A Surrejoinder to Peter Enns

G. K. Beal is Kenneth T. Wessner Chair of Biblical Studies, Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College Graduate School and Visiting Fellow at St Edmund’s College, Cambridge. He has written extensively on this and related subjects.

I am happy to have opportunity to reply to Peter Enns’s response in Themelios to my review article¹ of his essay on the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament, which appeared in his recent book, Inspiration and Incarnation.²

My first response to Enns’s critique, and to his similar response in JETS,³ is to encourage readers to go back and read his reply to my reviews of his book not only in Themelios but also in JETS,⁴ and then read my reviews again. I do not think that he has advanced the argument much beyond what I said in my reviews. For example, he offers no substantive response, in my view, to the evidence that he holds various significant narratives in Genesis and in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Corinthians 10:4) to be ‘myth’ or ‘legend’ according to its classic definition, and that he acknowledges that the biblical writers mistakenly thought such ‘myths’ corresponded to real past reality (I have written a full ‘surrejoinder’ to Enns’s JETS ‘Response’ elsewhere⁵).

Moreover, I will elaborate upon some of what Enns considers to be major critiques of my review of his book.

(1) Enns contends both in his Themelios and JETS response that I misread the genre of his book and that I reviewed it as a scholarly work instead of a popular book. Since he has the same objection to my JETS review in his response there, and since he refers to this in the Themelios review, I will include his evaluation from JETS in my following comments. He says that it is an unfair critique to say that he should have given both sides of various issues (with some representative footnoting). Enns acknowledges that the book was secondarily written for a scholarly audience, so this in itself allows for the critique that I gave. In fact, Enns claims that graduate and college-level students are included in his popular audience; certainly such students should be given both sides of this kind of explosive debate, including the dispute over the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. But, in addition, I also clearly acknowledged that the primary audience was popular and the secondary audience scholarly, and I wrote with this fully in mind.⁶ Yet even if his conception of a popular audience did not include students, should not we as scholars do the best we can to present both sides of such debated issues that Enns discusses? This was not a felicitous move by Enns, since the book appears as a one-sided attempt to convince readers without presenting all the evidence.

(2) I argued in the Themelios review that there was more diversity in Second Temple Judaism on the issue of non-contextual hermeneutical approaches to the Old Testament. In contrast, Enns contended that there was a dominant uncontrolled, so-called midrashic approach. In his response, he agrees that ‘Second Temple Judaism was not a hermeneutical monolith.’ But then he immediately says that ‘whatever diversity is there cannot be used to minimize the midrashic . . . dimension of Second Temple Judaism that is far, far more pervasive than any concern to be “sensitive” to the Old Testament context.’⁷ Thus, while he is willing to admit that there was hermeneutical diversity in Judaism on this issue, it is a token acknowledgement. My review of Enns set forth some significant exceptions to the idea that Judaism, especially early Judaism, operated by an uncontrolled hermeneutic. In contrast to me, he apparently does not consider this evidence to be significant.

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7  Enns, ‘Response to Prof. Greg Beale’, Themelios 32.3.
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Nevertheless, I will elaborate upon some of what Enns considers to be major critiques of my review of his book.

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The verdict is out about how diverse early Judaism was on this issue, but circumspect conclusions need to be held rather than sweeping statements one way or another. There needs to be much more investigation on a case by case basis in the works of early Judaism before broad conclusions can be reached. Part of the problem in assessing this is that particular kinds of interpretative approaches are seen by some to have no concern with an Old Testament author's original intention. At the same time others see these approaches to have an understandable rationale that is consistent with such authorial intention (typology is a case in point). Enns responds to my mention of Hillel's rules, contending that such rules were not to be understood as being consistent with a contextual approach to the Old Testament. As a basis for his conclusion, he cites some hermeneutical presuppositions that are unclearly grounded in early (pre-AD 70) Judaism and do not support his thesis. In this respect, it is unfortunate that Enns does not mention David Instone Brewer's work (a work I mentioned in my review of Enns), which, as far as I know, is the only one that has attempted on a broad scale to evaluate pre-AD 70 rabbinic exegesis, and which comes to conclusions that are different from Enns (one may disagree with Instone Brewer, but, at least, his is a work that should be acknowledged). His comments about the Mishnah and Talmud are not as relevant, since they represent later Judaism, which is further removed from the period of early Judaism and the New Testament.

