PAUL AND SCRIPTURE

STEVE MOYISE
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Many church debates involve a particular interpretation of Scripture, and many will at some point quote from the letters of St Paul. In most cases this is to quote the conclusions that Paul reached as he himself wrestled with the meaning of those texts that Christians call the Old Testament and Jews the Tanak or Hebrew Bible. There are over 100 explicit quotations of Scripture in Paul’s letters and at least double that number of allusions. However, what is potentially more useful than just citing Paul’s answers to first-century questions is to study how Paul interpreted Scripture, and that is the theme of this book. Paul believed that the Scriptures were the very ‘oracles of God’ (Rom. 3.2) and thus carried supreme authority in all matters. However, he had also come to believe that the divine plan revealed in Scripture had taken a significant step forward in the coming of Jesus Christ and the birth of the Church. There are still things to come (1 Cor. 15.20–28), but it is what has been fulfilled in the Christ-event – a convenient way of describing the life, death and resurrection of Christ and the birth of the Church – that is decisive for Paul. This revelation caused Paul to look at the Scriptures with new eyes, sometimes clarifying what was written and sometimes reinterpreting it. This interaction between old and new goes by many names, among them dialogical, reflexive, intertextual, and lies at the heart of all interpretation. How can Scripture ‘speak’ to new situations?

There are 13 letters in the New Testament that bear Paul’s name and it is common to divide them into three groups. The first group is known as the ‘undisputed’ letters. These are mainly from the early period of Paul’s life (c. 49–55 CE) and are accepted as genuine by the majority of scholars. There is debate as to whether 1 Thessalonians or Galatians is the earliest, followed by the two letters to the Corinthians and Romans. Philippians was written from prison, perhaps in this period or perhaps in the period narrated by Acts 28. The short personal letter to Philemon makes up the total of seven ‘undisputed’ letters. A second group (Colossians and Ephesians) appears to come from a slightly later period. These letters exhibit a more developed
understanding of the Church as the body of Christ (Col. 1.15–20; Eph. 4.1–16) and show signs of what later theologians would call church polity or organization (Col. 3.18—4.1; Eph. 5.21–33). Scholarship is evenly divided as to whether these come directly from Paul’s hand or were written in his name. The third group is known as the Pastoral Epistles, written to church leaders (Timothy and Titus) and containing instructions for the appointment of bishops (episkopoi), deacons (diakonoi) and elders (presbyteroi) in the Church. This is very different from the ‘charismatic’ leadership of the early house churches (e.g. 1 Cor. 12—14), but there is dispute about how late their period is. The majority of scholars think that they belong to a period of around 80–100 CE and that they were written by one of Paul’s disciples. Others suggest that the imprisonment of Acts 28 did not result in Paul’s death and that after his release he engaged in several years of missionary work (perhaps fulfilling the wish expressed in Romans 15.24 to get to Spain); he was then imprisoned a second time and it was at this point that he wrote the Pastoral Epistles. Finally, we should mention 2 Thessalonians, which differs so much from 1 Thessalonians that many scholars find it difficult to accept that it comes directly from Paul’s hand. Other scholars, however, do not find the differences insurmountable.

These various arguments are complex and need not detain us, for in fact the majority of Paul’s quotations come from the undisputed letters. The figures set out in the simple table opposite are not exact because there is sometimes debate as to what constitutes a quotation, but they give a good impression of the distribution, some 93 per cent occurring in the letters to the Romans, Galatians and Corinthians (see also Appendix 2: Index of Paul’s quotations).

It should be noted that this does not mean that letters like Philippians and Colossians show no interest in Scripture. Paul’s statement that one day, ‘at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord’ (Phil. 2.10–12) is certainly drawing on Isaiah 45.23, where God says: ‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.’ Indeed, Paul quotes this text in Romans 14.11 (but applied to God rather than Christ), and we shall make reference to Philippians when we discuss it. But it does not constitute a quotation in Philippians and is better categorized as an allusion.
Paul – the early years

