

Writing “In the image” of Scripture:
The Form and Function of References to Scripture in Colossians
Jerry L. Sumney
Lexington Theological Seminary

Discussion of Paul’s use of Scripture has grown exponentially since the publication of Richard Hays’ *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* twenty years ago. His work has stimulated important discussions of methods for identifying and interpreting allusions, as well of analyses of Paul’s hermeneutic. Even though I will treat Colossians as a pseudonymous work, the recent work on Paul demands that one stake out some initial positions about identifying allusions and their use in the broader Greco-Roman culture.

A number of interpreters have set out criteria for identifying allusions. Some focus on the author’s intent, others on whether the readers would have recognized the allusions. This study will focus on the author’s intent, while crediting the author with enough rhetorical acumen to use citations in ways that would effectively advance the letter’s argument. Christopher Beetham is among the most recent interpreters to set out criteria for identifying allusions and distinguishing them from echoes and parallels. He argues that a passage may be identified as an allusion only if it meets four criteria: 1) it is an intentional citation, 2) it has a single identifiable source, 3) it is distinctive enough in its new context that it is recognizable to alert readers (though audience recognition is not necessary for a reference to be an allusion), and 4) that the author expects the readers to know the original context of the originating text.¹ His criteria for an echo are: 1) it may be conscious or unconscious on the part of the author, 2) it must have a single identifiable source, 3) the author does not intend to direct the audience to the originating text, and 4) its effectiveness is not determined by whether the precursor was understood by the readers.

Such stringent criteria offer helpful standards, but some of these seem to assume things about both the author and the readers that are questionable, even though fairly commonly assumed. For that reason, I will examine some of these criteria as a starting point for discussing some common assumptions. The first concerns the thing to which an allusion alludes. Stanley Porter defines an allusion as a “nonformal invocation by an author of a text (or person, event, etc.) that the author could reasonably have been expected to know.”² This definition broadens the category of allusion by including not just specific texts, but also persons and events. With this definition, the author does not need to have a specific text in mind, only the characteristic ideas associated with a particular person or event. Studies of the use of Homer in a variety of types of literature suggest that they employed allusions in this broader way. For example, Plato sometimes alludes to a particular character from Homer without seeming to have a particular text in mind.³ Such allusions depend on the audience to recognize particular characteristics of that person, but not that they have a specific text in mind. Similarly, classical playwrights borrow Homeric allusions and similes without alluding to the specific texts in which they appear.⁴ This breadth of definition for an allusion, however, does make identifying distinctions between allusions and echoes more difficult, as Porter’s definition of an echo shows.⁵ Still, New Testament authors who allude to events such as the exodus do not need to have a specific text in mind to invoke themes associated with the originating text(s) and events.

Beetham’s criteria also embody the commonly held assumption that allusions should manifest resonance with what critical scholarship calls the original context.⁶ Given the methods employed by ancient authors, this seems questionable. The interpretive methods of the ancient

world often seem unconcerned about such an original context. As others (as early as W. D. Davies) have noted, the more important context is the interpretive use of a text (or event or person) in the environment of its use.⁷ Again, this is evident in both Judaism and the broader Greco-Roman environment. It is often the story as it is used in a tradition that determines the meaning of the allusion in the new text.⁸ Thus, while arguments may be built on interpretations that ground themselves in the originating texts,⁹ allusions serve a broader range of purposes within arguments than providing a specific original textual basis for a given point.¹⁰

Some who acknowledge the importance of the use of a text, event, or person in the first century environment spend a significant amount of study on the original context of a passage in the Hebrew Bible.¹¹ Once we move beyond Beetham's discussion of criteria for identifying allusions, he actually spends more time than most interpreters locating an identified allusion in its first-century environment. The concern to connect the New Testament usage of the Hebrew Bible with its historical-critical meaning often seems motivated by a desire to say that the New Testament author's usage is legitimate (by our standards).¹² But this may keep us from understanding an allusion's function in a New Testament text.

This does not mean that the use of a passage in the tradition has nothing to do with the original context of the cited material. Allusive uses of texts often derive their significance from some attachment to the meaning found in the originating context. This is true for allusions to Homer (e.g., what characteristics a figure is known for in the *Iliad*)¹³ even as it is of Israel's Scriptures in second-temple Judaism. Such connections to the originating texts, however, may be only thematic or general without the precision of critical exegesis.

Drawing on Porter, Stanley, and Beetham, this study will identify as an allusion a passage that: 1) is an intentional indirect reference, 2) to an identifiable source within the Israel's Scriptures (whether a specific text or a person, event, etc.), and that 3) intends to be recognized by the reader—though this may only be true for those Stanley calls informed readers and competent readers.¹⁴ Less direct allusive material we will call echoes. Even though these are yet less direct references to a text, event, person, etc., recognition of them may enrich the meaning for the reader. Our author may live in the language of the text to such an extent that echoes are a part of his speech. In such cases, the echo may tell us more about the author than it does the argument he is making at that moment.¹⁵ At the same time, such less direct references will probably be less important to the point the author is making. Stintson's study of Greek tragedy finds that less explicit allusions are also less important for the point an author is making. When an allusion is important to the plot, the author makes it more explicit and provides the necessary information so that those who would not recognize the allusion do not miss the point.¹⁶ A careful writer of other genres will probably take similar precautions.¹⁷

Allusions and Echoes in Colossians

Colossians 1:6, 10—"bearing fruit and growing"

The phrase "bearing fruit and growing" appears twice within the opening paragraphs of Colossians' thanksgiving. A number of interpreters hear echoes of Gen 1:22, 28 in this expression.¹⁸ In those verses the sea creatures and birds in v. 22 and humans in v. 28 are commanded to "grow (multiply) and fill" the earth. The same expression appears in Gen 9:1 and 7 after the flood and it appears in the singular in Gen 35:11 where God changes Jacob's name to Israel. The verbs *αὐξάνω* and *πληθύνω* also appear together in Gen 47:27; Jer 3:16 and 23:3.¹⁹ The Jeremiah texts promise that after the exile the people will "grow (multiply) and fill" the land. The combination of multiplying and filling does seem to have some currency in Genesis

and Jeremiah, but it does not appear in other writings within the LXX. It is never, however, used metaphorically in these books, but only for the literal increase of animals or humans. Although there are later texts that use these verbs within the same sentence (e.g., 1 En 5:10—cited by Beetham as an example of a metaphoric use), the same phrase does not appear (but perhaps the vocabulary echoes the earlier expression).

Neither does the phrase in the LXX appear in Colossians; rather the letter speaks of “bearing fruit and growing.” Indeed, these two verbs in Colossians are the only places in biblical Greek that these verbs appear together. However, there is a close parallel in Mk 4:8 where the good seed “brings up fruit and grows” (the same order as in Colossians). In Col 1:6 it is the gospel that is bearing fruit and growing, just as it is the word that is growing in Mark’s parable. Further, Acts 6:7 and 12:24 contain the words “grew and filled,” a phrase that does repeat the language of Genesis and Jeremiah. Acts later says that the “word” “grows and strengthens” in 19:20. Acts also has Stephen allude to Gen 47:27 (“grow and fill”) in his speech.

The combination of these metaphorical uses of growing in connection with the gospel message and the language of bearing fruit in Mark (and elsewhere in the Gospels’ traditions)²⁰ suggest that if the author of Colossians is alluding to Scripture with the phrase “bearing fruit and growing,”²¹ it is Scripture that has been mediated to him through the church’s tradition.²² The citation does not further the argument significantly. Recognizing an allusion to a tradition about the word growing and filling would strengthen the claim about the gospel’s growth in 1:6. In 1:10, where attention has turned to the growth of the Colossians themselves, there is more resonance with the imperatival nature of the similar statement in most Genesis passages and with the demands in the evangelists’ traditions that Jesus’ followers bear fruit.²³ (Such imagery also appears in the undisputed Paulines—Gal 5:22; Phil 1:11.)

This passage, then, tells us little about the way the author of Colossians uses Scripture. If he is echoing the Genesis passage(s) or Jeremiah (which itself seems to be alluding to Gen 1), his oblique reference functions as we suggested for distant echoes; since the reader²⁴ understands the point without knowing the originating text or, perhaps here, the tradition, the author does not need to devise ways to be certain the readers catch the resonance. Still, if they do hear an echo of the church’s tradition, their understanding would be enriched by the connections to the broader use of the metaphor’s association with the growth and spread of the gospel and so reinforce the point the author is making about the way God is acting through the gospel in 1:6. Alternatively, they may hear an echo of the image’s imperatival uses when they read 1:10, which calls them to grow in response to the gospel.²⁵

Colossians 1:9—“spiritual wisdom and understanding”

The author of Colossians opens the second paragraph of his thanksgiving/prayer for the recipients with a request that they be filled with knowledge of God’s will “with all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” This appeal alludes to Isa 11:2 and echoes Isa 11:9. Colossians uses the same terms for wisdom and knowledge as Isa 11:2, and Colossians’ use of “spiritual” draws on the same Isaiah verse which speaks of the future Davidic ruler having a spirit of wisdom and knowledge. Given this connection with Isaiah 11, it seems probable that the verse also echoes Isa 11:9, which speaks of this figure being “filled” with knowledge of God. While a number of passages speak of “wisdom and understanding,”²⁶ no others have as large a cluster of words and ideas as this Isaiah passage.

The promise of a ruler with knowledge and wisdom that is present in Isaiah 11 appears in various kinds of second-temple texts that bear the expectation that God’s messiah will have those

characteristics (1 En 49:3-4; Pss. Sol 17:35-43; T. Levi 18:5, 7; 1 QS28b).²⁷ The church's understanding of Christ would certainly incline it to identify this figure from Isaiah with Jesus (Mt 12:21 includes a fairly direct citation of Isa 11:10²⁸). Thus, the writer and perhaps the broader church would know aspects of Isaiah 11 as descriptions of Christ.

The request of Col 1:9, however, asks God to give these things to the readers. This may be a new use of the language of Isaiah, intended to jar the readers because it is not simply a statement about Christ. Allusions often function to "build a shock of recognition at the transformation" in meaning that the new use conveys.²⁹ Here the disjuncture involves attributing to all members of the church the characteristics expected in the eschatological messianic figure. Such a request could serve to reassure the readers of their status among the blessed without taking up the observances advocated by the teachers Colossians opposes.

As we saw with the previous echo, readers do not need to recognize the citation in order to get the primary point—namely, they have access to "all spiritual wisdom and understanding" without adopting the other teaching. If the readers do recognize the allusion, it deepens their understanding of the point by clearly placing them in the eschatological, messianic time and perhaps identifying them with the messiah and the blessings he possesses.

Since the author does not make an effort to help the readers identify an allusion here, he probably thinks they do not need to recognize it to understand his point. Furthermore, he does not use the allusion to establish a directly disputed point, only to open a way for readers to understand themselves and the gifts available to them. The vocabulary of Scripture may add weight to the request and to their vision of themselves, but it does not function directly as an authority here. Again, it is difficult to know whether the author knows this passage primarily from reading Isaiah or whether it comes to him principally through the church's use of the passage. Since the author is Jewish and since he alludes to language from Isaiah 11 that no other New Testament author cites, he probably knows this text directly. We cannot tell whether he knows this chapter of the prophet from a collection of texts (e.g., a testimonium) or from the full text of Isaiah.

