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SCRIPTURE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: LITERARY AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES¹

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Abstract

Following the work of C.H. Dodd (1952) and R.B. Hays (1989), it is often assumed that the task of explaining scriptural quotations in the NT is to look beyond superficial discrepancies and discover sophisticated patterns or frameworks of meaning. Those who argue that the rhetorical purposes of the NT authors should take priority over what the text once meant in its ancient context are said to be blind to this level of sophistication, which often involves evoking texts at some distance from the quoted text. In this article, I examine two quotations (Isa 40:3; 52:5) where scholars have argued that the meaning and function of the texts (in Mark 1:2-3 and Rom 2:24 respectively) depends on their ability to evoke a wider Isaian framework. I first establish that the arguments for Isa 40:3 in Mark 1:2-3 are very much stronger than the arguments for Isa 52:5 in Rom 2:24. I then show that there are significant counter-arguments to the case for Isa 40:3 in Mark 1:2-3, which are not necessarily fatal but do raise serious questions. I conclude that the much weaker case of Isa 52:5 in Rom 2:24 can safely be dismissed.

1. Introduction

1.1 Use of Scripture and theology

As with many NT topics, traditional approaches to ‘Scripture in the NT’ have usually focused on theology. For example, if we want to know why Mark opens his Gospel with a quotation from Isa 40: (‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight’), the answer lies in Mark’s theology; in particular, his understanding of Jesus as the *χριστός* who fulfils the hopes of Israel. If we want to know why Paul’s first explicit quotation in Romans is

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