Intertextual Study 2: Paul’s use of the Old Testament in the New Testament

Old Testament Quote: Psalm 44v22

*Context*: Psalm 44, written by the sons of Korah, has similar themes to Psalm 60 and is likely to be written around the same time. Psalm 60 is noted as written after the Edomites attack Israel while their army was fighting the Syrians, taking advantage of the lack of defence while the majority of Israel’s army was further north, as is recorded in 1 Chronicles 18v12-13 and 2 Samuel 8v13.

*Audience*: Psalm 44 is primarily addressed to God and speaks directly to Him but was also written for the benefit of the people of Israel. Addressed to the chief musician and intended to be sung at the Temple, this psalm would be heard by those coming to visit, reminding them of God’s faithfulness.

*Purpose*: This psalm gives praise and recognition to God’s works and is intended to remind Israel that God would deliver them. It describes how all throughout time God’s people have suffered persecution, but eventually been delivered. The purpose was to reassure those suffering, as they can be certain God will do the same with them.

*Meaning of passage*: Psalm 44 is written to offer reassurance to those who are suffering that God will deliver them. Throughout the psalm it becomes clear the people are not suffering for any particular reason, such as a specific sin or neglection of God’s law, as is seen in verse seventeen, “All this has come upon us, But we have not forgotten You.” Verse twenty-two shows they are being persecuted because of their faith and obedience in following Yahweh, “for Your sake we are killed all day long”; and the second half of the verse shows the worthlessness of their lives to those administering persecution. This verse offers encouragement to those being persecuted because of their beliefs that others had previously been in the same situation and had been delivered.

New Testament Quote: Romans 8v36

*Context*: Romans was written by the apostle Paul when he was in Corinth during Nero’s rule as emperor of Rome. As Paul wrote the letter there was no national persecution but around five to ten years later, Nero imposed significant persecution on the Christians, killing many of them. However, the Roman people generally viewed Christians with suspicion because of the nature of their beliefs, such as eating the body and drinking the blood, claiming the Roman religion as false, and not giving heed to the social structures of the time. Because of the lack of regulations concerning them, the Christians were left to the discretion of the local governor, who was able to deal with them as they saw fit.

*Audience*: Romans was written to the ecclesia in Rome, which consisted of both Jews and Gentiles, though there was probably more Gentiles, as the previous emperor, Claudius, had expelled the Jews from Rome and although Nero had allowed them to return, many chose not to. Romans 1v3 shows the Roman ecclesia were known for their strong faith, as seen in Romans 1v8, and Paul writes to encourage them to hold to it, knowing of the difficult times and persecution that they were soon to face. While no official persecution was taking place at the time, the Christians’ refusal to sacrifice to the Roman gods was viewed as defiance against the Roman system and they were largely viewed with scepticism and mistrust.

*Purpose*: Romans expounds the gospel and doctrines of the truth, helping them to clearly understand what they believe and why and Chapter 8 is specifically encouraging them to stand up for the doctrines they were being taught. The oppression they would soon suffer would hit the Gentiles harder, as they were unused to standing up for their beliefs and lacked the solid background knowledge of the law and prophets the Jews had.

*Meaning of passage*: Romans 8 offers encouragement to the Roman ecclesia that God will be with them through every struggle. In verse thirty-five, Paul writes, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword?” Then, following verse thirty-six, he writes, “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us,” and explains how nothing could separate them from the love of God. These words alone would offer consolation to the Roman ecclesia, as they would be comforted that God will always be there for them, but the audience and purpose of the original quote would have provided additional encouragement.

Paul’s Reason for Quoting Psalm 44v22

Paul’s audience would have found his use of this quote encouraging was because of the purpose of the original quote. The Roman ecclesia was soon to suffer an extraordinary amount of persecution from Nero because of their faith, and the design of the psalm is to comfort those who suffer because of their beliefs. Psalm 44 was written to show the people coming to worship Yahweh that though they may suffer for His sake, God will never cast them off and will bring deliverance eventually. This was exactly the message that Paul was trying to communicate to the Romans, and the knowledge that many others had been in similar situations in the past would have offered much comfort. The knowledge that they were not alone, and the reminder that God was on their side would have given them motivation and strength to hold to their faith. The audience of Psalm 44 would also have been encouraging. The Psalmist clearly believed that many people could benefit from hearing this message, again reinforcing the idea that they were not alone in their struggles against oppression and feelings of abandonment. From the context of Psalm 44, the Roman ecclesia could gain encouragement in that they too had no particular reason to be persecuted but were still suffering for God’s sake. The Edomites’ attack on Israel is not recorded as a punishment for any sin, were not being punished for their personal wickedness. Paul’s use of this quote supported his argument in showing that they were not alone in suffering for Yahweh’s name and that God would deliver them in due time.

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