Colossians 1:12-14—exodus motif ("inheritance," "rescued," "redemption")

As 1:12-14 introduces the liturgical material of 1:15-20, it draws on a number of themes associated with the exodus in biblical texts and later tradition. In addition, it employs some preformed confessional material.³⁰ Among the elements of these verses that echo exodus motifs are the metaphors for salvation: "share of the inheritance," "rescued," and "redemption." The combination of these images seems to allude to Ex 6:6-8 primarily, but also to echo other texts that speak of God's acts in the exodus narrative and of the establishment of David's house. The echo of 2 Sam 7:12-14, 18, where God promises to be a father to David's descendants and David declares that his house is not worthy of this honor, is particularly strong.

In Col 1:12 the author assures the recipients that they have been qualified to receive "the share of the inheritance of the saints in light." The terms used in this phrase echo language used to describe the portion of the land that the Israelites would receive in Canaan. *Μερίς* and *κληρος*, along with *κληρονόμος*, are used in Israel's Scriptures to describe their possessing of the land. Both *μερίς* and *κληρος* are rare in the New Testament (*κληρος* appears 10 times, 4 of which are quotations or clear allusions to Ps 22:19, two of which speak of casting lots, and none of them are in the Pauline corpus; *μερίς* appears only four other times, with only one of those occurrences is in the Pauline corpus [1 Cor 6:15]). The rarity of the terms increases the likelihood that they are drawn from earlier texts or traditions. The only places these two terms

appear together in the LXX are in passages that speak of the Levites not receiving a “share and inheritance” in the land (Num 18:20-21; Deut 10:9; 12:12; 14:27; 18:1; Josh 14:2-4; 18:6-7). Thus, this formulation of what God has done for believers in Christ draws its language from this tradition, but makes a very different claim—namely, that believers *do* receive the inheritance.³¹ Still this association with taking possession of the land ties this expression to the exodus motif.

Various Jewish texts draw on the metaphor of inheritance to speak of the blessings of the eschatological time.³² So this metaphor was in current usage for the church or this author to adapt.

Colossians does not seem to draw this expression directly from the biblical text; rather, it has been mediated to this author through the church’s tradition. The uncommon reference to God as father in the Pauline texts combined with these unusual terms suggests that the author is relying on traditional formulations here.³³ This sense is strengthened by the many parallels between this passage and Acts 26:18, a passage in which Luke has Paul describe his own conversion. Among those parallels is use of the metaphor of inheritance (κληρος) for salvation. This increases the possibility that the readers would recognize that the writer has incorporated material from the tradition that adds weight to his assertion.

Colossians 1:13-14 more certainly incorporates confessional material.³⁴ This tradition alludes to Ex 6:6-8, which was also echoed in the inheritance language used in Col 1:12.³⁵ In Exodus 6, God tells the Israelites that he is rescuing them, ransoming them, and giving them a new land. The exodus is clearly one of the strains of Israel’s story that Paul expected his churches to know (see e.g., 1 Cor 10:1-13). Thus, we can expect readers in a Pauline church to recognize that elements of these images of salvation are derived from that narrative. Exodus 6:6-8, with its concentration of metaphors, may be one of the texts with which Pauline churches would be familiar.

The echo of Exodus 6, however, a part of the traditional formulation that Colossians cites more directly. While the audience hears resonances with God’s acts in the exodus, this language also counters claims Rome makes for itself. Thus, they probably heard multiple layers of reverberations in this allusion to the tradition. The origin of these metaphors is the exodus narrative and perhaps Ex 6:6-8, but the meanings have expanded in Colossians to include both earthly and heavenly beings and cosmic rescue and transfer into an eschatological realm. The connections are clear, so are the expansions.

There may also be an echo of 2 Sam 7:12-14, 18 here in the reference to God’s “beloved son.” In the Samuel passage, God promises to be the father of David’s descendants and says they will be his sons. David’s response is to ask why God has loved him so much.

The expression “beloved son” appears nowhere else in the Pauline corpus, but this formulation in Colossians follows closely the use of this title in the announcements at Jesus’ baptism as recorded in the Synoptics. So this expression within the confessional material probably draws on a widely known church tradition about Jesus’ identity, perhaps already associated with his baptism. Either the church or the author of Colossians would find such interpretations ready to hand because this promise to David’s descendants had already been given a messianic meaning in second-temple Judaism. Perhaps this begins with Neh 13:26, which recalls the Samuel text. This interpretation also appears in Ps of Sol 17 and at Qumran in 4QFlor 1, 1-12 and 4Q252 5, 1-4.³⁶ Even without those assurances from prior texts, we would expect the church to draw on 2 Samuel 7 once it had interpreted Jesus as a reigning messianic figure (see below the use of Ps 110 in the church’s tradition as evidence that they assigned Jesus this identity at an early time). For Gentile readers who did not have a developed sense of

messianic expectation, it would probably be more meaningful for them to hear resonance with a traditional ecclesial formulation than to hear it as a fulfillment of the hope for a Davidic messianic figure.

If most of the imagery and vocabulary of Col 1:12-14 appear as citations of pre-formed confessional material, we learn nothing about the way the author of Colossians reads or uses Scripture in his argument. We do see that he values and expects his audience to value the traditions of the church. He expects these citations to bolster his argument as he reminds the audience of things they have confessed about Christ and the blessings they have received through him.

Colossians 1:15-20

The pre-formed liturgical material Colossians inserts at 1:15-20 contains a number of allusions to and echoes of Israel's Scriptures. These include the references to the "image of God" (Gen 1:26, 28), the firstborn (Ps 89:27 [88:28 LXX]; Ex 4:22-23), Christ as the beginning and a participant in creation (Prov. 8:22-31), and God's indwelling in Christ (Ps 68:16 [67:17 LXX]). These various citations function in different ways within the passage.

The allusions to Proverbs 8 and the development of the wisdom tradition adopted in this liturgy represent a use of scripture as a foundation on which believers constructed new understandings of Jesus.³⁷ Proverbs has wisdom say that God created her at the beginning (ἀρχῇ; v. 22) before anything else was created, then she participates with God in the work of creation (vv. 27-28). As Wisdom of Solomon develops this idea, she is the image (εἰκὼν) of God's goodness (7:26). Dunn argues that the development of the idea of wisdom as the image of God bridges the gap between God and the visible world.³⁸ The person or community who composed the liturgy that Colossians incorporates shifts such ideas to Christ and expands the role of Christ beyond what the wisdom tradition said about hypostasized Wisdom. Most notably, "all things" were not only made through and exist in Christ, but also exist "for him" (vv. 16-17). Thus, the author of this liturgical tradition uses Scripture, as interpreted in a community with which he was conversant, as a starting point for reflection about the nature and work of Christ.³⁹ The second strophe adds an eschatological dimension to this reflection.

This liturgy draws on multiple passages of Scripture. The reference to Christ as the "image of God" in v. 15 also alludes, perhaps second-handedly (and so should be classified as an echo), to the language of Gen 1:26-28,⁴⁰ even as it also adapts such terminology from what the wisdom tradition claimed for Wisdom.⁴¹ This language probably does not reflect a "new Adam" Christology, since we find no clear references to such a theology in the liturgy. Following Burney, N. T. Wright argues that this poetic material evokes a tradition in which Gen 1:1 and Prov 8:22 are mutually explanatory. Whether or not Burney's more detailed explication of the passage is correct, the liturgy's author intends to apply to Jesus all that might be said about Wisdom while glancing at interpretations of the Genesis creation narratives.⁴² The context of creation and the similarity of language (including the repetitions of "all" which are also found in Gen 1:28-31) support this reading. While the text draws on the language of the Genesis creation narrative (perhaps as used in the Wisdom tradition), there is no clear theological development from Genesis in this text. At the same time, the liturgy does seem to depend on the wisdom tradition's prior interpretation of "image" to add significance to its initial assertion.

Calling Christ "firstborn" draws on both broad cultural understandings of this status and Jewish understandings of the place of Israel and Israel's king. As noted in connection with Col 1:12-14, the church's tradition interpreted Christ through the Davidic promises found in 2 Sam

7:12-14, 18 in which God promises to be a father to David's descendants. The beginning of each strophe of Colossian's liturgy presses the image further by identifying Christ as God's "firstborn,"⁴³ the firstborn of creation in v. 15 and the firstborn of the church (the new creation) in v. 18.⁴⁴

"Firstborn" conveys both priority and status, which were combined in general cultural use. Both ideas are also important in both strophes of the Colossian liturgy. Verses 15-16 assert Christ's superior status in relation to all of creation by asserting his priority—he was in existence before all other beings who might offer something to or make threats against church members. If this passage draws, in part, from Ex 4:22-23 (where Israel is named God's firstborn) the emphasis is on status not priority, but the status of Christ depends on his prior existence that permits him to participate in the creation of all other beings. There is no reason to suspect that the author of the liturgy has in view questions about whether Christ was a created or eternal being—his point requires only temporal priority.

Colossians 1:18 clearly relates chronological priority and superior status, as the *ἴνα* clause indicates: Christ is the "firstborn from the dead *so that* he might have preeminence in all things." This statement (whether inserted by the author of Colossians or not) assigns Christ the highest position in the church by identifying him as the one through whom God initiated the eschatological time by raising him from the dead. As the first to experience resurrection, Christ has superior status in relation to everyone within the church (that is, those who will experience resurrection), just as priority in (or to) creation positioned him above all created beings.

It seems probable that the liturgy's identification of Christ as firstborn alludes to uses of Ps 89:27 [88:28 LXX], a psalm that celebrates the covenant with David and his descendants. This psalm has God call David's descendant God's firstborn to assign him the rank of highest king on earth. The liturgist of Colossians accepted the church's interpretation of Christ as the awaited descendant of David who now has a cosmic role (see e.g., Acts 2:25-36, esp. v. 30 combined with the many places that cite Ps 110:1 to assert Christ's exaltation) and as the firstborn from the dead (e.g., Rom 8:29). Only the cosmic aspect of this status (not the Davidic or national meaning) plays a role here. Such interpretations of Christ depend on Ps 89 (and 110), but it is difficult for us to determine whether the writer of this liturgy knows those passages directly from Scripture or primarily through their uses within the church. Still, this does seem to be a place where Scripture has served as a basis for developing the church's understanding of Christ.

A final echo of Scripture appears in v. 19, where the liturgist asserts that "all the fullness was pleased to dwell in him." Psalm 68:16 (67:17 LXX) speaks of God being pleased to live in Mt. Zion.⁴⁵ The Pauline school knows this psalm, as we see by its use in Eph 4:8.⁴⁶ The liturgy in Colossians transfers the psalm's declaration about a place to a person. Beyond this psalm, there are a number of passages that speak of God dwelling in Jerusalem or the temple, enough that we may see it as a recognizable theme.⁴⁷ The combination of the presence of *εὐδοκέω* with *κατοικέω* makes Ps 68 the more likely immediate source of the theme.

