

## **The Role of the Audience in the Interpretation of Paul's References to the Jewish Scriptures**

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Virtually all modern studies of Paul's use of Scripture have focused on the literary, hermeneutical, or theological dimensions of his engagement with the biblical text. The central concern of these studies has been to develop a deeper and richer understanding of the ways in which Paul understood and interpreted his ancestral Scriptures. Substantial attention has been devoted to clarifying how Paul handled particular texts, together with the broader role and influence of Scripture in his theology. Along the way, scholars have called attention to the many ways in which Paul's interpretive techniques and conclusions both resembled and differed from those of other Jewish interpreters of his era. For the most part, the scholarly gaze has remained firmly fixed on the question of how Paul read and interpreted the Jewish Scriptures in the light of his Christian faith.

One of the little-noticed side-effects of all this scholarly activity is that the actual social and rhetorical setting of Paul's letters has tended to fall by the wayside. For most interpreters, the task is not to explain how Paul's biblical references fit into a developing argument that was created to influence a specific audience, but rather to reconstruct how Paul interacted with the biblical text prior to the composition of the letter. Usually this involves comparing a passage from Paul's letters with one or more biblical passages that the interpreter sees as the source of Paul's language and then drawing inferences about Paul's reading of Scripture from the similarities and differences between the two texts. Some scholars focus their attention on a single passage, while others examine a series of passages in an effort to draw broader

conclusions about Paul's usage. The goal, however, is the same—to understand the way Paul interpreted the biblical text. Occasionally a scholar will talk about how a particular quotation, allusion, or echo might relate to the concerns or interests of Paul's epistolary audience, but these observations are usually limited to passages in which Paul seems to be using Scripture in a polemical sense, as with his references to Abraham in Galatians 3 and 4 or his quotations about “wisdom” in the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians.

In principle, there is nothing wrong with this approach. Paul's letters are saturated with biblical language, and it makes sense to look for patterns that might indicate how Paul's thinking was shaped by the Jewish Scriptures both before and after he became a follower of Jesus. Yet there are many obstacles that stand in the way of such a task. Some of these obstacles are well known, while others are less obvious.

1. While many of Paul's biblical references are clearly marked, others are not. Scholars frequently disagree about whether a passage in Paul's letters intends to echo or allude to a specific text of Scripture or whether it simply reflects Paul's ordinary manner of speaking. Efforts to develop a set of criteria for resolving this problem have been helpful, but their application remains highly subjective.<sup>1</sup>

2. In cases where a reference is clear, scholars sometimes find it hard to know precisely what biblical text Paul had in mind. Even with marked quotations, there remain passages where scholars disagree about the identity of the text to which Paul was referring,<sup>2</sup> and there are several

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<sup>1</sup> Virtually all scholars who have worked in this area in recent years have relied on the criteria set forth by Richard B. Hays in *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1989), 29-33. For a more recent discussion and refinement of these criteria, see Richard B. Hays, “Who Has Believed Our Message? Paul's Reading of Isaiah,” in *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 25-49.

<sup>2</sup> For example, does the quotation in Gal 3:6 refer to Gen 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, or 28:14? Does the unmarked citation in 1 Cor 5:13 refer to Deut 17:1, 19:19, 22:21, 22:22, 22:24, or 24:7?

places in which the precise nature of Paul's biblical *Vorlage* is unclear.<sup>3</sup> The fact that Paul so often modifies the wording of the biblical text to accord with his own interpretive agenda also complicates the picture.<sup>4</sup>

3. The brevity and ambiguity of Paul's references to the Jewish Scriptures also pose problems for interpreters. Only rarely does Paul engage in an extended exposition of a particular passage of Scripture that exposes his interpretative method to public view.<sup>5</sup> His usual practice is to embed quotations and allusions in his developing argument and then leave it to the audience to figure out the link between his own prose and the text to which he refers. In many cases the reasoning behind the reference is opaque, as evidenced by the divergent interpretations that scholars have offered for many of Paul's biblical references.

This last point deserves more attention than it has received. Even scholars who are aware of the methodological problems associated with trying to uncover the "original authorial intent" behind a piece of literature speak routinely of how Paul "read" or "interpreted" a particular passage of Scripture, as though Paul's mental activity could be recovered by engaging in a judicious comparison of Paul's text with the biblical passage to which the letter refers. The reality, of course, is that all such efforts reflect the analytical insights of contemporary scholarly readers who have ready access to the texts of Paul's letters and the Jewish Scriptures in easy-to-use printed and hypertext versions, together with a vast array of published studies in which other scholars spell out their ideas concerning how Paul might have read and interpreted a particular biblical text. The fact that so many thoughtful and resourceful interpreters remain divided over what Paul had in mind in the majority of his references to the Jewish Scriptures ought to lead

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Rom 9:33, 11:3-4, 11:26-27. For a discussion of the textual problems associated with these and other explicit quotations in Paul's letters, see Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature*, SNTSMS 74 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> For an extended discussion of this phenomenon, see the study cited in the previous note.

<sup>5</sup> The most obvious examples are of course Rom 4:9-23 and Gal 4:21-31.

scholars to think more seriously about the role of the reader (or in ancient terms, the audience) in the interpretation of Paul's biblical references. Until recently, however, this question has received little attention from scholars.

### **Defining the Audience**

One of the principal reasons for the success of Richard Hays' book, Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul,<sup>6</sup> lies in his thoughtful attention to questions of methodology. Hays harbors no illusions that his readings of Paul's letters can be naively equated with "what Paul intended" at the moment when he penned his letters. His aim is rather to produce "late twentieth-century readings of Paul informed by intelligent historical understanding."<sup>7</sup> Quoting frequently from the work of literary critic John Hollander,<sup>8</sup> Hays indicates that his concern is not to investigate what Paul might have intended or what the original audience might have understood, but rather to call attention to "the poetic effects produced for those who have ears to hear."<sup>9</sup> In particular, he is interested in the possible presence in Paul's letters of the diachronic trope that Hollander calls "transumption" or "metalepsis." According to Hays (following Hollander), "When a literary echo links the text in which it occurs to an earlier text, the figurative effect of the echo can lie in the unstated or suppressed (transumed) points of resonance between the two texts."<sup>10</sup> The task of the interpreter in this case is to recover and highlight the suppressed material so that readers who are less familiar with the source text can participate in the "field of whispered or unstated

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<sup>6</sup>New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1989.

<sup>7</sup>Echoes of Scripture, 27.

<sup>8</sup> John Hollander, The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981). In a later article ("On the Rebound: A Response to Critiques of Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul," in Paul and the Scriptures of Israel, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, JSNTSup 83 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 80), Hays also gives substantial credit to Thomas M. Greene, The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) and Michael Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) for shaping his thought.

<sup>9</sup> Hays, Echoes of Scripture, 19.

<sup>10</sup> Hays, Echoes of Scripture, 20.

correspondences” that is implicitly set up between the two texts.<sup>11</sup> The rest of Hays’ book is devoted to showing how this might work.

The influence of Hays’ “metaleptic” approach to analyzing Paul’s engagement with the text of Scripture is hard to overstate. The most visible marker of his influence is the frequency with which one hears other scholars using the phrase “those who have ears to hear” when calling attention to what they see as unstated points of resonance between Paul’s letters and a particular passage from the Jewish Scriptures. The presence of so many unstated references to Scripture has led many scholars to conclude that Paul reflected more thoughtfully on the broader literary context of his quotations, allusions, and echoes than has commonly been supposed. The effect has been to insulate Paul from the accusation that he frequently takes verses out of context.

In the nearly two decades since Hays’ book was published, relatively few questions have been raised about the methodological validity of his approach.<sup>12</sup> In particular, little attention has been given to the manner in which Hays applies the insights of John Hollander, Thomas Greene, and the other literary critics whom he cites in his book. A careful review of the works of these critics suggests that Hays has turned their methodological insights in directions that they might not have endorsed.