Before we embark on our study of Paul and Scripture we need to say something about Paul’s background. From his own letters we learn that he was a Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin, and a member of the Pharisees (Phil. 3.5). He was proud of his heritage, believing that Israel had been entrusted with the ‘oracles of God’ (Rom. 3.2), which he elaborates as possessing the ‘adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises’ (Rom. 9.4). His early life was characterized by ‘zeal’ for these traditions; indeed, he can speak of advancing in Judaism ‘beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors’ (Gal. 1.14). To the modern reader this might sound like a description of a conscientious religious person who studied a lot and prayed a lot. But ‘zeal’ has a more specific meaning in a first-century Jewish context. People like Phinehas (Num. 25) and Elijah (2 Kings 10) were remembered for their ‘zeal’ for God, which not only involved strict adherence to God’s laws but violent opposition to those who broke them or caused others to break them. That Paul belonged to such a tradition is shown by his reaction to the early Church: ‘I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it’ (Gal. 1.13). It is probably also reflected in his condemnation of pagan behaviour in Romans 1.18–32, which ends: ‘They know God’s decree, that those who practise such things deserve to die – yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practise them.’

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We also learn from Philippians 3.5 that Paul was a Pharisee – but what type of Pharisee? In the generation before Paul, two parties had become dominant among the Pharisees, led by Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai. Our knowledge of them comes mainly from the Mishnah, a collection of laws and rulings that were codified around 200 CE. In these rulings the strict opinion of Shammai is often contrasted with the more liberal opinion of Hillel. From Paul’s statement in Philippians 3.6 (‘as to righteousness under the law, blameless’), it would appear that he belonged to the strict party. Not only did he follow the general principle of the Pharisees that the written law, complemented by the oral law, could and should be lived out in daily life, he was also active in challenging anything that stood in the way of it. And since the Jews were under Roman rule this inevitably had political implications. Paul not only shared the hopes of his people that God would once again ‘raise up the booth of David that is fallen’ (Amos 9.11 – a text quoted in Acts and the Dead Sea Scrolls), he also believed that he had a role to play in preparing for it.

The author of Acts – traditionally thought to be Luke – tells us that Paul’s Jewish name was Saul and that he came from a city called Tarsus in Cilicia (modern Turkey, just north of Cyprus). According to the historian Strabo, Tarsus was the home of a famous school or university that in certain respects surpassed even those at Athens and Alexandria. Its leading teachers were Stoics (Stoicism was a form of Greek philosophy) and it is possible that Greek and Latin literature formed part of Paul’s education. Certainly his letters display a powerful rhetorical style, which makes it unlikely that he learnt Greek solely to converse with non-Jews. And as we shall see later, he is thoroughly at home in using the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures known as the Septuagint, or lxx, from the legend that it was translated by 72 Jewish scholars in 72 days. In all likelihood he learnt Greek as a child, and although his letters would not be confused with classical literature, they have their own eloquence and fluency. Thus his ‘zeal’ does not appear to have been directed against ‘all things Greek’, though he may have shunned Greek philosophy.

Acts also tells us that he studied under Rabbi Gamaliel in Jerusalem, where he was ‘educated strictly according to…ancestral law, being zealous for God’ (Acts 22.3). This reference is slightly puzzling in that we know from other sources that Gamaliel represented the more lenient Hillel party. However, it is not uncommon for students to
disagree with their teachers, and the reference to zeal might indicate that such tendencies were already present in the youthful Paul. On the other hand, some scholars think that Luke was mistaken, perhaps deducing that the great apostle ‘must’ have studied under the great rabbi. Where the two sources agree is that Paul was a persecutor of the Church. Acts 8.1 has just a cursory mention that Paul approved of the stoning of Stephen, but in Acts 9.1 we are told that ‘Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem’. It was on such a journey that Paul’s life was turned upside down.

Paul’s Damascus-road experience
Paul says very little about his ‘conversion’, or ‘call’, as some prefer to describe it. In Galatians 1.16, after stating that he used to be a persecutor of the Church, he says that God was pleased ‘to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles’. In the debates he is tackling in 1 Corinthians he finds it necessary to assert that he also has seen the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 9.1 this is posed as a rhetorical question: ‘Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?’ In 1 Corinthians 15.5–8 he is listing the witnesses to the resurrection (Peter, the Twelve, a crowd of over 500), and ends with this statement: ‘Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.’ These brief descriptions of this turning point in Paul’s life are greatly amplified in Acts, where the experience and its aftermath are narrated on no fewer than three occasions (9.1–30; 22.1–21; 26.1–23). The shortest account puts it like this:

I was travelling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, when at midday along the road, your Excellency, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.’ I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The Lord answered, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you.

