

Chapter three. Methodological presuppositions.

A review of errors.

Throughout history Biblical scholars have made simple, but in terms of consequences, serious mistakes. This chapter reviews some of the simple basic errors made by scholars that have had massive influences on how academics have interpreted the texts of Scripture. The chapter seeks to show how these errors have left a deeply flawed understanding. We will then examine a mistake that is currently being made is having equally devastating influence.

Linguistic errors.

Until recently scholars saw no difficulty in using etymology as the key to understand the meaning of Biblical words. Philologists would tell us what the roots of words were and it was naively assumed that the meaning was transferred across the centuries to the text that was being considered. It does not take a trained linguist to know that language is constantly changing. Thus to establish the meaning that a word had two thousand years earlier is of little help to understand its meaning when used by a completely different generation. What determines any words meaning is not what how earlier generations understood the particular word, but how the generation that has produced the text under consideration interprets it. This can only be known through carefully reflecting on both its immediate and its wider context. In retrospect it is a mistake so simple that it matches the massive mistake of failing to design computer software to handle dates past the end of 1999. At least theologians are not the only academics to make silly mistakes!

Conceptual errors.

Another mistake that should never have happened relates to the Greek language of the NT. The NT documents were written in the *Koiné* Greek that pervaded every level of the Hellenistic world. For centuries it was considered that the appropriate preparation for the study of NT theology was a thorough grounding in the Greek classics. Thus most NT scholars of previous generations followed this well tried and little questioned route into theology. Those who had this education were looked on as eminently suited to the task of NT exegesis. They had the great advantage of being able to fall back on the broad learning they had gained of the Hellenistic world, its thought patterns and its vocabulary.

Few saw that there was a flaw in this method, but there was. While the vocabulary of the NT could be found throughout the Hellenistic world, it did not have the same meaning when it was used in a religious sense within the Jewish community. Here the language had imbibed its own theological meaning as a result of the translation of the Hebrew Bible some two hundred years or so before Christ. The Hebrew meaning had been poured into the text of the Greek translation to produce a language that had its own particular lexicon. It was Greek in its alphabet and vocabulary, but Hebrew in its mindset and essential meaning. It was this very *language* that Judaism bequeathed to the infant church as she interpreted and proclaimed the

message of the prophets.¹

Seen from this perspective, the classical method of training for theological study was fundamentally flawed. It was not from Athens that the writers of the NT had drawn their understanding, but Jerusalem. Much theological literature that exists demonstrates this confusion. It is evidenced in the way that even those who assert the NT's dependence on the OT still nevertheless give emphasis to the Hellenistic cultural and literary background that they presuppose the text draws on.

Dating errors.

Bultmann is another example of how flawed practice totally spoils the work of a world renowned scholar. Bultmann's reliance on the Gnostic documents was misplaced trust. His argument was that the NT writers were fighting against the threatening mindset of Gnosticism. He argued that the early church borrowed its language and imagery from Gnosticism, using it to develop their claims for Jesus. These claims were, according to Bultmann, far greater than anything Jesus would have claimed for himself. Bultmann held that by studying the Gnostic documents the background of the theology of the NT could be identified and so its history could be plotted and understood. Out of this study he sought to demythologise the Gospel. His mistake was to assume that the Gnostic texts which he relied on were evidence of the state of Gnosticism in the first century. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that this was not the case. Gnosticism was only in its embryonic stage in the first century. Rather than Christians borrowing from Gnosticism, it had been Gnosticism that had borrowed from Christians.

As we saw in chapter one, the methods of liberal theology are increasingly being exposed to have been based on faulty presuppositions. During the closing decades of the 1800's Europe was caught up in an intellectual revolution that was to alter radically the way man viewed himself. This ranged from the natural sciences to religion. The history of mankind was no longer seen as static, but as dynamic and evolving. In politics this gave birth to communism, in theology to liberalism.

The premise that liberal scholars embraced was that there was no unique divine revelation. All religions were the products of folklore or the borrowing from other religions, either directly or by adapting their opponents arguments to promote their own world views.

