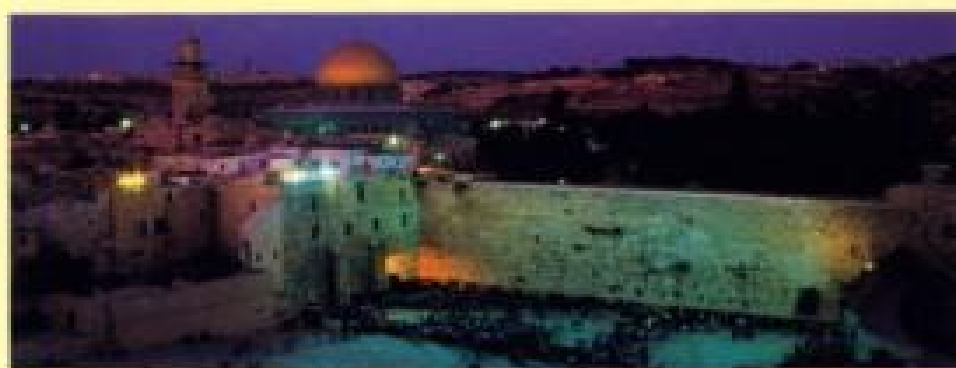


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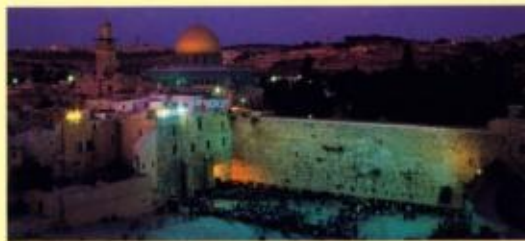


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COMMENTARY  
NEW TESTAMENT

# Craig S. Keener

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**This book is dedicated to our  
brothers and sisters  
on the frontline of evangelism in  
Africa, Asia, Latin America,  
the inner cities of North America and  
the many other places  
where followers of Jesus are paying a  
high price  
to proclaim his gospel in truth. Many  
of them have not had  
the time or opportunity to pursue the  
original cultural context  
of the New Testament, but I pray  
with all my heart  
that this book will be useful to them  
in their service  
to our Lord Jesus Christ.**



## Acknowledgments

The list of scholars in New Testament, Judaic studies and Greco-Roman antiquity to whose writings I am indebted could fill many pages, and for this reason I forgo it. The list of scholars with whom I have studied personally is shorter, but still I list only a few of my academic mentors: Ben Aker, Mary Boatwright, Morna Hooker, Dale Martin, Eric Meyers, Ramsey Michaels, Jim Moyer, E. P. Sanders, D. Moody Smith, Wesley Smith and Orval Wintermute.

More direct acknowledgment must be made to my faithful and patient editors at InterVarsity Press, Rodney Clapp and Ruth Goring Stewart. About two years after I had decided that IVP would be the ideal publisher for a commentary like this one if I ever got the time to write it, Rodney contacted me and asked if I would be interested in writing a book for IVP. Since that time I have appreciated not only the editorial help but also the spiritual encouragement my friends at IVP have provided.

Finally, I must thank my students and members of congregations over the years who have afforded me the opportunity to test out the ideas in this commentary. They are the ones who helped me sift through which elements of background were genuinely important to communicating the message of the biblical text and which were only peripheral. In this connection, I should mention especially my undergraduate students at Duke and my seminary students at Hood Theological Seminary. I should also thank the various campus ministry groups (InterVarsity, Raptures, Crusade and Koinonia at Duke, and New Generation at Livingstone College) that have allowed me to test out this commentary's material in smaller group settings and in personal discipleship.

The story of how the Lord provided financially while I was working on the commentary full time-to the exact dollar amount I had prayed for to pay rent and buy groceries that year, and within twenty-four hours of the prayer-is another story in itself. But I have seen the Lord's special hand of providence in the

undertaking of this work, and I hope that, in the end, this work owes far more to his input than to mine.



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## List of Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
GNC	Good News Commentary
GNS	Good News Studies
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
ICC	International Critical Commentary
KJV	King James Version
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCB	New Century Bible
NIBC	New International Bible Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
SBLBMI	Society of Biblical Literature: The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series

SBLSBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
SNTSMS	Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series
TDGR	Translated Documents of Greece and Rome
TEV	Today's English Version
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
*	Indicates names and terms found in the glossary

# HOW TO USE THIS COMMENTARY

Cultural and historical background can clarify virtually every text in the New Testament, yet much of this material has been inaccessible to nontechnical readers. Although many helpful commentaries exist, no single commentary has focused solely on the background material. Yet it is precisely this element—the background that indicates how the New Testament's writers and first readers would have understood its message—that the nontechnical reader needs as a resource for Bible study (most other elements, such as context, can be deduced from the text itself).

Some surveys of the cultural background of the New Testament exist, but none of these is arranged in a manner that allows the reader to answer all the pertinent questions on a given passage. This deficiency convinced me twelve years ago to undertake this project, which is now long overdue. This book is written in the hope that all Christians will now be able to read the New Testament much closer to the way its first readers would have read it.

## A CULTURAL COMMENTARY

Cultural context makes a difference in how we read the New Testament. For instance, since there were plenty of exorcists in the ancient world, ancient readers would not have been surprised that Jesus cast out demons, but since most exorcists employed magic spells or pain compliance techniques to seek to expel demons, Jesus' driving them out "by his word" was impressive. Viewing the conflict concerning head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11 in the broader context of tensions over head coverings between well-to-do and less well-to-do women in first-century Corinth clarifies Paul's teaching in that passage. Understanding ancient views on slavery demonstrates that Paul's teaching, far from supporting that institution, undermines it. Recognizing what Jewish people meant by "resurrection" answers the objections of many skeptics today concerning the

character of Jesus' resurrection. And so forth.

The sole purpose of this commentary (unlike most commentaries) is to make available the most relevant cultural, social and historical background for reading the New Testament the way its first readers would have read it. Although some notes about context or theology have been necessary, such notes have been kept to a minimum to leave most of the work of interpretation with the reader.

Knowing the ancient culture is critical to understanding the Bible. Our need to recognize the setting of the biblical writers does not deny that biblical passages are valid for all time; the point is that they are not valid for all circumstances. Different texts in the Bible address different situations. For instance, some texts address how to be saved, some address Christ's call to missions, some address his concern for the poor, and so on. Before we apply those passages, we need to understand what circumstances they originally addressed.

This is not to play down the importance of other factors in interpreting the Bible. The most important issue, next to the Spirit's application to our hearts and lives, is always literary context: reading each book of the Bible the way it was put together under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This commentary itself is meant only as a tool to provide readers ready access to New Testament background-it is not meant to be the whole story. In my own preaching and teaching, I am more concerned with literary context than with culture. But readers can ascertain the context on their own by studying the Bible itself. For ministers and other Bible readers, application of the Bible is also crucial, but specific applications will differ from culture to culture and from person to person, and these, again, are readily available to readers of the Bible without outside helps.

For the majority of the users of this commentary, who have not studied Greek and Hebrew, a good, readable translation is crucial for understanding the Bible. (For instance, both the NASB, which is more word for word, and the NIV, which is more readable, are very helpful. One might read regularly from the NIV and

study more detailed passages from or compare with the NASB.) In contrast to the half-dozen mainly medieval manuscripts on which the King James Version was based, we now have over five thousand New Testament manuscripts, including some from extremely close to the time the New Testament books were written (by the standards used for ancient texts). These manuscripts make the New Testament by far the best-documented work of the ancient world and also explain why more accurate translations are available today than in times past. But the biggest reason for using an up-to-date translation is that it is written in the current English we speak and thus is easier to understand. Understanding the Bible so one can obey its teaching is, after all, the main purpose for reading it.

Other methods of getting into the text itself, like outlining and taking notes, are also useful to many readers. For a more complete guide on how to study the Bible, the reader should consult the helpful book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1981).

But the one factor in applying the Bible that is not available to most Bible readers is the cultural background. This commentary is meant to fill that need and should be used in conjunction with other important elements of Bible study: an accurate and readable translation, context, prayer and personal application.

Again, this commentary will not be helpful for those who neglect context, a rule of interpretation more basic than culture. It is best to read through each book of the Bible as a whole, rather than skipping from one part of the Bible to another, so one can get the whole message of a particular biblical book. These books were written one at a time to different groups of readers, who read them one book at a time and applied them to their specific situations. One must keep this point in mind when reading, teaching or preaching from the Bible. (Many alleged contradictions in the Bible arise from ignoring context and the way books were written in the ancient world. Ancient writers, like modern preachers, often applied and updated the language, while being faithful to the meaning, by arranging their materials; so the context is usually inspired guidance on how to

apply a teaching in the Bible.) It is always important to check the context of a passage in the biblical book in which it occurs before using this commentary.

But once one has examined a passage in context, this commentary will be an invaluable tool. One may use it while reading through the Bible for daily devotions; one may use it for Bible studies or for sermon preparation. The one book orthodox Christians accept as God's Word is the most important book for us to study, and it is hoped that this commentary will aid all believers in their study of God's Word.

Although the format of this book has been tested in the classroom, in Bible studies, from the pulpit and in personal devotions, it may fail to answer some social-cultural questions related to passages of the New Testament. Despite efforts to answer the right questions, it is impossible to anticipate every question; for this reason, some helpful books on ancient culture are listed in the brief bibliography at the end of this introduction.

The reader may also find background relevant to a particular passage under other passages where I had felt it was most important to include it. Because the New Testament itself is composed of books aimed at different audiences (Mark was meant to be read quickly, whereas Matthew was meant to be studied and memorized), my treatment of some books is more detailed than that of others. As the book most foreign to modern readers, Revelation receives the most detailed treatment.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This commentary may be used either for reference or in conjunction with one's regular Bible reading. In reading the Bible devotionally or in preparing sermons or Bible studies, one has two of the most crucial tools for interpretation in the Bible itself: the text and its context. The third most crucial tool, which was already known and assumed by the ancient readers but is unavailable to most modern readers, is the background of the text. This commentary is written to



supply that need to the fullest extent possible in a one-volume work.

The most important ancient background for the New Testament's ideas is the Old Testament, especially in its Greek translation. This commentary includes Old Testament background, but because that background is available to all readers of the Bible, the emphasis of the commentary is on other Jewish and GrecoRoman culture of the first century. Early Christian writers naturally also drew on other early Christian traditions, many of which are available to us in the New Testament; but because that material is directly available to the reader, it has been omitted for the most part here. Similarly omitted are notes on background that are transcultural, because readers in all cultures assume this information.

Those who use this commentary in conjunction with personal Bible study should read the biblical passage first and examine its context. Then they may most profitably examine the notes in this commentary; the notes on related passages may also be helpful. Having established what the text was saying to the ancient readers, one has a real feel for the issues being addressed and is ready to move to the stage of personal application.

The situation behind Paul's letter to the Romans provides one example of how one could apply what one learns in this commentary. In that letter, Paul argues that Jews and Gentiles are saved on the same terms and urges reconciliation between them within the body of Christ. In the United States, where many churches are still segregated along lines of race and white Christians have often not taken the time to hear the hurts that black Christians and other minority peoples have faced here, Paul's message of racial reconciliation is painfully relevant. Once we grasp the point of the text in its original historical setting, we are in a position to apply that text to both our personal lives and our culture today.

Because the Bible's original message, once understood, speaks to human issues today in a variety of situations and cultures, the way we apply it will vary

from person to person and culture to culture. (For instance, if Paul urges the Corinthians to deal seriously with sin, the principle is clear; but different people will have to deal with different sins.) For that reason, most application is left to the reader's common sense and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

This point usually applies even where I strongly felt that guidance should be given concerning application. For instance, in my treatment of Matthew 24:15-22 I emphasize those details that were fulfilled in A.D. 66-70. Some people think that certain prophecies in that passage will be fulfilled again; but because that is a theological rather than a cultural-historical issue, I leave that matter to the reader's discretion. In the same way, I am convinced that the background provided for passages on women's ministry should lead modern readers to recognize that Paul does indeed accept the teaching ministry of women. But due to the nature of this work, someone who does not share that conviction can nevertheless profitably use the commentary on those passages without feeling constrained to accept my view. I dare to hope that all sincere believers, grappling with the same context and the same background, are likely to come to similar conclusions in the end.

Most readers will be familiar with words like priest and Palestine, but terms whose cultural significance may be unfamiliar to the reader are found in the glossary at the end of this book and are marked at least once in a given context with an asterisk. Some recurrent theological terms (like Spirit, apocalyptic, Diaspora, Pharisee and kingdom) had specific meanings in the ancient world that cannot be mentioned in each text; the regular reader of this commentary should thus become familiar with these terms in the glossary.

## HOW NOT TO USE THIS BOOK

Not all background in this commentary is equally helpful for understanding the Bible. Some background is almost self-evident, especially where ancient culture and modern readers' culture overlap. Likewise, not all sources are of equal merit for our purposes. Some sources, particularly rabbinic sources, are later than the

New Testament; some of the information from these sources is more helpful whereas other material is less helpful, and I weighed these factors as carefully as possible in writing this commentary. Usually only Old Testament and Apocrypha citations and occasionally citations from the Jewish Pseudepigrapha are explicitly given in this commentary; citing all the rabbinic, Greek and Roman sources would weigh it down too heavily for the general reader.

Some background is included because it appears in standard scholarly commentaries, and readers must judge for themselves how relevant it is for their interpretation. This is a background commentary; it does not dictate how readers must understand or apply the text, and readers who disagree with some interpretations I suggest will nevertheless find the commentary useful.

More importantly, the general reader should be aware that parallels between an idea in the New Testament and an idea in the ancient world need not mean that one copied the other-both may have drawn on a familiar saying or concept in the culture. Thus I cite the parallels simply to illustrate how many people in that culture would have heard what the New Testament was saying. For instance, Paul's use of the kinds of arguments used by rhetoricians (professional public speakers) indicates that he was relating to his culture, not that he wrote without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Further, people and sources from wholly unrelated cultures (e.g., Stoics and the Old Testament) may share some concepts simply because those concepts make sense in those cultures (or even most cultures), even if they do not make sense in ours; our own culture often unconsciously limits our understanding of Paul and his contemporaries. Because ancient peoples did not think as we do does not mean that they were wrong; we can still learn much from their insights in areas like rhetoric and human relationships.

Similarly, when I comment that Paul used the language of Stoic philosophers, I do not mean that Paul had adopted Stoicism; public philosophical discourse had been commonly affected by Stoic ideas and terminology. In other cases, the adoption of philosophical language is intentional; outsiders sometimes viewed

Christianity as a philosophical school, and Christians were able to use this outside perception as a means to communicate the gospel. Like other writers, Paul could appeal to his culture in the popular language of his day but give that language a new twist.

When I cite a later Jewish tradition that amplifies the Old Testament, I do not mean to imply that the tradition is necessarily true. These citations are to help us feel how the first readers and hearers of the New Testament felt about the Old Testament characters; sometimes New Testament writers also allude to these extrabiblical traditions (Jude 14-15). (One need not assume that New Testament writers always simply recycled earlier Jewish imagery to relate to their culture, however; often a variety of Jewish views existed, and the New Testament writers picked a particular one. Although the New Testament writers had to accommodate the language of their day to communicate their point, neither they nor we need see all that language as inaccurate. Some modern readers assume glibly that ancient worldviews are wrong, but phenomena sometimes attributed to "primitive" worldviews, such as possession by harmful spirits, can now be corroborated by crosscultural evidence; they need not be explained away by modern Western rationalism.)

Finally, we should always be cautious in application; it is important that we apply biblical texts only to genuinely analogous situations. For instance, it is not accurate to read Jesus' attacks on the religious leaders of his day as attacks against all Jewish people, as some anti-Semites have. Jesus and his disciples were themselves Jewish, and such an abuse of the text makes no more sense than using the book of Exodus against Egyptians today (later Old Testament prophets did not, e.g., Is 19:23-25). Jesus' challenges against the piety of religious authorities in his day have nothing to do with their ethnicity; these challenges are meant to confront us as religious people today and warn us not to act as those religious leaders did. The issue was a religious one, not an ethnic one. In other words, we must apply the principles of the text in the light of the real issues the biblical authors were addressing and not ignore the passages' historical context.

## A POPULAR, NOT A SCHOLARLY, COMMENTARY

Scholars may be disappointed that the text of this work is not documented or nuanced the way a scholarly work would be, but should keep in mind that this book is not written primarily for scholars, who already have access to much of this information elsewhere. But pastors and other Bible readers who have fewer resources and less time available need a concise and handy reference work in one volume at their disposal.

Scholars like to document and investigate all angles of a question, nuancing their language carefully and guarding against attacks by those holding other interpretations of the same texts. This is not possible in a work of this length. Scholars also like to include all available data, which the same limitation also prohibits here. To be useful for most pastors' preaching and most other Christians' Bible study, this work's language needs to be plain and concise.

I have generally ignored scholarly questions that do not deal directly with the issue central to this book, the ancient context of the New Testament. It is important for the purpose of this book to ask what the text as it stands means; it is not important to ask about the sources behind the text and their editing, and I have dealt with those issues only where absolutely necessary. When I have addressed those issues, however, I have done so from orthodox Christian assumptions about Scripture, assumptions which I could amply defend were that my purpose in this book.

The purpose of this book is likewise limited not only to cultural-historical context in general, but also to that which actually sheds light on the New Testament. For instance, to claim that some emphasis of early Christianity is distinctive to Christianity is not to claim that other groups did not have their own distinctive characteristics; but this is a commentary on the New Testament, not a commentary on those other groups.

I have, however, tried to be as fair as possible to the major different views of

the background of the New Testament. My own research divides fairly evenly between the Jewish and GrecoRoman contexts of the New Testament, with an emphasis on ancient Judaism as part of the larger Mediterranean culture. I have often labored over a variety of interpretations of the evidence before selecting which interpretation or interpretations I felt were most accurate or most relevant to the text. Not every scholar will agree on every point, but I have endeavored to make the book as accurate and helpful as possible. I hope that this book will both stimulate other students to pursue more detailed scholarship and provide easy access to the world of the New Testament for those whose call in life does not permit them the opportunity to pursue it in more detail.

