

Response to Professor Greg Beale

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I am pleased to be able to respond, albeit briefly, to Professor Beale's recent review in *Themelios*. He raises a number of thoughtful points, and they deserve fuller interaction than I am able to give in the limited space allotted, and so I must remain content to attempt to distil what I perceive to be his main objections and address them as best I can.

It seems clear to me from reading both of Prof. Beale's reviews (here and in *JETS*) that his disagreements with me are not merely academic, but touch on issues that are important to him for the very faith we both share. He suggests as much by concluding his *Themelios* review with comments as to the 'pessimistic pedagogical and homiletical' conclusions of my approach to apostolic hermeneutics. While I do not share this assessment, I recognize the importance of such an exchange. Despite our very real academic differences, what unites us both is an earnest engagement of Scripture as evangelicals, and an articulation of the fruit of that engagement to those in our hearing, ultimately in an effort to exalt Scripture and the One who inspired it. I do not think we differ so much on basic theological principles, namely the inspiration and authority of Scripture, but in how the rubber of those principles meets the sometimes bumpy road of historical analysis and the realities of our canon.

At any rate, as Beale has mentioned in both his reviews, my book and the articles to which he refers have, if anything, driven him to look more closely at his own position. I echo that sentiment, which I hope to demonstrate in my response below.

Need to acknowledge different points of view

On one level, I certainly understand Beale's recurring plea that I acknowledge views of scholars that differ from my own. But although this is a normal academic expectation, I still do not agree that the nature of this type of book requires, or even would benefit from, the kind of exposition for which he asks. I understand that he and others might feel slighted, even implicated, and so might even feel a touch of irritation. I wish this

were not the case, and perhaps a timely word or two at various junctures of the book might have helped obviate that impression. Nevertheless, I have often heard it said that books written by academics are not read enough by people who could benefit most from them. Perhaps the reason for this is that we insist on involving our readers in matters that are of little to no interest to them (and if they are interested, they can be pointed in the right direction, as I try to do in the annotated bibliographies in my book). What is more, it is not at all the case that, unless I address differences of opinion, my readers are 'left to trust Enns' [sic] word for it.' For one thing, this charge could be levelled against nearly any book that deals with knotty matters and is aimed at a more popular audience. Also, even if I addressed the matters he wished I had, lay readers would *still* largely need to take my word for why I consider certain opinions off base. Such engagement would have shifted the focus of my book away from its apologetic purpose and accessible style.

I, however, am no pious piper. I find it refreshing that some very sympathetic lay readers, while being very supportive on the whole of the approach I take in my book, have expressed areas of disagreement. Their questions have helped me refine how I package some of the issues addressed in the book. This type of dialogue is precisely what I was hoping for when I set out to write the book. Lay readers may not be as easily swayed as we academics sometimes think, and I am glad about this. Indeed, many readers in my target audience have already been involved in struggles that make them very knowledgeable (if even on a less academic level) of certain matters concerning Scripture. As I mentioned in my *JETS* response, I say again, in all sincerity, that he is more than free to write a popular level book of a very different nature, but I remain unconvinced that my rhetorical strategy represents a failure on my part.

Hermeneutical diversity in Second Temple Judaism

Beale is certainly correct, and I am fully aware, that Second Temple Judaism was not a hermeneutical monolith. But whatever diversity is there cannot be used to minimize the midrashic (see below) dimension of Second Temple Judaism that is far, far more pervasive than any concern to be 'sensitive' to the Old Testament context. To be sure, the rules of Hillel, to choose one of Beale's examples, are not simply to be equated with, say, Qumran *pesher*. But neither were these rules intended to inch

ancient readers closer to a plain, contextual, semi-grammatical-historical sense of Scripture ('compatible with a contextual interpretation of the Old Testament' as Beale puts it). Rather, these rules operated under the assumption that, since God is the real author of Scripture; all of Scripture is 'simultaneous' and so a proper study of Scripture will allow the different parts of Scripture to 'speak' to each other, thus revealing God's will. These rules guided Jews in extracting safe and useful teaching from the Bible for the life of the people gathered around the primacy of divine Torah. A reading of the Mishnah and Talmud, moreover, further indicates that these rules did not encourage strict attention to contextual matters, and in fact resulted in conflicting and contradictory interpretations. In these cases, the 'correct' conclusion was not determined by which reading was more 'compatible with contextual interpretation of the Old Testament'. It came about by the needs of the interpretive community gathered around Torah and by its tradition. Furthermore, however one understands rabbinic interpretation, it is still not representative of the broad range of ancient texts we have. These would have to include at least the pseudepigrapha, apocrypha, and the Dead Sea Scrolls, all of which must be taken into account in order to yield a 'broad but accurate sketch'¹ of Second Temple hermeneutics.