He contends that what unites some early Jewish texts (Jubilees, the Qumran Habakkuk pesher, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Pseudo-Philo) is the pursuit of mining Scripture for hidden, richer meanings in order to hear God speak once again in a community's present circumstances. This is probably the case at many points, but to say with confidence that this is the major trend of how the Old Testament is used in these texts could only be concluded after more work was done on each Old Testament reference in these texts. Furthermore, such a revelatory stance is not necessarily irreconcilable with an attempt to interpret the Old Testament in ways that still have links to the original meaning. I remain unconvinced that even if such revelatory stance were true of other early Jewish texts (e.g., 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, 1 Enoch, and the Qumran War Scroll), it does not necessitate an uncontrolled hermeneutics, as the evidence of my Themelios review article attempted to show. Enns also claims that I said that 'although it has its moments, Second Temple hermeneutics is overall not nearly as "odd" as some people think.' This is not precisely what I said, since the way Enns has phrased it makes it sound as though I think the overall thrust of Judaism is to interpret the Old Testament in line with the original authorial intent. More precisely, my point was merely to assert that there is more significant diversity on this issue in early Jewish (pre-AD 70) interpretative approaches than Enns and others allow.

(3) Enns disagrees with my contention that New Testament writers are characterized by using the Old Testament with the context in mind. He suggests that my approach is ‘an uncritical adoption of etic hermeneutical categories’, and that I assume that the New Testament writers share my ‘concerns with matters of contextual exegesis’ (italics are mine). In other words, he argues that I make use of predetermined modern categories of exegesis for organizing and interpreting the New Testament, rather than familiarizing myself with the hermeneutical categories that are well recognized within the ancient Jewish culture.

In a similar manner, Enns says that for me to ‘use words like “twist” or “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.’ His point in the context of the dialogue is that such exegesis may have been legitimate for ancient Judaism and Christianity, since it was the accepted socially constructed approach of the day. Just because we have a different, accepted approach today does not make that ancient, non-contextual approach wrong, nor should we evaluate Jewish exegesis through what we modern exegetes consider to be a correct contextual method of interpretation. The problem with this is that it does not recognize that in the contemporary period there is not necessarily an accepted approach. Enns says the accepted method today is the contextual approach that tries to obtain an author's original meaning. There is, however, a significant movement among some scholars today that affirms we cannot obtain such an original meaning, since it is impossible to interpret objectively. Consequently, they conclude that interpreters are left to reading into the texts that they interpret the reflection of their own socially constructed thoughts. Could Enns himself be reading the Jewish material through such a contemporary lens?

I agree with Enns's basic assumption that all interpreters, including Enns and I, have presuppositions that influence their interpretative approach. So, the issue is which lens makes best sense of the New Testament data, his lens or mine. This is where we disagree. Let us hope that neither of us
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16 Themelios 32/3
is being "uncritical" as we examine the material through our respective lenses. In order to support his contention that I am "uncritical" he would need to show evidence of having evaluated my writings over the past twenty-plus years, most of which have been studies of the Old Testament in the New Testament and, often, about how Jewish exegetical perspectives relate to this. He does not adduce such evidence.

I doubt that it is helpful to evaluate one another as being "uncritical" scholars, since that lowers the level of the dialogue to *ad hominem* argumentation.

Enns lists only eight "odd" uses of the Old Testament in New Testament in his book, and apparently on the basis that these texts are representative of many more, he concludes that New Testament hermeneutics is reflective of Jewish hermeneutics. In his reply he does not attempt to list any other examples of texts of which he considers the 'eight' to be representative. If he had other examples in mind as representative of the New Testament approach, he could have listed them in his reply. Consequently, he has left himself open to being considered unduly prejudicial toward only his view.

