

BOOK REVIEW

Walser, Georg A., *Old Testament Quotations in Hebrews: Studies in their Textual and Contextual Background* (WUNT, 2.356; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013). xv + 220 pp. Pbk. €74.00.

Dr. Georg Walser presents here a revised version of the doctoral dissertation that he did at the University of Leicester under the supervision of Dr. Susan Docherty. Walser has previously completed a PhD in Old Testament (University of Gothenburg) and a second PhD in Classical Greek (Lund University). The topic of this monograph fits well within his expertise. Despite the recent and welcome resurgence in Septuagint studies, this volume—perhaps because it deals with a New Testament book—has still managed to escape much notice. This is unfortunate since Walser's volume brings a wealth of Septuagint scholarship to bear upon the study of Hebrews, which could be instructive for future works on the intersection between the Septuagint and the New Testament.

Rather than confining his study to discussing typical issues related to the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament, Walser seeks to discover what texts of the Septuagint the author of Hebrews might have been using and how his exegesis was influenced by these texts and the interpretive traditions that birthed and were birthed by them. This leads Walser to engage deeply with the flourishing yet oft-neglected field of Septuagint studies. Walser (rightly) eschews the notion of a fixed text, or *textus receptus*, and instead favors a pluriform text for both early Judaism and the Hebrews writer, a refreshing change in direction away from many previous studies. Additionally, while Walser adopts the consensus view in modern Jewish studies of a longer and later 'parting of the ways' between Judaism and Christianity and interprets Hebrews as a Jewish Christian document, he also recognizes 'the role of Scripture in the process of forming two separate communities, the Jewish and the Christian', and is interested in exploring how early Christian and Jewish communities interpreted these texts they held in

common (pp. 6-7). Walser also conducts his research with the assumption that later interpretations of Scripture are based on, or reflective of, earlier interpretations. Thus, he examines how the Old Testament texts used by the Hebrews writer were also used in Second Temple Jewish material and in material from both the Eastern and Western churches until around 500 CE.

Walser has divided the bulk of his monograph into three major chapters, each analyzing one of the following texts: Jer. 31.33 (Heb. 8.10; 10.16), Ps. 40.7 (Heb. 10.5) and Gen. 47.31 (Heb. 11.21). Each chapter includes discussion and analysis of the given text, followed by discussions of the text's history and reception. The volume also provides an extensive bibliography, including numerous sources in German as well as English, and a helpful subject index.

Regarding Jer. 31.33 (38.33 LXX), Walser focuses on the fact that the Hebrews writer used a version with the plural 'laws' instead of the singular 'law'. The plural version, by all appearances, is unique to the Septuagint, whereas the singular reading was preferred by the Masoretes. This issue has been little explored in biblical studies, yet Walser argues (significantly) that the Septuagint version is likely based on a different Hebrew *Vorlage* that is older, and hence more original, than the MT (pp. 30-34). This raises several questions for interpretation and challenges older scholarship on Hebrews which interpreted the writer's use of Jeremiah 31 as either referring to the setting aside of the whole law or an implied distinction between the Decalogue and the rest of the Torah. Walser also examines the interpretive context of the two versions of Jer. 31.33, looking at its use in Qumran, the Pseudepigrapha, the targumim, the midrashim and early Christian sources (e.g. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Eusebius of Caesarea, John Chrysostom). After a review of the sources, Walser concludes that there are 'no traces of the LXX version in any of the early Jewish sources' (p. 84). Additionally, he argues that the Hebrews writer could not have drawn upon a pre-Christian interpretation in which 'the law' was understood as referring to anything other than the Torah itself. In later Christian interpretation, 'laws' (plural) came to refer to the teaching of Jesus, and Walser argues that the Hebrews writer's use of 'laws' indicates that he also was aware of an earlier version of this sort of interpretation.

The case of Ps. 40.7b (39.7b LXX) is an intriguing issue for those studying textual traditions. The Hebrew text reads, 'you have dug ears

for me' (לִי כְּרִימִים אֲזַיְנִים), and the Septuagint version says, 'but you prepared ears for me' (ὥτια δὲ κατηρτίσω μοι). In Heb. 10.5, however, the quotation reads, 'but a body you have prepared for me' (σῶμα δὲ κατηρτίσω μοι). As Walser notes, the differences between Hebrews and both the Septuagint and MT versions of this passage have led some scholars to argue that the reading in Hebrews was 'fabricated' by the Hebrews writer and subsequently found its way into later manuscripts of the Septuagint (p. 90). However, Walser argues that this is unlikely, and he notes that the reading attested in Hebrews is also found in the great codices Sinaiticus, Vaticanus and Alexandrinus as well as in P. Bodmer 24. While Rahlfs believed ὥτια was the original reading, Walser follows the majority of recent Septuagint scholarship in arguing that σῶμα was more likely the original reading and that ὥτια was a scribal attempt at bringing the Greek text back in line with a form of the MT (pp. 91-93). Walser also examines the Jewish interpretive tradition and argues that the interpretation of Hebrews, which associates this text with the body of Jesus and thus with a sacrifice of a human 'body', was unique to Hebrews' Christian context (p. 140).