A term that for me and others adequately describes the general hermeneutical tenor of Second Temple hermeneutics is *midrash*. There are certainly well known differences of opinion of how this word should be used. Some (e.g., G. Porton) argue that the term should be restricted to actual rabbinic midrashic texts, while others (e.g., R. Bloch) prefer a broader definition, that is, a description of hermeneutical posture. Both points have their internal logic, but I am of the latter opinion. What unites such otherwise diverse texts as *Jubilees*, the pesher on Habakkuk, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* is a hermeneutical posture that seeks: (1) to mine Scripture for hidden, richer meanings in order to hear God speak once again in a community's present circumstances, and (2) to preserve these interpretive traditions for successive generations. When understood this way (and I am hardly a single voice crying in the wilderness), Second

1 *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 131. I would add the Targums to this list, particularly Neofiti and *Ps-Jonathan*. Even though the printed forms known to us are centuries later, they are widely considered to preserve some interpretive traditions that are pre-Christian.

Temple biblical interpretation can generally be labelled 'midrashic' or as I call it in the book 'odd' (an attempt to avoid jargon), that is, not operating from the interpretive standards we take for granted when we open our Bibles and read.

The question of 'consistency' with the Old Testament

When it comes to explaining the manner in which the Old Testament sense is related to the New Testament's use of it, Beale employs language that in my view does not shed light on Second Temple interpretive practices or on apostolic hermeneutics. To begin with, to insist on using words like 'twist', to 'distort' to describe non-contextual exegesis of the Second Temple period erects, at the outset, a hermeneutical wall of hostility between the New Testament and its environment. Our first aim is to understand their hermeneutical methods as historical phenomena rather than pass judgement on the basis of our own hermeneutical conventions. The fact remains, however, which Beale also recognizes, that apostolic exegesis really does do some things that cannot be explained by grammatical-historical standards. As a result they might be left open to a similar charge of twisting and distorting. This seems to lead Beale to a two-pronged defence: (1) although it has its moments, Second Temple hermeneutics is overall not nearly as 'odd' as some people think, and (2) that despite some similarities, the New Testament is on the whole more contextually bound to the Old Testament than its neighbouring texts.

I disagree on the first point (as noted above). As for the second point, Beale's own descriptions of New Testament hermeneutics belie a palpable tension between acknowledging the similarities between the New Testament and its environment and wishing to maintain some distance between them. So, we read that the New Testament authors are 'not inconsistent' with the Old Testament context, or their interpretations do 'not contravene' that context, or 'reveal a contextual awareness' or are 'sensitive' to the Old Testament context, while also being willing to 'creatively develop' that Old Testament passage. This language seems unnecessarily defensive, even protectionist. I am not sure how this contributes to our understanding of the nature of Second Temple hermeneutics and the place of the New Testament in it. Descriptions such as 'consistent with', 'sensitive to', and even 'context' must be understood first and foremost within the conventions of *ancient* interpreters. As

biblical scholars, this historical question is the first order of business.² Beale's terms suggest an uncritical adoption of etic hermeneutical categories. So we are presented with a picture of apostolic hermeneutics where it is assumed that the New Testament writers share his concerns with matters of contextual exegesis.

There is no question that apostolic hermeneutics is a complex matter. I try to boil it down in my book; Beale tries to do so in his own way. However, in my estimation, what controlled the New Testament writers seems to have been something other than 'be careful not to contravene' the Old Testament. Rather, what supported apostolic hermeneutics was how is their Scripture now to be understood in light of the climactic revelatory event, the person and work of Christ. For us today, the hermeneutical lesson to be learned is surely more than observing how the New Testament authors are 'not inconsistent' with the Old Testament and make sure we follow. I look forward to the Baker volume he mentions (in n. 4) and how certain thorny issues will be handled there. However, I do not think we will come to a clearer understanding of apostolic hermeneutics as a historical phenomenon by adducing Beale's categories, at least not without further clarification.