My comments are based on more than a decade of work especially on the primary literature of the ancient world but also on recent scholarly research in ancient Judaism and GrecoRoman antiquity, as well as on other commentaries. Were I to cite all the sources to which I am indebted, this commentary would run to an unmanageable length, but I acknowledge here that they are many. (One source I have meticulously avoided, due to current scholarly criticism, is Strack-Billerbeck's commentary on the New Testament from rabbinic sources. Most of my beginning work in ancient Judaism was in rabbinic sources, and I trust that the reader will have lost nothing from this omission. Besides being out of date, Strack-Billerbeck suffers from a lack of discrimination between early and late sources, those most and least likely to be representative of early Judaism as a whole, and worst of all, from an unfair portrayal of the spirit of the sources. I have tried to avoid these mistakes insofar as possible in my own work.)

To keep the commentary to manageable length, I have made painful decisions about what material to omit. I have not adduced the many parallels available to turns of phrases or mentioned remote parallels that would not illumine a passage for the minister or general reader. I have often chosen to delete material of uncertain value, even if it is used by many other scholars. (For instance, given the uncertainty of the date of the document called the Similitudes of Enoch, I have not used it as background for Jesus' title "Son of Man," although many

scholars do.) I have also tried to avoid duplicating the information available in other commonly used reference works. Because word studies are elsewhere available, I have generally omitted discussions of Greek words except where the meaning of the text depends on the broader cultural context of these words.

Readers may detect some points where my own theology has influenced my reading of a text in a manner that disagrees with their own. I genuinely try to derive my theology and applications only from my study of the biblical text, but if the reverse has occasionally happened, I ask the reader's pardon. This book is meant to be useful, not controversial, and if readers disagree on some points, I hope they will find most of the rest of the commentary helpful nonetheless.

## OTHER SOURCES FOR THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The following sources are useful to readers of the New Testament.

General. See especially John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment*, LEC 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986); David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, LEC 8 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987); Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987). A helpful anthology of texts is C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989); a helpful one-volume source of data is *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House/Leicester, U.K.: InterVarsity Press, 1982); see more fully *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols., rev. ed., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1979-88).

*How to Understand the Bible in Its Context*. See especially Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1981); compare A. Berkeley Mickelsen and Alvera Mickelsen, *Understanding Scripture* (Peabody,

Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992).

Students wishing for a more advanced discussion of modern hermeneutical (interpretive) issues should consult Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1991).

Judaism: General. E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE-66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1992).

Judaism: Rabbinic Judaism. The most complete summaries of the views of the ancient rabbis are George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, 2 vols. (1927; reprint, New York: Schocken, 1971); and Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes, Hebrew University, 1979). Unfortunately, neither work gives special attention to the development in rabbinic thought; New Testament students must depend on the earliest and most widely attested (preferably in other kinds of sources) traditions. But it does not hurt readers to start with a basic summary of the developed traditions, if one is sensitive to the dates of rabbis cited and the dates of the documents in which the attributions occur, and to the breadth of attestation provided. (The arguments of Jacob Neusner and others in this regard are now generally accepted, although details and levels of skepticism concerning the sources vary.)

Judaism: Surveys of the Documents. One useful work is Samuel Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); cf. Martin McNamara, *Palestinian Judaism and the New Testament*, GNS 4 (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1983). For a summary of rabbinic literature, see Hermann L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (1931; reprint, New York: Atheneum, 1978). Some more recent and progressive approaches may be sampled in volumes like *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg, SBLBMI 2 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986). Most issues are treated in detail in more specialized works; for



instance, see E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), for Jewish views on salvation; on the roles of women see Leonard Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1976); Judith Romney Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). *Judaism: Primary Sources*. One should especially read the Old Testament and the Apocrypha (in the latter, especially *Wisdom of Solomon* and *Ecclesiasticus* or *Sirach*); then translations of the Dead Sea Scrolls; and the documents of most relevant date in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983-1985), especially 1 Enoch, Jubilees, the Sibylline Oracles (not all from the same period), the Letter of Aristeas and others like 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch. Josephus is invaluable, though due to the sheer volume of his works, one may wish to focus on *Against Apion*, the *Life* and then the *War* (*The Works of Josephus*, trans. W. Whiston [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1987]). Readers may wish to peruse Philo to acquaint themselves with a major Jewish philosopher in the Diaspora; the works of Philo are now available in a one-volume edition (trans. C. D. Yonge; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993). Those who wish to examine rabbinic literature firsthand might start with *Abot* in the *Mishnah*; many early traditions are also preserved in the *Tosefta*, *Abot de Rabbi Nathan* and the tannaitic commentaries on parts of the Pentateuch (*Mekilta* on Exodus, *Sifra* on Leviticus, *Sifre* on Numbers, and *Sifre* on Deuteronomy). Archaeological data are regularly published in journals but also appear in books such as Eric M. Meyers and James F. Strange, *Archaeology, the Rabbis, and Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981); collections of inscriptions and papyri are also helpful.

*GrecoRoman World: General*. See Stambaugh and Balch, *Social Environment*; M. Cary and T. J. Haarhoff, *Life and Thought in the Greek and Roman World*, 4th ed. (London: Methuen, 1946); cf. also Abraham J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation: A GrecoRoman Sourcebook*, LEC 4 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986); Wayne A. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians*, LEC 6

(Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986).

GrecoRoman World: Secondary Sources. On the way texts were written and understood in the GrecoRoman world, see Aune, *Literary Environment*; cf. also Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in GrecoRoman Antiquity*, LEC 5 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986). On moralists and moral issues, see Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation*; and Meeks, *Moral World*. On Greek religion, see Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

On history, Tacitus, Suetonius and Josephus are quite readable and may be pursued before the secondary sources; many Greek and Roman sources are available in paperback (e.g., through Penguin Books), although those wishing to do more advanced work should locate the Loeb Classical Library editions. Helpful secondary sources include F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972); and Bo Reicke, *The New Testament Era: The World of the Bible from 500 B.C. to A.D. 100* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974). Specialized works, such as those on women in antiquity (e.g., Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982], one collection of texts), are indispensable for more detailed study.

GrecoRoman World: Primary Sources. A broad sampling of documents is available in *The Roman Empire: Augustus to Hadrian*, ed. Robert K. Sherk, TDGR 6 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988). For first-century history, one should read Tacitus and Suetonius. For first-and second-century moral thought, one should at least sample Epictetus, Seneca, Plutarch and perhaps a satirist like Juvenal; see also Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition*, SBL SBS 12 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977).

Introductions to New Testament Scholarship. See, for example, Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992);

Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1970); George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974). On the historical reliability of the New Testament, see, e.g., F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

# THE NEED FOR A CULTURAL-HISTORICAL COMMENTARY

any readers will recognize the value of a cultural commentary. But others may, even after reading "How to Use This Commentary," still remain unclear. The following essay elaborates the importance of cultural background in biblical interpretation for those who have not been exposed to this issue previously. Because those already trained in biblical studies will agree with the need for cultural context, this essay is directed solely toward nontechnical readers.

## HOW THE BIBLE ITSELF INVITES US TO INTERPRET IT

Readers of the Bible have long realized the value of cultural and historical background for understanding the Bible. The biblical writers themselves assume its importance. For instance, when Mark writes about an issue debated by Jesus and his opponents, he explains the custom involved in it to his Gentile readers, who would not have otherwise known the custom (Mk 7:3-4). Similarly, when Jesus' opponents take an apparent concession in the Law at face value, Jesus says that the intent of the Law is what is crucial, and to grasp it one must understand the situation and the state of its original audience (Mk 10:4-5).

Biblical writers can often simply assume the importance of the readers' knowing the situation. (It was understood in the ancient world that the better one knew the situation with which a speech dealt, the better one could understand the speech: see the first-century A.D. Roman rhetorician \*Quintilian 10.1.22; one should also keep rereading the speech to catch all the subtle nuances and foreshadowings in it; see Quintilian 10.1.20-21.) For instance, when Paul writes a letter to the Corinthians, he can assume that the Corinthians know what situations he is addressing. Reading 1 Corinthians may be like listening to one

side of a telephone conversation, and we can fortunately reconstruct most of the conversation by reading 1 Corinthians. But part of the meaning of the conversation is determined by the situation itself, not just by the words in front of us. What Paul assumes his readers will grasp in his writing is as much a part of his meaning as what he says. If we cannot relate to the situation he and his readers are assuming, we will have more difficulty understanding his point. A few examples will illustrate this point.

Paul addresses the issue of celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7. There he definitely sounds as if he favors celibacy, and even though he allows marriage as a valid lifestyle, some commentators think he suggests that it is a second-class lifestyle for those who do not have the gift of being able to "control themselves." He certainly makes some valid points about the benefits of singleness, but is he really against marriage in general? First Corinthians 7:1 tells us plainly that Paul is responding to a letter from some of the Christians in Corinth. Because some of these Christians followed a certain view in their culture that opposed marriage, one could just as easily read the chapter as follows: Paul is saying, "You have a good point, and I agree with you that singleness is a good gift from God. But you are taking matters too far if you impose it on married people or on people who should get married."

A clearer example would be how we read Paul's warnings about meat offered to idols. It would be all too easy for readers today to say, "Well, there aren't any idols to sacrifice meat to today, so let's just skip this chapter of 1 Corinthians." But this sidesteps the transcultural issue behind the cultural issue. Once we see how concrete the issue was in Corinth—that well-to-do Christians who did not eat this food could offend friends and business associates, and all to keep the less-educated Christians from being hurt in their faith—we can compare it with similar issues today. Some Christians today want a prestigious lifestyle because it attracts other yuppies to a religion that demands little in the way of sacrifice even if such a religion alienates the homeless and hungry in developing nations and in our North American cities. Considering how to balance the interests of different

factions in a church is relevant in many congregations today.

Understanding that the Bible does address issues and motives like those we face today is important. Far from making the Bible less relevant, understanding the situation helps us make it more relevant (sometimes even uncomfortably relevant). It forces us to see that the people with whom Paul dealt were not simply morally unstable troublemakers; they were real people with real agendas like ourselves.

## RELEVANCE TO ALL CULTURES

Most of the book God gave us was not directly dictated in the first person (i.e., the Bible does not read as if God were saying: "I'm God, and I am speaking directly to everybody in all times"). Some Bible readers have always wanted the Bible to read that way and like to pretend that this is the proper way to interpret it. But God chose to inspire the Bible in a different form: he inspired his prophets and witnesses to address real situations in their own day as an example for generations that would follow (1 Cor 10:11). If Paul was inspired to write a letter to the Corinthians, whether people today like it or not, that letter is a letter to the Corinthians, just as it claims to be.

God gave us eternal principles, but he gave them to us in specific concrete forms, addressing real situations. He gave us those principles in the form of illustrations, to show us how those principles work out in real-life situations, because he wanted to make sure that we would apply them to our own real-life situations. Thus, for example, Deuteronomy 22:8 ("build a parapet around your roof, lest you incur bloodguilt if someone falls off") still teaches us concern for our neighbor's safety, even though most of us no longer have flat roofs on which we entertain our neighbors. The moral today might be, "Make your colleague fasten her seatbelt when she rides with you to work." The example might be different today, but the point is the same; yet until we understand the original example, we cannot recognize the real point we must reapply in our own culture.

We may not like the fact that God gave us his Word in concrete form, because in our culture we are used to thinking abstractly. But in many cultures people think concretely and can read a story or a conversation and learn much more about God than we can learn from reading a series of abstractions. Those cultures are more attuned to the Bible that God chose to give the world than we are. Much of the Bible is historical narrative (i.e., true stories), and much of it is letter or prophecy directed to specific situations. Thus its format is more like a conversation than an abstract philosophical treatise. Even abstract principles like those in Proverbs are expressed in specific cultural forms; for instance, some Egyptian wisdom sayings use almost the same wording as their Hebrew counterparts, because that was how people in that part of the ancient Near East expressed their wisdom at that time.

If God had not chosen to give us the Bible in concrete, cultural forms, what forms would he have used? Is there a neutral language, a universal one not bound by any culture? (Some North Americans seem to think that English is neutral; but had the Normans not ruled English territory for some time, we would not speak English now ourselves.) As one scholar put it, if God had just spoken to us in a cosmic wind, how many of us would have understood him? Or as one cartoon put it, if God had revealed the details of quantum physics and the theory of relativity to Moses, instead of "In the beginning God created," would Moses or the Hebrew language have been able to communicate that data to his contemporaries? God is too practical and too concerned about us understanding him to try to communicate with us like that. He worked through all the different cultures—from early in the Old Testament to totally different cultural situations in the New Testament—to communicate his Word.

## BEYOND OUR OWN CULTURAL STARTING POINTS

Indeed, God is so involved in the multicultural matrix of history that he did not disdain to step into it himself. The ultimate enculturation of his Word occurred when the Word became flesh, as the prologue of John (1:1-18) declares. Jesus

did not come as a cultureless, amorphous, genderless human. He came as a first-century Jewish man, with unique chromosomes and physical features, just as each of the rest of us is unique. His cultural specificity does not mean that he was not for all of us; it means instead that he could better identify with all of us as a particular person-by being like we are-than by being a general, faceless person who compromised any real humanity for an indistinctive "neutrality." Many Gnostics, who reinterpreted Christianity in later centuries, tried to deny that Jesus really came "in the flesh," but the apostle John is clear that this point is the dividing line between genuine and phony Christians: genuine Christians believe that our Lord Jesus came in the flesh, as a particular historical person (1 Jn 4:1-6). Those who insist on understanding Jesus-or the other people in the Bible-apart from that historical particularity are treading on the outer fringes of Christian faith.

One of the main emphases in the book of Acts is that the gospel is for all peoples and all cultures. The first Christians were surprised to learn that the gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews, but throughout the book of Acts the Spirit of God was revealing this multicultural mission to the church. That was God's program from the beginning: missions from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Those like Stephen and Paul, who already knew more than one culture, were the most ready to participate in God's plan. People who assume that God reveals himself only in one culture (their own) are a couple of millennia behind on their Bible reading! In Acts we find God purposely revealing himself to people of all cultures in terms they understood; thus Paul preaches one way in a synagogue in Acts 13, another way to rural farmers in chapter 14 and still another way to Greek philosophers in chapter 17. The same Paul related to specific issues of ancient culture in his letters, and we cannot ignore those issues if we wish to know what Paul's point was.

When Paul fought for Gentiles to have the right to come to Christ as Gentiles, he was fighting cultural bigots who (in that case) said that one had to be Jewish to be a first-rate Christian. They read the Bible in the light of their own culture



and tradition and thought that everybody else should read it the same way they did. They had quite a lot of good company, unfortunately, because their problem was not their Jewishness-Paul was just as Jewish as they were. The problem was that they read the Bible in light of their own cultural assumptions, which is the same problem we all have unless we train ourselves to see beyond those assumptions. Our own backgrounds and the information we start with affect the categories and associations we bring to a text-consciously or unconsciously. By contrast, getting more of the ancient readers' backgrounds helps us to read texts more as they would have read them.

Missionaries today face problems similar to Paul's. (For instance, compare the graphic examples in Don Richardson, *Peace Child* [Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1974], and case studies in more technical works from various perspectives, like Marvin K. Mayers, *Christianity Confronts Culture: A Strategy for CrossCultural Evangelism* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1974]; Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in CrossCultural Perspective* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979]; Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: An Applied Anthropology for the Religious Worker* [Techny, Ill.: Divine Word, 1970; Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey, 1976].) If we read the gospel in the light of our own culture, we are in danger of mixing our culture in with the Bible and then imposing our new concoction on someone else as a condition of being right with God. For instance, missionaries were the first people to introduce divorce into some African societies, thinking that they were creating a remedy for polygamy. They refused to accept these African converts as full Christians until they got rid of their extra wives. In so doing, they not only introduced a new sin and social upheaval into these societies, but they imposed a condition on these new believers that the Bible itself does not demand. Polygamous marriages do not appear in a healthy light in the Bible, and I am not suggesting that polygamy is good. But neither should we simply break up polygamous marriages already in existence, without thought for the husbands, wives, children and others involved. Nowhere does the Bible advocate breaking up such marriages already in existence.

Most missionaries today recognize that Christians in different cultures can learn from one another. Different parts of the Bible appeal to different groups. One part of the Bible unclear to us may be clear to some Shona Christians in Zimbabwe. Or a reading that one group thinks is clear may be a misinterpretation of the text. Hindus who read Jesus' teaching about being "born again" as a reference to reincarnation have missed Jesus' meaning because they have read it from the standpoint of Hindu assumptions. But if we start merely from our own culture's assumptions, we stand as much chance of misreading the Bible as reincarnationist Hindus do. (Hopefully none of us would err so far as the man who suspected that when the Bible called Herod a "fox," it meant that his subjects thought him attractive.)

Some devoutly evangelical Christians in certain Asian and African cultures still venerate their ancestors, and North American Christians generally consider such veneration as pagan. But we North Americans often explain away texts like "You can't serve both God and -nammon," and "covetousness is idolatry," so we can live the way we want. Christians in other cultures generally consider our culture's materialism as pagan too. Our cultural blinders let us see other people's sins more easily than our own, and only reading the Scriptures the way the writers were inspired to intend them-rather than the way the Scriptures fit what we already believe-will challenge our own cultural misconceptions.

What common ground can we, as Christian interpreters from a variety of cultures, have? If we want an objective way to interpret the Bible, and if we believe that the writers were inspired to address specific issues of their day, then we need to try to find out what issues they were addressing. To some extent we can figure that out from the texts themselves. We do not have to know what women's head coverings looked like in Corinth to figure out from 1 Corinthians 11 that the question of whether women should wear head coverings was an issue there. Further, some texts can give us background for other texts; for instance, 2 Kings tells us what was going on when Isaiah was prophesying to the people of Israel, and so helps us understand the book of Isaiah.

But such background is not always enough. This is true not only of so-called problem passages but also of passages that we assume we interpret correctly. For instance, when we read that the good seed bears fruit a hundred times over (Mt 13:23), only if we know the average size of an ancient Palestinian harvest do we understand how abundant such a harvest would be. The charge against Jesus posted above the cross, "The King of the Jews," makes a lot more sense if we recognize that the Romans were very nervous about so-called prophets in Judea whom some people thought were messianic kings, because some of these "prophets" had already stirred up a great deal of trouble for Rome.