I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles – to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

(Acts 26.12–18)

To what extent this represents an imaginative expansion of the tradition is not clear. What we can say is that it agrees with Paul's central claims: first, that he had a vision of Jesus; second, that it happened in the vicinity of Damascus; third, that it resulted in a vocation to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Krister Stendahl (1976) famously questioned the use of the term ‘conversion’ to describe this since Paul was not changing from one religion (Judaism) to another (Christianity).\(^1\) Even some 20 years after the event, Paul could cite himself as proof that God has not rejected his people, since ‘I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin’ (Rom. 11.1). Stendahl suggested that Paul received a new vocation or calling but not a conversion. However, while most scholars acknowledge the point, most people would recognize the upheaval in his thinking and change of direction in his life as conversion.

Paul – missionary, pastor and theologian
Reconstructing ‘what happened next’ is not easy. From Galatians 1.17 we learn that Paul immediately went to Arabia and afterwards to Damascus, either for reflection (the older view) or missionary work (the newer view). Three years later, he paid a brief visit to Jerusalem (Gal. 1.18–19) and then worked in the regions of Syria (based in Antioch) and Cilicia (where his home town is located). Some 14 years later – it is unclear if this includes the three years or not – he went up to Jerusalem to settle a dispute that was threatening the viability of his Gentile mission, namely whether Gentile converts needed to be circumcised and taught to obey the Jewish law (Gal. 2.1–10). From Paul’s point of view the outcome was successful, and ‘even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek’ (Gal. 2.3). However, Paul then goes on to narrate a falling out with Peter at Antioch. Up until ‘certain people came from James’ (Gal. 2.12), Peter was happy to eat with the Gentiles, but when they...
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arrived, he withdrew and only ate with his fellow Jews. Paul was livid, not only accusing Peter of hypocrisy but also of undermining the gospel. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, this dispute had important repercussions for Paul’s thinking about the significance of Abraham, Moses and the law.

Acts agrees that Paul spent some time in Damascus and Antioch, and adds the interesting detail that it was Barnabas who went to Tarsus (in Cilicia) to find Paul and bring him back to Antioch, where they worked for a year (11.25–26). It then gives a detailed account of missionary work in Cilicia and beyond (via a sea journey to Cyprus), before describing the celebrated Jerusalem council in chapter 15. This sequence fits quite well with what Paul tells us, except for the following. First, Acts 9.26–30 says that Paul left Damascus and came to Jerusalem, where he engaged in missionary work among the Jews. In Galatians, Paul seems adamant that he did not spend any length of time in Jerusalem. Second, Acts 15 resulted in a decree that accepted that Gentiles do not need to be circumcised but added that they should ‘abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication’ (Acts 15.29). In Galatians, Paul appears to claim that no conditions were imposed, though it is possible that he might not have regarded these as conditions. Third, Acts makes no mention of a falling out with Peter though, interestingly, it does describe a falling out with Barnabas (Acts 15.39).

What is clear from both Paul and Acts is that around 49 or 50 CE the Church came very close to schism over the issue of whether Gentiles needed to be circumcised and obey the law. This might seem a relatively trivial issue to us, but for them it concerned the authority of God’s law, for Genesis 17 could hardly be clearer:

As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring.

(Gen. 17.9–12)

Furthermore, Jesus was circumcised, and nowhere in the Gospels do we find a saying suggesting that this is no longer in force. Indeed, Matthew has Jesus declaring that 'whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5.19). How then can Paul claim that he upholds the law (Rom. 3.31), while warning the Galatians that 'if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you' (Gal. 5.2)? We shall explore this in Chapters 2 and 3 but for now shall simply note that Paul’s arguments did not necessarily convince everyone. In Acts 21 we are told that Paul returns to Jerusalem after preaching in Greece and Macedonia and tells James and the elders about all that ‘God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry’ (v. 19). This is initially welcomed (‘When they heard it, they praised God’, v. 20), but what follows somewhat undercuts it, for James says to Paul: ‘You see, brother, how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews, and they are all zealous for the law. They have been told about you that you teach all the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and that you tell them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs’ (vv. 20–21). James has a solution to persuade the Jewish believers that this is not true. He urges Paul to join a group of men who have taken a vow and thus demonstrate ‘that you yourself observe and guard the law’ (v. 24). James then reminds Paul of the decree that was sent to the Gentiles, but only refers to the prohibitions: ‘But as for the Gentiles who have become believers, we have sent a letter with our judgement that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication’ (v. 25). Thus the reader of Galatians and Romans is likely to conclude that Paul’s arguments won the day, whereas Acts suggests they had little impact on the Christians of Judea.