Unlike his mentors, Hays is not content to speak only about “poetic resonances” between Paul’s biblical references and the text of Scripture. For Hays, it is important to be able to attribute a significant proportion of these resonances to the hermeneutical activity of Paul himself. As Hays puts it, “If I, having learned something about Paul’s historical circumstances

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<sup>11</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Of the five critical essays on Hays’ book that appeared (along with a response from Hays) in the 1993 book *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel* (see note 8), only two (the articles by Evans and Green) explicitly question elements of Hays’ methodology. Additional criticisms of Hays’ approach can be found in Christopher D. Stanley, *Arguing With Scripture: The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* (New York/London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 38 n. 2, 47 n. 29.

and having read the same Scripture that Paul lived in so deeply, discern in his language echoes of that Scripture, it is not improbable that I am overhearing the same echoes that he and his earliest readers might have been able to hear.”<sup>13</sup> By the end of the book, Hays is using the fruits of his analysis of various Pauline texts to draw broad conclusions about the manner in which the historical Paul viewed and interpreted his ancestral Scriptures.<sup>14</sup> Much of the material upon which Hays bases his conclusions is derived from his analysis of Paul’s explicit quotations, where it is clear that Paul intended to refer to the biblical text. But his findings are also influenced by the results of his investigations of various “echoes” of Scripture in Paul’s letters, materials that he had previously indicated cannot be so readily tied to the intentions of the author.<sup>15</sup>

Hays is such an artful reader of texts and such a persuasive writer that few scholars have noticed how he blurs his categories at this point. As it turns out, this questionable mixing of materials does not have a major impact on Hays’ understanding of Paul’s interpretive activity. Nearly everything that Hays says in his final chapter could have been derived from a study of Paul’s quotations without reference to the texts that Hays identifies as “echoes” of the Jewish Scriptures. For example, the quotations by themselves provide sufficient justification for Hays’ statement that for Paul, “The biblical text must be read as a vast texture of latent promise, and the promise must be recovered through interpretive strategies that allow the hidden word to become manifest.”<sup>16</sup> The same is true for his conclusion that “for Paul, original intention is not a primary hermeneutical concern,”<sup>17</sup> along with many other such statements. In other words, the bulk of

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<sup>13</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 28.

<sup>14</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 154-92. Virtually every page of this chapter includes references to “Paul as reader of Scripture” (154), “Paul’s readings of Scripture” (155), “Paul’s construal of Torah” (157), “Paul’s hermeneutical procedures” (158), etc.

<sup>15</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 19, 32; cf. 156.

<sup>16</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 155.

<sup>17</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 156.

Hays' observations concerning Paul's handling of Scripture are to be the product of a sound application of traditional methods of analysis by a scholar who has a good ear for texts rather than the fruit of a new theoretical approach to Paul's letters.

There are two areas, however, in which Hays' conclusions would appear to be open to challenge on methodological grounds. The first is his insistence that Paul's theological outlook was heavily influenced by his reflection on the broader literary contexts of the many biblical texts to which he refers in his letters. Hays' argument slips into circularity at this point, since his interpretation of Paul's letters presupposes his thesis that metalepsis is the key to understanding many of the passing references to Scripture in Paul's letters. This thesis impels Hays to search for evidence of a contextual orientation behind Paul's biblical references and to ignore readings that would suggest a greater disjunction between Paul's letters and the context of his references. Hays is aware of the potential circularity of his argument at this point, and he takes pains to indicate why he thinks that this mode of reading does more justice to Paul's thought than the atomistic or non-contextual readings that have been proposed by other scholars.<sup>18</sup> In the end, however, Hays acknowledges that his understanding of Paul's interpretive activity reflects his own aesthetic judgment that his model offers a satisfying reading of Paul's letters.<sup>19</sup> It remains unclear how Hays would respond to a scholar who claims to find more aesthetic satisfaction in an atomistic or non-contextual reading of Paul's engagement with the Jewish Scriptures.

This leads us to the second and more serious problem with the methodology employed by Hays and his followers. To justify his shift from literary analysis (uncovering poetic resonances) to historical study (elucidating how Paul read and interpreted the biblical text), Hays proposes a

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<sup>18</sup> This is the underlying purpose of Hays' seven criteria for identifying the presence of a biblical echo in a Pauline text (Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 29-32).

<sup>19</sup> The last of Hays' seven tests for the presence of a biblical echo is "satisfaction," which involves a subjective decision about the cumulative weight of the evidence (Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 31-32).

“common sense hermeneutics” that is based on the assumption “that readers ancient and modern can share a common sense of the text’s meaning.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, Hays presumes that there is at least a rough analogy between the reading experiences of ancient and modern audiences when they encounter Paul’s letters. No such presumption is required for a purely literary reading of the letters, but as Hays recognizes, the conventions of historical analysis require some kind of criteria for testing the validity of claims concerning actions in the past. According to Hays,

Prominent among these conventions are the convictions that a proposed interpretation must be justified with reference to evidence provided both by the text’s rhetorical structure and by what can be known through critical investigation about the author *and the original readers*. Any interpretation must respect these constraints in order to be persuasive within my reading community. Claims about intertextual meaning are strongest where it can credibly be demonstrated that they occur within the literary structure of the text and that they can plausibly be ascribed to the intention of the author *and the competence of the original readers*.<sup>21</sup>

The dual reference to “the original readers” in this formulation is clearly intentional, since Hays could easily have omitted this phrase and limited his attention to Paul’s personal engagement with the biblical text. A similar concern for ancient readers can be observed in Hays’ first and fifth criteria for testing claims about the presence of biblical echoes in Paul’s letters.<sup>22</sup> But the reason for its inclusion is unclear. Why should it matter to Hays whether the “original readers” of Paul’s letter could have recognized and understood Paul’s references to the Jewish Scriptures? Why does Hays not simply say, “Here are some interesting connections that I

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<sup>20</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 27-28.

<sup>21</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 28; italics added.

<sup>22</sup> Under the heading of “Availability,” Hays says that the interpreter should ask, “Was the proposed source of the echo available to the author and/or his original readers?” (Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 29). Under “Historical Plausibility,” he asks, “Could Paul have intended the alleged meaning effect? Could his readers have understood it?” Later in the same section he states that this test “necessarily requires hypothetical constructs of what might have been intended and grasped by particular first-century figures” (Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 30).

have observed between Paul's letters and the biblical texts that he cites, and here is why I think that Paul might have seen them also"? Hays never answers this question.

Surprisingly, Hays' claim that Paul's echoes of Scripture ought to be intelligible to "the original readers" plays a rather minor role in his own analysis of Paul's letters. Here and there he asks whether a particularly obscure reference might have been recognized by Paul's first-century audience, but as a rule he seems to presume that Paul's readers will be able to identify the source of his biblical references and recall their broader literary context. Questions about the literary competence of the "original readers" serve primarily as a check against excessively speculative readings of Paul's literary intentions; elsewhere they recede into the background.

The reason why Hays devotes so little practical attention to the "original readers" of Paul's letters is not hard to find. According to Hays, "The implied readers of these letters appear to be primarily Gentile Christians with an extensive knowledge of the LXX and an urgent interest in its interpretation."<sup>23</sup> Hays is aware that this description of the implied readers of Paul's letters might not be valid for the "actual original readers" of the letters,<sup>24</sup> yet he fails to follow up on this observation, noting rather meekly that "some such characterization of Paul's actual readers... is not implausible."<sup>25</sup> This virtual equation of the implied audience with the actual audience of Paul's letters allows Hays to sidestep the thorny question of whether Paul's first-century audiences would have been capable of recognizing and following Paul's many allusive references to the Jewish Scriptures, along with the related question of whether this was in fact what Paul expected. The question makes little difference to Hays' analysis of Paul's own

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<sup>23</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 29. Whether this is in fact an accurate description of the "implied readers" of Paul's letters will be addressed at a later point.

<sup>24</sup> According to Hays, "Whether the actual original readers of the letters fit this description is a question that must be distinguished carefully for the literary question about the implied reader as an intertextual phenomenon" (*Echoes of Scripture*, 201 n. 92).

<sup>25</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 201 n. 92.

engagement with the biblical text, but it plays a vital role in his reconstruction of Paul's rhetoric, since Hays believes that Paul included echoes and allusions in his letters in a conscious attempt to lead his first-century audiences into a deeper understanding of the meaning of the texts to which he refers. For Hays, Paul's echoes and allusions serve to invite his audiences to recall the broader literary context from which the reference was selected and to rethink the meaning of the passage under the tutelage of Paul's own Christian reading of the text.

