiah are used (Isa 29:16 only counted once). Moreover, chapters 9-11 contain a total of thirty citations from the OT, so the use of Isaiah constitutes more than one-third of the total, and far outweighs the use of any other single OT book in this section of Romans (Gen—3 citations [4 vv.]; Exod—2 citations; Hos—2 citations; Joel—1 citation; Pss—3 citations [4 vv.]; Mal—1 citation [2 vv.]; Deut—3 citations [7 vv.]; 1 Kgs—2 citations [3 vv.]; 1 Sam—1 citation; Job—1 citation). Here we find a striking, concentrated use of the OT, and chiefly of Isaiah, in a critical argument concerning the Jew-Gentile-in-Christ issue.

Briefly, we will survey the specific contribution of each citation in Romans to Paul's discussion of Jew and Gentile by means of providing a thematic statement and listing the citations that deal with that particular aspect of the subject. (1) Both Jews and Gentiles apart from Christ are objects of wrath not mercy (Rom 2:24; 3:15-17). (2) Both Gentiles and the remnant of Israel who accept the gospel of Christ are included in the Davidic kingdom and its promises (9:27-28, 29; 10:11, 11:26-27, 34; 15:12, 21).⁴ (3) Many Jews reject the gospel

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and are cut off but the Gentiles believe and are included in the Davidic kingdom (9:20, 33; 10:15, 16, 20-21; 11:8). (4) Romans 14:11 addresses the conflict between Jew and Gentile believers over differences of religious tradition. Thus, it also addresses the matter, but with respect to a specific pastoral concern.

In the remainder of Paul's citations we find more variety in the thematic grouping, although Galatians 4:27 does use Isaiah in the same thematic vein as we found in Romans. In his sole citation in Galatians Paul is dealing with the heresy of legalism. This probably should come as no surprise, given the close conceptual relationship that exists between Romans and Galatians.⁵

In 1 Corinthians Isaiah is used to discuss God's wisdom in relation to man's (1:19), the lack of spiritual knowledge in the world compared with the Spirit's revelation in the church (2:9, 16), the abuse of glossolalia (14:21), and the resurrection (15:32, 54).

In 2 Corinthians the thematic grouping is no less diverse. Paul urges the Corinthians to accept God's reconciliation (6:2); he exhorts them to be separate from the world as the temple of God (6:17); and he encourages the Corinthians to contribute to the collection for the saints (9:10).

⁴ Rom 15:21 is specifically a personal reference to Paul's practice of preaching the gospel to unreached peoples, which in turn has meant postponement of his plan to visit Rome. Nevertheless, the Gentiles are explicitly linked to the citation (vv. 17-20, esp. 18).

⁵ The use of Isaiah in Paul's speeches in Acts is noteworthy also. It appears that Luke has preserved the Pauline tradition accurately, if the use of Isaiah in his speeches is any indication. Two of the citations (Acts 13:22 = Isa 44:28; Acts 13:34 = Isa 55:3) are used to demonstrate the fulfillment of the Davidic promises in Christ (cf. Rom 15:12). In another citation (Acts 13:47 = Isa 49:6) Luke records Paul's application to himself of a messianic text describing his own missionary role as a "light to the Gentiles" (cf. Rom 15:21). And in Acts 28:26-27 Luke records Paul's citation of Isa 6:9-10, pronouncing on his contemporary Jewish audience the "hardening" curse of Isaiah. All of these citations are addressing the debate over Jew and Gentile in Christ, which was at its core a christological debate.

The diversity of Paul's thematic grouping of citations from Isaiah in the epistles other than Romans emphasizes even more the distinctiveness of his use of Isaiah in Romans. There can be little doubt, based on the theological tendencies of Paul's use, that Isaiah was more influential than any other OT book in the formation of his response to the issue of Jew and Gentile in Christ. Moreover, for the same reason, Isaiah appears to have had more explicit influence in Romans than in the other Pauline epistles. The other three *Hauptbriefe* do not exhibit this singular thematic orientation, although the only citation from Isaiah in Galatians does address the issue.

