

BOOK REVIEW

Beale, G.K., *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012). xviii + 173 pp. Pbk. \$17.99 USD.

G.K. Beale has done much work in the area of the New Testament use of the Old Testament, especially recently with the publication of *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012) and the co-edited *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) with D.A. Carson. It is no surprise, then, that Beale has come out with yet another major work on this important and trending topic in biblical studies. He states that the methodology outlined in this book is the basis of his two previous works, especially the *Commentary*. It focuses on ‘methodological approaches and sources to aid in the task of understanding how the NT writers refer to the OT’ (p. xvii). Hence, it is a sort of *how to* book on interpreting New Testament passages that seem to either quote or allude to (among other such terms) the Old Testament.

The first chapter appropriately identifies the problem in this discussion, as Beale writes: ‘The most important debate is about whether the NT interprets the Old in line with the original OT meaning’ (p. 1). He begins the chapter by surveying what he considers to be some of the more popular approaches, including the Jewish interpretation approach, the testimony book approach, the Christocentric approach, the rhetorical approach and the postmodern approach (although instead of the word ‘approach’ he uses ‘debate’). At the end of this survey, Beale writes:

The point of this section is not to make a sustained argument for any viewpoint. Indeed, a substantial book could be written only on this topic. In fact, the 1,200-page *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* has done just this: the vast majority of discussions in it have concluded that, to varying degrees, the context of the OT is important for understanding its use in the NT (p. 13).

The second chapter identifies two of the key terms and definitions involved in this discussion, namely *quotation* and *allusion*. Beale defines quotation as ‘a direct citation of an OT passage that is easily recognizable by its clear and unique verbal parallelism’ (p. 29). He states, ‘Most commentators agree on the vast majority of what should be recognized as quotations from the OT’ (p. 29). Allusions, on the other hand, are a bit more challenging to identify, but Beale provides a working definition: ‘a brief expression consciously intended by an author to be dependent on an OT passage’ (p. 31). He further expands the definition by stating that ‘The telltale key to discerning an allusion is that of recognizing an *incomparable or unique parallel in wording, syntax, concept, or cluster of motifs in the same order or structure*’ (p. 31; italics original).

The core of the book, according to Beale, is Chapter 3, in which Beale outlines his view of the New Testament use of the Old Testament. He writes: ‘Once an OT reference has been identified in the NT, one can begin to work on how the NT writer is interpreting the reference. This chapter offers a nine-fold approach to understanding the Old in the New’ (p. 41). The nine steps are: (1) identify the Old Testament reference, whether it is a quotation or an allusion (using criteria laid out in the previous chapter); (2) analyze the New Testament context in which the Old Testament reference occurs; (3) analyze the original Old Testament context; (4) survey the use of the Old Testament passage in other early and late Judaistic literature; (5) compare texts, including variant readings; (6) analyze textual use of the Old Testament passage; (7) analyze the New Testament author’s interpretive use of the Old Testament passage; (8) analyze the New Testament author’s theological use of the Old Testament passage, and (9) analyze the New Testament author’s rhetorical use of the Old Testament passage. The rest of the chapters in this book elaborate further on some (not all) of the points outlined above.

There are many useful aspects of the book, including an introductory survey and identification of the major points of discussion for this topic. One helpful step that Beale has identified is looking at textual variants and seeing how these might influence how an Old Testament passage is referenced in the New Testament. I think further elaboration on textual issues would be helpful for that purpose, particularly a discussion on how many textual variants are actually significant for this topic.

However, there are a few points of critique that I offer here. First, arguing for a particular theory explaining how New Testament writers ‘use’ the Old Testament would strengthen the overall argument and is quite critical in this sort of book, even if it is meant to be introductory. Since the point of the book is to be a ‘how to’ guide for interpreting New Testament texts that refer to the Old Testament, the theory behind the ‘how to’ is extremely important as the foundation for the application. In fact, I would state that hermeneutical *methods* are based on foundational hermeneutical *theories*. If the theory behind the method is wrong, the method should be deemed faulty as well, and one cannot simply *assume* a position when the debate is as muddled as Beale (rightly) notes. To that end, an expanded version of the initial section identifying the various theories of Old Testament in the New Testament, defending and arguing for his particular theory, would greatly enhance the overall strength of the book. That being said, Beale does have some implicit theories underlying the methods outlined in the book. It is the underlying assumption that when New Testament writers refer in some way to an Old Testament passage, whether quotation, allusion or the allusive (often elusive) echo, they are placing some sort of interpretive scheme upon that original Old Testament text. Whether this is right or wrong is beyond the scope of this review, but the direction of the book would be better served if this, if true, was identified and expanded upon at the outset.

Another problem arises regarding Beale’s definitions and criteria for determining *quotation* and *allusion*. He states that most commentators agree which passages in the New Testament are Old Testament quotations, and yet scholars disagree on exactly how many quotations of the Old Testament there really are in the New Testament. To define a quotation as a ‘direct citation...that is easily recognizable’ simply appeals to a perceived *a priori* universal recognition of the Old Testament quotation. But the point of the discussion is that references are not all easily recognizable and this is precisely why the debate continues regarding terms and definitions. What exactly are the criteria that qualify a passage in the New Testament to be an Old Testament quotation or allusion? I think a more robust definition of quotation might help clarify some of the confusion surrounding these terms, perhaps even categorizing different types of quotations.

Also problematic is Beale’s definition of *allusion*. Whether or not an author *consciously* intended to refer to a particular Old Testament text

(or even concept) is difficult, if not impossible, to determine, especially since we are not able to ask authors what their intentions were. Perhaps if Beale has some criteria by which to determine conscious intent, these should be delineated in the section.

A final critique relates to step seven of Beale's nine-fold approach. The major problem is that it seems to be a bit simplistic, and perhaps even circular, even for an introductory book. This step, analyzing the New Testament author's interpretive (or 'hermeneutical') use of the Old Testament, entails determining what category of usage the New Testament author employs. He writes:

If students at the outset are generally aware of the various primary ways NT writers interpret the OT, then they are in a better position to narrow down what use may be in mind in a particular passage under study. When one knows the possible options of use, one can try these on for size in a specific case being analyzed (p. 55).

But this seems circular in that the categories are based on preconceived notions of how New Testament writers are using the Old Testament reference. To set these categories up, according to Beale, one must look at individual occurrences, determine *how* the New Testament writer is using them, and then reread that particular category onto other usages. But this whole step of determining categories of usages seems to be the whole dilemma of this discussion: *how* is the New Testament writer 'using' the Old Testament? Should we have preconceived notions of how it was used? Perhaps Beale suggests that we start with his own set of categories. He writes: 'The categories of uses in this chapter are based on my own past study together with the findings of other scholars who work in this field' (p. 55). But again, how were these categories determined? There is a level of circularity involved that I think would benefit from further elaboration on how these categories should be determined from the beginning.

In spite of these critiques, I think the book is a good starting point and a useful resource for a beginning student and interpreter on the New Testament use of the Old Testament. Overall, Beale introduces various approaches to the subject and expands on his own particular approach. One major contribution is the lengthy bibliography on related resources that students can delve into after reading this book.

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