Further, culture affects even which books strike us as easier to understand; different parts of the Bible appeal to different cultures. Any reader of Leviticus and 1 Timothy could tell that the forms of writing used in these documents are quite different. Leviticus's hygiene codes have parallels in Hittite and other ancient Near Eastern texts; Leviticus was addressing issues of its day. But the subject matter of Leviticus would not have even interested most GrecoRoman readers by the time 1 Timothy was written, whereas all of 1 Timothy's themes and literary forms have parallels in GrecoRoman literature. To modern Western readers, most of the New Testament is much more inviting than Leviticus; but in many cultures, laws concerning what is clean and unclean are important, and Christians in these cultures have taken more interest in some parts of the Bible that we tend to ignore. Of course, we have theological reasons for saying that we do not need to obey Leviticus literally today; but if all Scripture is inspired and profitable for teaching (2 Tim 3:16), it must have some purpose. The question is just, What is that purpose? What point was God communicating to his people? Cultural background helps us figure out what the purpose was.

## OBJECTIONS TO USING CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Although everyone knows that the Bible was written in a different time and culture, and most people take that fact into account when they read particular passages, not everyone is consistent in using cultural background. Of course, not

all passages in the Bible require much background; our culture still has some features in common with the culture of the Bible. But if we do not know anything about the original culture, we may sometimes assume that we do not need any background for a passage when in fact it would dramatically affect the way we read the text. Even though most people recognize the need to pay attention to cultural background, some people become nervous at the suggestion that they need it.

Some Christians occasionally object that using cultural and historical background is dangerous. "After all," they complain, "you can use culture to twist the Bible around to mean anything." People who raise this objection could cite one of the arguments raised by some apologists for a gay church with whom I have talked. Some gay theological writers claim that Paul argues against homosexual behavior only because at that time it was normally associated with idolatry; thus they suggest that Paul would not oppose homosexual behavior today. With no disrespect intended for these writers, the problem in this case is that the cultural background these writers give is wrong: homosexual behavior was widespread among the Greeks and was practiced by some Romans, and it was by no means specifically linked with idolatry. Although this example is a good argument against making up cultural background, it is no reason not to use genuine cultural background.

One might keep in mind that people have been twisting the Bible quite ably for a long time without using any cultural background; it is doubtful that a little historical study would make matters any worse. Ignoring the original culture and so reading it in light of our own is a far graver threat to most of us. (For example, the "Aryan Christians" under the Nazis "demythologized" biblical history to make it non-Jewish and hence more palatable to Nazi tastes. This is an extreme example of ignoring original historical context and reinterpreting the Bible to fit one's own culture. It differs from most reinterpretations today only in that the Nazis did it intentionally.)

A more common objection, which I raised myself a decade and a half ago, is

that assuming the importance of cultural background might take the Bible out of the hands of nonscholars. At that time I rejected the use of cultural information so thoroughly that I insisted that women should wear head coverings in church, and I even tried to get up enough nerve to engage in some of Paul's "holy kissing." Fortunately, I deferred the kissing idea till I could resolve the issue (I say "fortunately" because someone would have probably hit me). I finally did resolve it, and the more I have studied the world of the Bible, the more I have come to realize that God was being relevant in communicating his Word the way he did. He gave us concrete examples of how his ways address real human situations, not just abstract principles that we could memorize without pondering how to apply them to our lives. If we wish to follow God's example of being relevant, we need to understand what these teachings meant in their original culture before we try applying them to our own.

Cultural background does not take the Bible out of people's hands; it is when we ignore cultural context that we take the Bible out of people's hands. To hand people the symbols in Revelation with no explanation of how such symbols were commonly used in the ancient world is like handing the Gospel of Luke in Greek to somebody who cannot read Greek and saying, "Since this is the Word of God, you must understand and explain it." Only a trained scholar or a complete fool would have any idea what to do with it (and the fool's idea would be wrong).

## TRANSLATING BOTH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Some scholars before the time of Luther decided that the church hierarchy of their day was wrong to keep the Bible in Latin. Most people could not understand the Bible unless scholars translated it for them into their own language. Some of these scholars were martyred for their conviction that the Bible must be available in common people's language; Luther, who translated the Bible into the German of his day, barely escaped this same fate. The best way scholars could help people was not by saying, "Translations are not available for the common people; therefore we take the Bible out of their hands

if we say they actually needed such translations all along." The better approach was for such scholars to say, "Translations are not available for the people; therefore we will put the Bible into their hands by doing some hard work and making translations."

Translating can be difficult, as anybody who has studied a foreign language can testify. Some words do not translate directly in a single term; sometimes a word or phrase can have several different meanings, and the translator has to decide which meaning is best for a particular context. There is also more than one way to express an idea in English once one decides what it means. Those of us who have read the whole New Testament in Greek can testify that the same problems obtain there as in any other text we might try to translate. A random check of any passage in two or three Bible translations will verify the difficulty: no two translations will match exactly (otherwise, of course, they wouldn't be separate translations).

When Bible translators go into other cultures they face difficult questions regarding the meanings of words and phrases. For instance, some translators had to explain 'Behold, the Lamb of God!' (Jn 1:29) for a culture that had no sheep and thus no words for lambs. The culture did, however, have pigs, and used them for sacrifices. But if they translated it 'Behold, the Pig of God!' (which does not ring nicely to our American ears, and certainly would have offended ancient Jewish sensibilities even more), what would happen when they had to translate passages in the Old Testament where pigs were unclean but sheep were not? Perhaps they could best solve the issue by putting a footnote in the text and by translating with some combination of words that communicated the concept as best as possible in their language, like "hairy pig." Old Testament translators have had to resort to similar methods when rendering the Hebrew words for different kinds of locusts into English (Joel 1:4; 2:25). English does not have enough different words for locusts to match all the Hebrew terms, perhaps because the many varieties of locusts were more of an issue for the Israelites than they are for most of us.

But there is a bigger problem than just the words in the text in front of us. What happens when Paul makes an allusion to a whole concept that was important in his day? How do we translate that? Or do we just mention the issue in a footnote? The allusion that Paul makes is part of his meaning, yet sometimes even those who are otherwise competent to translate the text cannot catch the allusions Paul makes.

Some Christian readers during and before the Reformation period tried to figure out the situations that biblical texts were addressing. It was good that many scholars recognized the need to read the New Testament in the context of its own world, rather than viewing it as if it had been written in German or English directly to readers in the Renaissance or some other period. They were not, however, the majority. Most readers still read too much of their own culture into the text, just as we do when we fail to look at it in the light of the original culture. Medieval and Renaissance intellectuals did the same thing; most of us have seen paintings of biblical scenes with Europeans in European dress filling all the roles of the biblical dramas. They were painted as if most of the biblical characters were Europeans, even though we know that few biblical characters were Europeans, and none was northern European.

Fortunately, some knowledge about the ancient world was still available in the Reformation period. Many scholars from medieval days up through the nineteenth century were so competent in the Greek classics that they could catch all sorts of allusions to Greek customs in the New Testament. The problem is that many Greek customs had changed from the time those classics had been written to the time of the New Testament.

Another danger in assuming that all the background to the New Testament was classical Greek may be illustrated from the first few centuries that the New Testament was in circulation. The Gnostics often read the New Testament more in the light of Plato than in the light of the Judaism from which it emerged, and this was the source of many of their doctrines which other Christians rejected as heretical. Plato did have some influence on the world of the New Testament, but

he was hardly the most important influence.

Some writers, like John Lightfoot in the 1600s, challenged the predominant classical grid through which the New Testament was being read and offered Jewish texts as New Testament background. Lightfoot bent over backward to cover himself against the attacks of anti-Semites, explaining at some length that he indeed thought these Jewish texts were unspiritual, but that the work was necessary if one were to understand the New Testament.

Today, when anti-Semitism is less popular than in Lightfoot's day, it is more obvious to us that the Greek texts Lightfoot's contemporaries were using were much more pagan than the texts for which he found it necessary to apologize to his readers. Today it is generally recognized that Judaism forms the primary context of the New Testament. Its basic, broad context is GrecoRoman society, but Jewish people had lived in and adapted to GrecoRoman culture, paving the way for the first Christians' witness in the context of pagan culture. Further, the first Christians were Jewish, and outsiders perceived Christianity as a form of Judaism. Moreover, the earliest Christians themselves saw their faith in Jesus as the true fulfillment of the Old Testament hope and hence saw themselves as faithful to Judaism. (Indeed, the New Testament writers affirm that only Christians were faithful to biblical Judaism; although some other Jewish groups also claimed to be the faithful remnant of Israel, these groups do not seem to have survived into subsequent centuries.) Both the specific Jewish and the broader GrecoRoman contexts of the New Testament are crucial for its interpretation, just as a good translation is.

## THE WORK THAT REMAINS

Christians, especially those most committed to crosscultural missions, have always recognized the importance of reading the Bible in the light of its original cultural context. But while translations are available to most Christians, the cultural "footnotes" are not. Many helpful commentaries do exist, but no single commentary provides easy access to all the requisite background in one or two



volumes. The more volumes in a work, the less accessible it becomes to most readers. Only a small percentage of people who read the Bible today have full sets of commentaries, fewer of them would have access to adequate cultural information in each of those commentaries, and fewer still can regularly take time to sort through them.

Many earlier biblical scholars gave their lives to translate the Bible and so to begin to make it intelligible to whoever wanted to read it; but the work has never been completed. Many Bible readers still have very limited access to the background. Although many tasks demand the attention of Christian biblical scholars, this is surely one of the most important.

The need to understand the cultural context of the Bible should be as clear today as the need for translation was in the Reformation period. In our industrial, Western society, we are moving farther and farther from any vestige of biblical roots; our culture is becoming more and more alienated from the cultures in which the Bible was written and our young people are finding God's Book more and more foreign. It does no good to lament that most people will not visit our churches and learn our Christian language. God has called us to be missionaries to our world, so we must make the Word of God intelligible to our culture. We must not simply read it; we must understand it and explain it. We must explain what the writers meant when they wrote it to cultures long since changed or vanished, and how its message applies to us today.

Most of the church in North America today seems asleep to its mission, largely because we have not allowed the Word of God to speak to us in all its radical power. We have allowed it to be a foreign book, and allowed the people it addresses to be a people far removed from our own lives. The tragedy is that the stakes have never been as high as they are in our generation: the world boasts a population five times as high as it did one and a half centuries ago, when the church was stirring to its missions call in another great move of the Spirit. Now, with millions of international students, visitors and immigrants moving into our own world here in the West and other regions with high concentrations of

Christians, the opportunities are greater than ever before, as is the need. Not only can we send out many of our number as laborers for the harvest; all the rest of us must labor for the harvest here. We cannot afford to sleep.

God is making more than one important demand to his church, but one crucial demand is that we understand his Word. In a culture full of Bibles and teachings, those who value the Bible's authority still need to know and understand it better. Pastors, usually overworked, rarely have the time to investigate all the necessary resources to acquire background for each text on which they preach. Yet the need to understand God's message and to awaken the whole church to his call so we can fulfill the commission our Lord has given us is urgent.

Among the resources God provides for that task are specialists gifted in the body of Christ as teachers who can provide various valid insights to help us understand and apply God's Word. Just as missionaries must learn a language and a culture to communicate God's message to another culture, we need servants of God on the other end, learning the language and culture in which God's Book was written. Such teachers labored in the past to provide translations and labor today to provide other tools to make the treasures of the Bible more widely accessible to all its readers.

That certain segments of the secular academic community privately or publicly deride those who devote scholarship to God's glory or want their conclusions to be of practical value in the world makes it difficult for some scholars, who must answer to such critics, to write for the church. That some Christians have connected research with impiety does not help, either. But a long list of Christian scholars throughout history demonstrates that research can make the biblical message more available-scholars from Justin, Jerome and Augustine, to the monks who led the medieval universities on which modern universities are based, and later Luther, Calvin, Wesley and others. Charles Finney and Jonathan Edwards, leading figures in America's Great Awakenings, were academicians as well as devout servants of God. Likewise, many scholars today have pursued scholarship because this was God's call for them. Many of the tools they

developed have aided the preparation of this commentary.

But the biggest task does not fall to scholars alone. All believers are called to hear God's voice in the Scriptures, to start with what is already clear and to go from there. One need not be a scholar to read passages of the Bible in context or to read the cultural footnotes to the Bible that a commentary like this one is meant to provide. May God give us all grace to do our part, to obey Christ our Lord and to reveal him to the needy people of our generation.

# G O S P E L S

## Introduction

Genre. Genre means the kind of writing a work is, whether poetry, prophecy, bomb threat, letter, *etc.* Today it is easy to identify the genre of the Gospels, because four of them are grouped together at the beginning of the \*New Testament. But when each Gospel was written, people would have read it as belonging to some genre or genres they already knew. Genre is important because our expectation of the kind of writing something is will influence how we read it (e.g., we take poetry less literally than prose).

The Genre of the Gospels. In earlier times, when scholars had concentrated on classical Greek literature, they thought that the Gospels looked like common people's literature instead of "high" literature. But subsequent studies have shown that literature ranged widely between folk and high literature, and folk literature often imitated high literature. This means of deciding Gospel genre has lost popularity.

In recent times most scholars have come to classify the Gospels as ancient biography. Ancient biographies did not necessarily emphasize the same features that modern biographies do, but they were still a form of historical writing. Some biographers, like \*Plutarch and *Livy*, *certainly spiced up their narratives; others, like Tacitus (in the Agricola) and Suetonius, kept very close to their sources. Jewish writers could model their biographies after Old Testament* biographical \*narratives, which everyone in their day took to be reliable.

Jewish biography exhibits a variety of forms. \*Josephus spiced up his autobiography in good Greek style but still expected his readers to take him seriously, and the substance of his account is generally reliable. Some Palestinian Jewish historiography took the form of haggadic *midrash*, a sort of

*narrative commentary expanding on biblical stories (e.g., the book of Jubilees and \*Qumran's Genesis Apocryphon expand on Genesis).* These works did not directly influence the Gospels; Luke wrote like a good Greco-Roman historian, and none of the Gospels fits the haggadic midrash pattern. But even works such as Jubilees, with its haggadic expansions (often to explain details), deletions (often to whitewash heroes) and so forth, follow the basic outline of their sources at most points; the early Jewish Pseudo-Philo's Biblical Antiquities does so even more.

Ancient Historiography. Like many historians, journalists and others today, ancient historians had particular themes they wanted to emphasize. History was full of meaning and was to be written in a way that brought out its meaning. Most historians also sought to recount their narratives in a lively and entertaining way. At the same time, however, historians by definition sought to follow the sense of their sources, to be as accurate as possible. Even those who took the most freedom followed the basic substance of history; and, where they had inadequate sources, they aimed for verisimilitude.

Are the Gospels Accurate? On the continuum between more and less careful writers, the writers of the Gospels are among the most careful. When we see how Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source, it is clear that they followed their sources carefully. Writing for ancient readers, they naturally followed the literary conventions of their day. But the first Gospels were written when eyewitnesses were still in positions of authority in the church and oral tradition could be checked, and this supports their reliability; biographies of roughly contemporary characters were normally far more accurate than those concerning heroes of the distant past. See further comment on Luke 1:1-4.

Sayings. Students carefully learned sayings of their teachers, often taking notes to help them memorize. The sayings were sometimes passed on with the stories in which they occurred, and at other times they were passed on as isolated proverbs (sayings of the wise); later students in \*rhetorical schools could also transplant sayings to other appropriate stories about the same teacher. Sayings

were often collected, especially by \*disciples of a famous teacher. Sayings of one teacher were also sometimes modified or transferred to another teacher after much time had elapsed, but the Gospels were written when Jesus' teachings were still in the memories of the writers' sources, and hence it is unlikely that such changes occurred in the Gospels.

Jesus' words sometimes differ slightly from Gospel to Gospel. We expect such differences, because paraphrasing sayings in one's own words was a standard school exercise and a common writing technique in ancient times. (Those who conclude that different Gospel writers contradict each other because they quote Jesus differently are thus not paying attention to how works were written in antiquity.) At the same time, a particular style and rhythm and sometimes \*Aramaic expressions come through Jesus' sayings, indicating that the Gospel writers did not always paraphrase him, even in translation from Aramaic to Greek.

Jesus used many of the Palestinian Jewish teaching techniques of his day, such as *parables and* hyperbole (\*rhetorical exaggeration), to make his points graphically. To grasp them the way his first hearers grasped them, his sayings must be read in this light and then understood in the context of the whole of his teachings. For example, readers must adequately recognize both loyalty to parents (Mk 7:9-13) and the greater demands of the \*kingdom (Mk 10:29-30). Parables must also be read the way Jesus' Jewish hearers would have understood them. They were illustrations meant to convey truth, but some of the details of most parables are included simply to make the story work, so we should be careful not to read too much into such details.

**Literary Techniques.** Greek literary conventions permeated most Jewish literature written in the Greek language, and were applied both to historical books (which the Gospels claim to be) and novels alike. Writers of topical biography had complete freedom to rearrange their sources, so it should not surprise us that Matthew and Mark have many events in Jesus' ministry in different order. Although Jesus, like other Jewish teachers, surely repeated the

same sayings on separate occasions, some of his sayings probably occur in different places in the Gospels simply because the writers were exercising the freedom ancient biographers had to rearrange their material. This freedom enabled the Gospel writers, like preachers today, to preach Jesus as well as report about him, while still recounting his words and deeds accurately. Ancient Christians already knew, of course, that the Gospels were not in chronological order, as the early Christian teacher Papias plainly remarked about Mark.

**How to Read the Gospels.** Ancient biographies were meant to be read the whole way through rather than jumping from a passage in one book to a passage in another. Each of the four Gospels was written separately to different readers and was meant to be read on its own terms before the reader moved to a different Gospel. We should therefore work through each Gospel, following the flow of that Gospel's thought.

Ancient biographies often had morals to their stories and set forth the characters as positive or negative examples. Old Testament stories about men and women of God taught morals about faith and how to serve God. The reader is therefore meant to ask at the end of each Gospel story, What is the moral of this story? How does this story help me relate to Jesus better?

Sayings were often passed down as proverbs, which are general principles or graphic ways of making a point; other times they appear in the context of stories where they are applied in a specific way.