The last text that Walser investigates is Gen. 47.31b. The versions of the Genesis passage extant in the MT and Septuagint are quite different, though easily explained as resulting from a difference in vocalization of the Hebrew מטה, which can either mean 'bed' or 'staff', depending on the pronunciation (pp. 141-42). The reference to this text in Heb. 11.21 changes the context of the passage, however, by making Jacob's blessing of his grandsons into an act of worship, which differs from the original context of Gen. 47.30-31, where Joseph promises to bury his father with the other patriarchs. The blessing, which occurs in Genesis 48, does not explicitly involve worship. Walser argues convincingly that the Septuagint version did not result from an accidental misreading of the Hebrew text, and he contends that the readings preserved in both the Septuagint and the MT were pervasive in early Jewish and Christian textual traditions and that the original meaning of Gen. 47.31b has been lost. Walser comments upon the variant of Heb. 11.21 preserved in P⁴⁶ and argues that it was likely not original, given the fact that it is attested nowhere else, even if it predates all other extant Christian interpretive traditions. Walser also suggests the idea that while the Hebrews writer might have used the Septuagint, his interpretation might have been based on some other text or tradition (p. 178).

While Walser has given us an interesting set of studies on texts in Hebrews, one wishes that he would have explored some other texts that appear to have had a more obvious impact on the Hebrews writer. For instance, why not study the catena of Old Testament passages in Heb. 1.5-14, the references to Ps. 95.7-11 in Hebrews 3-4 or the use of Ps. 110.4 in Hebrews 7? Perhaps this decision was made out of a concern to limit the scope of the research or due to Walser's focus on textual traditions rather than the author's theological usage of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, a study of some of these passages could have enhanced his analysis.

Apart from his work on Gen. 47.31b, Walser also does not give much consideration to the potential role of scribal errors in the development of certain readings in the Septuagint or other traditions. For instance, regarding the use of 'laws' (plural) from Greek Jeremiah in Hebrews instead of 'law' (singular), as found in the Hebrew Bible, Walser does not acknowledge that a scribal error provides a simpler explanation for the differences between these readings found in the Septuagint and the MT. Perhaps, instead of indicating an interpretive tradition separate from that behind the MT, the Greek (*νόμους*) arose simply because a copyist reading an unpointed Hebrew text accidentally misread תּוֹרָתִי, 'my laws', instead of תּוֹרָתִי, 'my law'. While Walser notes that there are no extant Hebrew manuscripts of Jer. 31.33 with 'laws' in the plural, there are other places in the Hebrew Bible where the Torah is referred to in the plural form (e.g. Gen. 26.5; Exod. 18.16, 20; Lev. 26.46; Ezek. 44.24), so it is possible that this reading could have originated from a scribe's memory of the plural from other areas of the Hebrew Bible, including from the Pentateuch itself. These sorts of scribal errors—lapses in memory and attention to detail—were very common in antiquity and in many cases gave rise to a multitude of different readings that were subsequently transmitted.

There are also questions one might raise concerning Walser's assumption that the Hebrews writer was interacting with competing interpretations of Scripture. One problem is that his approach assumes that we can know how the 'other side' was reading the biblical texts used in Hebrews, and as Walser has noted, the evidence for this is sometimes unclear. However, for the sake of argument, let us assume that he is correct and that this is possible. One is still left wondering whether the decision to pit Hebrews' 'Christian' reading of the Old Testament against various 'Jewish' readings risks minimizing the fact

that the Hebrews writer was interested in resolving a crisis within his community and that his personal interests affected how he handled the Septuagint. The author's pastoral concern and practical resourcefulness in crisis management shaped his reading of the Old Testament more than anything else, including other traditions.

One also wonders how Walser can be confident in his ability to reconstruct earlier interpretive traditions in Hebrews from later texts from the Greek and Latin fathers. How can we be sure they were relying on prior interpretive tradition that was not influenced by Hebrews? Anticipating this question, Walser argues in various places that Hebrews was not widely distributed, making its influence on later interpreters' citations of Old Testament texts unlikely. However, this assumption is far from certain when we consider that Hebrews was circulating early on with Paul's letters, as evidenced in P⁴⁶ (circa 200 CE), and that it was obviously known among prominent Christian interpreters such as Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and John Chrysostom. These methodology-related questions merit further consideration.

Even though critical questions remain, Walser has provided a fascinating study of Greek Old Testament textual traditions in Hebrews. The prose is well written and clear, though made challenging at times by the impressive mass of references from original sources marshalled as evidence throughout the monograph. Additionally, Walser shows a real mastery of the secondary literature in Septuagint studies, especially that in German—this is one of the most rewarding aspects of the monograph. By bringing Septuagint scholarship and textual traditions into conversation with New Testament scholarship, Walser raises new and interesting interpretive questions regarding texts previously glossed over by scholars specializing in Hebrews. This monograph will continue to prove valuable for studies on the use of the Old Testament in Hebrews and in studies of the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament more generally.

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