



**Docherty, Susan E.**

***The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews: A Case Study in Early Jewish Bible Interpretation***

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

Susan Docherty is Head of Theology Religious Education & Combined Honours Programme Leader at Newman University College, Birmingham, UK. *The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews: A Case Study in Early Jewish Bible Interpretation* is her published Ph.D. thesis written under the supervision of Philip Alexander.

Chapter 1 is the standard introduction in which Docherty lays out her aims which is to offer a new approach to understanding the use of the OT in Hebrews.

Chapter 2 presents a survey of significant late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 21<sup>st</sup> century commentaries on Hebrews as well as a select variety of theological and structural studies of the letter. Docherty notes an almost uniform lack of attention given to the underlying Septuagint(s) text(s) that the author of Hebrews has made use of as well as a consistent lack of attention given to the author's exegetical techniques and axioms. While at times authors (e.g., DeSilva) will make reference to specific exegetical techniques such as *qal wahomer* or *gezera shawa* (46) the general tendency is to make a vague and general reference to midrash without developing the idea or explaining it. This is where Docherty turns to the study of rabbinic literature as a possible means of advancing our understanding of the exegetical techniques being employed in Hebrews and presumably the rest of the NT.

Chapter 3 in turn surveys the development of study in midrash. Docherty offers a summary and then evaluation of the work of some important scholars in the field of rabbinic literature. Renée Bloch and Geza Vermes represent the tradition-historical approach where their concern is to trace the historical development of exegetical traditions. Isaac Heinemann offered a theoretical description of midrash and distinguished between halakhic and haggadic forms of midrash suggesting that most haggadic midrash could be “explained as the result of ‘creative historiography’, filling out the details of biblical narratives, or ‘creative philology’, paying close attention to the interpretation of individual words.” (88) Michael Fishbane “suggests that later rabbinic interpretive practices are rooted in the bible itself” (91) and his work recognizes the historical and social context in which rabbinic exegesis was formed as well as noting “internal issues related to the text itself or perceived difficulties with it.” (91) Daniel Boyarin, while not claiming to be, is heavily indebted to Fishbane, especially in his emphasis on intertextuality in midrashic exegesis and his appreciation of modern literary theory. His major contribution to the field is in his demonstration that Christians and Jews have influenced one another in their biblical interpretation. Jacob Neusner’s documentary analysis treats each individual midrash as a whole or final document with an ‘authorship’ rather than an individual author and he sees rabbinic literature as every bit sophisticated as anything from the Western philosophical tradition. Arnold Goldberg’s contribution is form analysis, not to be confused with form criticism, in which he “offers a synchronic rather than diachronic analysis of the texts and is not interested in the *Sitz im Leben* or historical development of the forms.” (102) His approach allowed for the use of a consistent terminology (some already in use and some coined by Goldberg) to be applied to specific forms found throughout the rabbinic corpus and he was concerned with the “underlying theological presuppositions and the view of Scripture held by the rabbis.” (104) He also characterized the rabbinic view of scripture as a “collection of linguistic signs” (104) that are given their meaning by the co-text (i.e., the purely linguistic setting of the text). Alexander Samely builds upon the form-analytical work of Goldberg and applies it to the Pentateuchal targumim and the Mishnah making greater use of the field of linguistics than did Goldberg. “Samely has given some consideration to the underlying axioms about the nature of scripture and of language which made possible the hermeneutical operations evident in the rabbinic sources.” (110) And lastly Philip Alexander’s work is focused on defining the term midrash by identifying key literary features of midrash and then judging whether or not texts belong to this genre. This is predicated upon a distinction being made between the *form* of midrash and the *method* of midrash. In all this Docherty offers the positives and negatives of the work of each scholar while suggesting areas in which their work can be improved upon in the future. She most identifies with Goldberg and Samely but sees Samely as taking Goldberg’s work to the next level in his even more exacting terminology. She adopts Samely’s descriptions for her analysis of Hebrews where and when they fit.

Chapter 4 addresses the study of the Septuagint and its implications for Hebrews. Here Docherty points to a number of helpful introductory works such as those of Jobes & Silva; Dines;

Fernández Marcos; and McLay that highlight the history of the Septuagint and the history of Septuagint research. When Docherty uses the term 'Septuagint' she's referring to "the whole transmitted tradition of Greek versions" (123) as opposed to 'Old Greek' which has reference to the earliest stage that can be reconstructed for any individual book. She does well to establish the plurality of Septuagintal texts and to note that the textual history of the Septuagint needs to be approached on a book-by-book basis rather than drawing general conclusion on the final product. The final half of the chapter is spent establishing the sources for specific citations of the OT (mainly Psalms) in the book of Hebrews.

