1. Introduction

In this paper I would like to argue that Paul’s view on the authoritative Jewish writings, the “holy writings,” as he calls them (Rom 1:2), is rather nuanced and subtle.1 For Paul, the fact that these writings are called “holy” does not imply that they are divinely revealed in their entirety and for that reason authoritative and holy. As I will demonstrate, these writings are considered authoritative for a variety of reasons, firstly because they are the ancestral writings of the Jews, in the same way as the ancestral writings of others in Greco-Roman antiquity were considered authoritative. This will be explored in section one.

Secondly, in Paul’s view, some parts of the Jewish writings are more authoritative than others insofar as they contain the direct divine oracles of God, normally rendered in direct divine speech and addressed to the prophets who record them. This divine, oracular authority will be explored in section two.

Thirdly, the question that then arises is in what sense the prophets, and in particular their writings, are related to God’s oracles, which are encompassed by the prophetic writings. We will look at Philo, who seems to have reflected theoretically on the difference between oracular and prophetic authority and who provides a close analogy for Paul’s more implicit views on the issue. This is the subject of section three.

Finally, if Paul has such a nuanced view of the multilayered authority of the Jewish writings, we need to understand how this is related both to the well-known view expressed in 2 Tim 3:16, generally

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believed to be a later Pseudo-Pauline pseudepigraphon, that “all Scripture is inspired by God” and to other concepts in Paul’s writings such as “the word of God” and “revelation.” Whereas the later notions do not seem to contradict Paul’s concise and discerning differentiations between ancestral, oracular and prophetic authority, it appears that the more rigid, monolithic view of 2 Tim 3:16 was made as a counterclaim against an emerging gnostic way of thinking which denied the authoritative status of particular writings. Although 2 Timothy’s position is understandable in such a polemical context, it would be wrong, I would suggest, to mistake this for Paul’s understanding of the authoritative Jewish writings. His nuanced approach still reflects and has much in common with a general Jewish and Greco-Roman appreciation of the importance of ancestral writings and the special status of divine oracles, of which the prophets were the recipients and interpreters.

2. Human and Ancestral Authority

2.1. References to Moses, David and Isaiah as Human Authorial Names

Firstly we will discuss Paul’s reference to the human and ancestral aspect of his appreciation of the Jewish Scriptures as authoritative writings. On several occasions, Paul refers to figures such as Moses, David and Isaiah in their capacity as human authors. In these instances he does not refer to the “holy writings” but uses their names as authorial names. In relation to David and Isaiah, it seems clear that they are regarded as human authors to whom one can refer. Paul explicitly refers to David twice as the author of a subsequent quotation in his writings: in Rom 4:6–8 Paul quotes Ps 31:1–2 and in Rom 11:9–10 he quotes Ps 68:23–24. On both occasions Paul introduces the quotation with the phrase καὶ Δαυὶδ λέγει, “and David says.” In a similar way, quotations from Isaiah are introduced in Rom 10:16: Ἡσαϊας γὰρ λέγει; Rom 10:20–21: Ἡσαϊας δὲ ἀποτολμᾷ καί λέγει; and Rom 15:12: καὶ πάλιν Ἡσαϊας λέγει. Although David and Isaiah would have been held in high esteem by Paul, it seems that in these passages he considers them as human authors of authoritative writings, without implying or referring to the holy or divine nature of their