CHAPTER ONE

SCRIPTURE, THEOLOGY, AND MISSION IN THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which God announced beforehand through his prophets in holy writings concerning his son . . .

Romans 1:1-3

From the opening words of his letter to the Roman churches, Paul reveals himself to be both a “missionary theologian”¹ and a “hermeneutic theologian.”² That is, Paul presents his apostolic mission as one that proclaims and interprets the gospel and Israel’s scriptural traditions in the service of creating and sustaining communities called into existence by God’s grace and love in Jesus Christ. The epistle to the Romans reflects the dynamic interplay of a number of influences and constraints on Paul’s thought. Foundational convictions, experiences and practices of mission, scriptural interpretation, cultural and historical contexts—all shape and reshape one another in Paul’s ongoing struggle to make sense of God’s design for Israel and to faithfully fulfill his own divinely-ordained role in the outworking of that plan.³

Nowhere is this complex and dynamic interrelationship of scripture, theology, and mission more apparent than in Paul’s consistent representation of Isaiah as a fellow preacher of the good news. A striking feature of the letter to the Romans is the apostle’s frequent invocation of the oracles of Isaiah, not only through direct quotations,

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¹ On this topic, see the penetrating insights of Dahl 1977b.
² So Beker 1986:10.
³ As Dahl observes, “a systematic outline of [Paul’s] theological doctrines becomes at best an accurate and useful map, a two dimensional projection without depth or movement (Dahl 1977b:71). Several of the proposals for doing “Pauline theology” arising out of the Pauline Theology Group of the Society of Biblical Literature urge that Paul’s theology may be more adequately conceptualized as a dynamic activity rather than as a relatively static set of convictions (see, for example, Bassler 1993 and Kraftchick 1993).
but also through more indirect modes of allusion and intertextual echo. Citations from Isaiah account for nearly half of Paul's explicit appeals to scripture in Romans. Moreover, at a number of points in the letter the prophet Isaiah virtually takes on a life of his own and becomes a second voice, speaking in concert with the apostle concerning God's plan to redeem Israel and the nations. Isaiah "cries out on behalf of Israel," affirming God's unremitting faithfulness even in the midst of judgment. Isaiah boldly "dares to speak" of God's astonishing embrace of Gentiles, while God's own people stand off at a distance, estranged and unresponsive. Isaiah sings of the root of Jesse who comes to unite Jew and Gentile into a single community of worship and praise. Even where he is not named, the ancient prophet's words are a weighty and palpable presence, whether Paul is wrestling with Israel's resistance to God's righteousness or interpreting the crucial role his own mission plays in the redemptive plan of God.

Three interlocking questions motivate the study that follows. First, how did Paul, as an ancient reader, approach the book of Isaiah? In what form (or forms) did he encounter the book? What were the

4 Compare the slightly different lists of citations (due to the use of different criteria for identifying quotations) in Koch 1986:21-24, Smith 1988:270-72, and Hübner 1997:1-219. The term "scripture" presupposes the existence of a particular community with a particular set of beliefs and practices (see Lindbeck 1988). In this work, when I speak of Paul's reading of "scripture," I refer to what Paul—and presumably his first hearers—would have taken as holy writ. This is not necessarily coextensive with the "canon" of scripture (another term that is meaningful only in relation to a particular interpretive community) later recognized by rabbinic Judaism or, in various forms, by Christian churches (see Collins 1995a; Sundberg 1964). I avoid the term "Old Testament" as anachronistic for Paul. "Hebrew Bible" is similarly an inappropriate term for this study, both because it presupposes canonical decisions not made until a later period in a particular Jewish community, and also because, as will become evident, Paul's use of Israel's scriptures in his letters suggests that he read them primarily (if not solely) in one or more Greek versions.

5 Rom 9:27-29. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of ancient texts are my own.


7 Rom 15:12.

8 For a list of citations of and allusions to Isaiah in Romans identified in this study, see p. 342 below (Figure 6.1).

9 With reference to Paul, I will avoid terms such as First, Second, and Third Isaiah, since there is no evidence that readers in the Second Temple period recognized these particular divisions of the book or that they considered the book as a whole to be anything other than the collected oracles of Isaiah of Jerusalem. I will, however, occasionally use the terms as a convenient shorthand for referring to the major blocks of the book, 1-39, 40-55, 56-66. Interestingly, more recent cri-