The liturgy adds "all the fullness"⁴⁸ to the psalm's declaration about Jerusalem as it shifts its reference to Christ. This is the earliest extant instance of the church using this language to claim that all of God's fullness was present in Christ.⁴⁹ It is not surprising to see such affirmations arising in liturgical contexts rather than in theological argumentation. The early church's experience of God through Christ in worship contexts seems to be the origin of some of its exalted claims about Christ. If this is the case here, the Colossians liturgy is an example of the ways the church developed their ideas about Christ by combining their reading of Scripture

and their corporate experience of the presence of God in worship. In this case, their worship experience seems to shape their reading of Scripture more than the “original context” of the passage.

If it is correct that Col 1:15-20 is a preformed piece (even with some editorial insertions), its use of Scripture tells us nothing about how the author of Colossians uses Israel’s Scripture. It does indicate that the church drew on Scripture through interpretive traditions present within Judaism; that is, it did less consultation of the context of the originating texts and relied more on the ways those texts were mediated through prior and contemporaneous readings. We see this particularly in the liturgy’s use of the wisdom tradition. The other reading matrix that seems prominent here is that of the church’s worship experience. The use of Ps 68 and the wider theme present there suggests that the words of Scripture found new meanings in such settings, such that the newly assigned meaning becomes more important than the meanings evoked by the text’s original context.⁵⁰ The function citations have in the persuasiveness of the liturgy before its incorporation into Colossians remains unclear. The church’s prior use of the texts seems more significant than the power these citations wield as proofs from Scripture. Yet, the allusive use of the language of Scripture probably added weight to the assertions as they were first recited. It may be, however, that once the liturgy became known, the use of its language it carried more persuasive weight than the perhaps more distant echo of Scripture.

Colossians 2:11—“Circumcision not done with hands”

In Col 2:11-12, the writer asserts that at baptism believers receive a “circumcision not done with hands.” In some ways this is a difficult interpretation of baptism because gentiles generally did not see circumcision as a good thing.⁵¹ Use of this metaphor and the shift in pronouns in the middle of v. 13 (from second person plural to first person plural) suggests that the author of Colossians was Jewish, while the recipients of the letter were not.

This metaphor derives from figurative uses of circumcision in two prophets and Deuteronomy. Jeremiah 4:4 and Deuteronomy 10:16 call on the people to circumcise their hearts so they can serve God properly. Colossians 2:11 parallels Ezekiel 44:7, 9 by speaking of those who are uncircumcised of flesh and heart. Deuteronomy 30:6 is the only passage in the Hebrew Bible that speaks of God circumcising the hearts of the people, something God will do after the exile.⁵² Because only this text has God as the one acting, Beetham identifies Deut 30:6 as the specific text to which Col 2:11 alludes.⁵³ However, to make this argument he must assume that the author of Colossians (whom he identifies as Paul) knows the Hebrew text of this passage and makes his own translation because the LXX changes the terminology so that it says God will “purify” rather than circumcise their hearts. The figurative use of circumcision to speak of purifying one’s life was current in the first century among at least some Jews, as its use at Qumran indicates (1QS 5.5). Furthermore, Phil 3:3, along with Rom 2:28-29 and 2 Cor 3:3,⁵⁴ suggest that using circumcision in a metaphorical sense was known within the Pauline communities.⁵⁵

Given the few precise wording parallels (which consist only in that all use a form of περιτέμνω or περιτομή) with a specific text it seems best to see Col 2:11 as an allusion to the tradition of using circumcision as a metaphor rather than to a specific text. Beyond the small number of vocabulary parallels, none of the earlier texts (or indeed any other text in the whole LXX) use ἀχειροποίητος.⁵⁶

Knowledge of the meaning of circumcision indicates that the readers possess at least some broad understanding of Jewish religious practices and that those practices have their roots

in the Scriptural stories. Perhaps these include the stories of Abraham and the exodus. They perhaps also know of the metaphorical use of this ritual in the texts. Yet, if they do not know the specifics of the textual use of the image, they will miss little of the meaning conveyed in Colossians. They do need to understand circumcision as an initiatory rite and as related to covenant membership. The metaphoric use of circumcision in Deuteronomy, Qumran, and Philippians speak of an eschatological reality. Since the circumcision of the Colossians is performed by God, it is an eschatological act that signals their admission into the covenant community.

Colossians 2:13—“in the uncircumcision of your flesh”

Colossians 2:13 continues the metaphorical use of circumcision that began in 2:11. Now the writer comments that the Gentile readers were “dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision [or: foreskin] of your flesh.” This expression parallels the reference to those uncircumcised in flesh and heart in Ezek 44:7, 9. The closer word parallel comes from the expression “flesh of foreskin” found in the LXX in Gen 17:11, 14, 24, 25; Lev 12:3; and Judith 14:10. The expression seems to have the narrative of Abraham’s circumcision in mind since the phrase appears most often in that text, which recounts the initiation of the rite as a symbol of covenant membership, and so of a special relationship with God. Similarly, Colossians uses the phrase in connection with the transition of the readers from outsiders to being those forgiven and granted a relationship with God. Colossians, however, reverses the order of the wording so that it speaks of the “foreskin of the flesh” rather than the “flesh of the foreskin” as in the LXX passages.⁵⁷

Cannon identifies Col 2:13 as a part of a section composed of a collection of baptismal confessions.⁵⁸ We noted in connection with Col 2:11 that the metaphor of circumcision of the heart was used in some circles within Judaism and was already a part of the Pauline tradition. Other Christian writers as early as Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 4.16.1) and Tertullian (*Adv. Iud.* 3) connect Genesis 17 and spiritual circumcision, so it could well be a part of the church’s confessional traditions at a very early stage.⁵⁹ If this statement does derive from traditional material (whether Christian or Jewish), Colossians’ use of the expression may rely on those traditions rather than on a direct appropriation of the Genesis text.

The readers do not need to recognize an allusion to Genesis 17 to understand fully the point of the statement in Colossians. They are certainly aware of the distinction between Jews and Gentiles that circumcision marks and they recognize that this difference is theologically important. The central point of the opening clause of v. 13 is to identify the status of the non-Jewish readers prior to their incorporation into Christ; they were dead in sin and this was manifested in their uncircumcision, the sign that they were outside of God’s covenant.

Again, this use of Scripture by the author shows us little about his method of appropriating it. If he is drawing on the Genesis text directly, he alludes to a memorable phrase in a well-known story. Since the originating text told of the initiation of the symbol of the covenant, it is well suited to his comparison with baptism as the rite that brings believers forgiveness and relationship with God. But only this general significance of the story functions within the argument of Colossians. Yet its point is clear without recognizing the allusion; the metaphor points to a crucial change.

If this reference to Genesis 17 is mediated to the author of Colossians through the church’s traditions, as seems somewhat probable, it tells us nothing about the way he appropriates Scripture because this usage was determined before he adapted the tradition for his argument. In this case, the reference is more of an echo of the originating text than it is an

intentional allusion. Still, combined with the reference to circumcision in Col 2:11, it seems that the writer intentionally cites baptismal traditions and assumes his readers will recognize and accept them as good evidence for the points he is making. The incorporation of this symbol into baptismal traditions indicates that the framers of those traditions thought the metaphor conveyed important ideas. The persistence of the tradition and its presence in Colossians suggest that early Gentile Christ-confessors were taught the meaning of circumcision and at least the broadest outline of the Abraham narrative. This is the case whether or not the audience of Colossians recognized a citation of Scripture.

Colossians 2:16—“festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths”

The author of Colossians characterizes the demands of the teachers he opposes with a list that seems to allude to Scripture; he says they require observance of “festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths.” This summary of Jewish calendrical celebrations appears in Hos 2:13 (LXX) and Ezek 45:17. The same three festal occasions serve as a summary, though in reversed order, in 1 Chron 23:31; 2 Chron 2:3 (LXX); and 31:3.⁶⁰ In their original contexts, these lists serve very different purposes. In Hosea the summary lists the things God will not accept because of the people’s worship of Baal, but in Ezekiel it sets out the things expected when the temple is restored after the exile. The uses of the summary in Chronicles simply list expectations about celebrations at the temple.⁶¹ Still, in all these places, the three types of observances serve as an inclusive summary for holy days within Judaism. The same list appears in 1QM 2:4 (in the order of Hosea, Ezekiel, and Colossians), where it summarizes observances at which the community’s leaders will preside. At a later time, Justin Martyr (*Dial* 8.4) has the same three elements as a summary of Jewish observances. Thus, this is a known way to refer to Jewish festal observances as a whole.

Colossians also uses this list as a summary of Jewish observances, but makes no further use of it. It seems unlikely that the author is unaware that the list functions as a summary elsewhere. Given that he wants his audience to reject observance of these festivals, he does not have the Ezekiel passage in mind. Though Hosea has God reject these observances, the prophet issues no call for the people to discontinue them. Thus, Colossians does not have the context of a particular text in view, even as he alludes to a Scriptural summary of Jewish observances.⁶² If he is citing Scripture, we see nothing of his interpretive method beyond that he draws on its language, perhaps to give a more authoritative tone to his assertion. Given this phrase’s general usage, however, it remains unclear whether the author knows the summary from a broader tradition of usage or from the biblical texts. The former seems more likely, without that implying that he does not know that it has a biblical formulation.

If the audience recognizes this allusion, it is probably because they know it as a summary of observances rather than knowing it from a particular biblical text.⁶³ Even if they know it from a text, this adds little to its meaning as a summary, perhaps only adding a sense of authoritativeness to the assertion which simply repeats the phrase without giving it any interpretation.

Colossians 2:22—“human commands and teachings”

The second evaluation of the opponents’ regulations that Colossians gives in 2:22 alludes to Isa 29:13 to charge that they have their origin in “human commands and teachings,” rather than in divine commands. The terms ἑντολὰς and διδασκαλίᾳ each appear only four times in the LXX,⁶⁴ and they appear together only in Isa 29:13. Thus the reference to this Isaiah passage

seems certain and intentional. Beyond this similar wording, the Jesus tradition explicitly and more extensively quotes this Isaiah passage to accuse the Pharisees of hypocrisy in a dispute about ritual practices (Mt 15:8-9; Mk 8:6-7). Its use in the Jesus tradition is more significant because no other Jewish sources of the period cite Isa 29:13.⁶⁵ Furthermore, ἔνταλμα appears only three times in the New Testament, these two Gospel texts and Col 2:22. Thus, the recipients of Colossians probably recognize this allusion to Isaiah through its presence in the Jesus tradition.⁶⁶ Its absence in other sources suggests that the author of Colossians also knows its presence there and thinks of utilizing it in Colossians because of that usage.⁶⁷

Both the originating text and the Jesus tradition use this formula to condemn other teachings.⁶⁸ Colossians uses it for the same purpose.⁶⁹ The author does not develop any theological points from this citation, he simply brings its words forward and applies them to the other teaching to bolster his argument. Thus, he expects such a reference to the words of Scripture to wield authority among the readers. He believes, it seems, the readers hold that the words of Scripture as quoted by Jesus, even when placed in a new setting with no explicit interpretive justification, provide an authoritative message about the new setting.