Hays clearly underestimates the demands that this view of Paul's rhetoric places on a first-century audience. For the model to work, Paul's audience must first be able to recognize the presence of an unmarked echo or allusion in one of Paul's letters. This would require not only a deft ear but also a fairly substantial knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures, since the texts that Paul is said to reference in his letters are scattered throughout the biblical canon. Next, the audience must be able to recall in a fair amount of detail the broader literary context from which the text was taken. Central to Hays' model is the belief that Paul expected his audiences to draw connections between the references in his letters and the broader contexts from which those texts were extracted. From here, the audience must be able to figure out correctly for themselves how Paul has interpreted the passage in question, since Paul rarely spells out the reasoning behind his references to the biblical text. Along the way, they must be capable of making judgments about how Paul's interpretation of the biblical text resembles and differs from others that they might have heard in the past. Finally, the audience must be willing to accept these reconstructions of Paul's meaning as valid, since the references would lose their rhetorical weight if the audience were to find Paul's readings of Scripture unacceptable or unconvincing. Presumably this means that their responses would not be affected by the tensions and suspicions that frequently existed

between Paul and his audiences or the fact (acknowledged by Hays) that “Paul repeatedly interprets Scripture in ways that must have startled his first audience.”<sup>26</sup>

While it is not impossible that this is what Paul expected when he inserted references to the Jewish Scriptures in his letters, it seems quite unlikely that Paul would have placed such heavy interpretive demands on his audience. In fact, a closer examination of Hays’ model suggests that his concern to uncover “metaleptic” references to Scripture in Paul’s letters has led him to radically misinterpret the purpose and effects of Paul’s biblical rhetoric.

In the first place, the idea that Paul’s first-century audiences would have possessed the degree of biblical literacy presupposed by Hays’ approach is historically implausible. Unless Paul’s churches were highly anomalous, the great majority of their members would have been illiterate and thus unable to read the Jewish Bible for themselves. Moreover, his letters suggest that most of his addressees came from non-Jewish (i. e., “Gentile”) backgrounds where they would have been ignorant of the content of the Jewish Scriptures. Even if Paul had been aware of the existence of some kind of “Bible training program” in the churches that he addresses in his letters, he could not have known which passages his audiences would recognize, apart from the ones that were commonly used in Christian teaching and preaching.<sup>27</sup> If Paul expected his first-century audiences to be able to recognize, recall to memory, and engage in thoughtful reflection on the broader context of his unmarked references to the Jewish Scripture, he was a thoroughly incompetent rhetor. No ancient author would have so radically misjudged his audience.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 1. Hays frequently refers to Paul “transforming” the meaning of texts (e. g., *Echoes of Scripture*, 1, 45) and offering “revisionary” readings of Scripture (*Echoes of Scripture*, 66, 81). Elsewhere he refers to Paul’s “innovative interpretive strategy” (*Echoes of Scripture*, 114) and remarks on the “audacity” of a particular interpretive move (*Echoes of Scripture*, 112). Occasionally he uses stronger language, describing one Pauline interpretation as a “stunning misreading” of the text of Scripture and another as “historically outrageous” (*Echoes of Scripture*, 45, 82). Despite these problems, however, Hays’ hypothetical readers always seem to go along with Paul’s readings.

<sup>27</sup> All of these points will be developed further in the latter part of this essay.

The same objection applies to Hays' presumption that Paul meant for his audiences to figure out and embrace the reasoning behind his many references to the Jewish Scriptures. If contemporary scholars with all of their resources have been unable to come to agreement about how Paul was interpreting the biblical text in many cases, it is hard to see how Paul could have thought that his original audiences would be able to reconstruct his reasoning. It is even more difficult to believe that Paul overlooked the possibility that the biblically literate members of his audience might object to his often tendentious readings of the Jewish Scriptures. In fact, one can point to several places in Paul's letters where an ancient reader who was capable of consulting the original context of Paul's biblical references might have concluded that the text of Scripture offered more support for the views of Paul's opponents than for Paul.<sup>28</sup> When we add to this mix the tensions that frequently existed between Paul and the elite members of his congregations, it becomes virtually impossible to suppose that Paul would have trusted these people not only to accept his revisionary readings of Scripture without dissent but also to assist others in grasping his meaning.<sup>29</sup> Some may even have relished the opportunity to point out the flaws in Paul's arguments and thus undermine his authority. Once again, Hays' model implies that Paul was an incompetent rhetor who failed to anticipate potential problems with his audience.

In summary, Hays' contention that Paul inserted biblical references into his letters as a means of guiding his first-century audiences toward a new way of reading the Jewish Scriptures rests on shaky historical ground. This is not to say that Paul never engaged in such a practice—passages such as Romans 4:1-25 and Galatians 4:21-31 show clearly that Paul was capable of employing such a rhetorical strategy when he wished to do so. But the number of passages in

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<sup>28</sup> For example, see the discussion of Gal 3:6-14 in Stanley, *Arguing With Scripture*, 121-30.

<sup>29</sup> This is clearly the case in 1 Corinthians, where Paul repeatedly sides with the poorer members of the congregation against the (presumably literate) elite members (cf. Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982]), and arguably so in the case of Galatians, where the opponents appear to be offering their own text-based interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures.

which Paul explains to his audience how he is interpreting the text of Scripture is exceedingly small. Most of the time he simply weaves biblical references into his argument and then relies on the surface structure of the argument to highlight the points that he wants his audience to draw from the biblical text.<sup>30</sup> In many cases he also revises the wording of the text so that it comports more closely with his argument.<sup>31</sup> Taken together, these techniques suggest to the audience that there is no need for them to consult the original context of the passage to which Paul refers; if they want to know what the text means, all they have to do is listen to Paul.

A clear exception to this pattern occurs in several passages where Paul alludes to a particular biblical passage or story in the expectation that the audience will be able to supply the portions that he omits. In these cases the meaning of the reference is lost unless the audience is familiar with the missing material. Examples include 1 Cor 10:1-12 and 2 Cor 3:7-18, where he presumes that the Christians in Corinth are acquainted with some of the key episodes from the Exodus narrative; Gal 3:6-8, 3:16, 3:28, and 4:21-31, where he refers allusively to various aspects of the Abraham narrative (cf. Rom 4:1-25 and 9:6-13); and Rom 5:12-21, where his argument presupposes at least a minimal awareness of the story of Adam's fall in Genesis 3. Yet the amount of biblical material that the audience is expected to supply in these passages is fairly limited. The pattern varies from letter to letter, but virtually all of the references concern materials that were well-known in early Christianity: the creation stories, the ancestral narratives (primarily the story of Abraham), the Exodus saga, and a few of the more important laws of Torah.<sup>32</sup> These are precisely the kinds of materials that one would expect to be passed on by

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<sup>30</sup> This point is developed at great length in Stanley, *Arguing With Scripture* (see note 12), especially chapters five through eight.

<sup>31</sup> For a summary of the ways in which Paul commonly adapts the wording of his explicit quotations, see Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture*, 338-50.

<sup>32</sup> For more on this point, see the discussions of what Paul assumes concerning the biblical literacy of the Christians in Corinth, Galatia, and Rome, in Stanley, *Arguing With Scripture*, 75-78, 114-18, and 136-42.

word of mouth in a community of illiterates. How much Paul actually expected his audiences to know about these passages is unclear, since his references are highly selective. But the type and amount of biblical knowledge that would have been required to follow Paul's biblical argumentation is consistent with what we might expect from a functionally illiterate Gentile audience who had received a modest amount of biblical instruction in a Christian setting.

Taken as a whole, these observations suggest that Paul was aware of the limited biblical literacy of his intended audiences and crafted his arguments to suit their capabilities. Instead of expecting his audiences to remember and reflect on the original context of his biblical references, Paul seems to have made a serious effort to indicate to his audiences how he wished for his references to be understood. The success of this effort did not depend on anyone being able to reconstruct Paul's biblical hermeneutic or approve his handling of the biblical text. All that was needed was for an audience to be able to follow the argument of Paul's letter (no easy feat!) and accept his interpretations of Scripture as valid.

### **From Implied to Real Audiences**

If this understanding of Paul's biblical rhetoric is correct, it only tells us only what kind of audience Paul had in mind when he dictated his letters, i. e., the "implied audience" of the letters.<sup>33</sup> It says nothing about the actual literary capabilities of the people to whom Paul addressed his letters. We must always allow for the possibility that Paul could have underestimated or overestimated the amount of biblical knowledge that his audiences possessed,

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<sup>33</sup> Hays' contention that "the implied readers of these letters appear to be primarily Gentile Christians with an extensive knowledge of the LXX and an urgent interest in its interpretation" (Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 29) is rooted in his presumption that Paul expected his readers to engage in "metaleptic" readings of his biblical references, a position that this article aims to refute.

thus limiting the effectiveness of his biblical rhetoric. From what we know of Paul, he was not always a good judge of how people would understand his letters.

So where might we turn for information about the biblical literacy and reading abilities of the people to whom Paul's letters were addressed? The first step is to admit that we can never really know the answers to these questions, since our only information comes from the letters themselves, and they are clearly open to multiple interpretations. But we can determine what counts as a historically responsible presumption concerning the abilities of Paul's audiences by examining what can be known about literacy levels in general and biblical literacy in particular in the ancient world. Studies of the social makeup of Paul's churches have consistently shown that the great majority of people in Paul's churches came from non-elite and non-Jewish backgrounds, though some of them may have attended a Jewish synagogue prior to joining the Christian community. Unless we see evidence to the contrary, we should presume that Paul was at least broadly aware of the capabilities and limitations of his audiences that he took these factors into account when composing his letters, since this is one of the primary tasks of an effective rhetor.