Biblical Theology

This point follows upon the previous one. For Beale, biblical theology (in the Vosian trajectory, as he specifies) does not yield 'odd' uses of the Old Testament, that is, it does not proceed in disregard to the Old Testament context. Rather, although biblical theology is 'not a technical *grammatical-historical* [approach]' it nevertheless 'takes in wider biblical contexts than merely the one being quoted, yet it is not inconsistent with the quoted text.' I am not sure how well this defines biblical theology, but on one very

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- 2 Beale may disagree, but this point made repeatedly by R. Longenecker, and perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the concluding chapter of *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*: 'It has become all too common today to hear assertions of a theological nature as to what God must have done or claims of a historical nature as to what must have been the case during the apostolic period of the Church – and to find that such statements are based principally on deductions from what has previously been accepted and/or supported by current analogies alone. The temptation is always with us to mistake hypothesis for evidence or to judge theological and historical formulations by their coherence and widespread acceptance, rather than first of all by their correspondence and exegetical data' (*Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* [2nd ed; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 185).

important level, I agree with him here. I would not simply equate biblical theology with Second Temple practices. Moreover, I would consider biblical theology a distinct hermeneutical contribution prompted by the gospel message preached by Jesus and apostles.

But, the more fundamental point is that, as Beale also avers, biblical theology is not grammatical-historical exegesis. True, it 'takes in wider biblical contexts' but that offers no protection, for the very act of taking in wider contexts is precisely the problem to be discussed, and it demands that we assess *how* those wider contexts are 'taken in' to the apostles' exegetical programme. For example, the well known cases of Matthew's use of Hosea 11:2 in Matthew 2:15 and Paul's seed/seeds exegesis in Galatians 3:16, 29 are two instances of New Testament authors 'widening' the Old Testament passage they employ. How do they accomplish this? Matthew turns Hosea's retrospective observation into a prophetic utterance. Paul exploits a grammatical point to reinterpret the promise in Genesis of countless offspring to refer to one person, Christ.

Beale mentions Matthew 2:15 as a clear counter example to non-contextual exegesis *because* it is biblical theological, which by his definition is 'not inconsistent' with the Old Testament context. This is not persuasive to me. Both examples cited above are truly 'odd' uses of the Old Testament (in keeping with Second Temple interpretive practices), and they are *also* powerful examples of biblical theology (Christ embodies Israel's story; God's promises are fulfilled in Christ). To put it another way, the Biblical Theological message in these passages, although not *generated* by or *dependent* on such hermeneutical methods, is certainly born on the wings of these methods, not a 'sensitivity' to contextual or semi-contextual concerns. Beale may protest, but to describe these biblical theological expositions as 'not inconsistent with the quoted text' without clarifying how that non-inconsistency is demonstrated, indeed, what that even means, does not help to explain the phenomena.

Matthew's interpretation of Hosea shows that the ultimate meaning of Hosea's words is not constrained by Hosea's context, but actually transcends that context and *transforms* Hosea's words in light of the grand, ultimate context of the eschaton which was inaugurated at Christ's resurrection. It is on the basis of the hermeneutical centrality of the death and resurrection of Christ that broader themes are now taken hold of and seen through that eschatological lens, rather than a concern on the part of the New Testament writers to be constrained by the original context of

the Old Testament. In other words, it is the summative force of God's revelation in Christ that *allows* the 'wider biblical contexts' to enter the discussion. We may call this biblical theology (and I do), but that will not serve as a buffer between the New Testament and the interpretive practices of the world in which the New Testament writers lived.

The 'Moveable Well'³ of 1 Corinthians 10:4

I very much appreciate Beale's interaction with my thoughts on this issue. My handling of this passage does seem to have struck a particular chord, as it occupies him for several lengthy footnotes and will, apparently, occupy an entire doctoral dissertation under his supervision. What seems to concern him is mainly an apologetic issue, that is, the 'precarious historical' nature of this tradition found in an inspired text. I want to think about his observations a bit more, but at this juncture I wonder whether this apologetic is not in some way driving his historical analysis. There is much that could occupy my thoughts here, but I would refer interested readers to my 1996 *BBR* article,⁴ not because I think I have the last word there, but because I do not think that he has fully addressed the issues that are raised.