The writer of Colossians expects the audience to understand this phrase as a condemnation because it comes between two other condemning evaluations. Thus, even if they do not recognize the allusion, they will still understand the accusation correctly. This is particularly so in a context in which the other teachers claim to receive instruction from heavenly beings. If the readers do recognize the allusion, knowing that it is from Scripture gives the assertion more authority. The probability that the audience recognizes this allusion is increased because its use in the Jesus tradition identifies these words as a quotation of Isaiah. If the audience knows of the citation's presence among the words of Jesus, this adds yet more authority to these words. Indeed, the appearance of the phrase in Isaiah and the mouth of Jesus makes it a devastating critique of the other teaching.

Colossians 3:1—"seated at the right hand of God"

The theme-setting paragraph of 3:1-5 begins with an exhortation ("seek the things above") and supporting affirmations that draw on the exaltation of Christ (he is "above" and "seated at God's right hand"). The claim that Christ is seated at the right hand of God alludes to Ps 110 (109 LXX), a Davidic exaltation psalm. New Testament writers cite this psalm more often than any other.⁷⁰ Thus, it was well-known in the church. It served as an early interpretation of the resurrection of Christ, helping believers rethink their eschatology and contributing significantly to the development of early Christology. O'Brien asserts that it "was an essential and regular element in the early apostolic preaching," as evidenced by its presence in the Gospels, Acts, Paul, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and Revelation.⁷¹ Similarly, Hengel identifies this exaltation motif as "an extremely old Christological formula" that goes back to Ps 110.⁷² Beyond the existence of this well-attested tradition of using Ps 110 to interpret the death and resurrection/exaltation of Christ, a number of interpreters find a quotation of a preformed tradition in Col 3:1. Its phraseology has a sort of "creedal character."⁷³ So it may well be a fairly direct quotation of a set formulation of that tradition.⁷⁴ Leppa argues more specifically that Col 3:1 draws directly on Rom 8:34 rather than directly on the Psalm because there are more consecutive words from Romans than from the Psalm.⁷⁵

The author of Colossians seems to expect recognition and acceptance of this assertion about Christ, since he offers no substantiation for it. The citation provides support for the exhortation to "seek the things above," but the author does not use the psalm to ground any more

extensive Christological claims.⁷⁶ His use of the psalm assumes the appropriateness of applying its Davidic acclamation to Christ and expanding the claim to cosmic proportions. Since this interpretation of the psalm was so pervasive in the church's tradition, it may be that the author is simply accepting the church's interpretation without exercising his own hermeneutic.⁷⁷

Given that the tradition's use of Ps 110 includes, in places even emphasizes (Mk 12:36; Lk 20:41-44; Acts 2:33-35; Heb 1:13), explicit mention that it is a biblical citation, the readers probably recognize both that it is a foundational confession of the church and that it is built on Scripture. The church's extensive use of this psalm testifies to its usefulness as believers explored ways to understand the death and resurrection of Christ. We see nothing of the interpretive methods of the author of Colossians because he does not develop the implications of the application of the psalm to Christ beyond what already existed in the tradition.

Colossians 3:10—"according to the image of the one who created it"

In Colossians 3:8-11, the author asserts that believers must rid themselves of vices because they have been granted a new life, they have put on a "new self" that is constantly being renewed "according to the image of the one who created it." The mention of a person (ἄνθρωπος) being created in the image (εἰκῶν) of the one who creates it clearly alludes to Gen 1:26-27, where God creates the ἄνθρωπος in God's own image. In Colossians, the person created is an eschatological person, who is still in the process of being created as the person conforms his/her life to the ethical expectations Colossians sets out for believers.⁷⁸

As always in the Pauline corpus, the creator is God. Even where Christ is the agent of creation, as in Col 1:15-17, God remains the creator. Thus, in 3:10 God creates the new, eschatological person in God's own image. It is probably correct to identify this image of God with Christ,⁷⁹ so that the believer is both created and renewed on an ongoing basis in the image of Christ. Thus, this act of creation is not a single moment, but a continuing act of God that helps believers live as Colossians prescribes. This assertion infuses the Genesis creation narrative with new meaning. First, it sees the eschatological moment as a new act of creation that has important parallels with the original creation (perhaps we could call this a typological relationship). Second, the new creative act has a new "image" of God according to whose likeness the new person is made.⁸⁰ Third, the ethical significance of being created in the image of God dominates Colossians' comments about the created person, while reigning over creation is dominant in the LXX's Genesis account.⁸¹

This use of Genesis 1:26 draws on the general theme of creation and uses the vocabulary of the originating text to make new theological assertions. The apocalyptic tradition often saw the eschaton as a new act of creation, as the moment when the world would be as God intended it. The early church, as an apocalyptic movement, accepted new creation as a way to articulate what God was doing in Christ and in their communities (e.g. 2 Cor 5:16-21; Gal 6:15). Thus, drawing on a creation text to give expression to that theology seems natural. Further, since Christ was already seen as the pattern for eschatological existence in the Pauline tradition (see 1 Cor 15:20-49), it was a small step to adopt the language of "image" in the process of drawing on the creation narrative (especially since 1:15 has already called Christ the "image of God"). The baptismal liturgy in Gal 3:26-28 shows that the Genesis creation narrative had already been associated with the eschatological creation and that the church saw the beginning of that new creation breaking into the world in the baptism of its members.

The innovative move of Colossians is to use this creation language to ground exhortation.⁸² He creates a tension in this use of Gen 1:26, which points to a single act of

creation, by talking about a continual renewal of this newly created person. This makes the phrase express a partially realized eschatology—the new is here, yet it is still being formed. By mentioning this tension, the author grants the recipients a new identity, but can still exhort them to strive to live more ethical lives as they are empowered by God’s continuing renewal of their new selves.

The use of Gen 1:26-27 in Col 3:10 is more fully integrated into the argument than any other passage of Scripture we have seen the author of the letter employ. His interpretation of Gen 1:26-27 draws on contemporaneous eschatological thought so that the experience of the church is a new enactment of the original creation narrative. Thus, again, the primary matrix for interpretation is usage in the first century rather than the originating historical or literary context. Put more carefully, the meaning of the originating text for Colossians develops as a result of the interplay among originating context, contemporaneous usage in Judaism and the early church, and the situation the author addresses. But once again we may not be able to fully attribute these exegetical methods to the author of Colossians.

Colossians 3:11 clearly cites (and probably augments) the same baptismal tradition that Paul cites in Gal 3:26-28 and 1 Cor 12:13. The language beginning in Col 3:9b derives from a baptismal context (put on/put off; old person/new person). A number of interpreters argue that all of vv. 9b-11 rely on a new creation baptismal tradition.⁸³ If this is the case, the author of Colossians has probably inserted “being renewed in knowledge” into the formulation since it stands in some tension with the already accomplished creation of the “new person” in the surrounding material and since the phrase better integrates the citation into the argument of 3:5-11.

If the citation of the confessional tradition does not begin until v. 11, Colossian’s treatment of Gen 1:26-27 is still dependent on Paul’s earlier use of the new creation motif. Thus, we learn little of this writer’s exegetical techniques or hermeneutical methods; he is accepting and adapting previous Pauline exegesis, probably more because it is from Paul than because he thinks it reflects proper exegetical method. We do get some indication of the way Colossians deals with Scripture here because he applies the tradition and its use of Scripture in a new way. In a more specific manner than what we find in earlier Pauline materials, this use of Gen 1:26-27 in connection with the new creation motif serves as the grounds for ethical exhortation. Thus, either he takes the interpretation of the text current in the church and puts it to this new use or he uses the new creation theme to develop an interpretation of Gen 1:26-27 that serves his rhetorical purpose. He draws out the newly found meaning and uses it to ground his exhortation. It may be important that the author does not simply allude to Scripture, he supports the allusion with a citation of a well-known confession (v. 11). He seems, then, to think that the combination of Scripture and tradition is more persuasive than relying on the authority of Scripture alone.

If Colossians is citing a baptismal confession here, the author probably expects the audience to recognize it. Application of that confession would lend weight to his exhortation. If v. 10 is not part of such a confession, it seems likely that many readers would catch his allusion to the creation narrative and its understanding of humanity as being created in God’s image. They would probably at least recognize the Pauline theme of new creation. The support of Scripture or the Pauline tradition (or both) serves to make the exhortation more authoritative. At the same time, the allusion provides a basis for the writer’s interpretation of the eschatological situation in which believers live.

3:12—“as elect of God, holy”

Following his citation of the baptismal confession in Col 3:(10-)11, the author prepares to resume his explication of proper moral behavior by setting out the identity believers receive in their baptism: they are the “elect of God, holy and beloved.” Some interpreters hear an echo of Deut 7:6-8 in these titles.⁸⁴ The Deuteronomy text says that God elected Israel (though Colossians uses ἑκλεκτός, a noun that does not appear in the Deuteronomy passage, or anywhere in the Torah with this meaning) and it calls Israel holy. In addition, it calls Israel to obey God’s commands. These parallels may suggest that the way Colossians identifies believers in 3:12 echoes this particular passage. Furthermore, the language and theme of election are uncommon in Paul; this noun appears in the undisputed Paulines only in Rom 8:33 and 16:13.⁸⁵

Rather than being an echo of Deut 7:6-8, however, it seems more probable that Col 3:12 echoes the theme of election, not a specific passage. There are no occurrences of ἑκλεκτός and ἅγιος together in the LXX, though the idea that God requires holiness of the chosen people is common. This is at least the fourth time Colossians has referred to believers as holy or as saints (1:2, 4, 26; and perhaps 1:12 [saints of light]; see also 1:22 [“to present you holy”]). So the holiness of believers is a theme of Colossians, and a reference to their possession of holiness is particularly apt here as a sanction for ethical living. Calling these Gentile believers “chosen” or “elect” may identify them with the heritage and promises of God to Israel,⁸⁶ though we may wonder what that would mean to them or how important identification with Israel would be.⁸⁷ After all, the theme of election appears rather infrequently in the New Testament.⁸⁸ Still, asserting that these readers were chosen by God is important because it emphasizes that “the status of believers stems from a divine decision.”⁸⁹ Connecting this divine action with the demand for holiness fits the model of election that we know from Israel’s Scriptures.⁹⁰

Any member of the audience who could relate “elect of God” and “holy” to a specific passage would have to be thoroughly immersed in the study of Scripture. Many more might recognize the theme of the relationship between election and holiness that is implicit in much of the biblical text. The audience would gain little by recognizing an echo of a particular passage or even knowing that the theme draws on Scripture. The connection between being one of God’s people and proper living is already well established in Colossians.⁹¹ Even if this were not the case, 3:12 makes the connection clear. Thus, while the point is an important one for Colossians, this phrase’s possible echo of Scripture does little to undergird the argument.

3:20—“Children, obey your parents”

Given the prominence of the Ten Commandments within the narrative of the exodus story, it seems unlikely that the audience of Colossians would fail to recognize that the command for children to obey their parents is one of the Sinai commands. This probability is strengthened by the place this command holds in Josephus’s apology for Judaism (*C. Ap.* 2.28, 31). When the author of Colossians says that obeying one’s parents is “pleasing in the Lord,” he may be echoing the sanction given this command in both Ex 20:12 and Deut 5:16. In both, observing this command brings the promise of a long life in the promise land. The author of Ephesians quotes the command and makes this connection to the promise explicit (6:2-3). Citation of the promise may indicate that the tradition in which both Colossians and Ephesians stand had already begun to emulate the prominence this command receives in the Decalogue by having a promise attached to it.