On the general subject of literacy in the ancient world, the evidence is relatively clear. In his acclaimed study of ancient literacy, William Harris concluded that no more than 10-20% of the populace would have been able to read or write at any level during the classical, Hellenistic, and Roman imperial periods.<sup>34</sup> Virtually all elite males would have been literate, but their

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<sup>34</sup>Harris, Ancient Literacy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 272, 284, 328-30. Of course, literacy levels were lower for women than for men throughout the ancient world; see Susan Guettel Cole, "Could Greek Women Read and Write?" in Reflections of Women in Antiquity, ed. Helene P. Foley (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1981), 219-45; and Raffaella Cribiore, Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 74-101. The general validity of Harris's findings is affirmed (with some reservations) by the scholars who examined his work in the series of essays in J. H. Humphrey, ed., Literacy in the Ancient World (Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1991). Allan Millard (Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus [Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2000], 154-84) offers a more optimistic assessment of the data, but nearly all of his examples pertain to the practices of upper class and "professional"

numbers were too small in relation to the broader society to have much influence on the overall literacy figures.<sup>35</sup> Harris points to a number of social factors that inhibited the growth of literacy in Greek and Roman societies: the absence of any widespread network of schools (and the high cost of attending the ones that existed); the costliness of books (and the lack of public libraries from which they might be borrowed); the ready availability of intermediaries (scribes, literate slaves, etc.) to carry out chores that required literacy; the strength of ancient memories, which made writing less vital to ordinary people; and the general absence of any significant social, economic, or religious motivation for societal leaders to commit resources to the promotion of popular literacy.<sup>36</sup>

In a subsequent investigation of books and literacy in early Christianity, Harry Gamble concluded that even if the early church had a disproportionate number of craftspeople and small business workers among its numbers, the number of Christians who could read and write during the first few centuries CE would not have exceeded the upper end of the range specified by Harris.<sup>37</sup> As Gamble puts it, “It cannot be supposed that the extent of literacy in the ancient church was any greater than that in the Greco-Roman society of which Christianity was a part... Not only the writing of Christian literature, but also the ability to read, criticize and interpret it belonged to a small number of Christians in the first several centuries, ordinarily not more than about 10 percent in any given setting, and perhaps fewer in the many small and provincial

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writers (i. e., scribes), not ordinary working people. The same is true for the recent study by John F. A. Sawyer, Sacred Languages and Sacred Texts (London/New York: Routledge, 1999), 44-58, who compounds the problem by commingling materials from different periods.

<sup>35</sup> Harris, Ancient Literacy, 29-30, 103, 157.

<sup>36</sup> Harris, Ancient Literacy, 11-35. Recently Raffaella Cribiore has suggested that Harris may have oversimplified the social context of education in the ancient world and overlooked some of the less formal modes of education that occurred. In particular, he argues that a significant minority of the population might have been able to gain at least a rudimentary understanding of letters and numbers, though even this was “not much more than the ability to copy a brief text and read a list of words or a short passage from an author previously rehearsed” (Gymnastics of the Mind, 131). In the end he, like Harris, acknowledges that “mass education and majority literacy did not exist in the ancient world” (Gymnastics of the Mind, 17; cf. 50, 60, 76, 86, 163, 184, 187, 249).

<sup>37</sup> Harry Y. Gamble, Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 2-11.

congregations that were characteristic of early Christianity.” For this reason, says Gamble, “We must assume... that the large majority of Christians in the early centuries of the church were illiterate, not because they were unique but because they were in this respect typical.”<sup>38</sup>

What about the Jewish members of Paul’s congregations? Biblical scholars have long assumed that literacy rates were relatively high among the Jews of antiquity, since written texts played a key role in Jewish worship and Jews relied heavily on written texts to guide their daily conduct. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain passages that speak of the community studying the laws of Torah together,<sup>39</sup> and Josephus claims that Jews were trained to read and discuss their sacred texts throughout the Mediterranean world.<sup>40</sup> The Mishnah and Talmud also refer often to schools in which apparently literate young boys were trained to study the Torah.<sup>41</sup>

In recent years, however, a number of studies have indicated that literacy levels may not have been as high among the Jews of antiquity as scholars have thought.<sup>42</sup> Closer inspection of the literary evidence suggests that the texts that have been used to argue for widespread Jewish literacy are in fact speaking about special sub-groups within the broader Jewish community (the elite peers of Josephus, the priest-centered Dead Sea Scrolls community) or developments that arose later than the first century (the Torah-centered rabbinic schools). Moreover, comparative

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<sup>38</sup>Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 5-6. Pieter J. J Botha (“Greco-Roman Literacy as Setting for New Testament Writings,” *Neotestamentica* 26 [1992], 195-215) offers a similar view: “If early Christianity reflects a fair cross section of society, it would follow that a rather small percentage within those groups were literate. What is probably true in any case is that we have a completely disproportionate impression of an extremely small group of Christians” (211).

<sup>39</sup> 1QS 6:6-8, 8:11-12.

<sup>40</sup> *Contra Apion* 2:18, 2:25, 2:178.

<sup>41</sup> See the extensive discussion of the evidence in Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 39-110.

<sup>42</sup> In addition to the book by Hezser cited in the previous note, see Meir Bar-Ilan, “Writing In Ancient Israel and Early Judaism, Part Two: Scribes and Books in the Late Second Commonwealth and Rabbinic Period,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Jan Mulder (Assen: van Gorcum, 1988; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 21-38, and “Illiteracy in the Land of Israel in the First Centuries C.E.,” in *Essays in the Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society*, ed. Simcha Fishbane et al. (Hoboken: KTAV, 1992), 2:46-61.

studies of literate cultures suggest that ancient Palestine lacked virtually all of the social factors necessary for the development of widespread literacy.<sup>43</sup>

In her recent exhaustive review of the literary and inscriptional evidence for literacy in Roman Palestine, Catherine Hezser concluded that less than ten percent of the Jewish population would have been able to read simple texts and sign their names throughout the imperial era.<sup>44</sup>

Hezser describes Jewish literacy using the image of concentric circles.

At the center one has to imagine a very small number of highly literate people who could read literary texts in both Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek. Then there was another, slightly broader circle of those who could read literary texts in either Hebrew/Aramaic or Greek only. They were surrounded by people who could not read literary texts but only short letters, lists, and accounts. A broader proportion of the population may have been able merely to identify individual letters, names, and labels. They as well as the vast majority of their entirely illiterate contemporaries had access to texts through intermediaries only.<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps the best that can be said at this point is that the evidence that has often been cited for widespread Jewish literacy in antiquity is questionable. Thus while it is certainly reasonable to think that the Jewish members of Paul's churches would have been familiar with common biblical stories and key texts from their experience in Jewish synagogues, it would be hazardous to assume that they were capable of reading the text of Scripture (or any other text) on their own. As Catherine Hezser puts it, "Most Jews will have been aware of the symbolic value of the Torah,... but [they] did not study its contents or participate in the intellectual discourse which developed among its experts. They may have occasionally listened to scholarly disputes, attended Torah-readings in synagogues, and memorized some central texts and stories, but they

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<sup>43</sup> Hezser, *Jewish Literacy*, 37-38 (summary), 39-250 (full development).

<sup>44</sup> Hezser, *Jewish Literacy*, 496.

<sup>45</sup> Hezser, *Jewish Literacy*, 473.

did not actually study the text of Torah for themselves.”<sup>46</sup> In short, the presence of Jews in the early Christian congregations says little about overall literacy levels in the churches to whom the New Testament documents were addressed, including the letters of Paul.

Occasionally scholars have suggested that Paul was aware that the literate members of his churches routinely taught their illiterate brothers and sisters the content of the Jewish Scriptures, so that he could reasonably expect his audiences to recognize and recall the broader context of the biblical texts that he mentions in his letters.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, this proposal overlooks the many social barriers that stood in the way of such a practice. At the most basic level, it is anachronistic to think that the illiterate masses who labored from sunup to sundown merely to survive would have had either the time or the intellectual proclivity to sit around with their social superiors and listen to biblical texts being read and discussed or to ask thoughtful questions about their content. It is even less likely that the early Christian house-churches, which as far as we know met only once a week, developed a system for training illiterate people to memorize vast portions of the Jewish Scriptures, especially when there is no mention of such a practice anywhere in the New Testament.<sup>48</sup>

As for the small number of literate elites in Paul’s churches, it seems unlikely that many of them would have studied the Jewish Scriptures for themselves on a regular basis. Only the local synagogue would have owned a significant number of biblical scrolls, and the tensions that frequently existed between synagogue authorities and the followers of Jesus would have made it

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<sup>46</sup> Hezser, *Jewish Literacy*, 200 (cf. 456).

