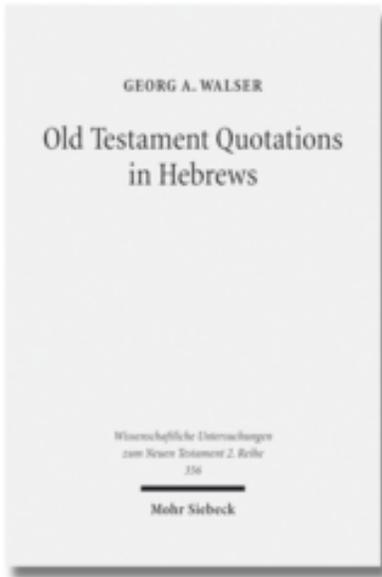


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Georg A. Walser

Old Testament Quotations in Hebrews: Studies in Their Textual and Contextual Background

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Brian C. Small
Baylor University
Waco, Texas

Numerous studies have been devoted to the use of the Old Testament in the book of Hebrews. Georg Walser seeks to contribute to this ever-burgeoning body of literature with this revised version of his doctoral dissertation, which was originally submitted to the University of Leicester in August 2012 under the direction of Susan Docherty.

In chapter 1 Walser introduces the rationale and aims of his study, his methodology, and other preliminary considerations. His study has two main objectives. First, he seeks to establish the textual background upon which Hebrews bases its Old Testament quotations. He contends that the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Greek Septuagint (LXX) is different and perhaps older than that found in the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT). It is quite likely that by the time Hebrews was written there were already multiple versions of the Hebrew text, Greek translations from the Hebrew, and even revisions of the Greek text. It is possible that the author of Hebrews was cognizant of more than one version of the Old Testament text. If so, how did the author select the version he would use, and what is the interrelationship between the author's interpretation of the text and the version he used?

Second, Walser attempts to determine the contextual background in which the Old Testament texts were interpreted before and after they were employed by the author of Hebrews. He believes that, when the texts were transmitted, they were accompanied by interpretations in the course of transmission. In order to accomplish his task, Walser traces the reception history of the Old Testament texts from the Second Temple period up through to the fifth century CE. Walser employs later traditions on the assumption that they are often based on earlier sources. Again, it is possible that the author of Hebrews was aware of more than one interpretive tradition of the texts he employed in his work.

A derivative aim of Walser's study concerns the implications for understanding the parting of the ways between the early Jewish and Christian communities. Did the two communities diverge due to possessing different versions of the Old Testament text, or was it due to differing interpretations of the text? He gives a preliminary answer to this question when he claims that the Jewish community preferred the Hebrew text, while the Christian community gravitated more toward the Greek text. Hence, differing versions of the Old Testament text may have contributed to the parting of the ways between these two groups.

Walser briefly surveys previous research on the use of the Old Testament in Hebrews. He concludes that these prior studies failed to consider the possibility that more than one Hebrew text existed at the time Hebrews was written. He does give a brief nod to some important studies that considered the usage of the LXX in Hebrews (Radu Gheorghita, Susan Docherty, and Gert Steyn). However, he does not highlight the contributions that these studies make and hence fails to situate his own study in relation to these earlier studies.

Chapters 2–4 form the heart of the work. Here Walser focuses on three Old Testament passages that existed in multiple versions at the time of the composition of Hebrews: Jer 31:33 (quoted in Heb 8:10 and 10:16), Ps 40:7 (quoted in Heb 10:5), and Gen 47:31 (quoted in Heb 11:21). Each chapter proceeds in the same manner: (1) Walser begins with an introduction highlighting the issues he will be exploring in the chapter. (2) Then he engages in a meticulous textual and philological analysis of each passage under consideration. He notes the differences between each version and comments upon the MT and LXX versions of the passage and their possible origins. He explores the biblical context of each passage both as they appear in the Old Testament and in Hebrews. He concludes with a summary of the evidence and the resulting issues that are raised in his analysis. (3) He then conducts a thorough historical/exegetical investigation of the reception history of the passage. He traces all possible quotations or allusions in the Jewish literature (Qumran, Pseudepigrapha, Targums, midrashim, Talmud), the New

Testament, and in the early Greek and Latin church fathers up to the end of the fifth century CE. For each text Walser provides the quotation in the original language (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin) and in English translation. He provides helpful summarizing paragraphs throughout this section of each chapter. (4) With the textual and contextual background information in place, Walser then engages in an evaluation of the Old Testament quotation within the context of Hebrews. (5) He ends with a conclusion summarizing his findings.