If the author of Colossians expects his reference to remind the readers of the promise found in the Decalogue, his purpose seems to skew the expected promise. Instead of saying that such conduct is pleasing *to* the Lord, he says it is pleasing *in* the Lord. This changes the frame of

reference in ways that may be significant, indeed, necessary for the readers to understand his instructions properly.⁹² Classical authors sometimes used allusions to make unexpected points, which made the point more emphatic.⁹³ Here in Colossians, the shift to saying that this obedience is “in the Lord” may point to obedience within the sphere of Christ’s reign—an assertion that may allow (adult) children to disobey non-believing parents who might order them to discontinue contact with the church.⁹⁴ The allusion to the promise in Exodus and Deuteronomy helps the readers recognize the precise point of the command in Colossians. Even without recognizing a reference to the promise in the Decalogue, however, readers would find the phrasing of v. 20 jarring. Thus, they could understand the point correctly, even without recognizing that it may play off the promise associated with the command in Scripture.

This use of Scripture differs from any that we have seen to this point in Colossians. Here the biblical text serves as a foil for the writer to make a rather different point by a simple change in the expected wording. Colossians does not seem to assert that the Decalogue’s promise is wrong, it simply redefines the commandment by the way it restates the sanction.

Parallels and Recognizable Broader Themes

There are a number of passages in Colossians that seem to play off various themes in Scripture and in the developing tradition of Judaism and the early church. Incorporating known expressions of such themes might lend weight to an assertion or serve simply as ornamentation that demonstrates thorough familiarity with traditions that are important to the community. These do not qualify as echoes of particular texts, only as expressions that may expect some resonance in the audience—even if they do not intend to bear a particular set of meanings into the context. A modern parallel of such a use of Scripture might be those people who are able to sprinkle expressions from (their tradition’s accepted translation of) Scripture throughout a conversation or a sermon. The argumentative value of such citations comes from the recognition that they reference an authority. (Even if the hearer does not know what part of that authority it comes from [indeed, even the speaker may not know the precise origin of the expression]. Such citations may simply be recognized a change in cadence [perhaps an “-{e}th” on the end of a verb] or vocabulary.) Perhaps the most significant argumentative force such recollections exert is that they enhance the ethos of the speaker; they demonstrate that the speaker has such advanced knowledge of the authoritative text that its words permeate her speech. Thus, the hearer should acknowledge that the speaker is an expert or an authority. Some examples of this kind of peppering the text of Colossians with resonant vocabulary may include the following.

1:5—“word of truth”

When Colossians describes the gospel as “the word of truth,” it may be an intentional reminiscence of the description of Scripture found in Ps 119:43 and 160. Elsewhere the LXX speaks of the word of God being true (e.g., Neh 9:16; Ps 119:142 [S has “word of truth”]; and Mal 2:6 speak of the “law of truth” cf. 2 Sam 7:28; 1 Kings 17:24). This expression is taken up by Ephesians (1:13) and then by 2 Tim (2:15). Similar expressions appear in John 17:17 and James 1:18. So it may have been a known way to refer to the gospel in some groups in the early church.

Colossians perhaps uses the phrase to set the previously received teaching over against the teaching the letter opposes. If the audience hears a reminiscence of Scripture here, it would lend a bit of support to this passing jab at the other teaching. If they hear it as a citation of a phrase in the tradition, it may pack yet more sting for the opponents.

3:17—“name of the Lord”

Colossians exhorts its readers to do “everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.” This may be a distant echo of the phrase “in the name of the Lord” that appears at least 18 times in the LXX. The phrase is used in very different contexts; sometimes it means that a person speaks with God’s authority (2 Sam 6:18), other times it is an oath formula (1 Sam 20:42), and at other times it is used for prayer (1 Kings 8:44).⁹⁵ Thus, it brings forward no specific context. Still, it may have a tone of remembrance that adds substance to the exhortation.

3:22—“people-pleasers”

In its instructions to slaves, the household code of Colossians tells slaves not to work only when being watched and not to work as “people-pleasers” but with sincerity because of their respect for their true lord, Christ (3:22). The unusual term ἀνθρωπάρεσκος⁹⁶ may be drawn from Ps 52:6 (53:6 LXX) where it is used to contrast those who try to please God and those who want to please people. This is its only occurrence in the LXX and its only other appearance in the New Testament is Eph 6:6, which is probably dependent upon its presence here in Colossians. The rarity of the term makes it more likely that the author of Colossians is echoing the Psalm. It seems unlikely, however, that most readers would hear a specific resonance with this text. The theme is not uncommon, and readers would not miss the point if they do not hear a connection with Psalm 52. Still, the unusual vocabulary which the audience might associate with their sacred text may lend weight to the exhortation.

Finally, there are places at which Colossians seems to parallel ideas that were derived from Scripture and developed in second-temple Judaism. The author may hope these expressions arouse some recognition of themes or images, but their familiarity is the only thing they contribute to the argument. Such parallels may include the reference to “treasures of knowledge and wisdom” in 2:3. This expression may have some relationship to Isa 45:3 and other passages in more contemporaneous literature that mention wisdom and knowledge together (e.g., Sir 21:18; Wis 1:6-7; 1QS 4.3, 22; QH 1.18-19; CD 2.3). Within the apocalyptic tradition, those taken on heavenly journeys sometimes saw the “hidden treasures” in the heavens (e.g., 1 En 18:1; 46:3). The author of Colossians may be echoing both the apocalyptic tradition (which would be particularly appropriate given the problems this church is having with visionaries) and the broader idiom of speaking of knowledge and wisdom together.

Conclusions

As is often noted, Colossians has no direct, multiple word quotations of Scripture. We have seen, however, that its author does cite Scripture in various ways and that these citations play a number of different roles in the letter’s argument. We can now see what conclusions we may draw from his allusions to and echoes of Scripture.

A first thing to note concerns the absence of citations in 1:24-2:5 (with the possible exception of a faint echo in 2:3), the section devoted to establishing Paul’s ethos as the one who suffers for the audience and who is the bearer of the true gospel. We might expect the author to connect Paul’s suffering for the community with the biblical tradition of the prophets who suffer for proclaiming God’s word or the people. Other passages dedicated to establishing Paul’s ethos cite Scripture to support his ministerial practices (e.g., 1 Cor 9:9; 2 Cor 4:6, 13), but Colossians takes another tack. This letter relates Paul’s willingness to suffer for the audience with the way Christ was willing to suffer for all. Thus, it is only Paul’s correlation to Christ, not his connection to the servants of God in Israel’s past, that Colossians chooses to mention as the way to identify Paul as the teacher to whom the audience should give their allegiance. This may suggest that the

author of Colossians does not think connections with Israel's leaders or prophets would provide a substantive commendation of Paul to this audience.

Where most of Colossians' allusions and echoes of Scripture do appear is even more surprising; most occur within citations of preformed and confessional material. Indeed, few (perhaps none) depend on direct knowledge of Scripture. The citations of Scripture that more certainly rely on church traditions of various sorts include: 1:6, 10 (bearing fruit and growing); 1:12-14 (rescue, redeem, inheritance); 1:15-20 (image of God, agent of creation, firstborn); 2:22 (human commands and teachings); 3:1 (seated at the right hand); and 3:11 (image of the one who created). Passages that refer to phrases or themes drawn from Scripture but cited as they were developed in Jewish and church traditions include: 2:11, 13 (non-physical circumcision); 2:16 (festivals, new moons, Sabbaths); 3:12 (election and holiness); and 3:20 (obey parents). The allusion to Isaiah 11 in Col 1:9 seems the most probable example of direct reliance on the biblical text for its use. But even here the claim is problematic because Isaiah 11 was so widely used in both Jewish and church tradition that the author may well know the text and that it is a biblical text, through these usages.

The references to non-physical circumcision in 2:11 and 13 provide the next best evidence for direct use of the text, but there is no precise textual parallel of 2:11. Furthermore, 2:13 not only draws on a central episode in the Abraham narrative, it may also be a citation of a pre-existent tradition. Other allusions and echoes are even less likely to require independent knowledge of the biblical text. The Jewish author of Colossians probably needed no immediate access to the biblical text to know the Ten Commandments well enough to cite the form of the command to children alluded to in Col 3:20. Moreover, the author's relating of election with a demand for holiness in 3:12 also draws on a theme that is prominent enough that the author need not have Deuteronomy 7 in mind when composing his exhortation. Finally, the summary of Jewish practice found in 2:16 seems well-known enough that the writer of Colossians used it because of its general currency rather than because he knows it from a particular text.

This does not mean that Scripture was unimportant or unrecognized by either the author or the audience of Colossians. It does suggest that their primary contact with and understanding of Scripture was mediated through the church's formalized traditions. The author continues to speak the language of Scripture and perhaps the audience continues to recognize that some of the language comes from Scripture, even if the exposure of both the author and audience to that wording comes largely from recitation of confessions, or repeated hearing of interpretations of texts, or episodes from the Jesus tradition. This observation may also suggest that extensive reading and interpretation of Scripture played a minor role in the communal activities of the churches addressed by Colossians.

It may help us think about the place of Scripture in these churches if we identify what the Scripture citations in Colossians assume about the audience's knowledge of those texts. The author expects them to recognize allusions to the creation narrative of Genesis 1, as he refers to the "image" of God twice with differing meanings (1:15; 3:11). It is possible that a further echo of this narrative sounds in the phrase "bearing fruit and growing" (1:6-7). The author assumes familiarity with the Abraham narrative, particularly the covenant sealing ceremony of Genesis 17. Indeed, the Gentile audience would have needed clear instruction about the meaning of circumcision within Judaism for this important metaphor of Colossians to make sense to them. Knowing the narrative of circumcision's inauguration as a covenant sign would reasonably comprise a part of that instruction. The exodus narrative and the metaphors associated with it

constitute an important part of the assumed knowledge of these readers. This narrative includes the story of the giving of the Law and at least some knowledge of the Ten Commandments.

The citations from these narratives, however, come from a very limited range of texts. Only the creation narrative and a central feature of the Abraham saga (and perhaps the promise to Jacob) appear from Genesis. A reader need know only the first four chapters of Exodus and the giving of the Law in chapter 20 to recognize all the allusions and echoes in Colossians from this book. Moreover, with the possible exception of references to non-physical circumcision (from Deut 10 and 30), readers need to know only the first seven chapters of Deuteronomy to hear the connections Colossians makes with that book. Thus, within the scope of knowing the Torah's central narratives, Colossians demands knowledge of a very narrow range of texts.

Colossians' citation of biblical texts outside the Torah includes some that point to the restoration of Israel and the Davidic ruler, which assume that the audience knows something of the fall of the Israelite kingdoms. The promises of restoration and the exaltation of a Davidic descendant stand out as texts these believers know through eschatological and Christological interpretations. The interpretations of these texts consistently expand their national claims so that they become cosmic claims. This inserts new meanings into these texts, but meanings their interpreters within the church find legitimate.

The line of interpreting Jesus as the promised Davidic descendant also draws on material in the Psalms. The affirmations about Christ in 1:15-20 and 3:1 build on this tradition as it appears in the Psalms. The extremely wide use of Ps 110 shows that the audience of Colossians would know it as Scripture and know its Christological interpretation.