Also, in similar manner, he does not address my critique that we do not define New Testament hermeneutics by first going to Judaism, studying their approach, and then to the New Testament and beginning with the assumption that the Jewish approach is most likely the New Testament approach. In this respect, he has not heeded S. Sandmel's warnings against 'parallelomania'. As historians, we study, for example, Paul, and then (ideally at the same time) we study other sectors of Judaism (each in their own right). Then we make comparisons and, finally, conclusions. In this respect, I made the point in the *Themelios* review that even contemporary, critical non-evangelical German scholars (e.g., H. Hübner and D. A. Koch) working in this area take the methodological approach just mentioned. It seems that Enns so opposes a contextual approach by New Testament writers because he sees a different approach in Judaism. However he might see the New Testament data in a different light if he let them speak for themselves first rather than seeing them through the lens of Judaism. It is for these reasons that my language about New Testament authors using the Old Testament in a way that is 'not inconsistent' with the Old Testament, or is 'sensitive' to the Old Testament, or does 'not contravene' the Old Testament, or 'reveals a contextual awareness' or 'creatively develops' the Old Testament is not 'unnecessarily defensive, even protectionist', as Enns concludes. Rather, such

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9 In this respect, the following are a representative sampling of works: C. H. Dodd, According to the Scriptures (London: Nisbet, 1952); more recently, e.g., see R. B. Hays, The Conversion of the Imagination (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) on which see my forthcoming review in JETS); and F. Watson, Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith (T & T Clark, 2004); see also the forthcoming volume, Commentary on the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament, edited by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker), with sixteen contributors.

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turpitude and their ignorance of God, they would have seen how the
texts are put together, would have grasped more clearly what this
God is truly like, and would have understood their Bibles properly.¹¹

By 'properly', I assume that Carson means 'sufficiently', but of course,
not with the full richness of meaning that fulfilment brings on the other
side of the resurrection. Consequently, the apologetic of the New
Testament writers is not only 'believe in Christ and you will understand
the Bible better', but it is also demonstrating to their unbelieving audience
that, even as non-Christians, they can perceive from the Scriptures that the
Messiah was to die and rise again.¹² This is why in Acts 17:11 Luke says
that the Bereans to whom Paul and Silas were witnessing 'were examining
the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.' Luke can also
say that Alexander, who 'was mighty in the Scriptures,' though
'acquainted only with the baptism of John,' was 'teaching accurately the
things concerning Jesus', apparently concerning Old Testament fulfilment
in Jesus. Then, when he was taught about the rest of Jesus' ministry 'more
accurately,' he was able to refute Jewish opponents by 'demonstrating by
the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah' (Acts 18:24–28). Note that he
had an 'accurate' understanding of the Old Testament in relation to John's
baptism (which includes Jesus' baptism). However, after receiving the full
revelation about prophetic messianic fulfilment in Jesus, he was able to
have a 'more accurate' understanding. This shows that there can be an
accurate understanding of the Old Testament in relation to its fulfilment in
Jesus. There can also be a greater understanding in the light of progressive
revelation about Jesus. There is no reason to understand this word
'accurate' in any different way to that in which we would today (i.e.,
having an understanding that significantly corresponds to a realistic
perception of the object of understanding in view, with which the other
uses of 'accurate' [akribos] in the New Testament are consistent (cf.
BAGD, 39)).

(4) Enns replies to my critique of his analysis of 1 Corinthians 10:4
concerning Christ as the 'rock that followed'. He does not address my
major point: Enns had concluded that Paul is referring to a Jewish legend
about a well that followed Israel in the wilderness; he says that though
Paul believed the legend was true, in reality, we now know that it was

legend (he says the same thing about the Genesis 1 creation account and
the Flood account, and I made the same critique in my JETS review, and
he did not address the problem in his response to me there). I wish that
Enns would have responded to this very important issue.

It is relevant that Paul himself says the following in 1 Timothy 1:4: 'do
not pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to
mere speculation'. Ironically, the kinds of myths that Paul is combating
appear to be those fanciful speculations based on the Old Testament, which
do not correspond to actual past events, especially perhaps genealogies in
Genesis, as for example, found in Jubilees and Pseudo-Philo.¹³ Likewise, 2
Peter 1:16 affirms, 'for we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we
made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but
we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.' The word used for 'tales' (mythos)
here refers to that which historically did not happen, in contrast to that
which did occur, indeed was 'witnessed' (on which see in the commentaries
on 2 Peter in loc., for instance by Bauckham, Kelly, and Neyrey).