This method struck at the heart of the traditional understanding of Christian revelation and the authority of the Bible particularly. It assumed that the NT was not historically reliable and that it was virtually all the product of the emerging Gentile churches as they used their own traditions to teach their new found faith in Jesus of Nazareth. The thrust of much NT scholarship since the advent of liberal scholarship has been to identify the points at which units of NT materials came into existence. It seeks to assign the material to its place in its evolution from being a message about a Jewish prophet to become the religion of Gentiles who claimed for Jesus a status comparable with the gods of the Hellenistic world.

Changing tides.

¹ Noack, "Faithfulness", 51.

After almost a century of liberal dominance, the method that it has developed is being seriously challenged from some of the leading academic institutions of the world.² An important factor in this change was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These have demonstrated that the language that had been assumed to have been borrowed from Hellenism had existed independently in Judaism itself.

Some are presenting their own alternatives to replace the method of liberalism, but what is clear is that liberalism is no longer the dominant attacking force that it once was. It is being asked far more searching questions than it has ever previously been asked in order to justify its claims. Alongside of this is the growing realisation that the NT is not a collection of Hellenistic writings as argued by the liberal forefathers, but it is being increasingly recognised to be a collection of essentially, if not entirely Jewish writings.³ If this is true, then it challenges at the most fundamental level the presuppositions of theological liberalism. There was no radical Hellenistic development. The identification of the NT as a collection of Jewish writings means that we have to abandon, or at least radically restrict, the method that has prevailed for the last hundred years, and begin all over again.

The above examples indicate how serious it is to build on flawed assumptions. The fact is that presuppositions determine conclusions. It is for this reason that liberalism was almost inevitably going to win the debate while it set the agenda. It had effectively set the rules of the game and this determined that it would always win when appealing to people with open minds. It is always important in any debate, but in theology especially, that before engaging in the debate, the assumptions are examined and if necessary challenged. Like a carefully drawn up legal agreement, liberalism determined what evidence was permissible and established the laws of evidence. The hypothesis that it set forth as representing the historic facts of the NT meant that there could be only one conclusion, that liberalism was right.

Assumptions and their conclusions.

What the above cases demonstrate is that no matter how gifted and able a scholar is, if his/her arguments are built on unsubstantiated assumptions, they cannot by his/her learning compensate. Until scholars are willing to acknowledge the mistakes they are making, then their conclusions will always be flawed. It would be wise to hear the comment of Fossum who said that: "I for one realize that I shall never become a scholar of the calibre of Bousset, Reitzen, or Bultmann. But the point is that they were wrong, whereas I am right."⁴ His claim to be right was based on the fact that he was not using the same flawed method of those he mentioned. It is perhaps a dangerous assertion for he cannot know that his own method will never be shown to be similarly lacking.

Now what is embarrassing for scholarship is that the major mistakes of the past should never have been made. It did not need exceptional academic ability to see that languages change their meaning. Nor does it take an academic genius to see that translations preserve something of the conceptual background of the original text. Indeed it ought to be obvious that failure to

² See Wright, *Jesus*, 3-144.

³ Namos, *Mystery*, 4.

⁴ Fossum, "Quest", 639.

recognise this would not only miss conceptual riches but that if they are overlooked then their absence from the reading of the translated text will leave a far from adequate synthesis of ideas. These very simple mistakes had profound effects and brought serious confusion into Biblical scholarship.

I now want to suggest that there is a research method that has recently found widespread acceptance in scholarly circles which I believe will be seen in years to come to have polluted the academic process and distorted the conclusions of scholarship significantly by imposing an extraneous and poorly constructed meaning on the NT text. This is being done by the modern use that is made of the pseudepigraphal writings.⁵

Contemporary confusion. The Pseudepigrapha.

The Pseudepigrapha are a body of ancient literature that has become very influential in recent NT research. Before we consider and evaluate its influence a brief look at the history of the literature and its study is appropriate.

