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https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_cbrfj.php

ST. PAUL'S USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

R. Aris

It is tempting to look for dominant signs of St. Paul's Pharisaic training in his letter to the Galatians, for in countering the influence of a Jewish corruption of the gospel he might well be at the top of his rabbinical bent. But, whilst one who was 'all things to all men'¹ would certainly be free to use his skill in handling the scriptures to confound the false teachers 'in their own craftiness'², it is easy to over-emphasise the similarity between St. Paul's interpretative methods and those of the Jewish teachers. This for two reasons. First, the conversion of St. Paul was complete to a degree that few have experienced or been loyal to. Whatsoever things were gain to him (and of these the claim to be 'as to the Law, a Pharisee'³ was not least) he counted, 'on account of Christ, loss',⁴ and he would not necessarily make concessions, even in style, in defence of a gospel that was 'to the Jews a stumbling block'.⁵ Secondly, though there was a large Jewish element in the population, the character of the Galatians may not have called for any display of rabbinical virtuosity. Lightfoot, after describing in some detail the influx of Jews into Galatia and discussing what influence their presence may have had, concludes that 'still with all this foreign admixture, it was the Celtic blood which gave distinctive colour to the Galatian character and separated them by so broad a line even from their near neighbours'.⁶ A very striking instance is their retention of their Celtic language along with the Greek spoken in common with other Asiatics, and though their character had 'gradually deteriorated under the enervating influence of a premature or forced civilization, nevertheless beneath the surface the Celtic character remains the same, whether manifested in the rude and fiery barbarians who were crushed by the arms of Caesar, or the impetuous fickle converts who call down the indignant rebuke of the Apostle of the Gentiles'.^{7*}

There are specific citations from the Old Testament in the Galatian epistle and one rather vague reference to the Law—'For it is written that Abraham had two sons'.⁸ They fall into four groups as follows:

- A. A sequence of six quotations in the argument of the first 14 verses of chapter 3.
- B. Chapter 3: 16.
- C. Two quotations in chapter 4 (vv. 27 and 30) in the discussion of the bond- and the free woman.
- D. The quotation of Lev. 19: 18 in chapter 5: 14, where St. Paul insists that the whole law is fulfilled in one word 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'.

Before briefly commenting on each of these groups, we might pause to note the fidelity of the quotations and the existence of cognate passages. This may be tabulated as follows.

*Preference for the South Galatian hypothesis might invalidate Lightfoot's ethnic conclusions for some readers, but Mr. Aris's point remains valid. (*Ed.*)

	<i>Gal.</i>	<i>O.T.</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Other quotes</i>
A. (i)	3:6	Gen. 15: 6	Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.	LXX.	Rom. 4: 3; Jas. 2: 23; Clem. Rom. 10. Justin. Dial. con. Tryph. 119.
(ii)	3: 8	Gen. 12: 3, 18: 18	In thee shall all the nations be blessed.	LXX. Conflation of the two passages.	Clem. Rom. 10 quotes Gen. 12: 3 only.
(iii)	3: 10	Deut. 27: 26	Cursed is everyone not continuing in the book of the law.	LXX modified to make self contained, replacing 'the words of this law' by 'the things written in the book of the law'.	Justin. Dial. 95. p. 322c quotes it exactly as St. Paul.
(iv)	3: 11	Hab. 2: 4	The just shall live by faith.	LXX has 'my just man'. Heb. has the sense of steadfastness which is here transmuted to faith.	Rom. 1: 17. Heb. 10: 38.
(v)	3: 12	Lev. 18: 5	He that shall have done these things shall live by them.	LXX with which Heb., Syr., and Samar. Pent. agree	Rom. 10: 5.
(vi)	3: 13	Deut. 21: 23	Cursed is everyone hanged on a tree.	LXX has 'cursed by God'. The omission of 'by God' is necessary in applying passage to Christ.	Acts 5: 30 refers to crucifixion as 'hanging on a cross'. Justin. Dial. p. 323c.
B. (vii)	3: 16	Gen. 22: 18	To thy seed (sing.)	LXX.	Acts 3: 25. Cf. Gen. 12: 7, 13: 15, 17: 7.
C. (vii)	4: 27	Isa. 54: 1	Rejoice thou barren . . . children . . . more numerous.	LXX.	Pseudo - Clem. Epist. ii 2. Justin. Apol. i. c. 53, p. 88c.
(ix)	4: 30	Gen. 21: 10	Cast out the bondwoman and her son . . .	LXX has at end . . . 'with my son Isaac'.	
D. (x)	5: 14	Lev. 19: 18	Love thy neighbour as thyself.	LXX.	Matt. 19: 19, 22: 39. Mk. 12: 31. Rom. 13: 9. Lk. 10: 27.