So, if Enns is correct about the legendary nature of 1 Corinthians 10:4,
then not only was Paul unaware that what he was recording was 'legend'
(as Enns actually says) but, if he had known, he would have repudiated it,
as he does in 1 Timothy. Is this really a likely scenario? Enns would have us
believe that the New Testament writers imbibed the myths that were held
in the surrounding Jewish culture. However, 1 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter
indicate that they were much more discerning than this and believed that
God had broken into history through Christ and had revealed salvific truth
in doing so. It was a historical truth that was different from the
surrounding religious myths of pagan and Jewish culture.

Enns responds to me concerning the textual problem in LAB Pseudo-
Philo 10:7 (sic; actually the reference is 11:15), and produces an argument
that counters my proposal that the original reading in 11:15 was 'Lord'
instead of 'it [the water, or by metonymy the rock-shaped well]' that
'followed' Israel in the wilderness. Readers will have to decide how
persuasive they think this is. My major point in discussing the textual
problem was not upon the probability of my textual analysis (which I
would still be happy to debate), but that Enns never mentions the
existence of the textual problem in his discussion of the Jewish
background of 1 Corinthians 10:4. This is not even covered in his article

¹¹ Carson, Three More Books on the Bible, 44.
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dedicated to 1 Corinthians 10:4. In fact, in my review at this point, I concluded the discussion by saying that my own evaluation of the textual problem 'could be debated, but our intention here is merely to point out the textual uncertainty' of the reference in Pseudo-Philo 11:15. The point is that this is not a minor textual problem, despite one's final conclusions about it, and to base a major conclusion in 1 Corinthians 10:4 on this Pseudo-Philo text is precarious. He says that 'the presence of a “moveable well” in Pseudo-Philo demonstrates that such a tradition was roughly contemporaneous with Paul.' But, in fact, the textual tenuousness of Pseudo-Philo 11:15 removes this text from being a 'sure' first-century witness to this tradition, which leaves only Tosephta Sukka 3.11 (date ca. AD 300) and Targum Onqueos Numbers 21:16-20 (date ca. AD 250-300). These are the only really solid textual witnesses to the kind of Jewish legend that Enns says Paul was dependent on; however, because of their late date, it is difficult to say that the legendary tradition was even extant in the first century. In contrast to Enns, if one consults the discussion by A.C. Thielson on 1 Corinthians 10:4, it will be seen how much of a fuller picture of the Old Testament and Jewish evidence is presented and more circumspect conclusions reached.16

(5) Let us remember that Enns does not exempt Jesus from being just as culturally determined as are the apostles in their use of the Old Testament. This means for Enns that Jesus was not concerned with the original meaning of Old Testament authors and that he read in meanings that had nothing to do with such original meaning. It would be helpful to hear Enns explain how such a view fits into his understanding of the incarnation. For example, it is obvious that the supernatural could break through in Jesus when he did miracles; why could not the same kind of breakthrough occur in his hermeneutics? Would not even those evangelicals who stress kenosis much more than others, at least, allow for this?

(6) One of my replies to Enns's contention that New Testament writers do not employ a grammatical-historical approach to interpreting the Old Testament is that there are other approaches that can still develop in a consistent, though creative manner the original authorial intentions of the Old Testament. I referred in my review article to a typological approach and to a biblical – theological approach. The latter uncovers how the New Testament writers explore and tease out intertextual and intratextual relationships within the Old Testament itself. I argued, for example, that the use of Hosea 11:1 is a good example of a New Testament writer doing a biblical theology of Hosea by exploring intratextual relationships between Hosea 11:1 and other texts within Hosea. Enns responds to this by saying that I am acknowledging that apostolic exegetics does some things that 'might be left open to a ... charge of twisting and distorting.' No, I would not concede this, though I would concede that there might be some different uses of the Old Testament in the New Testament that are family (of mss. p and D) v has a fairly equal claim on our attention. Every textual problem must be resolved on its own, with internal criteria of evidence. (Ibid., p. 264). This is a fuller picture of Jacobson’s evaluation of the manuscript families, which presents a quite different, much more positive picture of the p family than Enns’s incomplete comments convey. Could a Christian scribe later have added ‘Lord’, a possibility Enns suggests? It is possible but, up to this point, no one has adduced sufficient evidence to make this a probable scenario. Indeed, a text-critical proverb in some circles is, ‘all things are possible, but not all things are probable.’ Why would not such a purported Christian scribe substitute ‘Messiah’ or ‘Christ’ or ‘Jesus’ instead of the more ambiguous ‘Lord,’ the latter of which a Jewish scribe could feel comfortable with?