Throughout the Christian era it has been generally known that writings, whose authorship was not known, have existed. This collection is known as the Pseudepigrapha. The name reflects their false claims of authorship. They were attributed to important historical Jewish figures who clearly did not compose them.

Until recently, one of the problems in using this material has been that the Christian community preserved it. While there was little doubt that it was based on a Jewish genre and indeed probably had within it genuine Jewish material, there was no certainty as to how reliable it was as a guide to Jewish thought. It was widely regarded as mostly of Christian composition and therefore not representative in any significant way of intertestamental Judaism. Indeed, G. F. Moore pointed out that it is of a totally different genre from the Rabbinical material which, though latter, was the only authentic Jewish literature of the period that existed outside of the NT. For Moore, this difference confirmed the necessity for caution in accepting the material as relevant for Jewish studies of the NT period.

Pseudipigraphal development.

a. The Collection of Deane.

In fact there is ongoing debate as to what should be included in the Pseudepigrapha collection. It is a corpus that has slowly expanded over the past century. So for example, a work published in 1891 by W. J. Deane⁶ listed the following works as the making up the pseudipigraph:-

Lyrical

The Psalter of Solomon

Apocalyptical and Prophetical

The Book of Enoch

The Assumption of Moses

The Apocalypse of Baruch

The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.

⁵ For an example of an enthusiastic supporter of the use of the Pseudepigrapha see Harding, "Value" passim
⁶ Dean, *Pseudepigrapha*, table of contents.

Legendary
The Book of Jubilees
The Ascension of Isaiah

Mixed
The Sibylline Oracles.

b. The collections of Moore.

By 1920 G.F. Moore listed the collection as following:-

Mekilta	Tanhuma
Mekilta De-R. Simeone. Yohai	Debarim Rabbah (Deuteronomy)
Sifra	Bemidbar Rabbah (Numbers)
Sifre on Numbers	
Sifre Zuta	Sirach
Sifre on Deuteronomy	Psalms of Solomon
Midrash Tannaim	Gospels and Acts
	Teaching of the Twelve
The Mishnah	
Tosefta	
Apostles	
Pirkè Abot	
Abot De-R.Nathan	
Seder 'Olam	Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs
	Jubilees
Bereshit Rabbah (Genesis)	The Schismatic Sect in
Damascus Shemot Rabbah (Exodus)	
Ekah Rabbati (Lamentations)	1 Maccabees
Pesikta De R.Kahana	2 Maccabees
Pesikta Rabbati	Flavius Josephus
Wayyikra Rabbah (Leviticus)	Phio.

c. The collection of Charles.

Charles published a two volume work called The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in 1913. In volume 1, *The Apocrypha of the Old Testament*, Charles listed the following:

Historical Books-

1 Esdras.
1 Maccabees.
2 Maccabees.
3 Maccabees.

Quasi-Historical Books Written with a Moral Purpose-

Tobit

Judith.

Wisdom Literature-

Sirach
Wisdom of Solomon.

Additions to and Completion of the Canonical Books-

1 Baruch.
Epistle of Jeremy.
Prayer of Manasses.
Additions to Daniel-
Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three Children.
Susanna
Bel and the Dragon.

The second volume of Charles work was called *The Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*. In this volume he listed the following.

Primitive History Written from the Standpoint of the Law-

The Book of Jubilees.

Sacred Legends-

The Letter of Aristeas.
The Book of Adam and Eve.
The Martydom of Isaiah.

Apocalypses-

1 Enoch.
The Testaments of the XII Patriarchs.
The Sibylline Oracles.
The Assumption of Moses.
2 Enoch, or the Book of the Secrets of Enoch
2 Baruch or the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch.
3 Baruch or the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch.
4 Ezra.

Psalms-

The Psalms of Solomon.

Ethics and Wisdom Literature-

4 Maccabees.
Pirke Aboth.

The Story Ahikar

History-

The Fragments of a Zadokite Work.

d. The collection of Charlesworth.