**Applying the Gospels Today.** When we read \*narratives, or stories, in the Bible, we should look for the moral or morals of the story that the author wished to emphasize for his audience. We should try to put ourselves in the place of ancient readers and hear the words of Jesus as if we were hearing them for the first time from his own mouth. We should allow Jesus' graphic language to strike us the way it would have struck the first hearers. The Gospels recorded Jesus' sayings to apply them to other generations besides Jesus' own (the writers wrote them down for their own generation, after Jesus had ascended to heaven),

expecting the readers to apply them to their own situations. But before we can understand how Jesus' teachings apply to our situations today, we must understand what he actually said in first-century Palestine and what he meant.

The Gospels in This Commentary. Matthew, Mark and Luke overlap significantly (see \*Synoptic Gospels in the glossary), and in order to avoid repetition I have sometimes included more background under one of the Gospels than another one. Because readers will learn the most by working their way through one Gospel at a time, however, I have provided sufficient background for interpretation for each of the three Gospels. Mark was meant to be read quickly, like a tract, whereas Matthew was meant to be studied more as a training manual; my comments on Matthew are thus often more detailed, although Matthew and Luke receive less attention where they use Mark. When Matthew and Luke overlap, the commentary is generally more detailed on Matthew. I have treated John independently, because the Fourth Gospel overlaps with the others considerably less than they overlap with one another.

Bibliography. See especially David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, LEC 8 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987); Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992); Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978).



# LUKE

## Introduction

**Authorship.** Early tradition, verified by second-century witnesses and the early title of the book (see the discussion of authorship in the introduction to Mark), favors Luke, traveling companion of Paul, as the author of LukeActs. Although the case for Luke's use of medical language has been exaggerated, there is some evidence for it, and it is consonant with the tradition of Lukan authorship.

**Date, Purpose.** See the introduction to Acts; some of the specific emphases of LukeActs are clearer in Acts than in the Gospel. Luke and Acts together made up a single two-volume work.

**Setting.** Luke writes to readers in the Greek world or Greek-speaking upper-class Rome. His readers are well-to-do and literarily sophisticated, and possibly require confirmation in their faith or arguments they can use to defend it. See comment on 1:3-4 and the discussion of purpose in the introduction to Acts.

**Genre.** See the introduction to the Gospels. Whereas the other Gospels are closer to the genre of GrecoRoman biography, Luke's Gospel is the first volume of a two-volume work, LukeActs, which is in many ways closer to a GrecoRoman history than to a biography. Because Mark is one of Luke's sources, I treat many of the passages where they overlap more thoroughly in Mark than in Luke.

**Luke's Message.** Various themes are especially prominent in Luke: Jesus' ministry to the outcasts, the religiously unfit, the poor and women; this emphasis paves the way for his treatment of the \*Gentile mission in volume two, the book of Acts. The plot movement is from Galilee to Jerusalem in Luke (though the book is framed by scenes in the temple), and from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth in Acts.

Commentaries. Two of the most helpful commentaries are I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGCT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1979), and F. W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1987); these works were particularly useful in preparing this commentary. Cf. also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), and Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, NIBC (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1990). Besides general works mentioned in the introduction to Matthew, Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976), is helpful on the background of much of Luke (especially Lk 15).

1:1-4

### The Literary Prologue

In Luke's day the more sophisticated writers would often introduce their books with a piece of stylish prose written in the classical style. (Those with literary pretensions generally imitated the Greek of a much earlier period than was commonly spoken.) Luke's introduction here is superb in this regard.

1:1. Luke's word here for "account" was used for a \*narrative of many events, as distinct from a narrative of a single event, and was most characteristically (though certainly not only) applied to works of history.

Writers compiling a work usually started with one main source and wove in secondary material from another source or sources. (Most scholars agree that Luke begins with Mark as his main source and weaves in other material, including "Q"). Writers also normally explained why they were writing a work if other books on the same subject had appeared. Some writers invoked length (see 2 Maccabees) or stylistic considerations (see *Theon*) to explain the need for a new work; other authors thought earlier writers had investigated matters inadequately (Josephus, Artemidorus) or had embellished them rhetorically (Tacitus); still others simply wished to compile earlier works more thoroughly

(\*Quintilian). 1:2. "Handed down" was sometimes a technical term in the ancient world. *Disciples of rabbis* normally passed down first-generation traditions carefully. Oral storytellers were also adept at memorizing and passing on stories accurately. Because Luke writes while eyewitnesses are still alive, and because they were accorded a place of prominence in the early \*church, we may be sure that his traditions are reliable. (Eyewitness sources were accepted as the best.)

1:3-4. Literary introductions often specified the purpose of the work (e.g., in \*Josephus's *Against Apion*: "to teach all who wish to know the truth" about the Jewish people); here Luke wishes to provide "exact information" ("exact truth"-NASB; "certainty"-NIV).

It was proper for a good historian to check the data that had come to him. Books would often open with a dedication to the wealthy \*patron who sponsored the writing project. (LukeActs is not just a private work; Luke's Gospel is within 3 percent of the length of Acts, both fitting the standard size of scroll for publication.)

Theophilus, the name of the sponsor, was a common Jewish name. "Most excellent" could literally mark him as a member of a high class in Roman society (the equestrian order), although Luke may use the title only as a courtesy. Theophilus's desire for verification was reasonable in view of the many competing claims to religious truth in the Roman Empire.

1:5-25

### The Angel and the Priest

After the much more classical Greek prologue of 1:1-4, here Luke establishes himself as a master of various literary styles by adapting to \*Septuagint style, reflecting its Hebraic rhythms, which dominate chapters 1-2.

1:5. Historians customarily introduced a \*narrative by listing the names of reigning kings or governors, which provided the approximate time of the

narrative. Herod the Great was officially king of Judea from 37 to 4 B.C. Twenty-four "orders" (NRSV, TEV) or "divisions" (NIV, NASB) of priests (1 Chron 24:7-18, especially v. 10) took turns serving in the temple, two nonconsecutive weeks a year. Priests could marry any pure Israelite, but they often preferred daughters of priests ("daughters of Aaron").

1:6. The terms Luke uses to describe Zechariah and Elizabeth are the same that the \*Old Testament used for some other righteous people, such as Noah (Gen 6:9), Abraham (Gen 17:1) and Job (Job 1:1). One who reads those 'narratives understands that although they may not have been morally perfect (Gen 9:21) or complete (Job 42:3-6), they did not violate any stated commandments in the \*law. Thus Luke uses these terms to challenge the misconception that could arise from conventional wisdom concerning barrenness (Lk 1:7).

1:7. To be childless was economically and socially disastrous: economically, because parents had no one to support them in old age (cf. comment on 1 Tim 5:4, 8); socially, because in the law barrenness was sometimes a judgment for sin, and many people assumed the worst possible cause of a problem. Most people assumed that barrenness was a defect of the wife, and Jewish teachers generally insisted that a man divorce a childless wife so he could procreate. "Aged" may suggest that they were over sixty (\*Mishnah Abot 5:21); age itself conferred some social status and was sometimes listed among qualifications or virtues.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, however, Zechariah and Elizabeth are clearly righteous (1:6; cf. Wisdom of Solomon 4:1), and the Jewish reader would immediately think of righteous Abraham and Sarah, who was also barren. The Lord also opened the wombs of other matriarchs, Rachel and Rebekah, and those of Hannah and Samson's mother; yet Elizabeth is especially like Sarah, who was not only infertile but also too old to bear.

1:8-9. There were many more priests and Levites than necessary (perhaps

eighteen thousand) for any given function in the temple, so they were chosen for specific tasks by lot, during their appointed time of service (besides service on the three major festivals, they served about two weeks out of the year). Given the number of priests, a priest might get the opportunity in 1:9 only once in a lifetime; this would have been a special occasion for Zechariah.

Incense offerings (Ex 30:7-8) had been standard in ancient Near Eastern temples, perhaps to quench the stench of burning flesh from the sacrifices in the closed buildings. This offering in the temple preceded the morning sacrifice and followed the evening sacrifice. It is said that the officer who ministered regularly in the temple signaled the time to begin the offering and then withdrew; the priest cast incense on this altar, prostrated himself and then withdrew himself—normally immediately (cf. 1:21).

1:10. The hours of morning and evening sacrifices were also the major public hours of prayer in the temple (cf. Acts 3:1). Except during a feast, most of the people praying there would be Jerusalemites; unable to enter the priestly sanctuary, they were presumably men in the Court of Israel, and some women outside that in the Court of the Women.

1:11. The altar of incense was in the center of the priestly sanctuary, outside the holy of holies.

Zechariah 3:1 reports an Old Testament apparition in the temple. There \*Satan appears to the high priest, standing at his right to accuse him; but the high priest stands before the angel of the Lord, who defends him and brings him a message of peace for his people.

1:12. People usually reacted with fear to angelic revelations in the Old Testament as well.

1:13. Angelic annunciations, often complete with names, also preceded some major births in the Old Testament (e.g., Gen 16:11; 17:19; Is 7:14). Childless

people throughout the ancient world entreated deities for children.

1:14-15. The closest Old Testament parallel to Luke 1:15 is judges 13:4-5, 7, where Samson, as a Nazirite from birth, is warned to abstain from strong drink (cf. Num 6:3-4). Cf. Luke 7:33. Ancient Judaism especially viewed the \*Holy Spirit as the Spirit of *prophecy*. 1:16-17. *Elijah was to return before the day of the Lord, turning the father's hearts to the children (Mal 4:56; cf. Ecclus 48:10).* Although later rabbis interpreted this event as Elijah, master of intricate legal questions, straightening out Israelite genealogies, the point in Malachi is probably familial reconciliation; cf. Micah 7:5-6. On "prepared for the Lord," see Luke 3:4. On coming in Elijah's measure of the Spirit, cf. Elisha's request for a "double portion" (the inheritance right of a firstborn son) of this in 2 Kings 2:9; although John claimed no miracles, he was a great prophet-for he was Jesus' forerunner.

1:18. Like Zechariah here, Abraham (Gen 15:8; cf. 17:17), Gideon (Judg 6:17, 36-40; 7:10-11) and others in the Old Testament (2 Kings 20:8; cf. Is 7:10-14) asked for signs in the face of astounding promises, but they were not punished. That Zechariah's sign should be harsher to him (1:20) suggests only that this revelation is much greater than those which preceded it.

1:19. Although Judaism had developed quite a list of angelic names, the \*New Testament mentions only the two who also appear in the Old Testament: Gabriel (Dan 8:16; 9:21) and Michael (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1). These became the two most popular angels in

contemporary Jewish lore, in which Gabriel was sent on many divine missions. Jewish literature typically portrayed the chief angels as before God's throne.

1:20-21. Casting incense on the heated altar of incense normally took little time, after which the priest emerged immediately. The delay here may have troubled the crowds; perhaps they thought Zechariah had been disrespectful and struck dead, or that something else had gone wrong. If Zechariah's offering had failed,

their prayers were also in jeopardy.

1:22. The term here for "mute" can, but need not, include deafness.

1:23. Because his term of service was only two weeks a year, and he had no son to support him in his old age, Zechariah probably worked a small farm or did other work in the hill country of Judah. (Priests were supposed to be supported by others' tithes, not by working the land, but high taxes on the poor and unfair practices by the priestly aristocracy-especially in the decades just prior to A.D. 66-combined to make it harder on less wealthy priests.)

1:24-25. Praise such as Elizabeth utters here was common among the barren whom God visited (Gen 21:6-7; 1 Sam 2:1-11) but especially recalls Rachel's exultation, "God has removed my reproach!" (Gen 30:23).

1:26-38

### The Angel and the Girl

Luke here contrasts the simple faith of a teenage girl, Mary, with the genuine but less profound faith of an aged priest, Zechariah (cf. the severer contrasts between Hannah and Eli in 1 Sam 1-2; though the story line is quite different, in both cases God uses a humble and obscure servant to bear an agent of revival to the coming generation). This section has parallels not only with \*Old Testament birth annunciations but also with Old Testament call \*narratives: Mary was called to fill the office of Jesus' mother.

1:26-27. Because Joseph was of David's line and Jesus would be his legal son, Jesus could qualify as belonging to David's royal house. In Judaism, "virgins" were young maidens, usually fourteen or younger. The term Luke uses here for "virgin" also indicates that she had not yet had sexual relations with a man (1:34-35). Nazareth in this period was an insignificant village of an estimated sixteen hundred to two thousand inhabitants. On Gabriel, see comment on 1:19.

1:28-29. God often encouraged his servants that he was "with" them (e.g., Jer 1:8). Greetings (like "hail") were normal, but rank and status within society determined whom one should greet and with what words. As both a woman and a young person (perhaps twelve or fourteen years old) not yet married, Mary had virtually no social status. Neither the title ("favored" or "graced one") nor the promise ("The Lord is with you") was traditional in greetings, even had she been a person of status.

1:30. "Do not fear" (cf. 1:13) was also common in Old Testament revelations (e.g., Josh 1:9; Judg 6:23; Jer 1:8; Dan 10:12; cf. Gen 15:1). Mary here joins the list of those in the Bible who found favor before God (Gen 6:8; 19:16, 19; Ex 33:13).

1:31. This verse follows the typical Old Testament structure for a divine birth announcement and especially resembles Isaiah 7:14, the Immanuel promise (on which see Mt 1:23).

1:32-33. This language ultimately derives from 2 Samuel 7:12-16 and also identifies Mary's future son with the "Mighty God" \*Messiah of Isaiah 9:6-7

("Mighty God" is clearly a divine title; cf. Is 10:21). On the eternal \*kingdom, cf. also Daniel 2:44; 4:3; 6:26; 7:14.

1:34-35. Jewish tradition used the language of "overshadowing" for God's presence with his people.

1:36-37. The point of 1:36-37 is that God, who acted for Elizabeth as he did for Sarah, could still do anything. On 1:36, cf. Genesis 18:14 (on Sarah having a child); Mary has more faith than her ancestor (Gen 18:12-15).

1:38. Mary expresses her submission to the Lord's will in regular Old Testament terms for submission or acquiescence (e.g., 1 Sam 1:18; 25:41; 2 Sam 9:6, 11; 2 Kings 4:2; cf. Bel and Dragon 9; see especially 2 Sam 7:25).



1:39-56

### Miracle Mothers Meet

1:39-40. The journey from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea may have taken three to five days, depending on the precise location of Elizabeth's home. In view of bandits on the roads, young Mary's journey was courageous, although she may have found a caravan with which to travel; otherwise her family may not have allowed her to go. Greetings were normally blessings meant to bestow peace, hence the response of verse 41.

1:41. Like dancing, leaping was an expression of joy (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 19:9). Jewish people recognized that the fetus was able to sense and respond to stimuli; while occasionally suggesting that the fetus's gender could be changed by prayer up until birth, some 'rabbinic tradition also believed that infants could sin, sing and so forth in the womb. Some pagan stories also told of babies dancing in their mother's wombs or speaking in infancy, but pagans generally regarded these events as evil omens; here John's activity is instead a result of his prenatal sensitivity to the prophetic Spirit. On the \*Holy Spirit see 1:15.

1:42-44. For praising another indirectly through a secondary blessing, see comment on Matthew 13:16-17 (cf. also, e.g., the \*pseudepigraphic 2 Baruch 54:10-11).

1:45. Abraham also believed the promise of a son (Gen 15:6).

1:46-47. Verses 46-55 emphasize the exaltation of the poor and humble and the casting down of the proud and wealthy. This emphasis of Mary's song strongly resembles the praise song of Samuel's mother, Hannah, in 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Hannah celebrated when the Lord opened her barren womb. (Luke omits the imagery of military triumph that Hannah had applied to her rivalry with Peninnah.) Hebrew poetry commonly uses synonymous parallelism (in which a second line reiterates the statement of the first); thus "soul" and "spirit" are used interchangeably here, as often in Scripture; joy and praise are also linked (cf. Ps

33:1; 47:1; 95:2; 149:1-5).

1:48. The Old Testament spoke of those who obeyed God, especially the prophets, as God's servants. It also emphasized God's exalting the humble and reveals the importance ancient culture placed on one's honor and name enduring after one's death.

1:49-50. In verse 50 Mary alludes to Psalm 103:17, which in context emphasizes God's faithfulness, in spite of human frailty, to those who fear him. 1:51. This is the language of vindication through judgment; often in the Old Testament, God's "arm" would save his people and "scatter" their (his) enemies. Mary weaves together the language of various psalms.

1:52-53. The principle that God exalts the humble and casts down the proud was common in the Old Testament (e.g., Prov 3:34; Is 2:11-12, 17; cf.

Ecclus 10:14). "Filling the hungry" comes from Psalm 107:9, where God helps those in distress, because he is merciful.

1:54-55. God had promised to be faithful to his people Israel forever, because of the eternal covenant he had made by oath with their ancestor Abraham (e.g., Deut 7:7-8). Israel is God's "servant" in Isaiah 42-49 (cf. comment on Mt 12:15-18).

1:56. Although ancient texts sometimes speak of pregnancy as lasting ten months, it was known that it normally lasted nine; the three months mentioned here plus the six of verse 26 suggest that Mary was present long enough to see John's birth.

1:57-66

The Birth of John

This account lacks the \*hagiographic details found in many Jewish birth stories

of the period, especially those about Noah and Moses, where the baby illumined the room or (newborn Noah) spoke.

1:57-58. Neighbors customarily joined in celebrations (cf. 15:6), and the birth—especially an unusual one like this one—and circumcision of a son in the family home (typically performed by the father in this period) were such occasions; Jewish tradition suggests that guests assembled every night from a boy's birth to his circumcision. On the special cause for the celebration here, see comment on 1:7. Jewish people viewed sons as essential because they carried on the family line, although in practice they seem to have loved daughters no less.

1:59. The \*law required that circumcisions be performed on the eighth day; this was a special event, and Jewish custom included a charge to raise the child according to biblical law. Jewish children had customarily been named at birth; the evidence for naming a child at circumcision is late, apart from this text. But Roman infants were named eight or nine days after birth (for girls and boys, respectively), and Luke may either accommodate GrecoRoman practice for his readers or, more likely, indicate the GrecoRoman influence on Palestinian Jewish custom. Zechariah's muteness may have delayed the normal naming, but cf. 2:21.

1:60-62. Children often were named for grandfathers and sometimes for fathers. The father rather than the mother had ultimate say in the matter; in Roman (as opposed to Jewish) society the father even had the legal right to decide whether the family would raise the child or throw the infant out on the trash heaps.

1:63. The writing tablet was a wooden board coated with wax; one would inscribe the message on the wax surface.

