



Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels

By Richard Hays

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2.11.19 | Christopher Skinner

Symposium Introduction



Richard B. Hays, the recently retired George Washington Ivey Professor of New Testament at Duke Divinity school, is well known for his important contributions to New Testament studies. Among those contributions is his now classic treatment of intertextuality in the Pauline literature, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993)—one of the primary works through which a generation of students was introduced to the subject. Three decades later, Hays has provided a new generation of students with a similarly titled volume aimed at examining intertextuality in the canonical gospels. In the process of completing this book, Hays experienced serious medical issues that both delayed the volume and raised questions about whether it would even be completed. Against the backdrop of those medical concerns and in light of his previous work on intertextuality, it is important to note that Hays has generated a focused book that, while less methodologically robust than his Pauline volume, is every bit as substantive and careful in its investigation of scriptural interpretation and hermeneutics in the gospels. Whether one might choose to take issue with various methodological moves or interpretive decisions—and our respondents do—it is difficult to deny the value of this volume as a historical, literary, and theological investigation of the four evangelists and their use of Israel’s scripture to set forth their distinctive visions of Jesus.

Hays begins by making three important points about the aims of the book. First, this is not a book about the historical Jesus, nor does it represent an attempt to reconstruct how Jesus thought about the Hebrew Bible and its interpretation. Instead this work is more intensely focused on the authorial voices of each evangelist within the narrative and theological projects in which they engaged. In this way, the book is first and foremost a historically and theologically-informed literary analysis of each autonomous gospel text.

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In that light, a question to frame the book's interrelated foci might be, "How did *the evangelists* think about the Hebrew Bible and its interpretation and *how did they apply* that thinking to their portraits of Jesus?"

Second, Hays is not interested in discussing or advocating for any proposal related to the social context of the communities associated with the canonical gospels. He does not spend time rehearsing theories related to gospel communities or those who might deny such communities existed, nor does he enter into debates about the geography or social location of the evangelists. Again, the majority of the book is a literary critical investigation and much of the critical discussion relating to the preliminary investigation of the world behind the text is simply left out.

Third, the book is not concerned with how early Christian communities arrived at Christological views that saw Jesus as the human incarnation of Israel's God. While he locates himself in the camp of those who embrace a high early Christology, this book is not an attempt to trace that development.

On the heels of these three points, Hays describes his approach as follows:

[T]his is a book that offers an account of the narrative representation of Israel, Jesus, and the church in the canonical Gospels, with particular attention to the ways in which the four Evangelists reread Israel's Scripture—as well as the ways in which Israel's Scripture prefigures and illuminates the central character in the Gospel stories (7).

Following the book's introduction, there are four major sections under the heading "The Evangelists as Readers of Israel's Scripture." Hays tackles

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major themes in Mark (sections 1-5), Matthew (sections 6-10), Luke (sections 11-15), and John (sections 16-20), respectively. As ever, Hays' ability to generate a close reading that simultaneously instructs and provokes thought is on display throughout. The book closes with a flourish in which Hays sums up the value of figuration for appreciating the achievement of the four gospels and their presentations of Jesus.

All four respondents, Rafael Rodríguez (Johnson University), Eric Barreto (Princeton Theological Seminary), Jonathan Bernier (Lonergan Research Institute at Regis College), and Rebekah Eklund (Loyola University Maryland), are New Testament specialists who write with appreciation for Hays' erudition and sophistication, while offering astute critiques of the volume. These critiques, along with Hays' grateful though critical responses, contribute to a lively, interesting, and thought-provoking symposium.