<sup>47</sup> Discussed most recently by J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul “In Concert” in the Letter to the Romans* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 33-39.

<sup>48</sup> This is not to say that such feats of memory were impossible for illiterate people, but rather that there is no evidence for the existence of any sort of program or mechanism in the early churches for promoting this kind of activity. The Jewish synagogue is not an analogous situation, since even illiterate Jews were trained to know the content of their Scriptures from childhood. To gain a rough idea of how much an audience might be able to absorb and memorize as a result of weekly exposure to oral readings from Scripture, one only need think about the massive biblical illiteracy that characterizes many contemporary Christian churches despite the ready availability of written texts and nearly universal literacy.

difficult for many Christians (especially non-Jews) to gain access to them.<sup>49</sup> The sheer cost of biblical scrolls would also have limited their availability, though it is certainly possible that some of the wealthier Christians might have purchased a scroll or two for personal or congregational use. Ordinarily, literate Christians who were interested in the Jewish Scriptures would have copied excerpts onto wax tablets, papyrus scrolls, or parchment notebooks during times when they had access to biblical scrolls, in addition to relying on their memories.<sup>50</sup> Some of these people may have read their notes aloud or quoted from memory in the Christian gatherings, but there is little reason to think that the physical scrolls would have been available for reading and exposition in most of the Christian house-churches. For the ordinary first-century Christian, a first-hand encounter with a scroll of a biblical text was probably an unusual event.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>While it seems reasonable to suppose that a wealthy Diaspora synagogue might have owned copies of all of the scrolls that we call “the LXX,” we have no clear evidence to that effect. This possibility presumes that there existed a standard collection of texts that a synagogue would want to own, a notion that many scholars would reject for this period. As Harry Gamble notes, “The Scriptures of Judaism comprised not a single book but a collection of scrolls, five of the Torah and more of the prophetic books. These books were relatively costly, and their availability even to all synagogues cannot be taken for granted” (*Books and Readers*, 214).

<sup>50</sup>For evidence concerning the common practice of note-taking in antiquity and its significance for the apostle Paul, see Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture*, 73-78. Individuals for whom we have evidence of note-taking while reading include Socrates (according to Xenophon), Aristotle, Cicero, Pliny the Elder, Seneca, Plutarch, and Aulus Gellius. Several techniques were available: to copy the texts directly onto a papyrus scroll, to use one of the sturdier parchment notebooks that were already becoming available by this time, or to take notes onto a wax tablet (using a stylus) and then transfer them later to a more permanent repository. According to William Harris (*Ancient Literacy*, 194), codices of up to ten wax tablets were common, with each tablet able to hold fifty or more words per side. Jocelyn Penny Bell (*Wax Tablets of the Mind* [London/New York: Routledge, 1997], 149) calls attention to a third century CE relief of a boy holding a writing case containing his writing equipment (pens, ink, and knife), and remarks that “anyone doing research in a library, public or private, would carry such a writing case as well as tablets or papyri for taking notes.” For more on the technology of note-taking, see Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 50-53; Millard, *Reading and Writing*, 63-69; Bell, *Wax Tablets*, 149-50, 169-74, 177-81; C. H. Roberts and T. C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1983), 18-29; B. M. W. Knox and P. E. Easterling, “Books and Readers in the Ancient World,” in *Cambridge History of Ancient Literature*, ed. B. M. W. Knox and P. E. Easterling, 2 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 18; Frederic Kenyon, *Books and Readers in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1932), 91-92.

<sup>51</sup>Even if the words of Scripture were read aloud when Paul’s churches gathered for worship (cf. 1 Tim 4:13), this need not imply that the actual biblical scrolls were present. Notebooks filled with biblical excerpts would have served the same purpose (cf. Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 214). Interestingly, there is no mention of public Scripture-reading in the few passages where Paul himself speaks about corporate worship (1 Cor 11:17-34, 14:1-40; cf. Eph 5:19-20). Harry Gamble issues a similar warning against the uncritical assumption “that scripture reading belonged from the outset to specifically Christian worship or, if it did, that it played the same role that it did in the synagogue” (*Books and Readers*, 212). Like others, however, he eventually concludes that Paul’s expectations concerning his readers’ familiarity with Scripture imply that the Jewish Scriptures were regularly read and taught in the Pauline congregations (212-13). Joanna Dewey, after a careful survey of the evidence, concludes that “there is

Even when the literate members of Paul's churches had access to the Jewish Scriptures, other factors would have hindered their ability to engage with the biblical text. Ancient scrolls had no chapter or verse divisions or other textual markers to aid the reader in locating specific passages, and ancient readers had no concordances or other tools to assist them.<sup>52</sup> As a result, only people who had a thorough knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures (invariably Jews) would have been capable of chasing down a particular passage in a biblical scroll. Others would have had to rely on these people for guidance. Secondly, Christians from non-Jewish backgrounds—the great majority by the time the New Testament texts were written—frequently entered the church with no idea of where to look for the biblical verses that were cited by Paul and other early Christian writers.<sup>53</sup> Those who were literate and had attended Jewish synagogues (i. e., “God-fearers”) might have had at least a general idea of the location of certain well-known passages, but most of their biblical knowledge would have come from sermons by synagogue leaders. Literate Gentiles who had studied biblical scrolls for themselves while attending the synagogue would have been quite rare.

In summary, the evidence suggests that not more than a few individuals in any given church, i. e., those recruited from the educated (Jewish or non-Jewish) elites, would have been capable of reading and studying either the early Christian writings or the Jewish Scriptures for themselves, and many of them would have found it difficult to engage regularly with the biblical

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no evidence that Scripture readings were important in the worship of Paul's communities and it seems unlikely that they occurred at all” (“Textuality in an Oral Culture: A Survey of the Pauline Traditions,” *Semeia* 39 [1994], 52).

<sup>52</sup>For a discussion of the problems associated with locating and retrieving specific passages in ancient books, see Bell, *Wax Tablets*, 14-25.

<sup>53</sup>Of course, non-Jews were familiar with Jewish beliefs and practices, including their reverence for a collection of holy texts, but they did not (so far as we know) read the Jewish Scriptures for themselves. Even the literati of Greco-Roman society had wild ideas about the content of the Jewish Scriptures; see the citations in Menahem Stern, ed., *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974-84), and the discussion in Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U. Press, 1993). The earliest non-Jewish source that reveals a familiarity with the content of the Jewish Scriptures is an admiring quotation from Genesis 1 in Pseudo-Longinus' *On the Sublime* toward the end of the first century.

text.<sup>54</sup> Jewish Christians and non-Jews who had participated in Jewish synagogues as “God-fearers” might have recognized biblical references that escaped Christians from non-Jewish backgrounds, but there is no reason to think that more than a handful (if any) would have been capable of recalling the literary context of less common passages or looking up biblical verses for themselves.

If this is correct, it makes little sense to suppose that Paul inserted biblical references into his letters as a means of inviting his audiences to reflect in a new way on the broader context of his references. The same is true for Hays’ contention that Paul was attempting to train his audiences to imitate his “revisionary” readings of Scripture.<sup>55</sup> Both of these theories are grounded in a view of Paul’s audiences that pays little attention to current scholarly thinking about the literary capacities of a typical first-century audience. The only time when we can be sure that Paul expected his audiences to know and recall the context of a biblical reference is when he cites only the relevant points of a story or other passage and requires the audience to fill in the gaps, as in his allusive references to the Abraham narrative in Rom 4:1-24 and Gal 3:6-9 or the Exodus story in 1 Cor 10:1-11 or 2 Cor 3:7-18. Even here we cannot be sure that Paul’s initial audiences would have perceived his interpretations as “revisionary,” since this assumes that the audiences were familiar with other readings of the text before they encountered Paul’s version. For many of them, Paul’s interpretation might not have differed substantially from what they had already learned in Christian circles.

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<sup>54</sup>Joanna Dewey reaches the same conclusion in “Textuality,” 47-54. For more on the subject, see Pieter J. J. Botha, “Greco-Roman Literacy” (note 38) and “The Verbal Art of the Pauline Letters: Rhetoric, Performance and Practice,” in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (JSNTSup 90; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 409-28.