1:64-66. Prophetic speechlessness and the restoration of speech once the \*prophecy had been fulfilled are found also in Ezekiel 33:22.

1:67-79

## Zechariah's Prophecy

In the *Old Testament* only a *fine line* existed between inspired praise and prophecy (e.g., 1 Sam 10:5-6; 1 Chron 25:1-3), and often, as in Psalms, one could move from one to the other (46:1, 10; 91:1, 14).

1:67. The \*Spirit of God was especially (though not exclusively) associated with prophecy in the Old Testament, and this perspective continued in various Jewish circles around the time of Jesus.

1:68. "Blessed be God" occurs in Old Testament praise (e.g., 1 Chron 16:36; 2 Chron 6:4; Ps 41:13; 72:18) and became a standard opening prayer for

Jewish blessings. The prophets and later writers (cf. the \*Dead Sea Scrolls) spoke of God visiting his people for redemption and judgment. The use of "redeem" here compares this new event to when God saved his people from Egypt; the prophets had promised future deliverance in a new exodus.

1:69. Because a horn could give an animal the victory in battle, it indicated strength. "Horn of salvation" parallels the meaning of "rock" and "strength" in Psalm 18:2. Thus the Davidic \*Messiah would be their deliverer (cf. Ps 132:17).

1:70-75. God had promised salvation from their enemies in his covenant with Abraham and his descendants. The language here thoroughly reflects the Old Testament.

1:76. "Prepare his way" alludes to Isaiah 40:3 (predicting the herald of a new exodus) and perhaps Malachi 3:1 (probably connected with Elijah in 4:5); cf. Luke 3:4.

1:77. Future "salvation" in Isaiah includes deliverance from political oppressors; but, as here, it is predicated upon Israel's restoration to divine favor through forgiveness.

1:78. "Sunrise" (NASB) or "rising sun" (NIV) could allude to God as the Sun of righteousness in Malachi 4:2 (cf. Ps 84:11). Some commentators have suggested a Greek play on words referring to the \*Messiah as both a "shoot" and a "star" in the Old Testament.

1:79. Although Zechariah weaves in various allusions here as elsewhere in the chapter, Isaiah 9:2 is especially in view the context of this passage is explicitly messianic (Is 9:6-7).

1:80. The summary statement is especially reminiscent of 1 Samuel 2:26 and 3:19 for the maturation of the prophet Samuel. The desert was the expected place for a new exodus and thus for the *Messiah; some groups, seeking greater purity, withdrew from common Judaism into the desert. Whether John may have studied among such groups for a time is debated, although it is probable if his aged parents died before he reached maturity (the Essenes reportedly adopted children and trained them from age ten on).*

2:1-7

### Journey to Bethlehem

By A.D. 6 wide-scale censuses were taken every fourteen years; before that time, periodic censuses seem to have occurred at less regular intervals. A tax census instigated by the revered emperor Augustus initiates the contrast between Caesar's earthly pomp and Christ's heavenly glory in 2:1-14.

2:1. Censuses were important for evaluating taxation; they were generally conducted locally, so all local governments in all regions probably did not simultaneously implement Caesar's decree.

2:2. Some scholars dispute whether Quirinius was governor of Syria at this time. Quirinius was certainly governor of Syria during the much-remembered later census of A.D. 6, when Sepphoris and some Galilean patriots revolted against the tax census of that year. This passage seems to refer to an earlier census while

Herod the Great was still king (before 4 B.C.); thus Luke's "first census under Quirinius."

Some commentators have suggested that Luke blended the two events or that Quirinius was governor of Syria at the earlier time Luke describes as well as in A.D. 6, for which there is some (though currently incomplete) evidence. Historians dated events by naming current officials, so Quirinius may have been in office at the time

without being associated with this census. The governor of Syria is mentioned because the Roman province of Syria included Palestine under its jurisdiction at this time.

2:3. Although Egyptian census records show that people had to return to their homes for a tax census, the home to which they returned was where they owned property, not simply where they were born (censuses registered persons according to property). Joseph thus must have still held property in Bethlehem; if the tax census of A.D. 6 is any indication, he might not have had to register for any property in Galilee.

2:4. Pottery samples suggest a recent migration of people from the Bethlehem area to Nazareth around this time; Joseph's legal residence is apparently still Bethlehem, where he had been raised.

2:5. Betrothal provided most of the legal rights of marriage, but intercourse was forbidden; Joseph is courageous to take his pregnant betrothed with him, even if (as is quite possible) she is also a Bethlehemite who has to return to that town. Although tax laws in most of the empire required only the head of a household to appear, the province of Syria (then including Palestine) also taxed women. But Joseph may simply wish to avoid leaving her alone this late in her pregnancy, especially if the circumstances of her pregnancy had deprived her of other friends.

2:6-7. The "swaddling clothes" were long cloth strips used to keep babies' limbs straight so they could grow properly (cf. Wisdom of Solomon 7:4). Midwives normally assisted at birth; especially because this was Mary's first child, it is likely (though not clear from the text) that a midwife would assist her. Jewish law permitted midwives to travel a long distance even on the Sabbath to assist in delivery.

By the early second century A.D. even pagans were widely aware of the tradition that Jesus was born in a cave used as a livestock shelter behind someone's home, and they reported the site of this cave to the emperor Hadrian. The manger was a feeding trough for animals; sometimes these may have been built into the floor. The word traditionally translated "inn" probably means "home" or "guest room"; with all Joseph's scattered family members returning home at once, it is easier for Mary to bear (or care for the child after birth) in the vacant cave outside.

2:8-20

### The Real King's Birth

2:8. Due to the proximity to Jerusalem, some scholars have suggested that the flocks here are the temple flocks raised for sacrifice. This narrative would have challenged the values of many religious people, who despised shepherds; shepherds' work kept them from participation in the religious activities of their communities. Pasturing of flocks at night indicates that this was a warmer season, not winter (when they would graze more in the day); Roman Christians later adopted December 25 as Christmas only to supersede a pagan Roman festival scheduled at that time.

2:9. Angelic appearances, the revelation of God's glory and consequent fear among the humans present were common in the Old Testament when God was acting in history in special ways.

2:10-12. For "Do not be afraid" see comment on 1:13, 30. "Good news" could

refer to the proclamation of God's salvation (Is 52:7), but pagans applied it also to celebrations of the

cult of the emperor among all people in the supposedly worldwide empire. Particularly in celebration of his birthday (pagans publicly celebrated deities' birthdays), the emperor was hailed "Savior" and "Lord." But Jesus' birth in a lowly manger distinguishes the true king from the Roman emperor, whose loyalists in Luke's day would have bristled at (and perhaps responded violently to) the implicit comparison. "Signs" are common in prophetic literature (e.g., Is 7:14; Ezek 12:11) and function as much to provoke and explain truth as to prove it.

2:13-14. This choir contrasts with the earthly choirs used in the worship of the emperor. The current emperor, Augustus, was praised for having inaugurated a worldwide peace. The inverted parallelism (God vs. people, and "in the highest" vs. "on earth") suggests that "in the highest" means "among heaven's angelic hosts."

2:15-18. The shepherds probably checked the animal stables till they found the one with the baby; Bethlehem was not a large town.

2:19-20. Mary kept these matters in her mind as Jacob had Joseph's revelations in Genesis 37:11 (for the idiom, cf., e.g., Ps 119:11; Prov 6:21; Wisdom of Solomon 8:17).

2:21-40

The Infant and His Witnesses

2:21. See comment on 1:57-59.

2:22-24. These verses refer to Exodus 13:2, 12 and Leviticus 12:8. Jesus' parents fulfill the \*law of Moses properly and piously. The particular sacrifice they offer indicates that they are poor (Lev 12:8). Following the custom, Mary would lay



hands on the pigeons, then a priest would take them to the southwest corner of the altar, wringing one bird's neck as a sin offering and burning the other as a whole burnt offering.

2:25-26. This encounter with Simeon no doubt occurs in the Court of Women. God's future intervention for Israel was described as "consolation" or "comfort" (cf., e.g., Is 49:13; 51:3; 52:9; 66:13). The "*\*Holy Spirit*" was especially associated with *prophecy*. *On living to see God's grace before dying*, cf. Psalm 91:16, Tobit 10:13 and 11:9; sometimes in the Old Testament the righteous would be spared seeing disaster and the wicked would not experience good (e.g., 2 Kings 6:2; 22:20).

2:27-32. Simeon's praise reflects Old Testament piety such as Genesis 46:30, and prophecies like Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6.

2:33-35. *Prophecies in Jewish and GrecoRoman tradition were often obscure, easier understood in hindsight than at the moment they were given. Simeon's words probably allude to the stumbling stone of Isaiah 8:14-15 and the anticipated resurrection.* The "sword" reflects either Mary suffering over Jesus' pain or her heart being bared, probably the former (a mother's grief can symbolize a son's suffering, e.g., Judg 5:28).

2:36. Although the Old Testament did include prophetesses, they were much less prominent than male prophets in the Jewish tradition of this period. The name "Anna" (Tobit 1:9) is the Hebrew name "Hannah" (1 Sam 1:2).

2:37-38. Jewish and GrecoRoman culture often viewed widows who never remarried as pious and faithful. Judith, a famous widow in Jewish tradition, was said to have lived as a widow till her death at 105. If one adds the two numbers given in the text here, seven and eightyfour (taking eightyfour as the length of Anna's widowhood rather than her age), and she was married at the common age of fourteen, one could see her as 105 also.

2:39-40. See comment on 1:80.

2:41-52

### The Boy in the Temple

Where possible, ancient biographers would tell significant anecdotes about their subjects' youth, sometimes about spectacular child prodigies (e.g., Cyrus, \*Josephus). In 2:21-40, Jesus intrigued prophets; in 2:41-52, he intrigues teachers of the law.

2:41. The \*law required an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem at Passover (Deut 16:6), although most Jewish people living far away could not come annually. Although Jewish teachers did not always require women's attendance at the festivals, many women attended. This verse may be another allusion to Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:7 and 2:19.

2:42. "Twelve years old" would have been one year before Jesus officially became an adult Israelite and accepted responsibility for fulfilling the law. (Although the official Jewish bar mitzvah ceremony may not have existed in Jesus' day, its analogy to Roman coming-of-age rituals supports other evidence for an official entrance to adulthood around this age.)

2:43-45. Caravans, which afforded protection from robbers, were common on pilgrimages for the feasts in Jerusalem. Traveling with a caravan, in which neighbors from their town would watch the community children together, Mary and Joseph might assume that the near-adult Jesus was with companions, especially if by now they had younger children to attend to. If we assume a pace of twenty miles per day (though perhaps slower, depending on transportation and the children), Nazareth would be a little over three days' journey along the shortest route.

2:46-47. Some Jewish teachers in this period reportedly conducted their classes in the temple courts; the famous *Hillel and Shammai* may have been two such teachers. Asking questions was used both in teaching and in learning, but it was

important for learners to ask intelligent questions, as Jesus does. Teachers could answer questions with questions, and Jesus' answers are also intelligent.

2:48-51. The commandment to honor one's father and mother was regarded as one of the most important in the law, and children not yet considered adults were to express this honoring in part by obedience. On Mary's heart, see comment on 2:19.

2:52. See comment on 1:80; cf. Judith 16:23; for the wording, cf. also Proverbs 3:4.

3:1-6

## **Introduction of John**

3:1-2. It was customary to begin historical narratives by dating them according to the years of rulers and officials, both in GrecoRoman and Old Testament historiography, and often in introducing prophetic oracles or books (e.g., Is 1:1; 6:1). Luke thus shows that John began preaching somewhere between September of A.D. 27 and October of A.D. 28 (or, less likely, the following year). Tiberius reigned from A.D. 14 to 37; Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great (see comment on 1:5), was tetrarch (governor) of Galilee from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39; Pontius Pilate was in office from A.D. 26 to 36. On "Annas and Caiaphas" see comment on John 18:13, 19.

3:3. Non-Jews who wished to convert to Judaism were required to immerse themselves in water to remove their impurity as \*Gentiles; John requires this act of conversion even of Jews. See comment on Mark 1:5.

3:4-6. On the quotation see Mark

1:3; Isaiah promised a new exodus in which God would again save his people Israel. Luke extends the quote to more of Isaiah 40, possibly to conclude with seeing God's salvation; cf. Luke 2:30.

3:7-20

## John's Preaching

See comment on Matthew 3:7-12 for more details.

3:7. Vipers (e.g., the Nicander's viper) were commonly believed to eat their way out of their mother's womb; thus John's calling the crowd "viper's offspring" was even nastier than calling them "vipers." Serpents would flee a burning field.

3:8-9. The Jewish people believed that they were saved by virtue of their descent from Abraham, which constituted them the chosen people. The idea of raising people from stones appears in Greek mythology. Some scholars have suggested that John makes a wordplay between the Aramaic words for "children" and "stones."

3:10-11. The poorest people (such as most people in Egypt, who were peasants) had only one outer tunic; by such standards, anyone with two tunics had more than necessary. "What shall we do?" occurs throughout LukeActs as a question about how to be saved.

3:12-13. \*Tax gatherers sometimes collected extra money and kept the profit; although this practice was not legal, it was difficult to prevent.

3:14. Some commentators think these "soldiers" are Jewish police who accompanied tax gatherers or Herodian mercenaries, but more likely these are the light auxiliary non-Jewish troops that Rome recruited from Syria. Although the large legions were stationed in Syria, not Palestine, some soldiers were stationed in Palestine (Caesarea and Jerusalem) and smaller bands no doubt marched through. The frequency of Roman soldiers' illegal concubinage with native women also indicates that all soldiers did not remain in their garrison at all times. Jews were exempt from required military service due especially to their dietary laws.

Soldiers occasionally protested their wages, creating trouble with the government (e.g., the frontier mutiny of A.D. 14); they were known for extorting money from local people they intimidated or for falsely accusing them (see, e.g., the *papyri*; Apuleius).

3:15-17. On John's *messianic preaching*, see comment on Matthew 3:11-12. The Old Testament prophets had declared that in the end time the righteous would be endowed with the *Holy Spirit* and that the wicked would be burned with fire. The Jewish people generally viewed the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of prophecy, and some circles viewed the Spirit as a force that purified God's people from unholiness.

3:18. On his "many other words" see comment on Acts 2:40.

3:19-20. John's preaching to Herod Antipas fits prophetic morality, but Herod and his advisers may view it as a political statement, especially given the political cost of Herod's illicit liaison with Herodias (see comment on Mk 6:17-20). Herod's nemesis, a Nabatean king, also found ethnic allies in Herod's subject territory of Perea, and Herod may have viewed John's preaching in that region (On 3:23) as especially damaging.

In ancient Israel prophets normally enjoyed an immunity from persecution that was virtually unparalleled in the ancient Near East (prophets of other nations rarely denounced living kings; at most they suggested more funds for their temples). But some Israelite rulers did imprison (1 Kings 22:26-27; Jer

37-38) and seek to kill or silence them (1 Kings 13:4; 18:13; 19:2; 2 Kings 1:9; 6:31; 2 Chron 24:21; Jer 18:18, 23; 26:11, 20-23). John's costly stand prefigures Jesus' death at the hands of the authorities.

3:21-22

Jesus' Sonship Declared

Jewish tradition stressed that God communicated in this era by voices from heaven; most people believed that he no longer spoke by prophets, at least not as he once had. The prophetic ministry of John and the voice from heaven thus provide a dual witness to Jesus' identity. See further comment on Mark 1:9-11.

3:23-38

### Jesus' Ancestry

GrecoRoman biographers included lists of ancestors, especially illustrious ancestors, whenever possible. Like GrecoRoman genealogies, but unlike Matthew and *Old Testament genealogies*, *Luke starts with the most recent names and works backward. This procedure enables him to end with Son of God*" (cf. 1:35; 3:22; 4:3).

For more details on genealogies, see comment on Matthew 1:2-16. Scholars have proposed various explanations for the differences between the genealogies of Matthew and Luke, of which the following are most prominent: (1) one (probably Matthew) records the genealogy of Joseph, the other of Mary; (2) one (probably Matthew) spiritualizes the genealogy rather than following it literally; (3) the lines of descent cross but are different because one list includes several adoptive lines through levirate marriages (Deut 25:5-10).

In Greek society, men often entered public service at the age of thirty; Levites' service in the temple also began at thirty. Like a good Greek historian, Luke says "about thirty" (3:23) rather than stating an estimate as a definite number, as was more common in traditional Jewish historiography.

4:1-13

### Tested in the Wilderness

See comment on Matthew 4:1-11 for more details. Jesus here settles issues as good \*rabbis did, by appeal to Scripture. But this text also shows that Jesus does

not just use Scripture to accommodate contemporary views of its authority; he uses it as his authority and the final word on ethics even when dealing with a supracultural adversary. (It should go without saying that the original writer and readers would have viewed the devil as a literal, personal being; some modern readers' figurative treatment of the devil as a generic symbol for evil reads into the text something entirely foreign to it.)

The three texts from Deuteronomy (6:13, 16; 8:3) cited here (4:4, 8, 12) were commands given to Israel when Israel was tested in the wilderness. Unlike Adam, another "son" of God, who sinned (3:38), Jesus overcomes the tests (cf. Gen 3).

4:1-2. Moses also fasted forty days and nights; Israel also was in the wilderness forty years.

4:3. The devil's first test of Jesus is the sort of feat ancient thought attributed to magicians, who claimed to be able to transform themselves into animals and to transform other substances, like stones into bread.

4:4. Other Jewish circles (evident, e.g., in the \*Dead Sea Scrolls and later \*rabbinic texts) also used the phrase "It has been written" to introduce Scripture.

4:6-7. The world did not technically belong to the devil (Dan 4:32), who owned human hearts and societies only as a usurper. The most he could

do would be to make Jesus the political, military sort of \*Messiah most Jewish people who expected a Messiah were anticipating.

4:8. Deuteronomy 6:13, which Jesus cites, prohibits idolatry (Deut 6:14), a commandment anyone who worshiped the devil would obviously violate.

4:9-11. The devil takes Jesus to a part of the temple overlooking a deep valley; a fall from there would have meant certain death. Later \*rabbis acknowledged that the devil and demons could handle Scripture expertly; here the devil cites Psalm

91:11-12 out of context, because 91:10 makes clear that God's protection is for events that befall his servants, not an excuse to seek out such dangers.