Paul and Scripture

As noted above, Paul is thoroughly at home with the Greek translation of the Scriptures known as the Septuagint (LXX). However, we need to say a little more about what Paul would have regarded as Scripture and what sort of texts were known to him. The Hebrew Bible that has come down to us – known as the Masoretic Text, or MT – is divided into three sections: law, prophets and writings. There is little doubt that the first five books – Torah in Hebrew; Pentateuch in Greek – that make up the first section were foundational for all forms
of Judaism. Indeed, one of the reasons the Sadducees did not accept
the doctrine of resurrection was that it cannot be demonstrated from
the Torah (hence the significance of Jesus’ reply in Mark 12.18–27).
The second section is divided into the former prophets — what
Christians would call the historical books from Joshua to 2 Kings —
and the latter prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve).
This was also relatively fixed, though texts found at Qumran show that
there were variations in both wording and order. The third section
(writings) consists of the psalms, wisdom books (Proverbs, Job, Song
of Songs, Ecclesiastes), along with Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel,
Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles. There is much more debate as to
whether this was regarded as a fixed collection in Paul’s day. Luke
can end his Gospel by having Jesus say: ‘everything written about me
in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled’
(Luke 24.44). This could be referring to the three-fold division (psalms
standing for writings) or it may indicate a certain fluidity about what
was included in the writings at this point in time.

Of greater significance for our study is that despite the legend that
72 Jewish scholars miraculously agreed in their translations of the
Hebrew Scriptures, it is clear that it was in fact translated in stages. Thus
the Pentateuch translation tends to be fairly literal and frequently
preserves the word order of the Hebrew (even though the languages
have quite different structures). It was almost certainly the first section
to be translated. Other books are translated with more freedom and
indeed, in some cases, incorporate verses and even whole chapters
not present in the corresponding Hebrew book. The book of Daniel,
for example, has an additional 67 verses between the Hebrew text of
Daniel 3.23 and 3.24, which provide an explanation for why the
three young men were unharmed by the fiery furnace: ‘But the angel
of the Lord came down into the furnace… and drove the fiery flame
out of the furnace, and made the inside of the furnace as though
a moist wind were whistling through it.’ It also offers a long prayer
by a certain Azaraiah, who joined them in the furnace, and a song
of praise by the three men. When the Bible was translated into Latin
(Vulgate, fifth century), this additional material was included and
can be found in modern Roman Catholic Bibles, such as the Jerusalem
Bible (jbs). However, at the Reformation this material was classed as
‘deutero-canonical’, or ‘apocryphal’, and was not included in the King
James Version (kjv) or its subsequent revisions.

Steve Moyise, Paul and Scripture,
There are also a number of additional books in the LXX that are not in the Hebrew Bible, such as Tobit, Judith, 1—4 Maccabees, Sirach and the Psalms of Solomon. Most of these are printed in the New Jerusalem Bible (njb) but the New Revised Standard Version (nrsv) prints them separately under the heading of Apocrypha. The Protestant Bible only includes those books that are present in the Hebrew Bible, though interestingly prints them in the lxx order (e.g. Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles are now among the historical books, while Daniel is with the prophets). There does not appear to be any explicit quotation of these ‘deutero-canonical’ books in Paul’s undisputed letters, but he does appear to allude to some of them on occasion. One of the most difficult aspects of our study is to try to imagine what quoting or alluding to Scripture would have meant for someone like Paul. He would not have had our concept of ‘Bible’, a bound volume of 66 books (for Protestants) residing on his bookshelf. If the tradition about Gamaliel is correct, he would have known the Hebrew scrolls in use in Jerusalem and perhaps the lxx scrolls from Tarsus. His habit of preaching in the synagogues (Acts 13.14) would have alerted him to the fact that these scrolls sometimes differed, and would have brought familiarity with the Aramaic paraphrases known as Targumim (singular Targum), which increasingly accompanied readings of Scripture since many Jews could no longer understand Hebrew. So when Paul introduces a phrase or sentence with an introductory formula (IF) such as ‘as it is written’, we have to ask ourselves which version of the Scriptures he has in mind.