In 1985 Charlesworth⁷ expanded the list to:-

Apocalyptic Literature and Related Works

Ezra	1 Enoch	Questions of Ezra
	2 Enoch	Revelation of
Sedrach	3 Enoch	Apocalypse of
	Sibylline Oracles	2 Baruch
	Treatise of Shem	3 Baruch
	Apocryphon of Ezekiel	Apocalypse of
Abraham	Apocalypse of Zephaniah	Apocalypse of
Adam	The Fourth Book of Ezra	Apocalypse of
Elijah	Greek Apocalypse of Ezra	Apocalypse of
Daniel	Vision of Ezra	

Testaments (Often with Apocalyptic Sections)

Moses	Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs	Testament of
	Testament of Job	Testament of
Solomon	Testaments of the 3 Patriarchs	Testament of
Adam	(Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)	

Expansions of the OT and Legends

Letter of Aristeas	Ladder of Jacob
Jubilees	4 Baruch
Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah	Jannes and Jambres
Joseph and Aseneth	History of the Rechabites
Life of Adam and Eve	Eldad and Modad
Pseudo-Philo	History of Joseph

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Charlesworth, *ADB* 5:538.

Lives of the Prophets.

Wisdom and Philosophical Literature.

Ahiqar	Pseudo-Phocylides
3 Maccabees	Syriac-Manander
4 Maccabees	

Prayers, Psalms and Odes

More Psalms of David	Prayer of Joseph
Prayer of Manasseh	Prayer of Jacob
Psalms of Solomon	Odes of Solomon
Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers	

Fragments of Judeo-Hellenistic Works

Philo the Epic Poet	Theodotus
Orphica	Ezekiel the Tragedian
Fragments of Pseudo-Greek Poets	Aristobulus
Demetrius the Chronographer	Aristeas the Exegete
Eupolemus	Pseudo-Eupolemus
Cleodemus Malchus	Artapanus
Pseudo-Hecataeus.	

Historical voices.

When Moore published his list in 1920 he urged great caution in embracing the material as a reliable source for NT studies. He expressed his concern over the way the pseudepigraphal writings were being used in NT research. His concern was that this literature, which was increasingly available to NT scholars because of translations, was not properly understood. One of Moore's concerns was that the material was being used by people who were ignorant of its diversity and its particular genre which required careful use as a hermeneutic tool. Another of Moore's concerns was that there was no textual evidence to show that the material was truly Jewish.

The Dead Sea scrolls.

Some of Moore's concerns were allayed with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, for amongst them were two of the works of the Pseudepigrapha, the books of Jubilees and 1 Enoch along with fragments from the book of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. Thus some of the material of the Pseudepigrapha was genuinely early and Jewish so making it relevant to the NT period. The discovery of this material resulted in the essentially Jewish nature of much of the NT being recognised. This in turn caused scholars to pull back from the previously held assumption that NT religious imagery reflected the Graeco-Roman world. Themes such as the kingdom of God, the Son of Man and the Son of God have all been shown to have been part of Judaism and not the creation of the early church as had been argued by liberal

scholars.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has produced a renewed confidence in the authenticity of the pseudepigraphal material. This has meant that NT scholars have embraced it as the key to understanding the mindset of Second Temple Judaism and the world of the NT.

New errors in method.

While the mistakes of previous generations of scholars are slowly being rectified, the present generation is falling into its own traps. The mushrooming of intertestamental studies as a result of the discoveries at Qumran has produced another method of training for theologians. The Pseudepigrapha have become the key for deciphering the NT message. There is no doubt that these writings give fascinating insights into this period of Judaism. They are an invaluable source for evidence of the extent to which particular theological topics were discussed throughout the different strands of Judaism. Nevertheless, the extent of their relevance for the NT message must be questioned. As we have seen, the mistake of the past was to assume that the Greek of the NT was the same as that used in secular society. This same sort of assumption is being made in another guise by many NT scholars. The assumption is that there was a strict equivalence in terminology or even themes that are found in these writings and in the NT. But this assumption cannot go unchallenged,⁸ not least because it is radically changing the message of the NT documents.⁹

Theological diversity.