4:12. Jesus cites Deuteronomy 6:16, which refers to how the Israelites had tested God at Massah by refusing to accept that God was among them until he wrought a sign for them (Ex 17:7). 4:13. To most ancient readers, the devil's departure would have implied at least his temporary defeat (cf. the \*Testament of Job 27:6; Life of Adam 17:2-3, of uncertain date).

4:14-30

### Preaching in His Hometown Synagogue

Luke, who follows the order of his sources quite meticulously (probably according to the pattern of biography he is using), departs from that order here (cf. Mk 6:1-6), because this section becomes his programmatic or thesis statement for the \*gospel. (Cf. Peter's sermon in Acts 2, which functions analogously for Acts.)

That Jesus would quote Scripture against the devil (4:1-13) would hardly have disturbed his contemporaries; that he would use it to challenge traditions that his contemporaries believe are scriptural, however, enrages them. Jewish teachers officially welcomed debate, examining all views from the Scriptures; but they generally interpreted Scripture in such a way as to support views sanctioned by tradition (a frequent practice in many churches today).

4:14-15. Visiting \*rabbis were often given opportunities to teach; but Nazareth, a village of sixteen hundred to two thousand inhabitants, already knew Jesus and would be less open to thinking about him in new ways.

4:16. The people would have known that Jesus was devout and skilled in Hebrew from his previous readings in his hometown \*synagogue. One customarily sat while expounding Scripture (Mt 5:1) but stood while reading it.



4:17. Synagogues later followed regular lectionary readings, but in this period readers had more freedom to choose the reading from the Prophets; even later, readers in the Prophets were allowed to "skip" passages. The synagogue attendant (ckazan-v. 20) presumably chose which book to read (different books of the Old Testament were on different scrolls). "Opening" the book meant unrolling the Hebrew scroll to the right place.

4:18-19. Isaiah in this passage (61:1-2; cf. 58:6) seems to describe Israel's future in terms of the year of jubilee, or year of release, from Leviticus 25; the \*Dead Sea Scrolls read Isaiah 61 in this way. Some scholars have suggested that a recent jubilee year may have made this text fresh in the minds of Jesus' hearers; some other scholars dispute whether this even remained a current practice in mainstream Judaism. That Luke ends the quote on a note of salvation is probably intentional, but his readers who know Scripture well would know how the passage continues.

4:20. Teachers normally sat to ex

pound Scripture. The \*synagogue attendant was the chazan, the official responsible for the upkeep of the building, the scrolls and so forth; this position was eventually a paid one (but lower in authority than "rulers" of a synagogue). Synagogues were probably less formal than churches or synagogues generally are today, so the attentiveness of those present is significant.

4:21-22. Immediacy ("today"; cf. 2:11; 19:5, 9; 23:43) is the initial key to the coming offense; the text Jesus reads is supposed to be fulfilled in the messianic era, and the inhabitants of Nazareth saw neither \*Messiah nor messianic era before them. Because they lived only four miles from Sepphoris, they were well aware of how the Romans had destroyed that Galilean capital after a messianic-style revolt in A.D. 6; that this region was thereafter cautious about messianic announcements is clear from the fact that the rebuilt Sepphoris did not join in the later revolt of A.D. 66.

Writers of the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, who believed that they lived on the verge of the end time, often stressed the immediacy of biblical prophecies, applying descriptions of Nahum, Habakkuk and others to their own day. Interpreting the Bible this way was thus not in itself offensive to first-century Palestinian Jews; the offense was implying that the end time had arrived in Jesus' own ministry.

4:23-24. The tradition that Israel rejected its own prophets was strong in Judaism; for instance, Jeremiah was persecuted by his own priestly town, Anathoth (Jer 1:1; 11:18-23). The proverb in 4:23 is attested in some form in Greek classical and medical literature, and some \*rabbis cited a similar Aramaic proverb.

4:25-27. Jesus mentions the socially weak (widows) and marginalized (lepers) here, but the main point is that non-Jews were the ones to accept two of the major signs prophets of the \*Old Testament. Sidon and Syria were among the particularly despised areas. Jesus' point: Nazareth will not receive him, but non-Jews will.

4:28-29. A mob could not legally execute capital punishment in Jewish Palestine; the crowd is thus unusually angry-especially to attempt this execution on the sabbath (v. 16). Although Nazareth does not appear to have been built on a hill per se, like many ancient cities it was set in the hill country, with plenty of jagged rocks and cliffs nearby. Stoning began with throwing the criminal over a cliff, then hurling rocks nearly the size of one's head on top of the victim. One aimed for the chest first, but at such a distance one's aim would not be particularly accurate. 4:30. Whether the Lord hides him (cf. Jer 36:26), his attitude silences them, or his townspeople suddenly realize what they are doing to one of their own, Jesus walks through the crowd unharmed-his hour had not yet come.

4:31-37

Preaching in Capernaum's Synagogue

A pericope about Jesus' inhospitable reception in a house of prayer and study (4:14-30) is followed by his confrontation with a demoniac in one. Yet the people's response in Capernaum, which by the second century A.D. had become a center for early Jewish Christianity, contrasts with that of Nazareth in 4:14-30. See comment on Mark 1:21-28.

4:31. Archaeologists have found the site of Capernaum's \*synagogue.

4:32. Most teachers would try to expound the \*law by explaining the proper way to translate it or by appealing to their legal or \*narrative traditions; Jesus goes beyond such practices.

4:33-34. Demons were often associated with magic, and magicians tried to subdue other spiritual forces by invoking their names. If the demon is trying to subdue Jesus in this way ("I know who you are" was used to subdue spiritual powers in magical texts), as some scholars have suggested-his ploy does not work.

4:35-37. Exorcists had two main methods of expelling demons: (1) scaring the demon out or making it too sick to stay-for example, by putting a smelly root up the possessed person's nose in the hope that the demon would not be able to stand it-or (2) invoking the name of a higher spirit to get rid of the lower one. The people are amazed that Jesus can be effective by simply ordering the demons to leave.

4:38-44

Popularity Increases

See comment on Mark 1:29-39 for more details.

4:38. Simon's father-in-law had probably passed away, and Simon and his wife had taken her widowed mother into their home. Caring for one's extended family was more common then than it is today.

4:39. Waiting on guests was an important element of hospitality normally assigned to the adult women of the household (most free families could not afford slaves).

4:40-41. The sabbath (4:31) ended Saturday at sundown. "As the sun was setting" indicates that the sabbath is ending; thus people could carry the sick to Jesus for healing (carrying was considered work, thus forbidden on the sabbath). Greeks used laying on hands as a point of contact for healing more often than Jewish people did, but it had a rich symbolism in Jewish tradition as well (see comment on Acts 6:6). Jesus could also heal without it if the people could believe (see Lk 7:6-9).

4:42-44. It was nearly impossible to find a place to be alone in ancient towns, with their narrow streets and sometimes (often in poorer places like Egypt) twenty people living in the common one-room houses. Most blocks in Capernaum consisted of four homes facing a common courtyard. Villages were also often close together, though one could find a place alone if one arose early enough (most people arose at dawn).

5:1-11

### Fishers of People

Like Moses' experience as a shepherd, David's as a commander and Joseph's as an administrator, the background of these \*disciples as fishermen can provide them a perspective that will help them for their new task.

5:1-2. Nets would collect things other than edible fish, thus requiring cleaning. Edible fish in the inland "Sea" of Galilee (the Lake of Gennesaret) today include varieties of carp; \*Josephus says that the lake of Galilee held several kinds of fish.

5:3. The shore of the lake functioned acoustically like an amphitheater; withdrawing a little from the crowd and addressing them from the boat thus

would have made Jesus much easier to hear.

5:4-5. Peter's obedience is exemplary; a fisherman might trust a \*rabbi's teaching on religious matters but need not do so in his own field of expertise, fishing. The fishermen had labored with a dragnet at night, which should have caught them many more fish than Jesus' instructions in 5:5. Sources suggest that fish were more easily caught at night than in the day in the lake of Galilee; they would be sold in the morning.

5:6. Jesus' multiplication of food and of creatures has \*Old Testament precedent (e.g., food-Ex 16:13; 2 Kings 4:1-7, 42-44; creatures-Ex 8:6, 17, 24; 10:13).

5:7. Because the overhead cost of equipment was high, fishermen often worked together in cooperatives; families would sometimes work together to increase their profits. Other fishing cooperatives are known from ancient Palestine, so it is not unusual for Simon and Andrew to be in business with the family of Zebedee (5:10). Men working from more than one boat could let down larger nets than those working from only one; fish could then be emptied onto the boat or the nets hauled ashore.

5:8-9. Moses, Gideon and Jeremiah were all overwhelmed by their initial calls; but Peter's excuse is especially like Isaiah's (Is 6:5) and fits Luke's emphasis (Lk 5:20, 30-32).

5:10. "Fishers of people" could allude to two Old Testament texts (Jer 16:16; Hab 1:15), transforming an image of impending judgment into one of rescue from that judgment; but Jesus is probably just transforming their vocation as fishermen, as God made Moses and David "shepherds" of his people.

5:11. Fishermen made a better-than-average income (even if they had had a bad night-5:5), so leaving their job is an act of radical commitment that they would expect to adversely affect them economically.

5:12-16

## Cleansing a Leper

See comment on Mark 1:40-45 for more details. Lepers were outcasts from society, and most nonlepers would not have wanted to touch them, even had Jewish law permitted it. The Bible had prescribed particular sacrifices if someone's leprosy were cured (Lev 14:1-32). By complying with these regulations, Jesus does nothing to violate the \*law or to offend the priests.

Teachers thought to perform miracles usually drew large followings, because many people were sick; the number of people who flocked to hot springs in Galilee that were thought to relieve ailments attests to the large numbers of people who suffered from various afflictions.

5:17-26

## Healing a Paralytic

For more details, see comment on Mark 2:1-12.

*5:17. Pharisees seem to have been located especially in Jerusalem and Judea; thus the Galileans probably consisted mainly of the other group Luke mentions, the teachers of the law. All Galilean villages would have had scribes schooled in Jewish law, who could execute legal documents and train children in the law of Moses.*

5:18-19. The average Capernaum home may have allowed only about fifty persons standing (the span of the largest excavated homes there is eighteen feet). One gained access to the roof by an outside staircase, so these men could reach it unimpeded. The roof of a single-story Palestinian home was sturdy enough to walk on but was normally made of branches and rushes laid over the roof's beams and covered with dried mud; thus one could dig through it.

Luke changes this Palestinian roof structure to the flat roof of interlocking tiles more familiar to his own readers, as preachers today change details when

retelling biblical stories to make them relevant to their hearers. For the same reason, Luke does not mention their digging through the roof. The paralytic's "bed" would have been the mat on which he always lay.

5:20-21. Judaism believed that only God could forgive sins, but most Jews allowed that some of God's representatives could speak on God's behalf. Technically, "blasphemy" involved pronouncing the divine name or perhaps inviting people to follow other gods; less technically, it had to involve at least dishonoring God. Strictly speaking, therefore, these legal scholars are mistaken in interpreting Jesus' words as blasphemy, even by their own rules.

5:22-26. Some Jewish teachers accepted miracles as verification that a teacher was truly God's representative; others did not regard miracles as sufficient proof if they disagreed with that teacher's interpretation of Scripture.

5:27-32

### Partying with Sinners

See comment on Mark 2:13-17 for more details. In the Old Testament, God instructed "sinners" in his way, i.e., the humble who knew their need (Ps 25:8-9).

5:27-28. Customs officials were employees in Herod's civil service; they made good wages and were not likely to get their jobs back once they left them, especially on such short notice.

5:29. Jesus' invitation for Levi to follow him constituted a great honor, especially for one who would have normally been excluded from religious circles. That Levi should respond by throwing a party for him is not surprising; repaying honor was an important part of social life in antiquity. Table fellowship indicated intimate relations among those who shared it, and given the nature of ancient banquets, it was natural for a well-to-do person to invite his (former) colleagues and also subordinates to a feast.

5:30. The *Pharisees (and the teachers belonging to their party)* were scrupulous about their special rules on eating and did not like to eat with less scrupulous people, especially people like tax gatherers and sinners. Most people regarded tax gatherers as collaborators with the Romans, and nationalistic religious people despised them. Because the Pharisees here attack only Jesus' table fellowship, we may be certain that Jesus and his own disciples conduct themselves properly in word, eating and drinking and so forth (e.g., they would not get drunk), whether or not all of Levi's other guests are doing the same.

5:33-39

Partying or Fasting?

See comment on Mark 2:18-22. The \*Old Testament also recognized that some practices or objects once appropriate in worship or commemoration were no longer appropriate (2 Kings 18:4; Jer 3:16).

5:33. Although the Old Testament commanded many more feasts than fasts, fasting had become a widespread Jewish practice; \*Pharisees often fasted twice a week. Although *ascetic fasting was forbidden, many people probably did fast for ascetic reasons. Fasting was an important practice to join with prayer or penitence, so it would have been unusual for disciples (prospective \*rabbis) to have avoided it altogether. A teacher was regarded as responsible for the behavior of his disciples.*

5:34-35. Wedding feasts required seven days of festivity; one was not permitted to fast or engage in other acts of mourning or difficult labor during a wedding feast. Jesus makes an analogy about the similar inappropriateness of fasting in his own time.

5:36-38. Jesus uses two familiar facts to make his point. Older clothes had already shrunk from washing. Wine

could be kept in either jars or wineskins; wineskins, unlike jars, would stretch.



Old wineskins had already been stretched to capacity by wine fermenting within them; if they were then filled with unfermented wine, it would likewise expand, and the old wineskins, already stretched to the limit, would break. Watered-down wine was drunk with meals.

5:39. Although distillation had not yet been developed and wine could achieve only a certain level of alcoholic content, aged wine was generally preferred over fresh wine that had not yet begun to ferment (a proverb, e.g., Ecclus 9:10; \*rabbis). Jesus is probably indicating why the religious people are objecting to the joy of Jesus' \*disciples: it is something new.

6:1-5

Lord of the Sabbath

See Mark 2:23-28 for more details. Some scholars have suggested that "rubbing with their hands" (v. 1) by extension constituted threshing, a forbidden category of work on the Sabbath. Although the law of Moses was especially authoritative for Jewish legal experts, the \*narratives of other parts of the *Old Testament sometimes illustrate principles of the law's spirit* taking precedence over its normal practice (e.g., 2 Chron 30:2-3).

If Jesus could demonstrate his case from Scripture, his opponents technically could not prosecute him successfully, due to the variety of Palestinian Jewish views on how the sabbath was to be observed.

6:6-11

Lawful to Do Good

See further comment on Mark 3:1-6.

6:6. The muscles and nerves of a "dried" or "withered" hand were inactive; thus the hand, smaller than usual, was incurably nonfunctional.

6:7-10. Again, Jesus does nothing to violate the \*law; although many religious teachers opposed minor cures on the sabbath, "stretching out one's hand" was not considered work, and God could answer prayer on the Sabbath.

6:11. Unintentional violations of the sabbath, or issues of disagreement about what constituted the sabbath (matters that were debated) were normally treated lightly; capital punishment (Ex 31:14; 35:2) was thought appropriate only for those who willfully rejected the sabbath. Jesus' opponents go far beyond their own teachings here.

6:12-16

Choosing the Twelve

See comment on Mark 3:13-19.

6:12. Jesus may here follow a pattern in Moses' ministry. Moses prayed on a mountainside, receiving instructions about helpers (Ex 19:24; 24:1-2; cf. 31:1-2) and successors (Num 27:15-23; cf. 20:23-29).

6:13-16. People often had a secondary name, sometimes a nickname, which may account for the slight differences among the Gospels' lists of the Twelve, as well as for the distinguishing of two Simons, two Judases and the second James in the list (these names were common in this period).

6:17-26

Blessings and Woes

See comment on Matthew 5:3-12. Blessings and woes were a common literary form, especially in the \*Old Testament and Judaism; here they may parallel the blessings and curses of the covenant given from the mountains in Deuteronomy 27-28. For the particular blessings and curses listed here, cf. perhaps Isaiah 65:13-16.

6:17-19. On this introduction to Luke's Sermon on the Plain (or "level place"), see comment on Matthew 4:23-25.

6:20. Some of Jesus' *disciples who had not been economically poor became poor to follow him (see 18:28)*. Behind Luke's "poor" and Matthew's "poor in spirit" probably lies a particular Aramaic term that means both. "The poor" had become a designation for the pious in some Jewish circles, because they were the oppressed who trusted solely in God. The piety of the poor was emphasized especially after the Roman general Pompey redistributed Jewish lands about a century before Jesus; like most other people in the ancient Mediterranean world, most Jewish people were poor. The Jewish people longed for the \*kingdom

6:21. Being "filled" (sustained) was a hoped-for blessing of the \*messianic era. Hunger struck poor families in times of famine (the situation in rural Palestine was better than that of rural Egypt but worse than that of Corinth or Italy). Weeping was a sign of mourning or repentance.

6:22-23. The Old Testament tradition that most true prophets suffered rejection was amplified further in Judaism, so Jesus' hearers would have caught his point. The separation or ostracism here might allude to being officially put out of the \*synagogue (cf. comment on Jn 9:22) but is probably meant more generally.

6:24-25. "Comfort" was a blessing of the messianic era (e.g., Is 40:1; cf. Lk 16:25). Most of Jesus' hearers were poor, but Luke's urban, GrecoRoman readership was probably better off (1:3-4); Luke pulls no punches for his own audience (cf. \*1 Enoch 96:4-5). Laughter was often associated with scorn.

6:26. Greek philosophers, who often scoffed at the opinions of the masses, sometimes complained if the multitudes spoke well of them. But Jesus' comparison with the prophets is even more appropriate; the burden of proof was always on prophets who told people what they wanted to hear (Jer 6:14; 28:8-9). Although the hearers often suspected some truth in the genuine prophets' claims (Jer 21:1-2; 37:3; 42:2; cf. 1 Kings 22:27), false prophets were usually more

popular (1 Kings 22:12-13; Jer 5:31; 23:13-14).

6:27-38

### Treat Others Mercifully

6:27. The \*Old Testament specifically commanded love of neighbor (Lev 19:18), but no one commanded love of enemies.