<sup>55</sup> It is interesting to note that these claims about Paul attempting to influence his audiences to read the text of Scripture in a new way are largely absent from Hays’ earlier essays that were recently republished in Hays, *Conversion of the Imagination* (see note 1). The sole exception is the first essay in the volume, “The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians” (1-24), which not surprisingly was the last to be written.

These observations about Paul's audiences in no way undermine the many valuable insights that Richard Hays and his followers have put forward concerning the manner in which Paul himself read and interpreted the Jewish Scriptures. In fact, Hays' careful attention to the broader literary context of Paul's biblical references has convinced many scholars that they have underestimated the extent to which Paul's thinking was rooted in the Jewish Scriptures. Even scholars who disagree with Hays' readings of specific texts remain indebted to him for the questions that he raises and the thoughtful and elegant way in which he presents his answers. Clearly the figure of metalepsis has proved to be a useful tool in the hands of scholars who know how to wield it.

Like all tools, however, this one can be misused. It is interesting to observe that neither of the two literary critics whom Richard Hays cites as his primary theoretical influences makes the same mistake that Hays does by confusing historical and literary audiences.<sup>56</sup> In The Figure of Echo, John Hollander focuses on the activity of the literate reader who is familiar with a range of texts and thus capable of recognizing them when they reappear in a later text. No poetic trope is involved unless a reference can be recognized. As Hollander puts it, "The reader of texts, in order to overhear echoes, must have some kind of access to an earlier voice, and to its cave of resonant signification, analogous to that of the author of the later text. When such access is lost in a community of reading, what may have been an allusion may fade in prominence; and yet a scholarly recovery of the context would restore the allusion, by revealing the intent as well as by showing means."<sup>57</sup> In other words, the contemporary scholarly reader can bring the trope to life even if it would have been missed by the original audience. This is precisely what Hays is doing

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<sup>56</sup> On the influence of John Hollander and Thomas Greene on Hays' thought, see Hays, Echoes of Scripture, 14-21, 27, 173-78, and Hays, "On the Rebound," 43, 46, 59, 72, 80, 82, 95-96.

<sup>57</sup> Hollander, Figure of Echo, 65-66. The subtitle of the book ("A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After") indicates clearly that Hollander is concerned with the activities of a literate age: Hollander's discussion of the literary figure that he calls "metalepsis" must be understood against the backdrop of these ideas.

with Paul's letters—presenting a scholarly retrieval of an earlier voice that Paul might arguably have heard in Scripture. The results are invariably speculative, but no more so than for any other author.

Problems arise, however, when Hays tries to bring Paul's historical audience into the analytical picture. Hays overlooks the vast gulf that separates the cultured readers of Milton's poetry (the subject of Hollander's study) from the ancient audiences to whom Paul directed his letters. The materials that Hollander analyzes in his book were written for a literate audience that was familiar with many classic works of literature and attuned to the presence of poetic echoes and allusions. Paul's letters, by contrast, were written for a very different type of audience, one that was largely illiterate and possessed only a limited acquaintance with the text of Scripture. By ignoring this difference, Hays has constructed a model of Paul's rhetoric of Scripture that is historically invalid. What Paul offers to his audiences is not a direct encounter with the voice of Scripture but a highly selective interpretation of that voice. Not surprisingly, that voice always upholds Paul's arguments. Few of Paul's original hearers would have been in a position to differ.

In a similar way Thomas Greene, another of Hays' stated influences, seeks to uncover how literate authors of the Renaissance period engaged with earlier texts and incorporated them into their writings.<sup>58</sup> Greene's study is heavily author-centered; he has almost nothing to say about Renaissance authors using references to earlier works to influence their readers to adopt revisionary interpretations of the works that they cite. Greene does talk about authors struggling with the meaning and influence of earlier texts and rewriting them for later times, but the

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas M. Greene, Light in Troy (see note 8).

struggles that he describes take place in the creative psyche of the author.<sup>59</sup> The revisionary effects of the new literary product are apparent only to other literate people (whether ancient or modern) who are familiar with the author's literary predecessors.<sup>60</sup>

In summary, interpreters of Paul's letters can learn much from Richard Hays' thoughtful attempts to make sense of Paul's engagement with the text of Scripture, but they should be wary about imitating Hays' use of "metalepsis" as a tool for describing how ancient audiences might have interpreted Paul's biblical references. Historical studies suggest that most of the people in Paul's audiences would have been incapable of drawing the kinds of interpretive inferences that Hays and his followers believe that Paul wanted them to derive from his references. Either Paul was rhetorically inept in failing to take account of the literary capabilities of his audiences or Hays and his followers have misjudged what Paul was doing with his biblical references. We cannot have it both ways.

### **Taking the Audience Seriously**

Two brief examples will illustrate how different constructions of Paul's audience can affect the way we understand the use of Scripture in Paul's letters. One comes from a passage that is tangential to Paul's arguments (2 Cor 4:13) and the other from a passage that plays a central role in his theological reflection (Gal 3:6-14). The first reading of each passage will highlight some of the problems that might arise if the audience were to make a serious effort to

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<sup>59</sup> Greene, *Light in Troy*, 37-48. In his overview of ancient modes of literary imitation (54-80), Greene never asks how literate readers might have responded to an author's deviations from a known literary forebear.

<sup>60</sup> Unlike Hays, Greene distinguishes between allusions, i. e., "usages of earlier texts that the reader must recognize in order to read competently," and repetitions, "whose provenance may be obscure or irrelevant and matters little for the reading of the poem" (*Light in Troy*, 49). Hollander makes a similar distinction between allusion, which requires intentionality on the part of the author and a common library of texts linking author and audience, and echo, which can be present regardless of whether it is intended by the author or recognized by the original audience (*Figure of Echo*, 64-65). Both authors seem to regard allusion as a conscious rhetorical strategy and repetition/echo as a poetic trope that has no obvious rhetorical value.

recall the broader context of Paul's biblical reference, retrace his interpretation of the passage, and approve his handling of the biblical text. This is what Hays suggests that Paul expected his audiences to do. The second reading will look at the same passage through the eyes of an audience that knows only as much of the Scriptures as Paul presupposes in the letter in which the passage appears. The discussion of both passages is quite narrow, highlighting only those aspects of the passage that relate to the question at hand.<sup>61</sup> The purpose of these examples is to point out some of the difficulties that arise from a more critical application of Hays' model.

### ***2 Corinthians 4:13***

The quotation in 2 Cor 4:13 is one of the more obscure biblical references in the Pauline corpus. The quotation (together with the application that follows in vv. 13-15) occupies a fairly minor position in a lengthy chain of arguments that Paul brings forward to defend his ministry against questions that had been raised by some of the Corinthians (2:14-6:10). The function of the quotation is difficult to characterize. It does not serve as a "proof" for a specific argument; in fact, its link to the preceding verses is so loose that the audience would likely have been puzzled by its appearance.

The interpretive comments that frame the verse seem to suggest that Paul viewed the quotation (or wanted the Corinthians to view it) as a biblical warrant for his own ministry of preaching Christ despite all manner of troubles and opposition (cf. 4:1, 8-11). The quotation consists of only three words in the Greek (ἐπίστευσα, διὸ ἐλάλησα), but Paul makes the most of every syllable. Just as the Psalmist "believed" and therefore "spoke," says Paul, "So also we [i. e., Paul, using the editorial "we"] believe and therefore keep on speaking" the message about

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<sup>61</sup> Both examples are adapted from Stanley, *Arguing With Scripture*, 98-101, 121-30

Jesus' resurrection and the future resurrection of those who follow him (v. 14).<sup>62</sup> The shift from the aorist tense in the quotation to the present tense in Paul's interpretation is significant: he continues to have faith and to preach about Christ despite the troubles enumerated in vv. 8-11. Thus in the end the quotation does function somewhat like a "proof," since it serves to justify Paul's ministry as do the other arguments in this portion of his letter.

So what might the Corinthians have made of this quotation? An audience that knew the source of the reference would have been taken aback by Paul's handling of the passage. While he follows the wording of the biblical text precisely, the sense in which he uses the verse diverges so far from the original context as to raise questions about Paul's reliability as an interpreter. In the standard edition of the LXX, the verse that Paul quotes is the first verse of a new psalm (Ps 115:1) rather than the midpoint as in the Hebrew (Ps 116:10), but the issue is the same: what the Psalmist "spoke" was not "good news" as in Paul's case, but rather a word for which he was "humbled" by God.<sup>63</sup> The tone of complaint continues into the next verse, so Paul could not possibly have misunderstood the context. The problem remains even if we assume that the audience would have recognized a link between the sufferings of Paul described in 2 Cor 4:8-12 and those of the psalmist.<sup>64</sup> Apart from this broad point of contact, the context of the psalm would have offered little help in clarifying the link that Paul had in mind, so the Corinthians would have had to figure out for themselves the significance of the reference.<sup>65</sup> An audience that

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<sup>62</sup>As many commentators have noted, Paul's introductory comment, "having the same spirit of faith," constitutes an implicit claim that his experience of faith parallels that of the psalmist.