It would appear therefore that in this epistle St. Paul uses the Septuagint rather faithfully. The modifications to Deut. 27: 26 and Gen. 21: 10 are minor ones to fit in with the sense of the passage and make the quotation self-contained. The conflation of Gen. 12: 3 and 18: 18 is a minor one and the omission of 'by God' from Deut. 21: 23 is to be defended on theological grounds, for, though He becomes a curse for us, our Lord cannot be said to be cursed by God, though He was forsaken of Him. Ellis⁹ notes that of 93 quotations in St. Paul's writings, 51 agree with the Septuagint (of which 22 diverge from the Hebrew), 4 agree with the Hebrew against LXX, and 38 diverge from both. Evidently in Galatians the Septuagint is followed more closely than on the average.

To turn to the four groups of quotations, the first might well support the thesis that St. Paul is making full use of his early training, for the running commentary of chap. 3: 6 to 13 is similar in form to the technique of the Midrash. Certainly St. Paul's consummate skill in the handling of the scriptures is shown in the clarity of his argument and range of quotation. The argument is of course that a return to the Law was superfluous, in that Abraham's blessing and all that flowed from it depended on his faith; and perverse, since the Law brought in the very curse that Christ had to bear. This is well known and may perhaps be taken as read, but one or two of the quotations have interesting overtones.

Thus Gal. 3: 8 is one of the texts cited by Dodd in examining the problem of the *testimonia*.¹⁰ The thesis was put forward by Rendel Harris¹¹ that there is evidence for certain pre-canonical collections of messianic proof texts which N.T. writers quote freely. The evidence for this lies in quotations that occur in more than one writer which agree with one another in a reading different from the LXX, and that certain combinations of quotations occur from more than one writer.¹² In later times just such a collection is found for use of apologists and there is evidence that the author is really an editor revising and enlarging an earlier work. Dodd himself feels that this implies too mechanical a process and that the governing intention of the N.T. writers is rather 'to exploit whole contexts selected as the varying expression of certain fundamental and permanent elements in biblical revelation'.¹³ It is not possible here to exhibit these theories in detail but if Gal. 3: 8 is not just an inaccurate recollection of either Gen. 12: 3 or 22: 18 then it is evidence of a permitted freedom of quotation either from a collection of testimonies or from a section of the Law recognised as of particular value in the support of the gospel.

The interpretation of Deut. 21: 23 in verse 13 of the third chapter of Galatians is also of some interest, for the ambiguity of the Hebrew allowed somewhat various application, and the text occupied an important place in early controversies between Christian and Jew.¹⁴ The literal translation of the original is 'for (the) curse of God (is) he that is hanged', and the difficulty is that the genitive may either denote the person who pronounces the curse or the one who is cursed. The LXX and St. Paul take the meaning 'He that is hanged is accursed in the sight of God' and this would seem to be consonant with the injunction not to let the body hang after sunset lest the curse defile the land. An interpretation popular with Jewish

writers however is 'He that hangeth is a contempt of, a reproach or insult to God'. Lightfoot conjectures that this interpretation may have grown up in the days when Jewish patriots were impaled or crucified as rebels by their Syrian or Roman masters. That the curse of God should rest on such would be intolerable to the loyal Jew, and, if the spirit of the passage in Deut. could scarcely sustain this interpretation, the letter could certainly be pressed into service and might then give rise to a traditional interpretation. Certainly we can imagine these words thrown back at St. Paul as he preached in the synagogues—'accursed of God' or 'an insult to God' would do equally well. It was the 'scandal of the cross',¹⁵ which, St. Paul insists, could never be done away. Whilst crucifixion was not a Jewish mode of punishment, no Jew would question the legitimacy of St. Paul's application, for 'it was the hanging not the death that brought ignominy to the sufferer and defilement to the land'.¹⁶ What was unacceptable to the Jew was that the law had become a curse from under which the only redemption was to be found in Christ.