The pseudepigraphal texts are used as the key for understanding the meaning of the NT. This presupposes that they shared the same theological outlook and that their meanings are transposable. But this is to ignore a fatal flaw. There were, and still are, many theologies within Judaism.¹⁰ The documents represent different Jewish perspectives many of which were distinctive from, and in contradiction to, the others. This is made clear by Charlesworth, who, when commenting on the Pseudepigrapha, says: "In these writings, as in the Dead Sea Scrolls, we are introduced to the ideas, symbols, perceptions, fears, and dreams of pre-AD 70 Jews. Since none of them can with assurance be assigned to Pharisees Sadducees, Zealots or Essenes, it is wise not to describe early Judaism in terms of four such sects; rather we must now think of many groups and numerous subgroups."¹¹ Not until those distinctives are understood and their relationship to the NT established can they be safely used. To dump these texts mindlessly into footnotes or text of commentaries etc in order to give supporting evidence is doing the very opposite to what is intended. Instead of moving NT studies on to more scholarly methods, it is doing the very opposite. It is polluting the primary text from which NT theology can be safely done. As those who specialise in the intertestamental literature are fond of saying, we cannot speak of Judaism but of Judaisms.

⁸ So for example Davies, *Origins*, 172 and Barrett, *Corinthians*, 75 both challenge the parallels concerning the Spirit in Qumran as having any significance for understanding the NT doctrine of the Spirit

⁹ For example, interpreting the meaning of the death of Jesus in the light of Jewish martyr theology. For a discussion on this see chapter 8.

¹⁰ Davies, *Rabbinic*, p20.

¹¹ Charlesworth, "Pseudepigrapha", 538-9.

The method that has been adopted ignores the complexity of these sources and unwittingly reads a particular theology into the text and then in turn uses the pseudo-theological insight as the key to interpret the NT. The method is a circular one. Not recognising the differences in the meaning of the same terms within this range of literature, scholars have read their own meaning into the term, and then used that to show what the NT meant.

Unheeded warnings.

Perhaps it is Neusner who has been most vocal in declaring the complexity of Judaism. His concern is not the one that I am seeking to alert the reader to, care in using intertestamental literature for interpreting the NT. His concern is simply that Judaism has been reduced in the thinking of many scholars to a homogeneous system. His particular point is to establish that Judaism did not have common expectations concerning its coming messiah, but many and sometimes conflicting expectations. Indeed, Israel did not look for a Messiah but for messiahs. Neusner says: “What is wrong with the established view is simple. People join together books that do not speak the same language of thought, that refer to distinctive conceptions and doctrines of their own. If books so close in topic and sentiment as the four Gospels no longer yield harmonization, books so utterly remote from one another as the Mishnah and Philo and Fourth Ezra and Enoch should not contribute doctrines to the common pot: Judaism. But if we do not harmonise, then what we have to do is quite the opposite: analyse. In fact all we propose is to describe things item by item, and to postpone the work of searching for connections and even continuities until all the components have had their say, one by one. For, as we see throughout this book, each of the components - the distinct books - makes its own distinctive statement.”¹²

Indeed, Charlesworth has himself given warning of the diversity of Judaism. He wrote: “The contradicting ideas should not be explained away or forced into an artificial system. Such ideas in the Pseudepigrapha witness to the fact that early Judaism was not a speculative philosophical movement or theological system, even though the Jews demonstrated impressive speculative fecundity. The Pseudepigrapha mirror a living religion in which the attempt was made to come to terms with the dynamic phenomena of history and experience.”¹³

Indeed, my concerns are multiplied by Charlesworth’s remark concerning the difficulty of locating the documents of the Pseudepigrapha in their original theological stable. He says that: “we cannot identify with certainty any author of the pseudepigraphon as being a Pharisee or an Essene or a member of another sect.”¹⁴ In other words, we don’t not even know what theological school to assign the documents to! This makes it impossible to know the significance that should be given to the theological terminology the documents use, for the meaning given to terms differed from group to group.

