



The Utilization of the Old Testament in the Book of Acts of the Apostles

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Doi: <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.104.31>

Abstract

The paper entitled “The Utilization of the Old Testament in the Book of Acts of the Apostles” arose from the need to contextualize the scripture in contemporary usage as it relates to Africans. The study examines the Book of Acts in perspective, the engagement of the Old Testament in Acts of the Apostles, and the implications of the usage of the Old Testament in the contextual delivery of the Gospel for theological enterprise on the African continent. The paper employed an analytical method with descriptive and comparative approaches to analyze the usage of the Old Testament in the New Testament document under study and utilized a contextual comparison of the references in the selected verses of the Book of Acts. Findings show that the usage of the Old Testament by the writer of Acts was unique. In the book of Acts of the Apostles, a number of portions engage with the Old Testament using historical, thematic, theological, cultural, and other elements. Examples include 1:20-21; 2:17-21; 4:25 and 7:49-50. Findings show that the engagement of the Old Testament by the author of Acts was quite systematic and exploratory. These findings have implications for African theological enterprise, particularly in Nigeria. The delivery of the Gospel should engage the elements of culture and sociological peculiarities. It is recommended that theological educators should make efforts to reach and develop the faith of Africans with the wealth of their cultural and social peculiarities without compromising the centrality of Christ in the gospel delivery as typified by the usage of the Old Testament in Acts of the Apostles. In conclusion, the usage of the Old Testament in Acts of the Apostles could be further explored in contextualizing theological knowledge.

Keywords: Utilization, Old Testament, Acts of the Apostle, Contextualization, and Implications

Introduction

For many years of intellectual scrutiny and theological engagement, the Bible has been subjected to various examinations that have attempted to respond to a range of concerns. One such concern is the interdependency of books in the Holy Bible. The interdependence could



also be seen in the light of intertextuality. For the Jews, the Old Testament (*TANAK*) is the complete scripture for their life and faith practice. However, the Christian Bible combines both the Old and the New Testaments. The concern of interrelatedness could be seen as a concern of scholars such as J.I. Packer, S. Lewis Johnson, James M. Rochford, and Walter Kaiser (Kaiser, 1985,28). While some scholars (Packer and Hans) opine that the New Testament can stand on its own, others, like Kaiser and Rochford, hold the view that it cannot do so in order to fulfill its purpose (Toy,1888). The former position attempts to separate the New Testament from the Old Testament. However, the latter position considers that the New Testament hinges on the Old Testament. This does not necessarily suggest the superiority of one over the other. The writer's view suggests that the New and Old Testaments are like both sides of a valuable coin. Hence, there is active interdependency between the Old and the New Testaments.

However, scholars have examined the correlation between the Old and New Testaments in light of characteristic relationships. It is observable that the Old Testament appears to be essentially forward-looking, while the New Testament appears to be recessive-looking. This could be internally evident in the way the writers of the New Testament engaged the Old Testament in their writing (Toy, 1888,125). Some New Testament writers appear to contextualize, interpret, explain, expound, and apply the Old Testament in their writings (McKeown, 2014; Muller, 2001). This has much to do with the content and the context of different New Testament book writers (Mullins,1976). The usage of the Old Testament varies from book to book in the New Testament, possibly based on the intent of the New Testament writers and their audience.

Out of the New Testament books, the book of Acts of the Apostles, which is the focus of this paper, appears to serve a unique role in the account of birth, nurture, and development of the New Testament Church (Barret,1996). The account of Acts, due to its nature, apparently lends quite a bit from the Old Testament (Bruce, 1998). The quest of this paper is to examine how the writer of the book of Acts of the Apostles engages the Old Testament. The examination considers how the author of Acts of the Apostles uses, explores, applies, consummates, engages, employs, and deploys the Old Testament. The utilization involves the Old Testament's narratives, laws, prophecies, writings, events, and other features. The writer has engaged both descriptive and comparative approaches in this brief paper. The route this paper engages in consideration of the usage of the Old Testament in Acts runs through a structural stream that employs: (i) Introduction, (ii) The Book of Acts in Perspective, (iii) The Engagement of Old Testament in Acts of the Apostles, (iv) Implications of for Theological Enterprise, and (v) Conclusion.

The Book of Acts in Perspective

The book of Acts is quintessential in the New Testament as it factually accounts for the birth and development of the early church after the ascension of Jesus Christ. It is considered the historical account of the experiences of the early church and the circumstances that surrounded the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to other regions of the world (Olagunju: 2012). Concerning the authorship of Acts, quite a number of scholars agree that Luke, who was also the author of the book of Luke, a medical doctor in Antioch, and a companion of Apostle Paul, was the writer (Neyrey:1996).