**Introductory formulae (IF)**

Quotations are often divided into *marked* and *unmarked*. Marked quotations are introduced by an introductory formula (IF), which might be elaborate, as in Matthew 1.22 (‘All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet’), simple, as in Romans 1.17 (‘as it is written’) or a single word like ‘for’ (Rom. 10.13) or ‘but’ (Rom. 9.7). Unmarked quotations are woven into the author’s prose but are identified by close verbal parallels to another text. Two questions arise from this: Is there a rationale for why some quotations are marked and others are not? Does the IF tell us anything about the author’s attitude to the particular text and why it is being quoted?
Paul’s introductory formulae can therefore be divided into those that use a verb of writing (generally ‘as it is written’) and those that use a verb of speaking (a whole variety of expressions, such as ‘scripture says’, ‘he says’, ‘Isaiah/David/Moses/Hosea says’, ‘the law says’, ‘righteousness of faith says’, ‘God said’, ‘Isaiah cries out’). Is there a difference of attitude in using ‘Moses says’ and ‘God says’? Or is naming the human author simply an aid to finding the passage? These questions continue to be debated.

A modern example illustrates the difficulty. If I am listening to a sermon and the preacher quotes Paul as saying, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live’, I will recognize this as a quotation of Romans 1.17. However, I am familiar with this text from the nrs, which says, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’ It agrees that the righteous live by faith but does not say anything about how they obtained this righteousness. I might conclude, therefore, that the preacher has deliberately changed the wording of Romans 1.17 in order to ensure that the congregation adhere to the Reformation principle that righteousness comes through faith alone. However, there are two other options: first, the preacher might simply be quoting from the earlier Revised Standard Version (rsv), which says ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live’; second, the preacher might have decided to quote from the nrs on this occasion because it offers better support for the point he or she wishes to make.

Similarly, when Paul brings his condemnation of hypocritical Jewish teachers to a close in Romans 2.24, he says: ‘For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”’ Now most scholars believe that this is a quotation from Isaiah 52.5, but the Hebrew Masoretic Text lacks the key phrases ‘among the Gentiles’ and ‘because of you’. The Hebrew text simply says, ‘and continually, all day long, my name is despised,’ which neither blames the Jews nor mentions the Gentiles, and thus hardly supports Paul’s argument. Now it is possible that Paul is quoting a Hebrew text that he knows but that has not survived, and there are some examples where scholars think this might be the most plausible solution. However, in this case the explanation would appear to be that Paul is quoting the lxx of Isaiah 52.5, which reads: ‘because of you, continually, my name is blasphemed among the Gentiles’. It still differs from Paul’s
precise words (he substitutes 'name of God' for 'my name'), and there is a change of word order; but most scholars think that these are Paul’s modifications rather than his use of a different text.

In this book I will generally quote the Bible from the \textit{nrsv} (Anglicized edition) as it is readily available, but when I need to demonstrate particular agreements or disagreements I provide my own translation and use the abbreviation 'lit.' (literally) and adhere closely to the original word order – even though it will result in some poor English. Thus I will indicate the agreements and disagreements between Paul’s quotation in Romans 1.17 and the Hebrew and \textit{lxx} of Habakkuk 2.4 as follows:

- Hebrew text: lit. 'but the righteous by his faithfulness will live'
- \textit{lxx} text: lit. 'but the righteous by my faithfulness will live'
- Paul’s quotation: lit. 'but the righteous by faith will live'

It is of interest that Habakkuk 2.4 is also quoted in Hebrews 10.38 and is probably to be rendered: lit. 'but my righteous by faith will live'. It would therefore appear that Habakkuk 2.4 was known in the first century in a variety of forms ('his faithfulness', 'my faithfulness', 'my righteous'), and what is therefore of note in Paul’s quotation is that it lacks either a first-person pronoun ('my') or a third-person pronoun ('his'). We will discuss the possible reasons for this in Chapter 4. It should also be noted that many scholars reject the expression 'Old Testament' since Paul would not have regarded the Scriptures as 'old' (there was no 'New Testament' at this point). This is an important point, but there are also difficulties with the main alternatives: 'first testament' suffers from the same problem (Paul would not have understood 'first'), and 'Hebrew Bible' is misleading, given that Paul generally quoted from a Greek version. We thus retain the term 'Old Testament' as a reference to a body of literature, mindful that for Paul it was not 'old'.