Beale draws attention to what he considers a 'significant textual variant' in *LAB* 10:7, but in this case the evidence is not as damaging as he would have us think. It is true that the D manuscript group has 'it [the rock] followed' while the P manuscript group has 'the Lord followed'. But is it not the case, as Beale claims, that the latter group is of 'almost equal authority' to the former. There is always a bit of ambiguity in such discussions, but H. Jacobson, in his massive commentary, argues at length that the latter manuscript group routinely deviates from the Latin archetype, and that the changes that are made are at times stylistic, but

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- 3 Allow me to offer a needed clarification. My use of the phrase 'moveable well' is intended as a cipher for the ancient tradition of some miraculous and sustained supply of water during the wilderness wandering. Beale's critique of me is based in part on focusing on the specific notion of a moveable rock/well, which is a perfectly understandable conclusion to draw from the title of my article and from how I use the phrase. I was not clear in my use of the term and I stand corrected. It would have been clearer to refer to it as the 'miraculous water in the desert' tradition, with one strand being a moveable well/following rock, but one has to admit that some of the punch would be lost.
 - 4 'The 'Moveable Well' in 1 Cor 10:4: An Extra-Biblical Tradition in an Apostolic Text' *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 6 (1996): 23–38.

other times are quite intentional so as to change the meaning of the text.⁵

This alone does not solve all text-critical issues (the π family should not be tossed aside automatically), for as Jacobson continues, each instance must be investigated on its own terms. As for the text-critical question posed in 10:7, it is important to keep before us that *LAB* only exists in Latin, (a translation from the Greek from Hebrew). Although Jews were likely responsible for the Greek translation, it was probably Christians who insured the book's existence by copying it into Latin.⁶ All of this might lead one to pose the following two general (though not the only two) scenarios and to ask which is the more likely:

(1) 'Lord' was the original Hebrew reading, and 'it' is a corruption, introduced somewhere along the way, the only evidence for which is a Latin textual family that seems to be marked by deviations from its archetype, copied by Christians, and thus perpetuating an early Jewish interpretive tradition.

(2) 'It' is the original reading, thus participating in a well-documented and early Jewish tradition of a miraculous and mobile source of water,⁷ and that 'Lord' was introduced later (perhaps by Christian copyists).

Space does not allow a fuller explication of this argument, but Beale's assertions that 'Lord' is the more difficult reading and of more or less equal authority to 'it' are not persuasive to me. Also, as far as I can see, his own explanation for how Paul came to say 'the rock that followed' seems no less midrashic than the Second Temple texts from which he wishes to distance Paul.

5 H. Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, with Latin Text and English Translation (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 1.257–73, esp. 260–64.

6 Jacobson, *Commentary*, 1.276–77. Although note Jacobson's caution against M. R. James's overstatement of the role of the church in perpetuating the book (1.210).

7 It should also be mentioned that that *LAB* is replete with interpretive traditions, some well documented elsewhere, others only here. See, James H. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), 2.300. Alone this proves nothing, but an original 'it' changed later to 'Lord' makes best sense in view of the overall midrashic character of the book.

Implications

Beale is correct to draw attention to how historical conclusions affect contemporary method. We both affirm, in some sense, the need to allow the Bible's own behaviour to affect how we use it today. The difference between us is in how we explain apostolic hermeneutics in its historical setting and the degree to which this should stand as a model for contemporary exposition. A consideration of the New Testament's use of the Old Testament in its historical context (as I understand it) suggests to me a metaphor of 'path' rather than 'fortress' for contemporary biblical exposition, whereas Beale seems to be uncomfortable with such a metaphor, as it puts into jeopardy our hope for deriving true meaning from a biblical text (which does not necessarily imply that he prefers the fortress metaphor).

Despite my contention for the path metaphor, I am certainly not immune to the concerns that are reflected in Beale's position. Nevertheless, I remain convinced that not only apostolic exegesis, but also much of the history of interpretation, including contemporary, bears out the path metaphor. Interpretive breadth is unavoidable, not a function of poor exegetical method or a failure to maintain contextual ties. Rather, it is generated by the Bible's own gaps, or 'irritants' as James Kugel calls them. No, biblical interpretation is not a free-for-all, and 'all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life'⁸ are plain for all. But, the nuts and bolts of biblical exposition defy the firm convictions at every point for which we desire confirmation. Such an observation will not drive us to a 'pessimistic pedagogical and homiletical conclusion' as Beale warns. Rather, whatever implications there are for addressing the nature of biblical interpretation in our own Scripture, far more grave are the implications for failing to do so.

8 *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.4.