According to Crawford, Acts was probably written within the first two decades of the second century around 110CE. Jerome H. Neyrey notes that little can be known for certain regarding the identity of the author of Acts; what is clear is that the text presents the early Christian movement, known as "the Way," within the context of first-century Judaism(s) and that first-



century Judaism(s), as well as the spread of the Christian movement, must be understood within the larger first-century Graeco-Roman context (Toy, 1888,124-33). In his composition of Acts, Luke demonstrated command of some rhetorical conventions and techniques and drew on various cultural and social scripts. He also blended numerous writing genres including, but not limited to, elements of ancient biography, historiography, novels, and epics (Parker, 2008). Acts could be considered a "charter" document of Christian self-identity and legitimation, written not for a specific "Lukan community" but for a general audience of early Christians living in the ancient Mediterranean world. It is noteworthy that Acts was written in Greek; as such, the influence of its language expression has links with the contextual use of language (Miller, 1971). The Septuagint has some heavy-handed effects on the rendition of Acts in the usage of the Old Testament rather than the Masoretic texts and other manuscripts of the Old Testament. The writer examines how Acts employs the Old Testament in the next section.

The Engagement of the Old Testament in Acts

According to Arnold, Luke's use of the Old Testament has attracted considerable attention in contemporary studies (Arnold, 1996). In particular, Fitzmyer demonstrates that Luke sought to shape the account of Jesus and the early church to imitate Old Testament historiography (Fitzmyer, 1992). Luke's Old Testament quotations come from the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and the seven prophets (Bock, 2012). Astoundingly, Luke rarely quotes the historical books directly, though his dependence on certain passages from these books is apparent. Luke has also shaped his story in the manner of Old Testament language, themes, and others, and he appears to have intended consciously to write biblical narration. He has emulated Septuagintal Greek, used some Old Testament themes and models, and simulated biblical historiography with high literary sophistication (Rosner, 1993). This aspect shall be explored further below.

According to Fitzmyer, Luke explicitly introduces forty-five quotations of the Old Testament with expressions such as "this is what was said through the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16) or "as it is written" (Acts 7:42). Fitzmyer divides these into three categories. First, there are seventeen examples in which Luke has quoted the LXX verbatim. Then, there are twenty-two cases in which Luke cites the Old Testament text in a manner close to the LXX but not verbatim. Finally, Luke has quoted the Old Testament six times in Greek, far from the LXX. In this last category, Fitzmyer concedes that it is impossible to determine whether Luke has conflated, quoted from memory, or quoted from a different Greek version (Fitzmyer, 1992: 533-535). This reflects in a few examples below, as observed by the writer of this paper.

In the book of Acts of the Apostles, quite a number of portions engage the Old Testament. Examples include 1:20-21; 2:17-21; 4:25 and 7:49-50. The engagement covers the Old Testament's historical, thematic, theological, cultural, and other elements. Arnold notes that the engagement of the Old Testament by the author of the book of Acts was quite exploratory (Arnold, 1996: 300). This is also considered to be so by the writer as Acts engages the Old Testament with the interpretative and consummative approach (Jackson, 1911: 92-102). In the interpretative dimension, the author gives meaning to the New Testament experience based on the Old Testament. In contrast, in the consummative dimension, the author of Acts considers events in Acts as being a fulfillment of the prophetic dimension of the Old Testament.

In the historical element of the Old Testament, the writer of Acts considers the events in the Old Testament to be significant to the New Testament narrative, thereby providing a connection for the readers of Acts. For example, Acts 2:29 points to David as an actual historical figure that the audience could not deny, providing basis and connectivity to relay and relate the Gospel



message to them by Peter. Furthermore, Stephen's narrative in Acts 7:2-36 was a historical engagement of the Old Testament, which provides a basis and hinge for the Gospel delivery (Kim, 2007). In addition, the author of Acts notes that the Apostle Paul's introduction of the Gospel using the historical account in Genesis 12:1-12 provides a starting point for the audience's engagement with the Gospel. These could be considered to show creative usage of the Old Testament in the Book of Acts.

In the thematic element of the Old Testament, the author of Acts identifies some Old Testament themes as connections between the Old and New Testaments. One such theme is God's faithfulness to His word. For instance, the author in Acts projects God as a Holy and faithful One who raised a savior for his people out of the lineage of David. This reference to Isaiah 55:3 and Psalm 16:10 suggests that the author of Acts is conscious of the themes in the Old Testament. In engaging the theology of the Old Testament, the author of Acts projects the consciousness of the personality of God as evident in the Old Testament (Bock, 2012). For example, in Acts 2:25-28, the consciousness of the ever-abiding presence of God was re-echoed as the author quotes from Psalm 16:8-11, which reflects the experience of David, which mirrors the theology of Israel in the Old Testament.