The citations of prophetic texts that we find in Colossians assume that readers have some familiarity with select portions of Isaiah and perhaps parts of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea. That a Pauline church knows these prophets, especially Isaiah, is not surprising given how prominent Isaiah is in the undisputed Pauline letters.

The lengthy poetic liturgy of Col 1:15-20 adopts and adapts elements from the Wisdom tradition, especially Proverbs 8, and developments of those wisdom themes. The author of *the liturgy* certainly knows this stream of thought within Judaism and uses it to develop ideas about Christ. In this passage, we see the church use Scripture and its contemporaneous interpretation to give expression to its experiences of the presence of God in Christ. Scripture becomes the means through which the church's experiences and beliefs are formulated; it becomes the lens through which they find the meanings of the death and resurrection of Christ and the meanings of Christ's mediation of the presence of God. The appropriation of this text and its interpretive tradition assume a level of engagement with texts that we cannot assume for most members of Pauline churches. Yet, those who do breathe in this rarified atmosphere find connections with Scripture important. Furthermore, they find such connections persuasive, as well as enriching. The development we see in Col 1:15-20 seems to be an early example of the ways the church expanded its claims about Christ through its reading of Scripture. Such expanded claims found resonance with the wider church as they made sense of the community's experience of God in Christ.

Finding authors within the early church who know and draw on Scripture and interpretive traditions may tell us little about how others in these congregations know and appropriate Scripture. Those who recited the liturgy might have little understanding of its origins in Scripture or the Wisdom tradition. Perhaps early uses of the liturgy were accompanied by explanations of the Scriptural basis of its claims, though the parallels in other philosophic and religious contexts might have obviated the need for such explanations. If such explanations were

initially given, they would probably not continue after its use was established (and are not given in Colossians). Those who use the tradition may well remember that it is rooted in Scripture, but this may be all they pass on to those who adopt the material as time passes. Thus, even if the authors of the liturgy know this part of Scripture well, those who use it in their worship may not—probably do not.⁹⁷

On the other hand, the author of Colossians seems to assume that the letter's recipients will recognize the major stories of Israel's past and know that these narratives appear in an authoritative text. Because these narratives appear in Scripture, the readers of Colossians see them as legitimate paradigms through which they can interpret present experience. Various interpretive techniques may be used, but all recognize the authority of the texts.

While we see almost nothing of the exegetical techniques of the author of Colossians, we do see multiple ways the tradition has appropriated Scripture. In the liturgy of Col 1:15-20 we see the church identify Christ with the highest claims Scripture makes for any being other than God. Its claim that Christ was God's agent in creation seems to assume the claims to exaltation that developed in connection with Psalm 110. Thus, the claims of the first strophe are natural correlates of the eschatological element of the second strophe. The interpreters of texts that speak of the restoration of Israel and the Davidic promises shift the meanings of those texts so that they are no longer national promises; they now include Gentiles and, indeed, the whole cosmos. Again, such meanings assume Christ's exaltation. Other passages seem simply to apply to the church the hopes that the texts originally expressed for Israel. For example, using non-physical circumcision to interpret baptism takes a hoped for change in Israelites and asserts that it has happened among believers in Christ—Jews and Gentiles. In still other places, the author expects that merely citing recognizable words of Scripture has persuasive value.

While the originating context of these Scriptural texts may not be completely disregarded, it is not the central matrix from which the traditions that Colossians cites work in their applications of Scripture. The readers' beliefs about Christ and the inauguration of the eschatological age evoke new meanings from Scripture texts. These meanings assume a continuity with the story of God's prior acts, particularly among Israelites, but also that God has acted in unexpected ways which are nonetheless best understood through Scripture. Finding such expanded meanings of Scripture seems to cohere well with the interpretive techniques we see in later Christian authors such as Origen (or earlier with the Jewish interpreters at Qumran) and in many of the uses of Homer found outside the church.

The multiple meanings Origen finds in biblical texts and the explanations he gives about them indicate that he sees arriving at the literal meaning that critical exegesis seeks from the original context the least important kind of interpretation. Of course, this view is radically different from that taken by historical-critical scholarship with its valuing of that original meaning. The traditions cited in Colossians seem to find multiple levels of meanings, sometimes with the eschatological or Christological meaning overriding the original. In this, the interpretive technique is closer to Origen's than to that of critical exegesis. The traditions Colossians uses usually maintain thematic connections to the originating text (and so do not stray as far from their earlier meanings as Philo's allegories),⁹⁸ but they give these themes new meanings which cannot be derived from the texts without the presuppositions of the beliefs and experiences of the church.

Uses of Homer have significant parallels. Like the church's uses of Scripture, the citations of Homer retain some continuity with the character, event, or saying in the originating text. But that citation also inserts new meaning from the new context so that the old and new

contexts both contribute to the point being made with the citation. Also like usage of Homer, the traditions Colossians inserts draw on select portions of the originating text. Garner finds that most citations of Homer in Greek tragedies come from books 6 and 22 of the Iliad. He surmises from this that there is a discreet selection of material from within Homer that authors expect their audience to know. Hock notes that the earliest stages of Greek education used names drawn from Homer to teach the most elementary elements of writing.⁹⁹ Thus, authors could assume that many of the characters from the Homeric epics, and their distinctive characteristics, were known to nearly all. This means that even people without the skills of “functional literacy,” possessing little more than a basic recognition of the alphabet, knew central characters from Homer. A person did not need to be able to read Homer to recognize allusions to the plot and features of important figures in those texts.

The author of Colossians is Jewish (or at least purports to be) and so probably knows some Scripture because of his early synagogue education. Yet no detailed firsthand knowledge of an extensive segment of Scripture is evident in this letter. This may be due to his evaluation of his audience or to his lack of such knowledge. Given the limited range of materials the author expects this audience to recognize, perhaps we should envision a relatively small body of material that early church authors expected their audiences to recognize from Scripture, just as other authors usually presupposed knowledge of only discrete sections of Homer. Such would consist of well-known characters (Abraham, David, etc.), basic plot lines (creation, exodus, etc.), and even the wording of important texts (Ps 110; Genesis 1). These may have been gathered in testimonia for those who could read and held in memory by those who could not.

An author in the church would be able to assume that the audience recognized these characters and plot lines from Israel’s sacred texts. Such a collection must have begun to accumulate from the earliest days in Jerusalem, because some texts are so ubiquitous throughout different groups within the church that they must have been present near the beginning of the movement (e.g., Ps 110). The appearance of some of these texts in the preformed traditions Colossians cites also supports this hypothesis. This view does not demand that members of the church, especially those outside Judaism, learned or studied major portions of Israel’s Scriptures. Just as most people could not recall the less famous parts of Homer, but only those widely familiar plot lines, themes, and sections, so the use of Scripture in Colossians suggests that its Gentile recipients probably had a similarly narrow exposure to and recall of material in Scripture.

Despite the absence of direct quotations of Scripture, the author of Colossians clearly sees it as an authority and expects his readers to view it similarly. Not only do the traditions he cites depend on its authority, but he also assumes that recitation of its wording carries persuasive force. Finding most of the citations of Scripture in traditional material suggests that the audience of Colossians knows these texts primarily through the meanings they are given in the church. While these meanings will not be completely separate from the originating contexts, adherence to the meaning in the original (literary or historical) setting is not a goal of their interpretation. Rather, as we have noted, these texts are the means church members use to interpret their present experience of God and the place of Christ in that experience.

While our reading suggests that Scripture has a basic authority for the author of Colossians and his readers, and that their reading of Scripture derives from the church’s tradition, it seems that the citation of tradition has a more immediate impact on the argument of this letter than its citation of Scripture. The church’s tradition seems to possess a recognizable and direct authority. The tradition grounds many, probably most, of the letter’s central assertions. As we

see it here, Scripture forms the basis for the tradition. Thus, Scripture is the ultimate authority on which the tradition was built, but it is now the tradition that constitutes the most readily accessible authority. Some, perhaps most, continue to know that the tradition incorporates and interprets significant elements of Scripture. Colossians' use of the tradition suggests, however, that even for these members of the audience, it is the church's interpretation of Scripture (not its originating/original context) that bears authority. It seems unlikely that most of the audience of Colossians would make this distinction for most uses of the biblical texts since they know it almost entirely through the church's usage. Still, as we observe the handling of Scripture from this distance, in this letter Scripture seems to function as an authority through the way it is interpreted in the tradition more often than as an independent authority.

NOTES

¹ Christopher A. Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians* (BIS 96; Leiden: Brill, 2008) 18-19

² Stanley Porter, "The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament: A Brief Comment on Method and Terminology," in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* (ed. C.A. Evans and J. A. Sanders, JSNTSup 148; Sheffield, 1997) pp. 79-96, here p. 95.

³ Andrea Capra, "Protagoras' Achilles: Homeric Allusions as a Satirical Weapon (Pl. Prt. 340A)," *Classical Philology* 100 (2005): 274-277, here pp. 275-76

⁴ Richard Garner, *From Homer to tragedy : the art of allusion in Greek poetry* (London ; New York : Routledge, 1990) 47, 184-86. T. C. W. Stinton, "The Scope and Limits of Allusion in Greek Tragedy," in *Greek Tragedy and Its Legacy; Essays Presented to D. J. Conacher* (eds. M. Cropp, E. Fantham, S.E. Scully; Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 1986) pp. 67-102. On p. 68 Stinton notes that some allusions are simply ornamental.

⁵ Stanley Porter ("Allusions and Echoes," in *As It is Written; Studying Paul's Use of Scripture*, eds S.E. Porter and C.D. Stanley [SBL Symposium Series 50; Atlanta: SBL, 2008], pp. 29-40) p. 39 defines an echo as a reference that invokes "thematically related language of some more general notion or concept."

⁶ An extreme version of this tendency is that of Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., who argues that quotations of Old Testament passages that establish a doctrinal point in the New Testament were used with "the single truth-intention of the original author" in the originating context (*The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* [Moody Press, 1985] 14, 228).

⁷ W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1955) 151-52, for example.

⁸ June W. Allison, "Homeric Allusions at the Close of Thucydides' Sicilian Narrative," *American Journal of Philology* 118 (1997): 499-516, here pp. 510-11.

⁹ See Francis Watson's treatment of Paul's use of quotations in *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004).

¹⁰ See the range of uses of allusions in Christopher Stanley, "Paul and Homer: Greco-Roman Citation Practice in the First Century CE," *NovT* 32 (1990): 76. Further see Stanley's

citation of the uses of quotations taken from Morawski (*Arguing With Scripture: the Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* [New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004]174n4). Morawski gives four uses of quotations: authority, show erudition, stimulate or amplify, and ornamentation. If direct quotations serve these multiple purposes, we should expect no fewer kinds of uses of allusions.

¹¹ For example, Hays (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* [New Haven: Yale, 1989]) comments on the importance of the use of the originating passage in the first century, but then spends more time on the original context of the Hebrew Bible than on a passage's first century usage.

¹² Similarly, James W. Aageson, "Written Also for Our Sake" 155.

