

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Problems and issues

Paul the apostle has rightly been described¹ as both a ‘missionary theologian’, whose labours and letters are all directed toward the fulfilment of his calling to be ‘a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God’ (Rom. 15:16),² and a ‘hermeneutical theologian’ whose writings, even when they are not explicitly citing Scripture, are shaped at the deepest level by his interaction with its message.

At the intersection of these two great Pauline preoccupations – Scripture and the mission to the Gentiles – is a riddle that confronts us on at least four occasions within the letters of the Pauline corpus. In each instance, a citation of a text (or several texts) of Scripture seemingly speaking in the original context of the return of exiled or scattered Israelites is appropriated as a reference to Gentile believers in Christ.³

Thus, in Gal. 4:27, Paul cites Isaiah’s promise to desolate Jerusalem that she will one day have children ‘more numerous than the children of the one who is married’, and encourages the uncircumcised Galatian Gentiles reading

1 E.g. J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Paul and Isaiah 'in Concert'* (NovTSup 51; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1.

2 All biblical quotations, except where otherwise indicated, are taken from the NRSV.

3 Depending on how terms are defined and texts are interpreted, it could be argued that the same phenomenon can be found in several other places within these letters (e.g. Rom. 1:17; 2:15, 29; 10:20; 2 Cor. 3:3; 6:2; Gal. 3:11; Eph. 5:14). All of these other texts will be discussed at least briefly within the chapters that follow, and the methodology that I will follow (which includes a survey of the whole letter in which each citation occurs for the hermeneutical indications that it offers to its readers in their interpretation and appropriation of Scripture) should shed at least some light on all of them. There are no instances of the phenomenon outside of Galatians, 2 Corinthians, Romans and Ephesians. I selected the four texts for close analysis because (unlike Rom. 2:15, 29, 2 Cor. 3:3 and Eph. 5:14) they involve direct citations of the scriptural text, the texts that they cite (unlike the texts cited in Rom. 1:17; 10:20, 2 Cor. 6:2 and Gal. 3:11) make explicit reference to the plight of Israel’s exile and dispersion and/or its reversal. The selection of the four texts chosen also enables comparisons to be made between the hermeneutic at work in passages of disputed (2 Cor. 6:14–7:1 and Ephesians) and undisputed (Galatians and Romans) Pauline authorship, adding to the complexity of the task but also to its usefulness.