6:28. Although Jesus (23:34) and his followers (Acts 7:60) practiced this rule of blessing and praying for enemies, prayers for vindication by vengeance were common in the Old Testament (2 Chron 24:22; Ps 137:7-9; Jer 15:15; cf. Rev 6:10) and in ancient execration (magical curse) texts.

6:29. The blow on the right cheek was the most grievous insult in the ancient Near East. The clothing in the verse refers to the outer and inner cloak, respectively; the poorest of people (like the average peasant in Egypt) might have only one of each; thus here Jesus refers, perhaps in \*hyperbolic images, to absolute nonresistance on one's own behalf.

6:30. Here Jesus may allude to beggars, quite common in the ancient East, and poorer people seeking loans. In Jewish Palestine beggars were usually only those in genuine need, and most were unable to work; farmers generally sought loans to plant crops. Jewish society emphasized both charity and responsibility.

6:31. In its negative form ("Do not do

to others what you do not want them to do to you"), this was a common ethical saying in the ancient world.

6:32-33. Ideas like loving enemies and lending without hoping to receive again were unheard of, although many \*Pharisees advocated peace with the Roman state (at least, tolerating enemies in some sense).

6:34-35. In the Roman world, interest rates sometimes ran as high as 48 percent,

but the \*Old Testament forbade usury, or charging interest. Because many Jewish creditors feared that they would lose their investment if they lent too near the seventh year (when the \*law required cancellation of all debts), they stopped lending then, hurting the small farmers who needed to borrow for planting. Jewish teachers thus found a way to circumvent this law so the poor could borrow so long as they repaid. Jesus argues that this practice should not be necessary; those with resources should help those without, whether or not they would lose money by doing so.

Biblical laws about lending to the poor before the year of release (Deut 15:9; every seventh year debts were forgiven; cf. Lev 25) support Jesus' principle here, but Jesus goes even farther in emphasizing unselfish giving. Although the law limited selfishness, Jesus looks to the heart of the law and advocates sacrifice for one's neighbor. A good man's "sons" were expected to exemplify their father's character; thus God's children should act like him.

6:36. That human mercy should reflect God's mercy became a common Jewish saying (e.g., the \*Letter of Aristeas 208; *rabbis*). *"Merciful" may reflect the same Aramaic word translated "perfect" in Matthew 5:48.*

6:37. "Judge," "condemn" and "pardon" are all the language of the day of judgment, prefigured in God's current reckonings with his people (e.g., on the Day of Atonement).

6:38. The image here is of a measuring container into which as much grain as possible is packed; it is then shaken to allow the grain to settle, and more is poured in till the container overflows. Pouring it "into the lap" refers to the fold in the garment used as a pocket or pouch. Because Jewish people sometimes used "they" as a way of avoiding God's name, here "they will pour" (NASB) may mean that God will do it; or the idea may be that God will repay a person through others. The Old Testament often speaks of God judging people according to their ways (e.g., Is 65:7). Proverbs and other texts speak of his blessings toward the generous (e.g., Deut 15:10; Prov 19:17; 22:9; 28:8).

6:39-45

### True and False Teachers

6:39. Others also used this proverbial image about the blind. The point here is that one must learn the right way (6:40) and receive correction before seeking to teach others (6:41).

6:40. In ancient Judaism, the purpose of a *disciple's training* was to make him a *competent teacher*, or *rabbi*, in his own right. By definition, a disciple did not have more knowledge about the law than his teacher.

6:41-42. Here Jesus uses \*hyperbole, and the exaggeration would probably draw laughter-and thus attention-from Jesus' hearers.

6:43-45. See 3:9. Figs and grapes were often cultivated together and were two of the most common agricultural products in Palestine, often linked in Old Testament texts. Thorns and thistles were always troublesome to farmers (cf., e.g., Gen 3:18; also Is 5:2, 4 \*LXX).

6:46-49

### Right and Wrong Foundations

Jesus again uses the image of the day of judgment. The idea of ultimately being judged for hearing but not obeying was familiar (Ezek 33:32-33). But no Jewish teacher apart from Jesus claimed so much authority for his own words; such authority was reserved for the \*law itself.

Some commentators have suggested that "digging deep" (v. 48) implies that he built a cellar; although cellars were not uncommon in Palestinian houses, they were used more often in Greek architecture; cf. comment on 5:19.

7:1-10

## A Pagan's Amazing Faith

7:1-2. The nearest Roman legion was stationed in Syria, but many troops were also stationed at Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast; perhaps smaller groups were stationed or settled (after retirement?) at various points in Palestine. Centurions commanded a "century" (i.e., 100), which in practice consisted of sixty to eighty troops. Centurions were the backbone of the Roman army, in charge of discipline.

7:3-5. Non-Jews who feared God and donated substantial sums to the Jewish community were well respected. Centurions' salaries were much higher than those of their troops, but for this centurion to have built the local \*synagogue represented a great financial sacrifice. The main point lies in the contrasting views of worthiness (7:4, 6).

7:6. The centurion was not a full convert to Judaism and thus retained some of his uncleanness as a \*Gentile, especially in regard to the food in his home. To invite a Jewish teacher into such a home would have been offensive under normal circumstances, but in this case the community's elders want to make an exception (7:3).

7:7. During their twenty or so years of service in the Roman army, soldiers were not permitted to marry. Many had illegal local concubines, an arrangement that the army overlooked and the concubines found profitable. But centurions, who could be moved around more frequently, would be less likely than ordinary soldiers to have such relationships; they often married only after retirement. By ancient definitions, however, a household could include servants, and household servants and masters sometimes grew very close-especially if they made up the entire family unit.

7:8. The centurion demonstrates that he understands the principle of authority that Jesus exercises. Roman soldiers were very disciplined and except in rare times of mutiny followed orders carefully.

7:9. ""Gentiles" were generally synonymous with pagans, with no faith in Israel's God.

7:10. Some Jewish stories circulated about miracle workers, but reports of long-distance healings were rare and were viewed as more extraordinary than other miracles. Thus people would view this healing as especially miraculous.

7:11-17

### Interrupting a Funeral

Interrupting a funeral was a blatant breach of Jewish law and custom; touching the bier exposed Jesus to a day's uncleanness (Num 19:21-22); touching the corpse exposed him to a week's uncleanness (cf. Num 5:2-3; 19:11-20). But in Jesus' case, the influence goes in the other direction.

7:11-12. People customarily dropped whatever they were doing and joined in a funeral procession when it passed by. For a widow's only son to die be

fore she did was considered extremely tragic; it also left her dependent on public charity for support unless she had other relatives of means.

7:13. According to custom the bereaved mother would walk in front of the bier, so Jesus would meet her first. Philosophers often tried to console the bereaved by saying, "Do not grieve, for it will do no good." Jesus' approach is entirely different: he removes the cause of bereavement (1 Kings 17:17-24).

7:14. By touching even the bier, a stretcher on which the body was borne (Jewish custom did not use a closed coffin), Jesus would contract corpseuncleanness, the severest form of ritual impurity in Judaism. Only those closest to the deceased were expected to expose themselves to this impurity. The young man had not been dead long, because it was necessary to wash, anoint, wrap, mourn over and then bury the body as quickly as possible to avoid the stench of decomposition.



7:15-17. God had used several earlier prophets (Elijah and Elisha) to resuscitate the dead, but it was a rare miracle. The few pagan stories of resuscitations, especially from the third century A.D. (from Philostratus and \*Apuleius), are later and not validated by eyewitnesses as the Gospel accounts are; they also often exhibit features missing here, such as reports from the underworld.

7:18-23

### Encouraging John

7:18-20. Perhaps John is troubled that Jesus exposes himself to potential ritual uncleanness (e.g., with \*Gentiles and corpses) for the sake of healings. Then again, perhaps Jesus' words simply do not fit John's picture of the coming one he had proclaimed in 3:15-17, although John has no doubt that Jesus is at least a prophet who will tell him the truth.

7:21-23. Jesus' answer makes use of language from Isaiah 35:5; these healings are signs of the \*messianic era. Some teachers compared the blind, lame and lepers to the dead because they had no hope of recovery.

7:24-35

### Vindicating John

John's and Jesus' styles of ministry differ; but both are valid, and the religious community rejects both equally. 7:24. Reeds were fragile (Is 42:3), so a "reed shaken by the wind" would be notoriously weak (1 Kings 14:15) and undependable (2 Kings 18:21; Ezek 29:6).

7:25-26. Prophets were rarely well-to-do, and in times of national wickedness they were forced to operate outside societal boundaries. Now imprisoned by Herod Antipas, John is no court prophet who simply tells powerful people what they want to hear.

7:27. By fulfilling Isaiah 40:3, John is more than just any herald of God; he is

the direct announcer of the Lord, who will act in a decisively new way by leading his people in a new exodus. (The new exodus, a return from captivity, is a theme in Isaiah.)

7:28. This comparison elevates Jesus' *disciples rather than demeans John*. *One may compare the early* rabbinic saying that Johanan ben Zakkai, one of the most respected scholars of the first century, was the "least" of \*Hillel's eighty disciples; this saying was not meant to diminish Johanan's status but to increase that of his contemporaries and thus that of his teacher.

7:29-30. Because the once-for-all kind of \*baptism was essentially reserved for pagans converting to Judaism, the religious people are unwilling to accept it for themselves. They ques

tioned the religious commitment of less observant Jews, especially the `tax gatherers.

7:31-32. The marketplace was the most public part of town. Spoiled children having make-believe weddings and funerals (one later game was called "bury the grasshopper") represent Jesus' and John's dissatisfied opponents; unhappy with other children who would not play either game, they are upset no matter what.

7:33-34. John the Baptist fits the role of an `ascetic prophet, like Elijah (cf. 1:14-15 for John's abstention from wine); Jesus follows a model more like David, but both are proper in their place. Demon possession (v. 33) was associated with madness. "Glutton and drunkard" (v. 34) was a capital charge (Deut 21:20), hence a serious accusation.

7:35. Jewish tradition often personified Wisdom as divine, usually as a holy woman exhorting the righteous to follow her; here she is the mother of the righteous.

7:36-50

## The Pharisee and the Loose Woman

Jesus violated social taboos to reach out to those marginalized not only racially (7:1-10), economically (7:11-17) and religiously (7:24-35) but also morally (7:36-50). Since the classical Greek period, banquets had become a setting for moral instruction.

7:36. It was considered virtuous to invite a teacher over for dinner, especially if the teacher were from out of town or had just taught at the 'synagogue. That they are "reclining" rather than sitting indicates that they are using couches rather than chairs and that this is a banquet, perhaps in honor of the famous guest teacher.

7:37. That this woman is a "sinner" may imply that she is a prostitute (surely a Jewish one-cf. Psalms of Solomon 2:11-though many prostitutes in Palestine were non-Jews), or at least a woman known to be morally loose and probably seeking something disreputable. If the \*Pharisee is well-to-do, he may have a servant as a porter to check visitors at the door; but religious people often opened their homes for the poor, and the woman manages to get in. In banquets where uninvited people could enter, they were to remain quiet and away from the couches, observing the discussions of host and guests. Alabaster was considered the most appropriate container for perfume.

7:38. Jewish people did not consider perfume sinful, but because this woman is a "sinner" and uses the perfume as a tool of her trade, Jesus' acceptance of the gift of perfuming would offend religious sensitivities. That she stands "behind him" and anoints his feet instead of his head has to do with the posture of guests reclining on the couches; he would have had his left arm on the table and his feet away from the table toward the wall.

7:39. Adult women who were religious were expected to be married and thus would have their heads covered; any woman with her hair exposed to public view would be considered promiscuous. That this woman wipes Jesus' feet with

her hair would thus indicate not only her humility but also her marginal religious status, even had Jesus not been a prophet and had she not been known in the community's gossip. That the host allowed that Jesus might be a prophet at all suggests great respect, because Jewish people generally believed that prophets ceased after the \*Old Testament period.

7:40-42. Some scholars have argued

that \*Aramaic lacks a term for gratitude, hence "Which will love him more?" rather than, as we might expect, "Which will be more grateful?" Although debts were to be forgiven in the seventh year, experts in the law had found a way to get around that requirement. Those who could not pay could be imprisoned, temporarily enslaved or have certain goods confiscated; but this creditor goes beyond the letter of the law and extends mercy.

7:43-46. Common hospitality included providing water for the feet (though well-to-do householders left the washing to servants); the oft-invoked example of Abraham's hospitality (Gen 18:4) would render the host without excuse. Oil for the dry skin on one's head would also be a thoughtful act. A kiss was an affectionate or respectful form of greeting. Jesus faces her finally in verse 44; cf. comment on 7:38.

7:47-50. Although the priests could pronounce God's forgiveness after a sin offering, Jesus pronounces forgiveness without the clear restitution of a sacrifice to God in the temple. This pronouncement contradicted \*Pharisaic ethics, and most of early Judaism would have seen it at best as marginal behavior. (One story in the \*Dead Sea Scrolls is a rare exception to pronouncing forgiveness and accompanies an exorcism, but it does not seem to reflect general Jewish practice.)

8:1-3

The Women Disciples

For the form of support mentioned here, cf. 2 Kings 4:42. Women sometimes served as \*patrons, or supporters, of religious teachers or associations in the ancient Mediterranean. (Men outnumbered them more than ten to one, however, because men had more of the economic resources.) But for these women to travel with the group would have been viewed as scandalous. Adult coeducation was unheard of, and that these women are learning Jesus' teaching as closely as his male \*disciples would surely bother some outsiders as well. Upper-class families had more mobility, but commoners would still talk, as they did when other teachers (such as Greek philosophers) were accused of having women among their followers.

8:4-15

The Sower, the Seed and the Soils

See comment on Mark 4:3-20 for more details.

8:5-7. Seed was often sown before the ground was plowed; it thus commonly befell any of the fates reported here.

8:8. Thirtyfold, sixtyfold and a hundredfold are tremendously good harvests from Galilean soil.

8:9-10. Jewish teachers normally used \*parables to illustrate and explain points, not to conceal them. But if one told stories without stating the point they were meant to illustrate, as Jesus does here, only those who listen most astutely and start with insiders' knowledge could figure out one's point. Greek teachers like \*Plato would leave some points obscure to keep them from outsiders; Jewish teachers would sometimes do the same. Thus only those who were serious enough to persevere would understand.

8:11-15. Many of Jesus' hearers would be farmers who could relate well to these agricultural images; although Galilee (which was full of towns) was more urban than much of the empire, the tenant farmers who made up a large portion of the

Roman Empire were also common in rural Galilee.

8:16-18

#### Accountability for the Word

8:16. Jesus is a master of the graphic illustrations in which Jewish teachers sought to excel: invisible light is pointless, and God wants people to receive the light of his Word. The lamps Jesus mentions were small clay lamps that had to be set on a stand to shed much light in a room; anything placed over the lamp would have extinguished it. 8:17-18. If the crowds do not obey what light they receive, they will never receive more. The language of "measuring" is the language of weighing food and other commodities at the market; it was sometimes used for God measuring out just judgments in the final day.

8:19-21

#### Jesus' True Family

Thinking of one's coreligionists as brothers and sisters was common; respecting older persons as mothers or fathers was also widespread. But allowing ties in the religious community to take precedence even over family ties was unheard-of in Judaism, except when a pagan converted to Judaism and regarded his new family as more important than his old one.

8:22-25

#### Master of Winds and Sea

Some ancient stories told of powerful individuals able to subdue even the forces of nature, but these were nearly always gods or, less commonly, heroes of the distant past. In Jewish tradition, the one who ruled the winds and sea was God himself (Ps 107:29), though a few pious men were reputed to be able to persuade him to send rain. The surprise of the \*disciples at Jesus' power is thus easy to understand.

Storms often rose suddenly on the lake called the Sea of Galilee; these fishermen had usually stayed closer to Capernaum and are unprepared for a squall this far from shore. The only place one could sleep in a small fishing boat with water pouring in from a storm would be on the elevated stern, where one could use the wooden or leather-covered helmsman's seat, or a pillow sometimes kept under that seat, as a cushion to rest one's head.

8:26-39

### Subduing the Demonic Legion

See further comment on Mark 5:1-20.

8:26. Matthew's "Gadara" (Mt 8:28), eight miles from the lake, and Gerasa, about thirty miles from the lake, were in the same general region, the area of the Decapolis, a predominantly non-Jewish area.

8:27. Jewish people considered tombs unclean and a popular haunt for unclean spirits. Many ancient cultures brought offerings for the dead, which might also appeal to these demons.

8:28. In ancient magic, one could try to gain control over a spirit by naming it. The attempt at magical self-protection is powerless against Jesus.

8:29. The strength that this demoniac displays is reported in many cases of demon possession in various cultures today as well.

8:30-31. A legion included four to six thousand troops. This man is therefore hosting a large number of demons. According to Jewish tradition, many demons were imprisoned in the atmosphere or, as here, under the earth (in the "abyss").

8:32. Only \*Gentiles or nonobservant Jews considered "apostates" raised pigs, which Jewish readers would consider among the most unclean animals and thus rightful hosts for evil spirits. Ancient exorcists found that demons sometimes

asked for concessions if the pressure for them to evacuate their host became too great.

8:33. Jewish tradition often taught that demons could die, so in the absence of evidence to the contrary, many ancient readers would assume that the demons had been destroyed (or at least disabled) with their hosts.

8:34-37. The opposition to Jesus arises from both economic causes-the loss of a large herd of swine-and certain Greek conceptions of dangerous wonderworking magicians, whom most people feared.

8:38-39. Because his \*messiahship would be misunderstood, Jesus kept it a secret in predominantly Jewish areas. In the predominantly non-Jewish Decapolis, however, where people would wrongly perceive him as a magician, he urges his new disciple to spread the word about what God had done, thereby correcting the people's misunderstanding.

8:40-56

Death and the Flow of Blood

See further comment on Mark 5:21-43.

8:40-41. "Rulers of the \*synagogue" were the chief officials in synagogues and were prominent members of their communities.

8:42. The official's daughter had been a minor until that year and on account of both her age and her gender had virtually no social status, quite in contrast to her prominent father (vv. 40-41).

8:43. This woman's sickness was reckoned as if she had a menstrual period all month long; it made her continually unclean under the \*law (Lev 15:19-33)-a social problem on top of the physical one. Just as Jewish interpreters linked texts by a common word, Luke's source may use "twelve years" to emphasize the relatedness of these stories (vv. 42-43).