¹³ See Christopher Stanley, "Paul and Homer: Greco-Roman Citation Practice in the First Century CE," *NovT* 32 (1990): 48-78 and Andrea Capra, "Protagoras' Achilles: Homeric Allusion as a Satirical Weapon (Pl. Prt. 340A)," 275-76. See also Garner who asserts that Aeschylus borrows images and similes from Homer without alluding to their original context (*From Homer to tragedy*, 47).

¹⁴ See Stanley, *Arguing With Scripture* 68-69.

¹⁵ See the example by Jeffrey S. Rogers, "Scripture is as Scripturalists Do: Scripture as a Human Activity in the Qumran Scrolls," in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals*, ed. C.A. Evans and J. A. Sanders, JSNTSup 148 (Sheffield, 1997), 28-4, here p. 32.

¹⁶ Stintson, "The Scope and Limits of Allusion in Greek Tragedy," 67-74.

¹⁷ David Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity*, SBLMS 18 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 40 comments, "The less essential to its context an allusion is, the more we must be ready to regard it as a stereotyped truism, quite possibly inserted by the writer without much thought just because it was so familiar to himself and his readers."

¹⁸ Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), p. 20n60; Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1982), p. 13; Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, 41-42.

¹⁹ The phrase in Gen 1:22, 28 and 9:1 has an additional verb. Thus those texts have ἀυξάνω, πληθύνω, and πληρόω.

²⁰ Fruit bearing is a part of the Q traditions Matthew and Luke use (Mt 7:16-20; 12:33/Lk 6:43-44). The image appears fairly often in Matthew and John.

²¹ Barth and Blanke comment that this language is "reminiscent of imagery" in the Hebrew Bible and later Jewish texts and seem to think the author is aware of this connection and intentionally includes Gentiles in imagery usually used for Israel (*Colossians: a new translation with introduction and commentary*, AB [New York: Doubleday, 1994], pp. 158-59 and 158n30).

²² James D.G. Dunn (*The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], pp. 61-62), following Hauck and Meeks, asserts that fruit bearing was a familiar metaphor in Greek and Jewish thought of the era.

²³ Mt 7:16-20; 12:33/Lk 6:43-44; Lk 3:8-9; Jn 15:2-16.

²⁴ Although I will refer to the audience of Colossians as "readers," I recognize that the original audience would have been composed of more hearers than readers. At the same time, if Colossians intends to be included among the letters of Paul, its author probably envisions it being read multiple times in various settings—as his exhortation to have it read in Laodicea (4:15-16) indicates. Paul seems to expect his letters to be read multiple times, even as early as his writing of 1 Thessalonians (see 5:26).

²⁵ See this understanding of 1:6 and 1:9 in Sumney, *Colossians*, 38-39; 48-49. Beetham has gone far beyond the evidence when he asserts that the echo “implies that the word of the gospel is creating a people who will fulfill the purpose of the original creation mandate” (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, 55). Such an understanding of the function of this echo requires too much of the readers. Not only do they need to know the originating text, they also need to know its uses in Jeremiah and read it with an explicit eschatological lens that the author has not provided.

²⁶ Deuteronomy 4:6 and 1 Chr 22:12 speak of showing wisdom and understanding through observance of Torah. A broad meaning occurs in 2 Chr 1:10-12 and 2:13. In the former it refers to what Solomon needs to possess to rule well; in the latter it refers to the skills a builder needs to construct the temple. Similarly. In Ex 31:3, God tells Moses that “a divine spirit of wisdom and understanding” is on Bezalel so that he can build the tent of meeting according to God’s specifications. Finally, in Theodotion’s Dan 2:20, Daniel speaks of the wisdom and understanding of God.

²⁷ These references appear in Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, 67-72. Such messianic interpretations are not the only places where this language comes together. The Spirit of God gives Enoch wisdom and understanding in 1 En 37:3-4. Still, the prophetic nature of the originating text would incline later readers, particularly believers in Christ, to look for a messianic fulfillment of this Isianic prophecy.

²⁸ NA 27th lists 19 citations of Isa 11 in the New Testament. Many of these, however, are quite oblique and would perhaps not qualify as allusions or echoes using the criteria we are using here.

²⁹ Garner, *From Homer to tragedy*, 182 says this in connection with Sophocles’s use of Homer.

³⁰ Among the reasons for identifying at least significant parts of vv. 13-14 as preformed material include that v. 13 begins with ὁς, speaks of sins in the plural (which happens in the undisputed Paulines only in confessional material), refers to the kingdom of the son (rather than of God), and uses the expression “beloved son,” which does not appear elsewhere in the Pauline corpus. Elements of v. 12 that indicate that it also draws on preformed material include its reference to God as father (which is very uncommon in the Pauline corpus) and uses the terms μερίς and κληρος, both of which are uncommon in the Pauline corpus. Some confirmation of the presence of traditional formulations here comes from the parallels between the language here and that used to describe conversion in Acts 26:18. Among interpreters who find elements of a preformed probably baptismal confession in vv. 13-14 are Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), p. 53; Hans Hübner, *An Philemon, An die Kolosser, An die Epheser*, HNT 12 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1997), 52; Andreas Lindemann, *Der Kolosserbrief*, ZBK, NT 10 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1983), p. 22; Hay, 48-49. Ernst Käsemann, “A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy,” *Essays on New Testament Themes* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), pp. 149-168; Schweizer (*Letter to the Colossians*, 53), Lohse (*Colossians and Philemon*, 32-33), and David Hay (*Colossians*, ANTC [Nashville: Abingdon, 2000], p. 48) are among those who consider v. 12 as a part of a baptismal tradition. Reinhard Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit; Untersuchungen zu Form, Sprache und Stil der frühchristlichen Hymnen*, Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1967), however, finds too little

evidence to identify v. 12 as a preformed piece. Still he acknowledges that it and vv. 13-14 may come from a baptismal context.

³¹ Acts 8:21 is the only other place in the NT where these terms appear together. There the meaning coheres well with a remembrance that the formula spoke of the Levites not receiving an inheritance because Peter is telling Simon Magus that he has no “part or inheritance” in possessing the power of the Spirit.

³² E.g., Dan 12:13; Wis 5:5; 1 En 48:7; 1 QS 11:7-8, 10-12.

³³ Andreas Lindemann (*Der Kolosserbrief*, 22), however, finds this verse to be a reformulation of Phil 3:20.

³⁴ See the argument in n. 25 above. Among the interpreters who find preformed material here are Lindemann, *Der Kolosserbrief*, 22; Hay, *Colossians*, 48; Hübner, *An die Kolosser*, 52; Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 32-33.

³⁵ Exodus 6:6-8 speaks of God bringing the people into the land and giving it to them as an inheritance.

³⁶ See these references in Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, 104-106.

³⁷ Gordon Fee (“Old Testament Intertextuality in Colossians: Reflections on Pauline Christology and Gentile Inclusion in God’s Story,” in *History and Exegesis: New Testament Essays in Honor of Dr. E. Earle Ellis on his 80th Birthday*, ed Sang-Wan Son [New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006], pp. 212-20) has recently argued that Col 1:15-20 does not draw on wisdom traditions. The number of verbal and conceptual parallels between Proverbs 8 (along with other developments in the wisdom tradition) and this Colossians text, however, make his case unconvincing.

³⁸ Dunn, *Epistles*, 88. He cites Wis 7:26; Philo Leg All 1:43 and Philo’s comments about the Logos in Conf Ling 97, 147; De fuga et inventione 101; and De Som 1.239.

³⁹ James M. Robinson, “A Formal Analysis of Colossians 1 15-20,” *JBL* 76 (1957): 277-78 argues that the concepts that connect the various parts of this poetic material come from “the logo~, sofia, anqrwpo~ speculation of Hellenistic Judaism” and that this liturgy has applied this cluster of ideas to Jesus “*en bloc*” (p. 278). Lohse (*Colossians and Philemon*, 46) argues that the language of “image of God,” “1st-born of all creation,” and “beginning” are all designations of Wisdom in Hellenistic synagogues that churches that arose from circles of Hellenistic Judaism adopted and adapted to Christ. See also 1 En 49:1-4 where the spirit of wisdom dwells in the eschatological Elect One.

⁴⁰ So e.g., Fee, “Old Testament Intertextuality,” 212-15; Petr Pokorný, *Colossians: A Commentary* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), pp. 74-76; Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 46. Beetham, with appropriate caution, sees this “image” language as “a secondary echo” of Gen 1:28 (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, 131-32).

⁴¹ Beetham (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, 132) also notes that the echo of Genesis 1 is an allusion to the tradition rather than directly to the text.

⁴² “Poetry and Theology in Colossians 1.15-20,” *NTS* 36 (1990): 456-58. Lohse (*Colossians and Philemon*, 46-47n101), while finding an allusion to Genesis 1, rejects Burney’s view that the Colossians liturgy is an interpretation of the Genesis passage.

⁴³ Finding the terminology of “firstborn” at the beginning of each strophe seems to increase the probability that it is an allusion to a prior text. Garner’s study of Greek poetry concludes that it is a very common convention to place allusions at the beginning of a strophe

(*From Homer to tragedy*, 181). If the Colossian liturgy follows this convention, even by non-intentional copying of a form, it makes it more likely that “firstborn” is an allusion.

⁴⁴ The title firstborn also reflects language used for Wisdom in Philo, *Conf.* 62. Thus the influence of reflections on wisdom also inform the use of this title. For a fuller listing of the ways the Wisdom figure was developed in this era see Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, 135-37.

⁴⁵ Similar expressions of God choosing to dwell in Zion appear in Ps 132:13-14 (131:13-14 LXX); Isa 8:18; cf. 49:20. See Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 58. Barth and Blanke cite a number of other passages that speak of God’s presence dwelling in particular locations and associated with εὐδοκέω (*Colossians*, 212 nn. 76, 78).

⁴⁶ Although few commentators note an allusion to Ps 68 in Eph 4:8, the availability of the text and the parallels in wording suggest that this formulation may have developed in conjunction with this psalm.

⁴⁷ Among those passages are 2 Sam 7:6; 1 Kings 8:27 (cf. 2 Chron 6:18 where in the context of the dedication of the temple Solomon speaks of God dwelling on the death); Ps 132:13-14 (131:13-14, LXX); 135:21 (134:21, LXX); Isa 8:18. Barth and Blanke cite these LXX uses of κατοικέω and further uses of κατασκηνώω to express this idea (*Colossians*, 212).

⁴⁸ On use of “fullness” in the wisdom tradition and other second-temple texts see Dunn, *Epistles*, 99-102.

⁴⁹ It may be that John 1:16’s reference to the fullness of Christ precedes this statement, but its inference that this fullness is the fullness of God is less clear than the Colossians statement. Moreover, Col 2:9 makes it clear that the letter’s author understands the fullness to be the fullness of God’s nature. At the same time, Col 2:10 says that believers participate in the divine fullness through Christ, just as John says that believers receive grace through Christ’s fullness.

⁵⁰ This should make us even more reticent to read a “second Adam” theology into the reference to the “image” wording of 1:15.

⁵¹ See Sumney, *Colossians*, 135-36.

⁵² Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, 157.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 157-58.

⁵⁴ Dunn (*Epistles*, 156-57) sees these Pauline uses as an adaptation of the metaphorical use of circumcision (circumcision of the heart) found in Jewish tradition. Beyond the examples of this tradition cited above he lists 1QpHab 11:13; Jub 1:23; Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 1:305.