Chapter 5 contains Docherty's exegesis of Hebrews chapters 1 and 3-4. Here she uses Samely's terminology to inform her descriptions of what's going on with the author's exegesis. For each individual passage she follows a format where she addresses the source of the citation, the exegetical techniques employed by the author, and finally the wider context of the citation. She thoroughly points out the manner in which the author of Hebrews was very faithful in citing his source text and when variation does occur it can be attributed with some confidence to genuine textual variants within the source text(s) itself/themselves (see e.g., 135, 137, 140, 160, 194, etc.). She also notes how the author also has a keen eye to the wider context and themes throughout Scripture so that even when he segments (i.e., cuts out a word/phrase/sentence) his OT source text he has a wider OT context/theme in mind. He very frequently removes a passage from its original co-text and places it within a new co-text and gives stress or emphasis to certain parts of it in order to constrain its meaning in a particular direction (see e.g., 179, 183, 198). The author's exegesis is based largely in part on genuine questions raised by the text itself and not simply on trying to read Christ back into the OT (see 196). His motivations are more exegetical than theological although it must be admitted that theological motivations are always present to some degree or another. This was a very informative chapter and without a doubt the best of and most important the book.

Chapter 6 offers a summary of the earlier chapters as well as suggestions for further research, namely applying the descriptive-analytical method employed herein to use of the OT in other NT writings.

To be sure, Docherty's work is a step in the right direction for understanding the use of the OT in Hebrews, as she ably demonstrates a general lack of concern for the interpretive methods and axioms on the part of Hebrews commentators. This should certainly give the next generation of scholars writing on Hebrews pause for reflection. Her exegesis is generally convincing and the clarity gained from more precise terminology is also welcomed. However, there are areas in which I feel that Docherty's work can be improved. As can be seen from my chapter summaries above, the majority of this book is survey and summary, most of which was taken up in treatment of the study of midrash. Unfortunately this section of the book ends up being rather superfluous given the fact that Docherty chooses to take up Samely's terminology and little else. It would

have been sufficient to summarize his work and highlight its use for the description of the author of Hebrews' exegetical techniques.

There's also the lingering concern that it's a bit anachronistic to read later rabbinical interpretive techniques back into the NT. This is perhaps something that Docherty recognized as she attempts to equate NT interpretation with rabbinic interpretation under the perplexing use of the term "post-biblical Jewish exegesis" (2 ["Hebrews must be taken seriously as an important exemplar of early post-biblical Jewish exegesis"], 45, 64, 140, 192, 199, 200 [= "post-biblical scriptural interpretation"], 204, although cf. 7 where Hebrews [and the entire NT] seems to be treated in distinction from "post-biblical Jewish literature" as opposed to p. 5 where it seems to be included) as if Hebrews was somehow a post-biblical work. The intention seems to be to lump Hebrews into the same category as the rabbinic literature that Samely examined so as to make the connection between exegetical techniques more plausible. Perhaps at this point it would have been better to build off of the work of Boyarin and suggest that perhaps NT exegetical techniques influenced rabbinic exegesis in some way (?).

And my last major point of criticism would be that Docherty could have broadened the investigation to include more than just Hebrews 1, 3-4. As it stands her analysis is convincing but one is left wondering if it would be as convincing when examining the letter as a whole (or at least more substantial portions of it). Had the chapter on the study of midrash been significantly shorter (as it surely could have been) then this could have been a very real possibility. Minor gripes are the odd citation system which follows a bibliography style of some sort in footnotes but not any style I'm familiar with (e.g., SBL, Turabian, MLA, Chicago, or APA). Docherty also engages in some shaky speculation at times (e.g., "The author of Hebrews as much as any Jewish exegete, however, regarded it as legitimate interpretation to seek out what scriptural texts imply as much as what they actually say, presumably believing that they new meaning he gave them was inherent in the original revelation, which he regarded as having endless depths of meaning and real contemporary relevance." [181]), but these are rather insignificant complaints and they don't affect the overall usefulness of this work. My one suggestion for improvement past a wider examination of Hebrews would be a glossary of terms wherein the reader would have access to the precise descriptive terms and their definitions for the exegetical techniques employed by the author of Hebrews. Having this information collated somewhere in the back matter would be most helpful.

*The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews* is a volume that every student working in the field of biblical hermeneutics in general and the use of the OT in the NT specifically will want to engage. Docherty has set the stage for much more work to be done in this area and for that she is to be commended.