\textbf{New English Translation of the Septuagint (\textit{NETS})}

Since Paul is writing in Greek to a Greek-speaking audience, his quotations are generally from the \textit{lxx} (or a version of it). There have only been two translations of the \textit{lxx} into English, that of the American scholar Charles Thomson (1808) and the English cleric, Sir Lancelot Brenton (1844). But in 2007, a group...
of scholars used the latest manuscript evidence to produce NETS. This is an extremely useful resource for two reasons. First, each book or section of the LXX is introduced by a short essay on the characteristics of the LXX translator. Second, it has adopted the strategy of conforming the translation to the NRSV whenever the Greek and Hebrew are close, and departing from it when they are not. The English reader can therefore compare the NRSV and NETS and get some impression of the similarities and differences between the Greek and Hebrew versions, and the effect of these on the meaning of the text. As an example, Appendix 1 lists Paul’s quotations from Isaiah, and one can easily see that there are significant differences – indicated by italics – in the meaning of Isaiah 8.14; 10.22–23; 11.10; 25.8; 52.5 and 52.7.

Plan of the book

We begin our study with Paul’s use of the creation accounts and, in particular, the figure of Adam. Like his contemporaries, Paul uses the Adam story as a way of understanding the human condition, but unlike them he draws a parallel between Adam and Christ. He develops this in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5, though it might also lie behind some of his other arguments. We then turn (Chapter 2) to Paul’s use of the Abraham stories, which are critical for his understanding of faith and the people of God. He also constructs a number of arguments from the tradition that Abraham had two sons, one from his wife Sarah (Isaac) and one from the maid Hagar (Ishmael). He uses these to show that God’s promises are not necessarily constrained by physical descent.

In Chapter 3 we consider Paul’s use of the Moses (and Sinai) traditions. He draws on the conflict between Moses and Pharaoh as an illustration of divine hardening, and finds in Israel’s wilderness experiences many lessons for the Christian community. But ultimately, Paul labels Moses’ work as a ‘ministry of death’ (2 Cor. 3.7), which he contrasts with his own ministry of life and Spirit. The fact that Paul can say both positive and negative things about the law leads to Chapter 4. As well as specific studies in Paul’s use of Scripture, scholars have been engaged in a huge debate on ‘Paul and the law’. The difficulty is that he can speak in glowing terms that the law
is spiritual and good (Rom. 7.12) and that his ministry upholds it (Rom. 3.31), while also declaring that it belongs to the old age and Christians should have nothing to do with it (Gal. 4). Thus in Chapter 4 we review a number of solutions to this problem, including what has become known as the ‘New Perspective on Paul’, a complete rethink of the works/faith dichotomy that has characterized Protestant thought on the subject.

Next we consider Paul’s use of the prophets, and as this is an extensive topic we divide it into two chapters. Chapter 5 looks at the way Paul uses the prophets to explain how it has always been God’s purpose to include Gentiles, as well as to predict a period of unbelief for the Jews. Chapter 6 looks at the way Paul uses the prophets to regulate the life of the Christian community (e.g. in matters of spiritual discernment, speaking in tongues, purity and separation), as well as to support his understanding of resurrection (1 Cor. 15).

Paul’s use of the third section of the Hebrew Bible (writings) is the subject of Chapter 7. Paul makes extensive use of the psalms, but seldom to express praise (only Romans 15). Instead, he uses them in much the same way he uses the prophets: proclamation of the gospel; inclusion of the Gentiles; current unbelief of the Jews; future salvation; his own vocation and particular issues in the Church (e.g. Christian giving, acceptance of suffering). He does not make much use of Proverbs and Job, but there are a few quotations and allusions.

Finally, in Chapter 8 we consider a number of modern approaches to the study of Paul’s use of Scripture. We begin by dividing such approaches into three categories: intertextual, narrative and rhetorical. The first focuses on the surrounding context of the quoted text, suggesting that when it is quoted, it brings with it associations and connotations from its original context. The second focuses on the narrative framework to which the quoted text belongs. It suggests that the associations and connotations that a text brings with it are not so much from the surrounding context as from the larger story. The third focuses on how Paul uses the text to convince or persuade his readers to accept the point he is making. We conclude with a brief summary of some of the important studies that continue to inform the subject, and advice on further reading.