15 In this connection I must comment on a misrepresentation, unintentional no doubt, by Enns concerning the textual evidence for the problem in Pseudo-Philo. He says, ‘H. Jacobson, in his massive commentary, argues at length that the latter manuscript group [the p family, which supports the “Lord” reading in 11:15] routinely deviates from the Latin archetype, and that the changes made are at times stylistic but other times quite intentional so as to change the meaning of the text.’ This citation from Jacobson is made by Enns to indicate that the ‘Lord’ reading is more likely a scribal corruption and not representative of the original wording. But this is only what Jacobson says at the beginning of his discussion. He goes on to say that ‘we can find an additional – and more rational – explanation of our textual variants beyond a perhaps somewhat irresponsible and egotistic scribal.? More likely, he says, the scribe for the above manuscript group (p) was a “translator-reviser” who was copying from the Latin archetype but also was making changes to that archetype based on a Greek version that served as a model to his [Latin] exemplar,’ and he made changes on the basis of the Hebrew original or of a second- and different-Greek translation of that Hebrew original. (H. Jacobson, A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo’s Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum, with Latin Text and English Translation [AGAJU 31; Leiden: Brill, 1996], p. 261). Thus, the p scribe was not making changes based purely on his own interpretative interests but also on earlier Greek or Hebrew manuscripts that served as the original from which the Latin archetype was copied. Thus the p scribe had access to earlier Greek and/or Hebrew manuscripts of Pseudo-Philo than did the D scribe, who had access only to the Latin. After considering all the evidence, Jacobson finally concludes that each


17 Inspiration and Incarnation, 114-15, 132.
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A Surrejoinder to Peter Enns

difficult to understand. My view of the way typology and biblical theology work are not at odds with what could be referred to as an ‘organic’ approach to Old Testament meanings (here I refer the reader back to my review article in Themelios, where I explain how such uses make sense of the Old Testament passages, cited in line with the Old Testament original meaning). Once one considers these kinds of other methods of ‘organic development’ of the Old Testament, his list of ‘odd’ uses by New Testament writers is reduced to almost nil.

Conclusion

According to Enns, biblical writers were consciously intending to be understood as writing a historical genre, but, in fact, we now know such events are legend. Enns says that, though such accounts do not convey historical truth they still have important theological truth to tell us: that we are to worship the God of the Bible and not pagan gods. He even differs here from Robert Gundry, who contended that some narratives by gospel writers, which traditionally had been taken to be history, are not, since they were intentionally and consciously employing a midrashic method that added significant non-historical, but interpretative features. Enns is saying much more than this: the biblical writers thought they were recording history but they were wrong, since we now know they were unaware that they were recording myth. This is a conclusion that does not appear to pay due hermeneutical respect to the conscious historical genre signals by biblical writers, however interpretative they may be.

In conclusion, Enns’s attempt to argue that the New Testament writers ‘preached the right doctrine but from the wrong texts,’ for all the reasons noted above, I still find to be unpersuasive. Is it really inappropriately modernist to believe that Jesus and the apostles could have had understandings of the Old Testament that had significant links to the Old Testament’s original meaning? If this could be concluded of some significant aspects of early Jewish interpreters, why not also of the New Testament?

Should not the element of divine inspiration also affect the answer to this question to some degree; could not divine revelation break through to cause New Testament writers to perceive the original intention of Old Testament texts? I am also troubled by the implications of Enns’s conclusions, which leaves us with a Bible written by inspired authors, who

at significant points thought they were writing historical accounts, but, indeed, unbeknownst to them, were really mythical (though these are questions that can only be addressed in another venue).
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