II. THE DISTRIBUTION OF PAUL'S CITATIONS FROM ISAIAH AND THE "TESTIMONY BOOK" HYPOTHESIS

The history of the development of the "testimony book" hypothesis is well documented and its general thrust thoroughly discussed

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elsewhere.⁶ The purpose in taking it up once again here is to determine if Paul's textual base in citing Isaiah sheds any light on the theory, or, conversely, if the theory sheds any light specifically on Paul's Isaian text base.

The existence of testimony books in antiquity is well known. Of particular significance for NT studies is the more recent discovery of the testimony book, 4QFlorilegium, at Qumran. This discovery has come to play a prominent role in demonstrating the plausibility of the hypothesis. The question before us is whether Paul's use of Isaiah reflects the use of such an anthology comprised of Isaian texts.

Let us begin by surveying the use of the texts cited by Paul. Note from the following table the sectors in Isaiah where Paul's citations are concentrated, as well as the use of the same texts elsewhere in the NT.

<i>Isa-text</i>	<i>Paul's citation</i>	<i>Other NT citations</i>
1:9	Rom 9:29	—
8:14	Rom 9:33	1 Pet 2:8
10:22-23	Rom 9:27-28	—
11:10	Rom 15:12	—
22:13	1 Cor 15:32	—
15:8	1 Cor 15:54	—
27:9	Rom 11:27	—
28:11-12	1 Cor 14:21	—
28:16	Rom 9:33 & Rom 10:11	1 Pet 2:6
29:10	Rom 11:8	—
29:14	1 Cor 1:19	—

⁶ Cf., e.g., Ellis, *Use*, 98-107. The leading early popularizers of the theory were J. Rendall Harris (*Testimonies* [2 vols.; Cambridge: University, 1916, 1920]) and C. H. Dodd (*According to the Scriptures* [New York: Scribner's, 1952]).

29:16	Rom 9:20	—
40:13	Rom 11:34	—
	& 1 Cor 2:16	
45:23	Rom 14:11	—
49:8	2 Cor 6:2	—
52:5	Rom 2:24	—
52:7	Rom 10:15	—
52:11	2 Cor 6:17	—
52:15	Rom 15:21	—
53:1	Rom 10:16	John 12:38
54:1	Gal 4:27	—
55:10	2 Cor 9:10	—
59:7-8	Rom 3:15-17	—
59:20-21	Rom 11:26-27	—

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64:4	1 Cor 2:9	—
65:1-2	Rom 10:20-21	—

Only the two “stone” passages and Isaiah 53:1 are quoted both in Paul and elsewhere in the NT. The use of the stone passages was one of the key pieces of evidence in the anthology theory. Both Paul and Peter link these texts as testimonies of Christ, and both preserve the same distinctive readings of Isaiah 8:14. While there may have been influence of one NT author on the other, it is more likely that they were working from a common source.

Rendall Harris argued that this common source was a testimony book, comprised of groupings of specific OT texts characterized by a christological focus and a distinct anti-Jewish tone. The similarities between Paul and Peter, and the other occurrences of the stone texts in the NT (e.g., Mark 10:12 and parallels), suggest the linkage of these texts occurred early in the Christian tradition. But the use of the same OT texts by NT authors is relatively rare. So, the use of the stone passages, and only a few others, is not sufficient evidence to establish the existence of the extensive document that Harris proposed.

Nevertheless, his point concerning the anti-Jewish nature of the source does seem to be borne out when one compares Paul’s citation of Isaiah 53:1 (Rom 10:16) with John’s (John 12:38). Both Paul and John use Isaiah 53:1 to make the same point: the Jews have rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ. In point of fact, John’s larger contextual argument is quite similar to Paul’s. For example, John also emphasizes God’s sovereignty in the hardening of Israel as the reason for their rejection of Christ (cf., John 12:36b-43 and Paul’s argument in Rom 9:6-29; 10:5-21; 11:7-10).

As the table indicates, the specific texts used by Paul, in large part, are not cited elsewhere in the NT. This fact militates against any reconstruction of an anthology book that would describe it as a collection of specific texts around particular themes. If such were the case, one would expect at least a moderately higher incidence of citation elsewhere in the NT.