In engaging the cultural element of the Old Testament, the author of Acts identifies the Jewish culture as a peculiar people. This is evident in Acts 10:9-16, as the author consciously underscores the Jewish way of life in relation to eating and drinking, as evident in Leviticus 11:1-41. This becomes a turning point in connecting the Old Testament to the New Testament, where cultural and social orientations need to be revisited and revised in light of New Testament realities.

The author of the book of Acts considered the experiences in the New Testament as closely linked to the Old Testament and, indeed, a fulfillment of the records of the Old Testament, especially from the angle of prophecy. For example, the writer quotes the Prophet Joel in Joel 2:28-32, as noted in Acts 2:17-21. The writer notes the narrative of Peter's address as he gives meaning to a new experience of the Holy Spirit baptism based on Joel's prophecy in the emerging dispensation of the church in the New Testament. It is noteworthy that the author quotes Joel 2:28-32 directly in Acts 2:17-21. The context of the usage of the passage is considered a simulation and a fulfillment of prophecy in the new dispensation. This paper notes that the contexts have cohesions that are quite relevant and applicable to the audience in the New Testament.

The author of the book of Acts alludes to prophecies and events in the Old Testament to give meaning and resolution to challenges and provide direction to the early church in its teething stage. For example, in Acts 1:20, the author of Acts quotes Psalms 69:25 and Psalm 109:8 in the resolution of why the position of Judas Iscariot, the traitor, should be taken by another. This quotation is an attempt to use the Old Testament to resolve the situation of the Apostles. This quotation does not give credence to the context from which Psalms 69:25 and Psalms 109:8 were taken. It is considered by the writer as an adaptive or applicative use of the Old Testament to resolve a challenge. Notably, Psalm 69:25 is an account of David calling for God's help in a difficult situation. Also, Psalm 109:8 was another personal cry of David in difficulty. The rendition in the Masoretic Text is extracted as יְהוָה יִגְדֵל יָמָיו וְיִתֵּן אֲחֵרֵם לְעֹדוֹתָיו (Psalm 109:8 WTT- (Elliger & Rudolph, 1997). The English rendition is rendered as Psalm 109:8. Let his days be few, *and* let another take his office (Psalm 109:8 KJV). However, the Masoretic Text suggests: let the time or day be little or few; let another take over his oversight, mustering, visitation, or store. Hence in the original context of Psalm 109:8, it was a personal cry, desire, and prayer



and not necessarily prophesied for another use. However, the author of Acts creatively engages it as he narrates Peter's leadership response to the need to replace Judas Iscariot. This is considered an applicative use of the Old Testament in the context of Acts of the Apostles.

In a textual comparison of the rendition of Psalm 69:25 in the book of Acts in the New Testament with the Masoretic text, the writer observes that due to the dependence on the Septuagint, the rendition of Psalm 69:25 is found to be in Psalm 69 verse 26 in the Masoretic text (Betzman & Tully, 2016). It presents it thus: . It is תְּהִי־טִירְתֶּם נְשֻׁמָּה בְּאַהֲלֵיכֶם אֶל־יְהִי יִשָּׁב: 1 rendered in English translation as Let their habitation be desolate, *and* let none dwell in their tents. (Psalm 69:25). However, Masoretic text suggests: Let their encampment or battlement be ravaged, appalled, made desolate; let their tent be nothing to dwell in. The writer observes that the Septuagint rendition of the Hebrew word טִירְתֶּם, which means battlement or encampment, was just rendered as a place. The Hebrew context suggests a war-like situation rather than just a place of dwelling, as portrayed in the New Testament rendition (Barret, 1994: 38). The writer notes that the usage of the Old Testament in this portion is just a matter of convenience to convey meaning to readers and not a holistic representation of the Masoretic text background (Wendland, 2003: 23).

The writer of the book of Acts also reminisces the responsive approach to authorities. It gave a model of response to circumstances and authorities when persecution was against the church. For instance, In Acts 4:23-26, the author quotes Psalm 2:1-2 as the Apostles Peter and John's response in prayer unto God having been released from incarceration. The usage of the Old Testament here needed to be more holistic in content and context. This suggests the Apostles' internalization of the Old Testament, is evident through the narrative of Acts. In relation to the context of usage of Psalm 2:1-2, the writer observes that the author of Psalm 2 was not using it in the light of the Gospel but in reference to the national persecution of Israel as a royal Psalm. However, the usage of Psalm 2:1-2 in Acts is adapted to respond to the persecution of the body of believers. This could be similar in light of the writer's usage.