Inadequate samples.

¹² Neusner, *Judaisms*, xiii. See also the warning given by Bauckham, “Apocalypses”, 114 who says: “Heavily influenced by apocalyptic as primitive Christianity undoubtedly was, it was also highly selective in the aspects of apocalyptic which it took over. This is a fact about the NT which can only be appreciated by diligent study of pseudepigraphal works which do not look at all relevant to the NT.”

¹³ Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, 2 xxxiii.

¹⁴ Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, 2:xxix.

What also needs to be recognised is the limitation of the documents which we have. As indicated they represent a whole range of theological traditions but they convey very limited samples of the particular tradition that they come from. How much of Paul's theology would we appreciate if we had only 1 or 2 Thessalonians, or Philippians or even 1 Corinthians?¹⁵ It is only the multiplicity of documents addressed to different congregations and dealing with a wide range of issues that gives us reasonable grounds to believe that we can attempt to produce a Pauline theology. Obviously documents such as the letters of John, Peter or James gives us only a limited glimpse into the thinking of their authors. Although this may prove a major hurdle for scholarship, for orthodox Christianity this is not a problem, for it believes in the unity and inspiration of the Scriptures as written by men under the direction of the Spirit of Truth. We do not, or should not, look to these writings for a full theology. However, being part of the Christian Scriptures and sharing a similar mindset and system of beliefs, they can be interpreted from that wider perspective to which they also contribute. Obviously such a claim would be invalid if they represented factions within the early church, but such suggestions are no longer acceptable in the light of the results of modern research.

The authenticity of sources.

Furthermore, De Jonge has raised other problems that add to the dangers of relying on these texts. Like Moore back in 1920, he points out that the transmission of these texts was in the hands of Christians and that they preserved them because they served their purposes. We have no idea of how much material was discarded because it didn't serve the new movement's expectations. In addition there is the problem that these documents are almost entirely translations of the original texts, so we cannot be certain as to how faithful these translations are. We certainly know that the early 'Christians' were not averse to interpolating their own material into these texts in order to use them to support their views. It is difficult even to guess just how much tampering took place. However, since we know from textual evidence that they had been prepared to tamper with the NT documents, there is little doubt that at least the same amount of tampering would have taken place with the documents of the Pseudepigrapha. It is no wonder that De Jonge warns of the need of specialists to guide NT theologians in the use of these texts.¹⁶

The relevance of the documents.

But even if it was possible to demonstrate theological equivalence between NT texts and the Pseudepigrapha, what does it prove? For example how widespread were the Pseudepigraphal writings known? How far had their message penetrated wider Judaism? Were they known beyond Palestine and how do we know that the population of Palestine knew them? How can we know that an apparent reference or even an echo from the Jewish Pseudepigrapha, or latter recorded Rabbinic tradition for that matter, could

¹⁵ See Fee's warning, *Empowering*, 594 against assuming that we have Paul's pneumatology sewn up: "A text like this one alerts us that Paul's understanding is too large for us to encompass by merely collecting particular texts and looking at them."

¹⁶ De Jonge, "Pseudepigrapha", 61-63. Henninger, "Semiten", 176 claims that there is little evidence of a religious significance in the extrabiblical sources

have been recognised by the readers of the NT? How do we decide each individual NT writer's knowledge of the Pseudepigrapha? Indeed, Dunn¹⁷ claims that Luke as a Gentile shows no evidence of being aware of Intertestamental Judaism. Yet it is these writings that Turner¹⁸ and Menzies¹⁹ rely on, and incidentally, they come to totally different conclusions! They are an example of the danger of reading into the texts one's own preferences and then using the texts for understanding Luke's mindset concerning the Spirit. Indeed, not only does Luke fail to show that he is aware of these sources, but even if he had been, what relevance would they have had? He wrote his gospel for Gentile readers who were scattered across the Roman world and who could not possibly have known of their existence or contents. No one can seriously suggest, or rather should not seriously suggest, that the Gospel writers expected these so called allusions to be picked up by their readers. Such claims strain the evidence way beyond the point of credibility.