On the other hand, Paul’s citations do give evidence of concentrated use of certain sectors of Isaiah: chs. 1-9 = 2 citations; 10-19 = 1 citation; 20-29 = 7 citations; 30-39 = none; 40-49 = 3

citations; 50-59 = 9 citations; 60-66 = 2 citations. Paul apparently found a larger quantity of useful material in chs. 20-29 and 50-59, than in the other sectors of Isaiah. While this pattern may lend some support to the modified formulation of the testimony book hypothesis put forth by C. H. Dodd and his successors,⁷ it more certainly shows Paul's personal preference.

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Dodd objected to Harris's formulation of the theory on the grounds that it surpassed what the evidence could bear. Specifically, there were too few incidents of parallel citation (whether of merged texts or unique text forms), and there is no clear reference to it among patristic writers.⁸ Yet, the NT bore convincing evidence that there was a common textual-hermeneutical tradition at work influencing the individual authors. Instead of postulating a separate testimony book, Dodd argued that certain blocks of the OT, which plainly demonstrated the fulfillment of the OT Scriptures in Christ, were designated and interpreted in the early Christian tradition.⁹ These blocks of context served as the primary source of NT citations, and were organized around dominant thematic concerns in the early Christian tradition. Citations of specific verses from these contexts would, then, elicit the entire theological construct associated with them in the interpretive tradition of the early church.

Dodd identified four basic NT thematic classifications: apocalyptic-eschatological; new Israel; servant of the Lord; and unclassified. He divided the scriptural sectors more frequently used for these themes into primary and secondary categories of use.¹⁰ Our concern is specifically with his classification of Isa-plots, which he lists thus: (1) apocalyptic-eschatological class = no Isa-plots; (2) new Israel class, primary = Isa 6:1-9:7, 11:1-10; 28:16; 40:1-11; secondary = Isa 29; (3) servant of the Lord class, primary = 42:1-44:5; 49:1-13; 50:411; 52:13-53:12; 61; secondary = 58:6-10; (4) unclassified, primary = no Isa-plots; secondary = Isa 55:3.

While Dodd's list is not exhaustive, it does capture some of the major Isaian text plots that evidently were operating in the NT authors' hermeneutical milieu.¹¹ His salient contribution to the discussion was that NT writers not only used a common textual source, but they also used a common interpretive framework and tradition for those texts. This accounts for the essential correspondence between the interpretations of different authors in their use of the OT. Moreover, Dodd's classification accounts for the distinctive readings of certain parallel citations such as the reading of Isa 8:14 that is preserved in both Paul and Peter. They arose as part of the testimonium

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⁷ E.g., Hanson, *Living Utterances*, 38-40.

⁸ Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, 26-27.

⁹ Ibid., 126-27.

¹⁰ Ibid., 107-8.

¹¹ No other NT author made as much use of Isaiah as Paul. John cites Isaiah four times; author of Hebrews three; there are nine citations in Luke-Acts, five in Mark, and 10 in Matthew (of course several of the Synoptic/Acts references are embedded in speeches, e.g., in Paul's speeches in Acts 13:22, 34, 47; 28:26-27); and six in 1 Peter.

tradition.¹² It is another matter entirely, however, to consider whether it captures Paul's tendencies in the use of Isaian text plots.

Ten of Paul's citations do indeed originate in the sectors Dodd identified, and for the most part they also coincide with his thematic schema (8:14 in Rom 9:33; 11:10 in Rom 15:12; 28:16 in Rom 9:33 and 10:11; 29:10 in Rom 11:8; 29:14 in 1 Cor 1:19; 29:16 in Rom 9:20; 49:8 in 2 Cor 6:2; 52:15 in Rom 15:21; 53:1 in Rom 10:16). That leaves sixteen citations (or seventeen, depending on how one calculates) outside the parameters of the general NT usage of Isaiah, or in other words, the substantial majority of Paul's citations.

