Book Reviews


This book (declared “best academic book of the year” by the Association of Theological Booksellers during the SBL Meeting at Boston in 2008) is, according to the Introduction by the editors (pp. xxiii-xxviii), a commentary on all those NT passages in which the OT is used, in the form of either quotations or probable allusions. As a rule, six questions are asked for quotations and for clear allusions: (1) What is the NT context? (2) What is the OT context? (3) How was the OT source used in early Judaism? (4) What is the textual background of the quotation or allusion? (5) How has the OT passage been interpreted in its new context in the NT? (6) What theological use does the NT author make of the OT quotation or allusion?

The NT documents are discussed in their canonical order: Matthew by C.L. Blomberg (pp. 1-109), Mark by R.E. Watts (pp. 111-249), Luke by D.W. Pao and E.J. Schnabel (pp. 251-414), John by A.J. Köstenberger (pp. 415-512), Acts by I.H. Marshall (pp. 513-606), Romans by M.A. Seifrid (pp. 607-694), 1 Corinthians by B.S. Rosner (pp. 695-752), 2 Corinthians by P. Balla (pp. 753-783), Galatians by M. Silva (pp. 785-812), Ephesians by F. Thielman (pp. 813-833), Philippians by M. Silva (pp. 835-839), Colossians by G.K. Beale (pp. 841-870), 1 and 2 Thessalonians by J.A.D. Weima (pp. 871-889), 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus by P.H. Towner (pp. 891-918), Hebrews by G.H. Guthrie (pp. 919-995), James by D.A. Carson (pp. 997-1013), 1 Peter by the same author (pp. 1015-1045), who also comments on 2 Peter (pp. 1047-1061), 1, 2 and 3 John (pp. 1063-1067), and Jude (pp. 1069-1079), and lastly Revelation by G.K. Beale and S.M. McDonough (pp. 1081-1161). There is a short note on Philemon (p. 918), telling the reader that “[t]here are no OT quotations or clear allusions to discuss” in this letter. 2 and 3 John are included in the chapter on the Johannine Epistles, to judge from the chapter title (“1-3 John”), but there is in fact nothing on these two brief letters. All chapters end with a bibliography. The volume is closed with a very complete and very useful “Index of Scripture and Other Ancient Writings” (pp. 1163-1239).

The volume, with two columns per page, contains a wealth of materials on the NT use of the OT. One finds here discussion of all relevant NT passages, information on their textual affinities, on the OT and NT contexts, on parallels in early Jewish literature, on the function and meaning of the quotation or allusion, on relevant secondary literature. One aspect of the NT, its use of the OT, that is often dealt with more or less
marginally in commentaries, gets full attention in this volume. It deserves this full attention: Jesus and his followers saw themselves and their message firmly rooted in God’s history with Israel and in the Scriptures that issued from this history. We touch here on a central element of early Christianity, and this commentary on the OT in the NT shows how central it is.

The editors frankly admit that they have allowed some liberty to the contributors in the organization of the various chapters (see pp. xxiii, xxiv, xxvi). As a result, there is some unevenness in the distribution of materials. The chapter on Mark has 139 pages, whereas Matthew, a much longer gospel with a higher density of OT references, gets only 109 pages. For Luke’s Gospel, somewhat longer than Matthew but with a definitely lower density of use of the OT, there are 164 pages. There are comparable differences in proportion in the chapters on the other NT writings; especially striking are the 30 pages for Colossians, a letter in which most commentators do not find many OT materials. There are apparently differences among the contributors in the amount of space they devote to an individual quotation or allusion. The bibliographies are also of comparatively uneven size.

Almost all chapters start with an introduction on the way in which the biblical author in question deals with the OT, but these introductory sections are of very divergent size and scope. Such an introductory section would be the natural place to discuss a NT author’s use of formulæ to introduce quotations, but that does not always happen. I found the absence of a discussion of Matthew’s fulfilment formulæ (with their subtle differences) especially striking.

There is a lot of variety in the outline of the chapters themselves. One author makes his contribution into some sort of running commentary in that he mentions all kinds of OT references occurring between the quotations that are discussed more extensively (so Blomberg on Matthew, or Köstenberger on John), another one strictly limits himself to quotations and important allusions (so Watts on Mark). One author (Weima on 1 and 2 Thessalonians) gives much attention to OT vocabulary, OT metaphors and OT theology, whereas another one (Carson on the Johannine Epistles) explicitly states that he strictly focuses on the links between specific NT texts and specific OT texts, in the form of quotations, allusions, or references to events.

All evident OT quotations in the NT are discussed in the volume. Now quotations are rather easily established, certainly when they have been marked by an introductory (or concluding) formula. The selection of the allusions to be discussed is of course much more complicated, and will always be debatable. One gets the impression that not all contributors use the same criteria for establishing allusions. That is not surprising, in a sense even unavoidable, but it would have been helpful if there had been some explicit discussion of the various criteria used.

Questions of authorship of NT documents are hardly discussed in the book. It seems that the contributors simply take for granted the traditional ascriptions. This leads to views such as that there are no Deutero-Pauline Epistles: not only the seven undisputed letters, but also Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians and the three Pastoral Epistles are supposed to have been written by Paul himself. Although many scholars have expressed their doubts on the Pauline authorship of these six documents,