⁵⁵ George E. Cannon (*The Use of Traditional Materials in Colossians* [Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1983], p. 40) even argues that Col 2:11-13 is composed of fragments of baptismal confessions because of the accumulation of relative pronouns, prepositional phrases, and participial constructions.

⁵⁶ Garner *From Homer to tragedy*, 47 notes that Aeschylus sometimes draws imagery or similes from Homer without alluding to the particular context in which the image appears. A number of interpreters see use of “not made with hands” as an echo of the accusation made in various biblical texts that the gods of other peoples are merely “made by hands” (e.g., Lev 26:1; Isa 2:18). So e.g., Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 102; Dunn, *Epistles*, 156. The allusive nature of this expression renders the use of mirror reading on this passage (and 2:11) to assert that the opponents require circumcision (as e.g., Ernst Percy, *Die Probleme der Kolosser - und Epheserbriefe* [Lund: Gleerup: 1946] 140; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet*;

Studies in the role of the heavenly dimension in Paul's thought with special reference to his eschatology SNTSMS 43 [New York: Cambridge Press, 1981] 113) even more problematic.

⁵⁷ Beetham (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, 186-89) notes that 1QS 21.3.18-23 also reverses the wording. He asserts that their reversal is unintentional, but that the reversal in Colossians is intentional and laden with theological import.

⁵⁸ See above n. 49. Cannon (*The Use of Traditional Materials in Colossians*, 41) argues further that while these verses do not quote a single confession or hymn, their grammatical substructure and the presence of baptismal motifs point to the use of available material. Bruce Vawter, "The Colossians Hymn and the Principle of Reduction" *CBQ* 33 (1971): 74 also sees vv. 12-14 as a part of a block of material that Colossians incorporates. Similarly, F. O. Francis, "The Christological Argument of Colossians," in *God's Christ and His People* ed. J. Jervell and W. A. Meeks (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977), 199; Herold Weiss, "The Law in the Epistle to the Colossians," *CBQ* 34 (1972): 309n 63; Dunn (*Epistles*, 145-46) recognizes the hymnic nature of 2:9-12 and 13c-15, noting that it seems to draw on several prior and disparate traditions that the author brings into uncomfortable juxtaposition. This arrangement may seem to leave the reference to "foreskin of flesh" outside the traditional material, but Dunn's treatment of the phrase sees it drawing at least on Jewish traditional formulations (*Epistles*, 163).

⁵⁹ Beetham (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, 190) cites these texts from Irenaeus and Tertullian.

⁶⁰ The commentators who acknowledge this echo include J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1879; Repr. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), p. 193; Schweizer, *Letter to the Colossians*, 155; Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 339.

⁶¹ Isa 1:13-14 also contains all three terms, though not consecutively or as a succinct list.

⁶² This is a fairly clear case where Beetham's requirement that a writer have a particular text in view seems to fail. This summary certainly draws on the lists in these multiple biblical texts, but probably not a particular one of them.

⁶³ It is not impossible that the visionary teachers at Colossae cite this formula from the Ezekiel text as a way to claim that believers in the eschatological time need to keep these festivals. If they do use it, the readers would recognize the citation. But then the author would need to find clear ways to connect it to the polemical uses of phrase, which he does not do. There is no evidence that the opponents of Colossians use the Ezekiel text in this way. Further, if this is a citation of a prophetic text, we must avoid drawing conclusions about the opponents' teaching from its wording, as some do (e.g., Werner Bieder, *Die Kolossische Irrlehre und die Kirche von heute* Theologische Studien 33 [Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1952] 28), who say that the reference to "commands" shows that their teaching has an ethical component.

⁶⁴ The term ἔνταλμα occurs in Job 23:11, 12; Isa 29:13; 55:11 and διδασκαλία is found in Prov 2:17; Sir 24:33; 39:8; Isa 29:13.

⁶⁵ Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, 196.

⁶⁶ Dunn, *Epistles*, 193. Pokorný, *Colossians*, 154 also asserts that the similarity between the citations shows that the author of Colossians knows Mark. Further, since the prominence of Isaiah in Paul and the broader church tradition means this book would be better known in Pauline churches than most other prophets.

⁶⁷ Charles Nielsen ("The Status of Paul and His Letters in Colossians," *Perspectives* 12 [1985]: 119) seems to go too far when he asserts that the author of Colossians may not know that

this is a quotation from Isaiah because he knows it through the church's tradition. Given the explicit mention of Isaiah in that tradition, however, it is more likely that the writer of Colossians does know it is a quotation—even if he knows the text only because it appears in the Jesus tradition.

⁶⁸ Neither the Gospels nor Colossians quote this phrase precisely as it appears in the LXX. The Gospels change the wording in the same way (probably because Matthew is dependent on Mark at this point) and Colossians in a different way.

⁶⁹ Troy Martin (*By Philosophy and Empty Deceit: Colossians as a Response to a Cynic Critique*, JSNTSup 118 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996] 30) notes that the expression “human tradition” was used by Cynics to assert that their teaching was within a valuable tradition. Based on this he argues that the opponents of Colossians also use the phrase in this way. The form of Col 2:22, however, indicates that the author uses this as an accusation rather than as a less polemical description of the other teaching. O'Brien (*Colossians*, 151) is among those who recognize this allusion as an accusation.

⁷⁰ So, Schweizer, *Letter to the Colossians*, 174. Hay (*Glory at the Right Hand* 1973, 15) identifies 33 citations of this psalm in the New Testament.

⁷¹ O'Brien (*Colossians*, 162) where he lists these used of Ps 110: Mt 26:64; Mk 12:36; Lk 20:41-44; Acts 2:33-35; 5:31; 7:55, 56; Rom 8:34; Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pt 3:22; Rev 3:21.

⁷² Martin Hengel, "Hymn & Christology" in *Studia Biblica* 1978 III, 182.

⁷³ Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 133.

⁷⁴ So Hay, *Colossians*, 115. Similarly, Francis, "The Christological Argument of Colossians," 197; Nielsen, "The Status of Paul and His Letters in Colossians," 118.

⁷⁵ Outi Leppä, *The Making of Colossians; A Study on the Formation and Purpose of a Deutero-Pauline letter*, Publ of the Finnish Exegetical Society 86 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003) 158-59. Indeed, Rom 8:34 and Col 3:1 share ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ Θεοῦ, while only the terms “sitting” and being at the “right hand” are the same in the psalm.

⁷⁶ Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand* 40 claims this allusion to Ps 110 as one of those that adds “little or nothing” to the context, but is used because it is so familiar to the author and readers.

⁷⁷ Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand*, 44 thinks it is unclear whether the author of Colossians knows this Psalm independently of the church's formulaic usage of it or even whether he knows it refers to the psalm. Hay comments further (*Colossians*, 116-17) that the absence of a reference to Christ subduing his foes, which appears in Ps 110:1c, suggests that Colossians is drawing the quotation from the tradition rather than from reading the psalm.

⁷⁸ Given such differences, Margaret Y. MacDonald (*Colossians and Ephesians*, SP [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000], pp. 146-47) only goes as far as saying that this verse in Colossians “appears to be influenced by Gen 1:26-27.”

⁷⁹ So most commentators, e.g., Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 142-43; Harris, 153; Schweizer, *Letter to the Colossians*, 198; Hay, *Colossians*, 126. However, Lightfoot (*Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 216) rejects this view, arguing that it is not Christ because Christ is not in the Eph 4:24 parallel and is not in Genesis. But it is not unusual for Ephesians to shift the meanings of what it adopts from Colossians and the absence of Christ from the Genesis text would certainly not mean these later authors would not use the passage to speak of Christ, as other examples from Colossians demonstrate (e.g., Ps. 110:1).

⁸⁰ This need not imply an Adam/Christ Christology, though many find that view here. See the problems this text presents for a new Adam schema in Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 141.

⁸¹ MacDonald (*Colossians and Ephesians*, 138) suggests that the “in knowledge” phrase in v. 10 may also allude to the way knowledge figured into humanity’s failure.

⁸² Similarly, Jacob Jervell, *Imago Dei: Gen 1,26f. im Spätjudentum, in der Gnosis und in den paulinischen Briefen*, FRLANT 58 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960) 232-33. When 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 uses new creation language to urge its readers to adopt a new way of viewing life, the relationship to ethical exhortation is more distant than what we find in Col 3:10.

⁸³ Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 232-33; Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 142; MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 145-46. Dunn (*Epistles*, 223), however, thinks these various passages reflect a “cherished theme” more than a set formula. Even if this is the case, the method of interpretation of Scripture that arrives at the theme is a part of the tradition. Barth and Blanke (*Colossians*, 410-12) reject the idea that v. 9 adopts baptismal language at all, arguing that the old person/new person language is simply a creation of Paul that Colossians adopts.

⁸⁴ Dunn, *Epistles*, 228; Fee, “Old Testament Intertextuality,” 210.

⁸⁵ As Schweizer notes (*Letter to the Colossians*, 205), however, the theme does appear in more prominently in Rom 9-11.

⁸⁶ So Dunn, *Epistles*, 227-28.

⁸⁷ Even during Paul’s lifetime the question of the value of attachment to Israel may have arisen. The issues Paul addresses in Rom 14-15 may point to this, though Watson rejects this analysis. Questioning the value of connection to Israel may be a concern of Ephesians and it was a central thesis of Marcion at a later time.

⁸⁸ O’Brien (*Colossians*, 197-98) comments that this theme is much more prominent in the LXX than it is in the New Testament.

⁸⁹ Hay, *Colossians*, 130.

⁹⁰ MacDonald (*Colossians and Ephesians*, 139) comments that, “The notion of election is similar to that found in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., 1 Chron 16:13; Isa 43:20) and the QL (e.g., 1 QM 12:1).” This assertion that the author understands election to function with church members as it functioned in Israel is a different claim from that of Dunn (*Epistles*, 227-28), who says that election language signals that believers have been brought into the heritage of Israel.

⁹¹ Barth and Blanke (*Colossians*, 418) comment that the point of v. 12 is that as God’s chosen they are to reflect character of God seen in the messiah. Readers could have been prepared to understand this call to holiness in this way by the preceding reference to the “image” to which they are being conformed.

⁹² See the reading of this verse as a “hidden transcript” in Sumney, Comm 244-46.

⁹³ See Garner, *From Homer to tragedy*, 8.

⁹⁴ See the treatment of this command in Sumney, *Colossians*, 244-46.

⁹⁵ “In the name of the Lord” appears most often in the Deuteronomistic Histories and in Chronicles, but it also occurs outside that literature (e.g., Ps 20:7; Mic 4:5; Sir 47:18).

⁹⁶ It is rare enough that the Liddell-Scott *Intermediate Lexicon* lists it simply as a New Testament word.

⁹⁷ This is born out in part by the scarcity of citations of the Wisdom tradition in the New Testament.

⁹⁸ Stanley, "Homer" 54-55, 75-76 notes this same sort of coherence with the originating context in the ways other authors cite Homer.

⁹⁹ Ronald F. Hock, "Homer in Greco-Roman Education," pp. 56-77 in *Mimeisis and Intertextuality in Antiquity and Christianity*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity (ed. Dennis R. MacDonald; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2001), pp. 59-63.