While it is apparent that a significant number of Paul's citations are concentrated in certain (favorite?) Isaian text plots (esp. chs. 28, 29, and the fifties), his use is spread widely throughout the book. There are only two significant contextual gaps in Paul's use of Isaiah. First, he does not use material from the historical interlude in 36-39, nor from the section leading up to it which describes the eschatological restoration and deliverance of Jerusalem and the vindication of the Jews (30-35). Also, Paul cites only a descriptive snippet (22:13 in 1 Cor 15:32) from the oracles against the nations in 13-23. Otherwise, his citations are taken from a broad assortment of contexts.

This distribution indicates Paul's facility in using Isaiah; he possessed a notable degree of familiarity with the book. Moreover, since most of Paul's citations are taken from Isaian text plots that were not widely used in the NT (and only three of his verses are cited elsewhere in the NT), we see his creativity at work in forging the early church's understanding of Isaiah, particularly as it related to the issue of Jew and Gentile in Christ, an issue that was profoundly formative in Paul's own life and ministry (cf. the record of Acts; Galatians; Eph 2:11-3:13; Rom 9-11; etc.).

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt, if the witness of the Gospels to Christ's teaching is accepted, that it was Christ himself who originated the approach to Isaiah that was followed by Paul. It was Christ himself who first cited Isa 61:1-2 and then proclaimed, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:18-21); and it was Christ himself

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who first taught the church that all the scriptures spoke of him (Luke 24:25-27, 44-45).

Furthermore, it was Christ's fervent apostle, Paul, gifted with a mind of creative theological ability, who more than any other single NT writer forged the path for the interpretation of Isaiah. In his citations from Isaiah, we see Paul at work enlarging the cache of Isaian testimonies available to the church in the defense and propagation of the gospel. But Paul's work was not accomplished in a vacuum. He is breaking new interpretive ground by bringing an established interpretive tradition to bear on an increasing number of contexts in Isaiah. Christ laid down the comprehensive hermeneutical framework for the church—that all the

¹² Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, 30-60. Ellis (*Use*, 107-12) has suggested a further refinement of the testimony theory. He identifies a series of λέγει κύριος citations that occur in the NT grouped around the temple typology in which the church is viewed as the fulfillment of the temple promises. These citations all diverge from LXX and MT, a phenomenon that he attributes to the shaping of these texts in the tradition of the early church. Two of these sayings are Pauline citations from Isaiah: Rom 14:11 and 1 Cor 14:21.

scriptures spoke of him. Paul was busy finding the fulfillment of the ages there. But his work was always informed by the interpretive framework already laid down in the church by the Lord.¹³

Finally, with regard to text form, it should be said that the same interpretive tradition that shaped Paul's choice of citations from various contexts in Isaiah also shaped his adaptations of text form. When Paul creatively modified text forms as a method of interpretation, not only was he careful and deliberate, he was also being influenced by the interpretive tradition of the nascent church. He likely was the originator of several of his distinctive readings from Isaiah; he was not copying someone else's text form modification; but his framework controlled and shaped his original work. This same interpretive tradition may also play a formative role in what is often characterized as midrashic paraphrase in the NT.

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¹³ So Dodd, *Ibid.*, 108-10; McCartney, "Use," 38-40; L. C. Allen, "The Old Testament in Romans 1-8," in *Vox Evangelica* III (London: Epworth, 1964) 6-7. Koch is dismissive of Dodd's text plot theory, Ellis's related *legei kurios* theory, and Harris's testimony theory (*Zeuge*, 246-55). His refutation seems to lack substantive interaction with these arguments. He does not give consideration to the NT evidence of text forms and corresponding interpretations. Neither does he evaluate the significance of the collection of testimonies in 4QFlor. Furthermore, he fails to explain why a text plot theory, ipso facto, could not be part of the history of the LXX as well. The extant LXX copies have certainly been influenced by Christianity. Diez Macho (*El Targum*, 10-12, 30-31) points to the same types of traditions operating in the formation of the targums. He contends that the targums are documents of theological traditions about the OT texts they translate (paraphrastically). See also Bruce Chilton's treatment of Luke 4 as a reflection of Aramaic tradition (*God in Strength. Jesus Announcement of the Kingdom: Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt* [Freistadt: Plöchl, 1979], reprinted in the series, the Biblical Seminar [Sheffield: JSOT, 1987] 122-77).