<sup>63</sup>In the Hebrew text, the second line reports what the author said in his time of trouble ("I am greatly afflicted"); in the Greek text, the quotation is replaced by a statement describing what transpired after the "speaking" ("and I was greatly humbled"). In both cases the words spoken by the psalmist are cast in a negative light.

<sup>64</sup>Several commentators have noted the references to sufferings in both passages and suggested that Paul may have had the parallel in mind, though the meaning implied by the link remains unclear: cf. Philip E. Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 146-47; Margaret Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 1.340-41.

<sup>65</sup>Most commentators seem to think that Paul simply ran across a set of words that sounded like a good "motto" for his ministry and then copied them down (or memorized them) for later use without regard for their original context.

was familiar with the psalm would likely have been disturbed by the discrepancy between the original sense of the words that Paul cites and the way in which he uses them in his argument. This in turn might have led them to question whether they could trust Paul's skills as an interpreter.

An audience that knew nothing of the source of the reference, on the other hand, would have had to infer the meaning of the quotation from the letter itself. The clearest piece of evidence appears in the introductory phrase, where Paul declares that he has "the same spirit of faith" as the psalmist, which in turn leads him to "speak" as did the psalmist. From the verses that precede the quotation, the audience could have inferred that Paul's use of the words "faith" and "believing" in v. 13 was simply another way of speaking about how he perseveres in his ministry despite obstacles.<sup>66</sup> From the ensuing verses they could have discerned that the "speaking" mentioned in v. 13 referred to Paul's ministry of preaching about Jesus and the future resurrection. With the help of these interpretive cues, they could have figured out that Paul was implicitly claiming that the example of the psalmist served as a model for his own behavior. Exactly why Paul should have chosen to quote this particular verse of Scripture would have remained unclear, but the audience could have concluded that Paul's ability to apply a biblical like this to himself reinforced the validity of his ministry.

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Jan Lambrecht exemplifies this view: "Since in the psalm the 'speaking out' addresses God it is rather unlikely that Paul, who changes that speaking into preaching to people, intends to refer to the broader context of that psalm" (*Second Corinthians* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999], 74). For an argument to the contrary, see Frances Young and David F. Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 63-69.

<sup>66</sup>This would be true even if the audience failed to understand the somewhat tortured imagery of vv. 11-12 that immediately preceded the quotation, since the idea runs throughout the passage.

***Galatians 3:6-14***

The overall argument of Gal 3:6-14 is well-known and need not detain us here. Most of the scholarly disagreements over the meaning of this passage pertain directly or indirectly to the manner in which Paul uses Scripture to support his arguments. But few scholars have asked how these arguments might have appeared to the Galatians. The answer depends on how well they knew the context of the verses to which Paul refers in this difficult passage.

An audience that knew the original context of all of Paul's quotations in Gal 3:6-14 would have found Paul's arguments from Scripture both helpful and confusing. On the one hand, Paul's references to Abraham in vv. 6-9 would have appeared both clear and convincing to an audience that knew the Abraham narrative and shared Paul's Christian presuppositions. Both of the quotations that Paul adduces (from Gen 15:6 in v. 6 and Gen 12:3 in v. 8) are central to the stories in which they appear, and both would have evoked memories of God's promises to Abraham (and thus to Israel) and Abraham's faithful response. In both cases the sense in which Paul uses the verse is consistent with the original context, though the audience would have noted that Paul has adapted the wording of the second quotation slightly to highlight the connection.<sup>67</sup> The fact that Paul uses key words from the quotation in his interpretive comments ("believe" in v. 7, "justify" (cognate to "righteousness") in v. 8, "blessed" in v. 9) would have strengthened the impression that Paul's interpretation of the Abraham story was true to the text. From these verses the audience could have drawn the conclusion that the Scriptures of Judaism supported Paul's contention that faith alone is the basis for God's acceptance of Gentiles (i. e., the Galatians).

The same cannot be said for the quotations in vv. 10-14, where the audience would have found ample reason to question the legitimacy of Paul's biblical argumentation.

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<sup>67</sup>The replacement of *πᾶσαι αἱ θυλαί* with *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* and the related omission of *τῆς γῆς* has no basis in the textual tradition of Gen 12:3. While it is possible that Paul has accidentally conflated the wording with the very similar language of Gen 18:18, it seems more likely that Paul has substituted a close synonym to make the application of the verse to "Gentiles" (*τὰ ἔθνη*) more apparent. See the discussion in Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture*, 237.

(a) In the case of v. 10 (quoting Deut 27:26), the primary problem is the apparent conflict between the wording of the quotation and Paul's assertion in the first part of the verse. Where the quotation pronounces a curse on the person who does not continually follow the requirements of Torah, Paul appears to apply the curse to those who seek to *comply* with the laws of Torah.<sup>68</sup> This blatantly contradicts the original context of Deut 27, which contains a long series of curses on individuals who violate specific provisions of Torah.<sup>69</sup> The fact that the verse fails to clearly support Paul's assertion (and could in fact be read as upholding the views of his opponents) would have raised serious questions about the validity of Paul's handling of Scripture, and perhaps of his entire argument.<sup>70</sup>

(b) A similar situation prevails in the case of the quotation in v. 11. When comparing Paul's interpretation with the original context of Hab 2:4, the audience would have discovered significant discrepancies. By dropping the word  $\mu\omicron\upsilon$  from the quotation and ignoring the first clause of the verse,<sup>71</sup> Paul has converted a statement about God's faithfulness into a proleptic

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<sup>68</sup>Martin Luther saw the problem clearly: "Now these two sentences of Paul and Moses seem clean contrary. Paul saith: Whoever shall do the works of the law, is accursed. Moses saith: Whoever shall not do the works of the law is accursed. How shall the two sayings be reconciled together? Or else (which is more) how shall the one be proved by the other?" (A Commentary On St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, ed. Philip S. Watson [London: Clarke, 1953], 244). For an extended discussion of the problem and recent attempts to resolve it, see Christopher D. Stanley, "'Under a Curse': A Fresh Reading of Gal 3.10-14," NTS 36 (1990), 481-511.

<sup>69</sup>The contradiction could be avoided if the informed audience understood the "curse" in v. 10a as a threat rather than a present reality (see Stanley, "Under a Curse," 497-501). But since most modern interpreters have overlooked this solution to the problem, we should not assume that it would have been evident to the Galatians.

<sup>70</sup>Additional questions might have arisen from the fact that Paul quotes Deut 27:26 in a form that differs greatly from the standard LXX text. While some of the deviations can probably be traced to the use of a different Vorlage, others are clearly Pauline adaptations, such as the insertion of the words, "everything that is written in the book of the law" (cf. Deut 28:58) in place of "all the words of this law" in the middle of the verse. The cumulative effect of the variations and adaptations is to dehistoricize the text by eliminating all references to the covenant ceremony in Deuteronomy. But the language of the resultant quotation is not inconsistent with the original context of Deut 27, so the audience might not have found serious reason to be concerned. For a fuller discussion of how the wording of the quotation relates to Deut 27:26, see Stanley, Paul and the Language of Scripture, 238-43.

<sup>71</sup>The LXX of Hab 2:4 diverges sharply from the MT: "If he (?) should draw back, my soul will not be pleased with him; the righteous person will live by my faith(fulness)." The subject of the initial verb is not clear from the context, since there is no masculine antecedent as would be required by the pronoun  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omega\hat{\nu}$  at the end of the clause. The sense of the verse will not allow a continuation of the implied subject  $\kappa\upsilon\hat{\rho}\iota\omicron\varsigma$  from v. 3b (cf.  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\hat{\nu}$ ). The only way to make sense of the verse is to supply an indefinite human subject (he/she), as suggested in the translation above, though this leaves the verse disconnected from the broader context. Perhaps it was this very disconnection from the context that led Paul to disregard the context when he adopted this verse as a motto for his gospel (cf. Rom 1:17). For more on the text of Hab 2:4, see Stanley, Paul and the Language of Scripture, 83-84. For the argument that Paul took the context of Habakkuk seriously, see Hays, Echoes of Scripture, 39-41; Francis Watson, Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith (London/New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 78-126.

reference to Christian faith in God. A critical reader would have noticed that neither the verse that Paul quotes nor the broader context actually supports Paul's assertion in v. 11a, since there is nothing in Hab 2:4 that reflects negatively on Torah. All that Paul's opponents needed to do to undermine his argument was to point out (as they had probably already done) that obedience to Torah was the best and only way to express one's faith toward God.