If the passage in the earlier part of chapter 3 betrays some Jewish features, surely the distinction between *seed* and *seeds* in verse 16 outrabbits the rabbis! But perhaps we should not too lightly accuse St. Paul of indulging in extremely fancy and sophisticated argument, viz. that only one of Abraham's descendants was in view, that is Christ. St. Paul was certainly not ignorant of the fact that the singular was used as a collective noun,¹⁷ nor would he try to 'pull a fast one' over the Galatians. There seem to be two aspects of his interpretation. First, he sees the summing up of the whole race of Abraham in Christ (a conception not unknown to rabbinical writers though often grotesquely expressed¹⁸): secondly, by analogy, it is the spiritual descendants of Abraham, the faith family, that take the place of the natural, and he urges that it is the former to whom the promises truly belong in Christ.

The passages in chapter 4 are an example of the allegorical mode of interpretation and bear comparison both with the rabbinical and Alexandrian use of allegory. What distinguishes St. Paul is his sense of the historicity of the events he is using. Thus Philo's¹⁹ use of the allegory of Hagar and Sarah is that of the human soul (Abraham) progressing toward the knowledge of God.²⁰ His two alliances with Sarah, the princess, and with Hagar, the bondmaid, are his training in divine wisdom and in secular learning. His union with Sarah is at first unfruitful, because premature, and she directs him to turn to the inferior learning of the schools which gives more immediate results and allows him later to return to the divine wisdom to good purpose. Isaac represents true wisdom (*sophos*); and sophistry (*sophistēs*), represented by Ishmael, is eventually cast out before it. By contrast St. Paul sees in this passage of the patriarch's life a miniature representation of the workings of God's providence which are later seen in grander proportions in the church's history. 'With Philo the allegory is the whole substance of his teaching; with St. Paul . . . it is, to use Luther's comparison, the painting which decorates the house already built'.²¹

The various readings of Gal. 4: 25 are fully discussed by Lightfoot²² who comes down in favour of *To gar Sina oros estin en tē Arabia*—'for

Sinai is a mountain in Arabia'—a reading adopted by the N.E.B.²³ The confusion of Hagar with the Arabic name for Mt. Sinai is discussed at length by Lightfoot,²⁴ but need not detain us here, for the allegorical use is by direct comparison of elements standing in the same row or column. Thus:

- | | | | | | |
|----|---------|---|----------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. | Hagar | = | Sinai covenant | = | Present Jerusalem |
| 2. | Ishmael | = | flesh | = | Children of the present
Jerusalem |
| 3. | Sarah | = | New covenant | = | Jerusalem above |
| 4. | Isaac | = | promise | = | Children of the new Jerusalem |

In Gal. 4: 29 the statement that Ishmael persecuted Isaac is of interest. The Hebrew of Gen. 21:9 speaks of 'laughing' or 'mocking', which the LXX expands to *paizonta meta Isaak tou uiou autēs*. Now *paizonta* is patient of both the meaning 'playing with' and 'hunting, pursuing and hence persecuting'. The Midrash says that Ishmael shot arrows at Isaac whilst pretending to play with him! Probably St. Paul has in mind the antagonism between the descendants as much as that between the children.

The final quotation in chapter 5: 14 scarcely requires comment. It stands as the great summary of the Law 'in one word'. A commandment never superseded but transformed by a new standard: no longer 'as thyself' but 'as I have loved you'.

1. 1 Cor. 9: 22.
2. 1 Cor. 3: 19.
3. Phil. 3: 5.
4. Phil. 3: 7.
5. 1 Cor. 1: 23.
6. J. B. Lightfoot *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, 1865, p. 12. See whole section pp. 1-17.
7. Lightfoot, loc. cit. p. 13.
8. Gal. 4: 22.
9. E. E. Ellis. *Paul's use of the Old Testament*. Oliver and Boyd. 1957.
10. C. H. Dodd. *According to the scriptures*. Nisbet. 1952.
11. Rendel Harris. *Testimonies*. 1916, 1920.
12. Mark 1: 2-3 gives a composite citation from Malachi and Isaiah and attributes it to Isaiah; this might easily happen in using an anthology.
13. Dodd. loc. cit. p. 132.
14. The following is taken from Lightfoot loc. cit. pp. 152-4.
15. Gal. 5: 11.
16. Lightfoot. loc. cit. p. 154.
17. The plural signifies grain or crops e.g. 1 Sam. 8: 15.
18. Lightfoot. loc. cit. p. 143.
19. Philo. de Congr. Quer. Erud. Gr. 1. p. 519 et seq.
20. Lightfoot. loc. cit. pp. 198-200.
21. *ibid.* p. 200.
22. *ibid.* p. 192.
23. J. N. Darby has 'For Hagar is Mt. Sinai in Arabia'.
24. Lightfoot. loc. cit. pp. 193-198.