But even if there are echoes of these documents, could it not be that these extra-biblical writings are themselves echoing some other source that both the Pseudepigrapha and the NT writer were familiar with? In other words, they could both be echoing an unknown source. It is easy to imagine that in the process of usage they had both deviated from the common source that they both shared.²⁰ Are the pseudepigraphal writings in the same theological stream or have they drifted even further from the unrecognised source? The way the Dead Sea Scrolls and the NT use the same OT material in different ways is a warning of the possibility of this three way relationship. These are all questions or possibilities that are dangerously ignored by most scholars as they draw upon the texts for support for their interpretations.

Wright acknowledges the variety of beliefs in Judaism which makes us speak of Judaisms. He correctly, in my judgement, claims that despite this variety we can trace the outlines of a world view and a belief system, which were shared by a large number of Jews at the time.²¹ What I think he fails to do is recognise that he imports details into his own interpretation from these sources. He has given meanings to these texts that are the basis for interpreting the NT texts that he seeks to be faithful too. In fact, as indicated above, it is not possible to have any certainty as to the detailed meaning of these texts without knowing their original stable and without having a substantial collection of texts from the same source dealing with the themes they mention. In using this method, Wright, along with a growing number of other scholars,²² builds his exegesis on foundations that are unreliable. So for example, his Wisdom Christology relies on these texts. This is in spite of his own acknowledgements of the immense complexity of the material.²³

A contemporary example.

¹⁷ Dunn, "Response", 21.

¹⁸ Turner, *Spiritual*, *passim*.

¹⁹ Menzies *Empowered*, *passim*.

²⁰ See Fossum, *op cit* 643. See also Carson, *Introduction*, 122 for a similar discussion of sources in the early Church Fathers. The same difficulties apply to the Pseudepigrapha being identified as a source of common ideas in the NT.

²¹ Wright, *Testament*, 338, see Hays, "Adam", 79 concern over Wright's use .

²² e.g. Witherington, *Sage*; Stuhlmacher, *Romans*; Turner, *Power*.

²³ Wight, *People*, 119 says: "We have learned that we must not glibly pass over differences of setting and time, imagining continuity of thought between documents of different provenance."

The concern I am expressing may be appreciated if we imagine a contemporary situation. A visitor to the UK seeks to gain some understanding of the Scottish Presbyterian doctrine of the Spirit. The research begins with a survey of what the population think about the subject. Searches of past editions of newspapers give a variety of references to the Spirit. Then a search of the literature of other religious groupings within Scotland is made of their understanding of the Spirit. Spiritualism, Mormonism, Jehovah's witnesses, Unitarians, Baptists, Methodists, Catholics etc. are consulted. With this contextual study, the writings of the Presbyterian divines are then considered.

Now if this method were followed, and the fruit of the wider study were the basis of understanding the primary texts, then there would be virtually no possible chance of understanding the distinctive doctrines of Presbyterianism. It is the theological differences that are the important points of study, not the similarity of vocabulary. Much contemporary NT study is conducting its research in a similar way. The fact that terminology is similar or even identical is no guarantee that the meaning is the same. Failure to appreciate this results in eisegesis and not exegesis.

It might be thought that the above illustration makes the point, but it hasn't. The reason for saying this is that it does not actually fully match the situation in NT studies. To have a direct equivalence you would have to imagine that the researcher who has gathered all of this material on the Spirit from so many sources has a disastrous day. All of the search facilities he has employed fail. They are never available for anyone ever to use again. He can never use IT again to recover his sources, better still, his collection of material is the only collection in the world. And then, to add to this technological disaster, he is working in his study with the window open and a gale blows through the study window. Every top sheet of paper, with the details of the origin and theological background, is blown out of the window and is lost forever. Added to this the pages are scattered all over the room and the collections are completely mixed together so that it is impossible to know what page belonged to what group and therefore what the terminology on the individual sheets of paper conveyed to the original writer. The ability to locate the sources that they came from and therefore the views that they represent has also totally gone. There are now only piles of texts which cannot be labelled for their origin and which now can only be guessed as to the original meaning of the texts they hold. And now the researcher begins his study of the Presbyterian doctrine of the Holy Spirit!