In chapter 2 Walser focuses his analysis of Jer 31:33 (38:33 LXX) on one particular difference between the Hebrew and Greek versions. In the MT the word for “law” (*torah*) is in the singular. However, in the overwhelming majority of the LXX manuscripts the plural “laws” (*nomous*) is used. Hebrews, of course, quotes from the Greek version. Walser asserts that the difference between the two readings emerged not from the process of translation but that the *Vorlage* underlying the LXX text was different from the MT. All of the Jewish writings follow the MT in using the singular for “law.” The “law” refers to the Pentateuch (or Torah). There is nothing that is abrogated from the law, nor is there any need to add anything to the law. Hence, Hebrews does not share any affinities with the Jewish writings with regard to their interpretation of the law. The Greek early church writings make explicit use of the LXX and use the plural “laws.” The “laws” usually refer to something other than the Torah, such as the gospel or the teachings of Jesus and/or the apostles. The use of the plural “laws” does not seem to be a factor in their interpretation of the passage. The Latin writings generally share the same characteristics as the Greek writings, but there is some variance in interpretation. Some of the Latin fathers identify the law as the Torah. In his concluding remarks Walser argues that the plural “laws” must have led many of the early church fathers to conclude that Jeremiah was referring to something other than the Torah, such as the teachings of Jesus.

In chapter 3 Walser focuses upon the differences in the text of Ps 40:7b (39:7b LXX). In particular, the MT version reads “but you have dug ears for me,” while the LXX version has “but a body you have prepared for me.” Hebrews follows the LXX version. According to Walser, it is unlikely that this variant originated with the author of Hebrews; it was already in the version that the author used. All extant Jewish writings follow the MT version, but the ambiguity in the text has elicited a variety of interpretations, the most common being that God prefers obedience over sacrifice. In the early Christian church, however, both versions were known and used, although the majority of sources follow the LXX. Likewise, a variety of interpretations arose based on the two versions; however, a christological interpretation influenced by Hebrews was the most common. Walser claims that some of the interpretations seem to go back to the pre-Christian era and that Hebrews would have been familiar with some of these interpretations. It is likely, then,

that the author of Hebrews was influenced by some of these interpretations in his own treatment of the text.

In chapter 4 Walser concentrates on the difference between the MT and LXX in their versions of Gen 47:31. The MT states that Jacob worshiped “at the head of his bed,” while the LXX remarks that Jacob worshiped “upon the top of his staff.” Again, Hebrews follows the LXX version. Walser notes that the difference in the LXX is not a result of a mistaken translation but a legitimate construal of the Hebrew consonantal text. The consonantal text also lends itself to a third possible reading: Jacob worshiped “the ruler of his tribe.” The variant readings have given rise to a host of differing interpretations of the passage in both the early Jewish and Christian communities. The passage may refer to the place of worship (bed, staff) or the object of worship or reverence (God, Joseph, Reuben, Leah), the reason for worship, or simply a sign of Jacob’s old age. The staff may belong to Jacob or Joseph. The passage also has been placed in differing contexts (for example, the context in Heb 11:21 varies from the context of Gen 47:31). Once again, Walser contends that the author of Hebrews would have known some of these interpretations and that they may have influenced his own reading of the passage.

In chapter 5 Walser concludes with a summary of his results, some closing remarks on the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament and the parting of the ways debate, and suggested avenues for further research. End matter includes a comprehensive bibliography and indices of ancient sources, modern authors, and subjects.

Walser’s study is valuable in a number of ways. First, his study recognizes the complex textual history that already existed by the time Hebrews was composed. So many studies seem to work off of the assumption that Hebrews was working from a stable text, but the translation and transmission of the Old Testament text was far more complex. It is likely that multiple versions of both the Hebrew and Greek texts, along with their accompanying interpretations, were already in existence by the time of the writing of Hebrews. Future studies on the use of the Old Testament in Hebrews can no longer ignore this complexity.

Walser also helpfully raises the question of how multiple versions of the Old Testament affected the parting of the ways between the early Jewish and Christian communities. The two communities did not simply interpret the same texts differently; their differing interpretations also arose because of their preference for different versions of the Old Testament text. Walser only scratches the surface of this issue in this study, and it is one that is worth exploring in greater detail in future studies.

Walser has also assembled an impressive array of early Jewish and Christian excerpts that interpret the three main passages under consideration in this study. These collections should certainly prove invaluable for any future research on these passages.

By way of criticism, there are occasions when Walser tends to draw conclusions based on tenuous evidence. For example, he argues that the LXX usage of the plural “laws” arose not because of the translation process but because the LXX was based on a different *Vorlage* than that of the MT, despite the fact that there is no extant Hebrew version that contains the plural “laws” and that there is no surviving ancient Jewish interpretation that is based upon the plural. While he notes that the plural “laws” did not figure in the church fathers’ interpretation of Jer 31, he still argues that the plural must have promoted the interpretation that “the laws” was referring to something other than the Torah. He also argues that the author of Hebrews must have been aware of the early church interpretation that the law(s) referred to the teachings of Jesus and that this must have been the author’s construal of the passage also. Yet, there is scant evidence in Hebrews to support this contention. Other examples could be cited. At best these assertions would fall under the realm of possibility, even if one is not always fully persuaded of the probability of his claims.

Nevertheless, Walser has raised some important questions that merit further study and investigation, has illuminated how ancient persons interpreted three Old Testament passages that the author of Hebrews utilized, and has presented an interesting methodology that has potential for uncovering the meaning of the biblical texts.