(c) As with the previous two verses, an audience that was aware of the context of Paul's quotation might well have concluded that the verse that Paul quotes in Gal 3:12 actually lends more support to the views of his opponents than to Paul's position, since Lev 18:5 says clearly that obedience to God's laws is the pathway to "life." As in v. 11, the counterargument to Paul's position is obvious: there is nothing in Lev 18 that pits faith against obedience to Torah, so the followers of Jesus should obey the laws of Torah as an expression of their faith in God. Contrary to his intentions, Paul's clumsy handling of Scripture in vv. 10-12 might actually have persuaded an audience that knew the context of his quotations to embrace the views of his opponents.

(d) The final quotation in this passage, the excerpt from Deut 21:23 in v. 13, would have added more fuel to the audience's growing distrust of Paul's biblical argumentation. A glance at the original passage would have shown them that the verse that Paul quotes here actually refers to the ancient practice of hanging the dead body of a convicted criminal on a tree for public display, not to the redeeming death of a crucified Messiah. Only by extracting the verse from its original context and revising its wording can Paul claim that it refers to the death of Jesus.<sup>72</sup> For an audience that was aware of the original context, the tendentiousness of such a reading would have been quite glaring.

Thus we see that an audience that was familiar with the original context of Paul's quotations in Gal 3:10-13 would have been led inexorably toward a point of view that was the opposite of what Paul intended. When they compared Paul's interpretive comments with the

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<sup>72</sup>Two revisions can definitely be attributed to Paul: the omission of ὑπὸ θεοῦ (clearly an embarrassment when applied to Jesus' death) and the replacement of κεκατηραμένος with ἐπικατάρατος from v. 10 (to eliminate the verbal implication that the "curse" was pronounced before the victim was "hung on a tree"). For more on the way Paul handles the wording of the quotation, see Stanley, Paul and the Language of Scripture, 245-48.

original context, such an audience would have discovered that the passages not only failed to support Paul's arguments but could in fact be understood as upholding the views of his opponents. The fact that Paul manipulated the wording of the text in several instances to create a closer fit with his argument would have merely added to the audience's suspicions. Apparently Paul did not expect that his actual addressees in Galatia would be capable of checking his references in this manner.

The experience of an audience that was unfamiliar with the context of Paul's quotations would have been quite different. The only text of Scripture that Paul clearly expects his hearers to know in Gal 3:6-14 is the story of Abraham, to which he refers several times in vv. 6-9. As we noted earlier, Paul's handling of the biblical narrative in these verses is generally consistent with the original context. As a result, the audience would probably have concluded that the text of Scripture supported Paul's position.<sup>73</sup>

When they came to the dense biblical argumentation of Gal 3:10-13, an audience that was ignorant of the original context of Paul's quotations would have had to rely on Paul's interpretive comments to form their understanding of the meaning of the verses that he cites, since he makes no obvious reference to the original context. As a result, they would have been unaware of most of the problems that arise from a comparison of Paul's quotations with their original context.

(a) The conflict between Paul's statement and the verse that he cites in v. 10 is evident even without consulting the original context. An audience that knew the verse only from Paul's letter would doubtless have found Paul's argument obscure at this point. But since they could not consult the original context for clarification, they would have had no choice but to leave the tension unresolved as they continued through the letter.

(b) The quotation from Hab 2:4 in v. 11b would probably have passed unnoticed unless the audience had encountered the same verse elsewhere, since the statement is not marked as a

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<sup>73</sup>Such an audience might not have recognized v. 6 as a quotation since the marking is ambiguous (καθώς is always followed by γέγραπται when used with quotations in Paul's letters), but this would not have seriously interfered with their understanding of the passage.

quotation. The second part of the verse is clearly meant to ground the assertion in the first part, but Paul offers no indication that he is quoting a verse of Scripture here instead of issuing his own pronouncement on the subject. The relation of v. 11 to v. 10 is unclear, but a sympathetic audience would have found nothing here to hinder them from embracing Paul's argument.<sup>74</sup>

(c) The quotation from Lev 18:5 in v. 12b is also unmarked, but the fact that the second clause stands in syntactical tension with the first part of the verse (i. e., the pronouns have no antecedents) would have signified that a quotation was present. The meaning of the quotation might have seemed somewhat obscure at first due to the dangling pronouns, but in the wake of v. 10 the audience could probably have figured out that the word "them" here referred to the precepts of Torah and that v. 12a meant to contrast the "doing" of Torah with the way of (Christian) faith. Since they would have been unaware of Paul's questionable application of the verse from Leviticus, their questions would have centered on the validity of Paul's assertion in the first part of the verse, not on the quotation. The fact that Paul could quote a verse of Scripture to reinforce his point may have helped to commend his argument to such an audience, though even they might have wondered if the quotation actually upheld Paul's assertion in the first part of the verse.<sup>75</sup>

(d) As with the other verses in this section, the audience that was ignorant of the context of Paul's quotations would have had no reason to question his treatment of Deut 21:23. Their

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<sup>74</sup> The first part of v. 11 ("that no one is justified before God by Torah") appears on the surface to be a blatant contradiction of the quotation in v. 10. But since audiences normally assume that an author's argument is coherent until proven otherwise, a possible solution would be to take v. 11a as a restriction of v. 10b, implying that no one actually lives up to the requirement of Deut 27:26. Of course, Paul does not actually say this, and many scholars have argued that the thought is foreign to Paul (see the discussion in Stanley, "Under a Curse," 482-83). But it is easy to see how the language of the passage might lead one to that (possibly incorrect) conclusion. The problem arises from the terseness of Paul's language in vv. 10-12, which requires the audience to figure out the inner links of the argument for themselves. This includes both the transitions between the verses and the relation between Paul's assertions and the verses that he cites to support them.

<sup>75</sup> Any audience could have asked whether the emphasis on "doing" the Torah necessarily implied a lack of concern for "faith." The inconsistency between "faith" and "doing" is simply taken for granted in these verses, not argued. In fact, Paul's opponents could have used the quotations in vv. 11-12 to argue for the opposite position (the priority of Torah over faith) by reversing the quotations and changing a few of the words in the framing verses. Doing this yields the following (non-Pauline) argument: "It is obvious that no one is justified by God through faith, because (Scripture says,) 'The one who does these things will live by them.' But the righteousness that comes through Torah (nonetheless) requires faith, since (it says), 'The righteous person will live by faith.'"

only cue to the meaning of the verse would have come from Paul's framing comments, where the verse is applied to the death of Jesus on the cross. The logic of the primary argument would still have been obscure, since Paul simply assumes that the audience can figure out how Jesus being "cursed" on the cross could have redeemed others from the "curse of the law" (cf. v. 10).<sup>76</sup> But the meaning of the quotation (and its application to Jesus) would have been clear as long as the audience accepted the implied equivalence between crucifixion and being "hanged on a tree." Here again the fact that Paul could appeal to the authoritative text of Scripture in support of his argument would have commended his position to the audience.

On the whole, then, an audience that was unaware of the context of Paul's quotations would have found little cause for concern and ample reason to be persuaded by Paul's arguments from Scripture in Gal 3:6-14. Of course, the argument that the quotations were meant to support is by no means clear, and the audience might not have been willing to grant the validity of all of Paul's assertions. But with the possible exception of v. 10, nothing in the biblical quotations would have detracted from the argument. The fact that Paul could quote Scripture in his favor might even have inclined the audience to give him the benefit of the doubt elsewhere.

In summary, it seems clear that the response of the Galatians to Paul's arguments in Gal 3:6-14 would have been heavily conditioned by their prior knowledge of the biblical text. Those with an extensive knowledge of Scripture would have found Paul's quotations troubling to say the least, and some might even have concluded that the contexts of Paul's quotations offered more support for the views of Paul's opponents than for Paul. By contrast, those who knew less about the context of Paul's quotations could have avoided these problems. While we must be careful about generalizing from such limited evidence, the reactions that we have posited for each of these audiences lends prima facie support to the thesis that Paul constructed his biblical arguments for an "implied audience" that was incapable of consulting the original context of most of his biblical references.

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<sup>76</sup>Perhaps he had used similar language when he was with them (cf. 3:1), so that he had reason to think that they would be able to grasp his point.