This is in fact the situation in NT studies as far as the use of the pseudepigraphal writings are concerned. We do not know their theological homes, we can only guess. To make any sense of these sources will demand incredible discipline and patience²⁴ and certainly must not be pulled across into the field of NT studies as evidence to show that the proposed exegesis is supported by these texts. To use this method is to disregard the rules of historical research for admissible evidence.

A test case.

It might seem that the above conclusion is too harsh, that the Pseudepigrapha

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Wright, *Testament*, 100 himself says that: "Jewish sources alone are a lifetime's study."

must have more value than that limited use that has been conceded earlier. In fact what I have argued for is really not even as it really is, because it is even more serious. Even within the one community that we can define, and whose literature we have access to, the Qumran community, variation stops the possibility of any certainty in drawing conclusions concerning its belief system. The following extract show why this is the case:

It is not possible to do a simple, homogenous Qumran messianic belief without doing violence to the nature of the evidence. Nor, however, is it acceptable to make this variety of concepts the basis for working out a pattern of systematic development in chronological order for messianic beliefs at Qumran. We simply do not have sufficient information to allow precise dating of the Qumran works (essential for the construction of this kind of chronological schema), nor do we know enough about the interrelationship of the various Qumran writings.²⁵

If there is such uncertainty in interpreting the documents of such a clearly defined community, what chance is there of understanding an array of texts that come from such diverse groupings (and whose origin we don't even know) that existed within first century Judaism.? The complexity of the problem demands extreme caution in making any claims, and such caution is very really exercised, even by those who say they recognise its need.

Textual certainties.

But these observations are not meant to suggest that we languish in ignorance concerning the mindset of the early church. Paul's use of the prophets shows without a shadow of doubt the dependence of the early church on these writings. Indeed, we know that the whole of Judaism fed off these Scriptures. Every member of the covenant community drank in from their streams of warning, comfort, encouragement and hope. They gathered at least weekly to hear them read and be taught from their pages. The Psalms were used to express their worship to God. It is their writings that saturate the NT literature. To rely on texts, whose influence on the expectations of the covenant people is extremely doubtful, while the OT Scriptures are being treated as though they had little formative influence, is an irrational procedure. Not only were the NT letters written to communities outside of Palestine and its varied theological influences, so were the gospels themselves. In contrast the OT Scriptures were influential not only throughout every form of Judaism within the promised land, but in every synagogue throughout the Roman empire. Furthermore, it is these writings that Paul explicitly states are those which are fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus the Son of David.²⁶ It is from these Scriptures that the apostles taught, not from just any of the Palestinian perspectives, but from the perspective that Jesus himself had taught them.²⁷

²⁵ Chester "Expectations" 25

²⁶ Rom. 1:3:21f; 1Cor. 15:3.

²⁷ Dodd, *According, passim* acknowledges that the NT way of reading the OT shows every evidence of being the interpretation of one person who he acknowledges could only be Jesus himself.

The question of the significance of the rabbinical tradition on the NT writers has been widely discussed. There are those scholars who point out that the traditions were not written down until the end of the second century and therefore the material that precedes this date has its own problems relating to authenticity. Other scholars reject what they see is undue scepticism and treat the records as accurately preserving the traditions of the rabbis who are quoted.²⁸

Conclusion.

We have attempted to evaluate the Pseudepigrapha for NT research. We have seen that while it points to a widely held set of expectations, the detail was interpreted by each group in its own distinctive way. The common terminology is not evidence of a common theology and its literature is of limited value for NT research. What they do provide is evidence as to how wide different themes were discussed, but it does not give us the details that we need to map the theology of these documents accurately. We have seen in chapters 1 and 2 that the key to the NT is the OT. It is therefore the message of these writings that will be used as the theological key to Pauline thought.

²⁸

See chapter 10.