The author of Acts also uses the Old Testament in argumentative discourse. It sheds more light on the experiential discourse and resolution of developmental challenges that individual Christians and the early church were experiencing. This could be noticed as exemplified in Acts 15:16-18, where the author of Acts engages the book of Amos 9:11,12 in the resolution of developmental challenges at the point of seeming argument of the need for gentiles to partake in the Jewish rites before they can be accepted as believers in Christ (Bauckham,1996). The approach of the use of the Old Testament at this point could be considered revolutionary.

The writer of the book of Acts also engages the Old Testament as an ameliorative means to provide a solution and shed light on the early church's new course of action. For instance, the author of Acts in chapter 28, verses 26-27, quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10 while narrating Paul's approach to explaining the Gospel to his audience in Rome. The context of usage in Acts 28:26-27 is similar to Isaiah 6:9-10 during Isaiah's commissioning. The audiences appear to have a negative response to delivering the divine message. Hence, the use of the Old Testament addresses comparative contexts.

In summary as discussed above, the author of Acts engages the use of the Old Testament from various dimensions,. However, the writer considers this usage to have implications for the theological enterprise. This shall be undertaken in the next section.



Implications for Theological Enterprise

Due to the peculiarities and intricacies of the usage of the Old Testament in the book of Acts, the writer considers it to have some implications for the theological enterprise in the Nigerian context in particular, and the African context in general (Witherington,1996). These could be enumerated as follows:

- (a) There is a need to underscore the strengths and weaknesses of the author's approach to Acts in the use of the Old Testament to appropriate the advantages and avoid the disadvantages in its deployment in the Nigerian context. For example, the usage of the Old Testament in Acts was theologically contextualized. This suggests that not everything from the African past can serve the course of the advancement of the Gospel. Hence, a conscious effort is needed by African Christians and theologians.
- (b) Since Africans, especially Nigerians, are a people that engage in proverbs, myths, legends, and folklore in their cultural contexts, the presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ could be skillfully contextualized without necessarily betraying the Gospel and falling into the error of syncretism (Mbefo, 1987; Mensa, 2013).
- (c) The strength of oral tradition should be harnessed to domesticate the Gospel in the Nigerian context and Africa in general. This was exemplified in the detailed narrative of Stephen and Paul in Chapters seven and thirteen of the book of Acts, respectively.
- (d) A Gospel preacher needs to be conscious of context similarities and divergence to not deny the scripture's inspiration, integrity, and authority. Hence gospel preachers need to take approaches that avoid possible negative tendencies and outcomes.
- (e) The Gospel preachers needs to treat the personality and events of Jesus as being historically accurate and not as mere fiction (Ohaeri & Uye, 2019). This can be achieved with a critical understanding of the author's approach to the book of Acts as he engaged with the Old Testament.

In summary, the engagement of the Old Testament in the book of Acts gives a practical perspective of how the Gospel can be internalized and contextualized to be favorably harnessed for the Gospel's spread in Nigeria, as an example of an African setting.

Conclusion

This paper has examined how the author of the Acts of the Apostles engaged the Old Testament. The examination of the utilization of the Old Testament has been an attempt to consider how the writer of Acts of the Apostles used, explored, applied, consummated, engaged, employed, and deployed the Old Testament. The route this paper involved in consideration of the usage of the Old Testament in Acts runs through a structural stream that employs: (i) the Introduction, (ii) The Book of Acts in Perspective, (iii) The Engagement of the Old Testament in Acts of the Apostles, (iv) Implications of for Theological Enterprise, and (v) Conclusion. Findings show that the usage of the Old Testament in the book of Acts is quite peculiar. The engagement covers the Old Testament's historical, thematic, theological, cultural, and other elements. Findings also note that the engagement of the Old Testament by the author of the book of Acts was quite exploratory. These findings have implications for African theological enterprise, particularly in Nigeria. The delivery of the Gospel should engage various forms of the elements of culture and sociological peculiarities. We should also always remember that in many countries people have tribal worldviews which transcend any secular-sacred distinction that is evidenced in especially the West, we thus need to transfer meaning appositely



and note that any Biblical message does not exist in a sense of having an independent existence (Hesselgrave, 1991). The writer submits that an adequate understanding and employment of the usage of the Old Testament in Acts of the Apostles are valuable and helpful for theological discourse and Gospel spread in the Nigerian context and Africa in general where there are monotheistic perspectives (Mbiti, 1970).

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