8:44-45. If she touched anyone or anyone's clothes, she rendered that person ceremonially unclean for the rest of the day (cf. Lev 15:26-27). She therefore should not have even been in this heavy crowd. Many teachers avoided touching women altogether, lest they become accidentally contaminated. Thus this woman could not touch or be touched, was probably now divorced or had never married, and was marginal to the rest of Jewish society.

8:46-48. Jewish people generally believed that only teachers closest to God had supernatural knowledge. Jesus uses his supernatural knowledge to identify with the woman who had touched him-even though in the eyes of the public this would mean that he had contracted ritual uncleanness. Lest anyone be permitted to think that the healing had been accomplished by typical pagan magic, operating without Jesus' knowledge, he declares that it happened in response to "faith" (v. 48).

8:49. Once an event had occurred, it was too late to pray for its reversal. For example, the \*rabbis claimed that it was too late for one hearing a funeral procession to pray that it was not for a relative.

8:50-56. Several professional mourners were required at the funeral of even the poorest person; the funeral for a member of a prominent family like this one would have many mourners. Because bodies decomposed rapidly in Palestine, mourners had to be assembled as quickly as possible, and they had gathered before word even reached Jairus that his daughter had died.

9:1-6

Authorizing the Twelve

9:1-2. Under Jewish law, a sender could authorize messengers to act with his full legal authority to the extent of the commission given them.

9:3. Jesus instructs the \*disciples to travel light, like some other groups: (1) peasants, who often had only one cloak; (2) traveling philosophers called \*Cynics; (3) some prophets, like Elijah and John the Baptist. They are to be totally committed to their mission, not tied down with worldly concerns. The "bag" would have been used for begging (as the Cynics used it).

9:4. Jewish travelers depended on hospitality, which fellow Jews customarily extended to them.

9:5-6. "Shaking the dust off" essentially means treating these Jewish cities as if they are unclean, pagan cities, no defiling dust of which a pious Jew would want to bring into the Holy Land. A place like the temple was so holy that those entering would (at least in pious theory) not want the dust of the rest of Israel on their feet.

9:7-9

John Returned?

Although a few Jews influenced by \*Plato and other sources accepted reincarnation, most Palestinian Jews believed in bodily *resurrection*. *The idea here is probably like the temporary resuscitations Elijah and Elisha performed in the Old Testament* (1 Kings 17:22; 2 Kings 4:34-35) rather than the permanent resurrection anticipated at the end of the age (Dan 12:2). Herod the tetrarch was a son of Herod the Great; the latter had been king when Jesus was born.

9:10-17

Mass Feeding

9:10-12. The Galilean countryside was full of villages, but Jesus had withdrawn his followers some distance from the nearest villages. Even the larger towns would have under three thousand inhabitants; feeding the crowd in the villages

would have been difficult (9:12). (If they were beyond Bethsaida in \*Gentile territory, hospitality would be even harder to find.)

9:13. It would have taken two hundred days of an average person's wages (around seven months of hard labor) to feed the great multitude that had assembled.

9:14. The people are organized in ranks like armies. The purpose is to facilitate the distribution of food, but some people in the crowd may have thought that Jesus was organizing them as ranks for a \*messianic army (cf. Jn 6:15).

9:15. They may have "sat" instead of "reclined"; people generally reclined at banquets and sat for regular meals. 9:16. It was customary to begin a meal by giving thanks for the bread and then dividing it. People often prayed "looking toward heaven" (1 Kings 8:22, 54; Jn 17:1).

9:17. The multiplication of food is reminiscent of the miracle of God supplying manna for Israel in the wilderness, and especially of Elisha multiplying food (2 Kings 4:42-44, where some was also left over).

9:18-27

### The Cost of Following the Real Messiah

9:18-19. Because many Palestinian Jews believed that prophets in the \*Old Testament sense had ceased, ranking Jesus among the prophets would have been radical-but it was not radical enough to grasp his true identity.

9:20-21. There were many different views of the \*Messiah (or messiahs) in Jesus' time, but they all revolved around a deliverance on earth and an earthly kingdom.

9:22. The \*New Testament writers took some Old Testament texts as re

ferring to the Messiah's suffering, but most Jewish people in the first century did

not recognize these texts as referring to the Messiah, who was to reign as king. Most Jewish people believed in the \*resurrection of all the righteous dead at the end of the age and the inauguration of a \*kingdom under God's appointed ruler afterward.

9:23-25. The cross was an instrument of violent and painful execution. To "take the cross" was to carry the horizontal beam (the patibulum) of the cross out to the site of execution, usually past a jeering mob. In rhetorically strong terms, Jesus describes what all true \*disciples must be ready for: if they follow him, they must be ready to face literal scorn on the road to eventual martyrdom, for they must follow to the cross. From the moment of faith believers must count their lives forfeit for the \*kingdom.

9:26. "\*Son of Man" here may refer to Daniel 7:13-14. The *kingdom for which the disciples are hoping* will ultimately come; but it will be preceded by a period of great suffering and wickedness. Many others in Jesus' day taught that great suffering and sin would precede the kingdom; but Peter and his colleagues preferred the easier view that the kingdom would come without suffering (perhaps, as some believed, by a supernatural, costless triumph).

9:27. The future glory of the preceding verses is anticipated by way of a revelation of the glory they would experience in 9:32-35. Because the future *Messiah had already come, the glory of his future kingdom* is also already present.

9:28-36

### A Taste of Future Glory

God had revealed his glory to Moses on Mount Sinai, and Moses had come down from the mountain reflecting God's glory (Ex 32-34).

9:28. God revealed his glory to Moses on a mountain (see above).

9:29. Jewish literature often described angels and other heavenly beings as being clothed in white. Luke omits Mark's "transfigured" because of the pagan connotations this term could have to his readers (Greek gods and magicians transformed themselves into other forms, though Mark, like Luke, was alluding to Moses, not to magicians).

9:30. Elijah apparently never died (2 Kings 2:11; Mal 4:5; Jewish tradition); Moses was buried by God himself (Deut 34:6), and some (unbiblical) Jewish traditions even claimed that Moses was still alive (cf. comment on Rev 11:6). Both these figures were expected to return in some sense before the time of the end.

9:31. Jesus' departure here is literally his "exodus." Although this term was a natural way to describe death (Wisdom of Solomon 7:6), it may represent an allusion to Israel's future salvation, which the prophets and later Jews often viewed as a new exodus.

9:32-33. Peter's suggestion of erecting shelters on the mountain may allude to Israel's tabernacles in the wilderness, by which the Israelites recognized God's presence among them in Moses' day.

9:34-36. "Hear him" may refer to Deuteronomy 18:15, where the Israelites were warned to heed the "prophet like Moses," the new Moses who would come.

9:37-43a

Delivering a Demoniac

9:37-38. An only son was extremely important to a father in this culture, for social, economic (support in old age) and hereditary reasons (including the passing on of one's ancestral line).

9:39. The possessed person's lack of

control over his own motor responses parallels examples of spirit possession in many cultures through history and is attested in anthropological studies of spirit possession today. Greek medical texts mention "foam" in connection with epileptic seizures, the symptoms of which are in this case (but not always Mt 4:24) caused by demonic possession.

9:40-41. Jesus' response presupposes that he expected his \*disciples to have enough faith to work miracles as he did. Some ancient Jewish teachers were seen as miracle workers, but not often did they expect their disciples to be able to do miracles also.

9:42-43a. Exorcists normally tried to subdue demons by incantations invoking higher spirits, or by using smelly roots or pain-compliance techniques. Jesus here uses only his command, thereby showing his great authority.

9:43b-50

### Qualifying Misconceptions of Glory

9:43b-45. The glory on the mountain and Jesus' power over demons would confirm the \*disciples' \*messianic suspicions (9:20), so Jesus needs to reemphasize his definition of the messianic mission in contrast to theirs (see 9:22).

9:46-48. Status was a preeminent concern in ancient society; children had none. But Jesus declares that in God's sight they are like messengers in Jewish custom, who bore the full authorization of the one they represented (see comment on 9:1-2), so they did not need worldly status. Representatives of someone who had great authority exercised more authority than others who acted on their own.

9:49-50. Ancient exorcists often invoked more powerful spirits to drive out lesser ones. If this exorcist is genuinely effective (contrast Acts 19:15-16), he is probably on their side.

9:51-56

### Jerusalem via Samaria

9:51. This is a turning point in the plot movement, as in Acts 19:21. Like modern writers, skilled ancient writers gave signals of plot movement. "Setting one's face" normally implied resolute determination, such as a prophet would display (cf. Ezek 21:2).

9:52. Galilean pilgrims to the Passover feast in Jerusalem often took the short route through Samaria, although some took a longer route around it. But this verse suggests that Jesus sought accommodations there, which would have offended many pious \*Pharisees and most Jewish nationalists.

9:53. Even before John Hyrcanus, a Jewish king, had destroyed the \*Samaritan temple in the second century B.C., Samaritans and Jews had detested one another's holy sites. Samaritans later tried to defile the Jerusalem temple. They were also known to heckle pilgrims to Jerusalem, a practice that occasionally led to violence.

9:54. James and John want to call down fire from heaven as Elijah had done on the altar on Mount Carmel and when two companies of troops came against him (1 Kings 18:38; 2 Kings 1:10, 12). Elijah did this under much severer circumstances than Jesus faces here; all three cases were life-threatening, and his opponents at Carmel had been responsible for the martyrdom of most of his disciples.

9:55-56. Ancient Jewish readers would probably view Jesus' merciful restraint as pious (1 Sam 11:13; 2 Sam 19:22), no matter how much they hated the \*Samaritans.

9:57-62

### True Discipleship

9:57-58. \*Disciples usually sought out their own teachers. Some radical

philosophers who eschewed possessions sought to repulse prospective disciples with enormous demands, for the purpose of testing them and acquiring the most worthy. Many Palestinian Jews were poor, but few were homeless; Jesus had given up even home to travel and is completely dependent on the hospitality and support of others.

9:59-60. Family members would not be outside talking with \*rabbis during the mourning period, the week immediately following the death. The initial burial took place shortly after a person's decease, and would have already occurred by the time this man would be speaking with Jesus. But a year after the first burial, after the flesh had rotted off the bones, the son would return to rebury the bones in a special box in a slot in the tomb wall. Thus the son here could be asking for as much as a year's delay.

One of an eldest son's most important responsibilities was his father's burial. Jesus' demand that the son place Jesus above this responsibility would thus sound like heresy: in Jewish tradition, honoring father and mother was one of the greatest commandments, and to follow Jesus in such a radical way would seem to break this commandment.

9:61-62. One needed to keep one's eyes on the path of the plow to keep its furrow from becoming crooked. The hand-held plow was light and wooden and often had an iron point.

When Elijah found Elisha plowing, he called him to follow but allowed him first to bid farewell to his family (1 Kings 19:19-21). Jesus' call here is more radical than that of a radical prophet.

10:1-16

Authorizing the Seventy(-two)



10:1. If Jesus chose twelve *disciples to represent the twelve tribes of Israel, he may have chosen the number of this larger group to represent the seventy (sometimes seventy-two) nations of Jewish tradition, prefiguring the mission to the Gentiles.* (Some Greek manuscripts here read seventy, others read seventy-two.) Cf. also the seventy prophetically endowed elders of Numbers 11:24-25, plus Eldad and Medad (Num 11:26).

Heralds were generally sent "two by two." The term for "send" suggests that these are \*apostles just as the Twelve are (see comment on 9:1-2; cf. 1 Cor 15:5-7).

10:2. A \*rabbi of the late first to early second century made a similar statement to Jesus' here, referring to training people in the \*law; the urgency of harvesting while the fields are ripe was a natural image to first-century farmers.

10:3. Jewish people sometimes viewed themselves (Israel) as sheep among wolves (the \*Gentiles). The image of a lamb among wolves was proverbial for defenselessness.

10:4. These apostles are to travel light, like some other groups; cf. comment on 9:3. \*Essenes reportedly received such hospitality from fellow Essenes in various cities that they did not need to take provisions when they traveled. Greeting no one on the way indicates the urgency of their prophetic mission representing God and not themselves (cf. 1 Kings 13:9-10; 2 Kings 4:29; 9:3); it was offensive to withhold greetings, and pious people tried to be the first to greet an approaching person. (Jewish teachers agreed, however, that one should not interrupt religious duties like prayer in order to greet someone.)

10:5-9. Hospitality to travelers was a crucial virtue of Mediterranean antiquity, especially in Judaism. To whom and under what circumstances greetings should be given were important issues of social protocol, because the

greeting, "Peace," was a blessing meant to communicate peace. Jesus cuts

through such protocol with new directives.

10:10-11. Pious Jewish people returning to holy ground would not want so much as the dust of pagan territory clinging to their sandals.

10:12. Both the biblical prophets and subsequent Jewish tradition set forth Sodom as the epitome of sinfulness (e.g., Deut 32:32; Is 1:9; 3:9; 13:19; Jer 23:14; 50:40; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46; Amos 4:11; Zeph 2:9). The particular sin that Jesus mentions here is probably rejection of God's messengers, albeit lesser ones than Jesus (cf. Gen 19). 10:13. Jewish people thought of Tyre and Sidon as purely pagan cities (cf. 1 Kings 16:31), but those who were exposed to the truth had been known to repent (1 Kings 17:9-24). "Sackcloth and ashes" were characteristic of mourning, which sometimes expressed \*repentance.

10:14. According to some Jewish stories about the time of the end ("the day of judgment," as it was often called), the righteous among the nations would testify against the rest of their people, making it clear that no one had any excuse to reject the truth about God.

10:15. Jewish literature often described judgment in terms similar to those Jesus uses here (Is 5:14; \*Jubilees 24:31), especially against a ruler who exalted himself as a deity (e.g., the reference to the Babylonian king's death in Is 14:14-15).

10:16. See comment on 9:48.

10:17-24

The Real Cause for joy

10:17. Exorcists usually had to employ various incantations to persuade demons to leave; thus the \*disciples are amazed at the immediate efficacy of Jesus' name.

10:18. Although the texts often cited today as describing \*Satan's fall (Is 14;

Ezek 28) refer contextually only to kings who thought they were gods, much of Jewish tradition believed that angels had fallen (based especially on Gen 6:1-3).

But the context and the imperfect tense of the Greek verb ("I was watching") may suggest that something altogether different is in view here: the self-proclaimed ruler of this age (Lk 4:6) retreating from his position before Jesus' representatives. (One might compare, e.g., the Jewish tradition that the guardian angel of Egypt fell into the sea when God smote the Egyptians for Israel; the image of falling from heaven is usually not literal, e.g., Lam 2:1.)

10:19. The protection Jesus promises is similar to that which God had sometimes promised in the \*Old Testament (cf. Deut 8:15; Ps 91:13; for scorpions as a metaphor for human obstacles to one's call, see Ezek 2:6). Here serpents, sometimes associated with \*Satan, demons or magic, probably represent Satan's hosts.

10:20. The book containing the name of the righteous in heaven was a common image in Jewish literature (e.g., \*Jubilees; \*1 Enoch), with ample Old Testament precedent (Ex 32:32; Is 4:3; Dan 12:1; Mal 3:16; perhaps Ps 56:8; 139:16; Jer 17:3).

10:21. Jesus' prayer here might offend \*scribes, who had worked long and hard to study the \*law.

10:22. Jewish texts did speak of unique mediators of revelation (e.g., Moses), but in this period the role here ascribed to the Son as the sole revealer of the Father and as the content of the Father's revelation is held in Jewish texts only by Wisdom, personified as a divine power second only to God.

10:23-24. Some Jewish texts describe how the righteous in the Old Testa

ment longed to see the era of \*messianic redemption and a fuller revelation of God. Making a statement about someone (here, Jesus) by blessing someone else (here, those who saw him) was an accepted \*rhetorical technique of the day.

10:25-37

### Loving One's Neighbor

10:25. The lawyer's question about inheriting \*eternal life was a common Jewish theological question, and legal and other challenges to \*rabbis were common in ancient rabbinic debate.

10:26. Teachers often responded to questions with counterquestions. "How do you read?" was a fairly standard rabbinic question.

10:27. The legal expert offers the answers sometimes given by Jewish teachers (and by Jesus; see Mk 12:29-31), citing Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

10:28. Some texts in the \*law promised life for those who kept the law. This "life" meant long life on the land the Lord had given them, but many later Jewish interpreters read it as a promise of *eternal life*. *Jesus applies the principle to eternal life as well (cf. v. 25). "You have answered rightly" serves aptly as a prelude to a parable's application, driving the point home in the respondent's own case (4 Ezra 4:20; cf. 2 Sam 12:7; 1 Kings 20:40-42).*

10:29. Jewish teachers usually used "neighbor" to mean "fellow Israelite." Leviticus 19:18 clearly means "fellow Israelite" in the immediate context, but the less immediate context applies the principle also to any non-Israelite in the land (19:34).

10:30. Like most \*parables, this story has one main point that answers the interlocutor's question; the details are part of the story and are not meant to be allegorized. Jericho was lower in elevation than Jerusalem; hence one would "go down" there. Robbers were common along the road and would especially attack a person traveling alone. Many people did not have extra clothes, which were thus a valuable item to steal.

10:31. Priests were supposed to avoid especially impurity from a corpse;

\*Pharisees thought one would contract it if even one's shadow touched the corpse. Like the man who had been robbed, the priest was "going down" (v. 31), hence he was heading from Jerusalem and did not have to worry about being unable to perform duties in the temple. But rules were rules; although the rule of mercy would take precedence if the man were clearly alive, the man looked as if he might be dead (v. 30), and the priest did not wish to take the chance. The task was better left to a Levite or ordinary Israelite. Jesus' criticism of the priesthood here is milder than that of the \*Essenes and often that of the prophets (Hos 6:9).

10:32. Rules for Levites were not as strict as for priests, but the Levite also wished to avoid defilement.

10:33. Jews and \*Samaritans traditionally had no love for each other; although violence was the exception rather than the rule, the literature of each betrays an attitude of hostility toward the other. Jesus' illustration would offend Jewish listeners, striking at the heart of their patriotism, which was religiously justified.

10:34-35. Oil was used medicinally and for washing wounds; wine was also apparently used to disinfect wounds. Jewish people commonly avoided Gentile, and probably Samaritan, oil. "I will repay" was a standard formula guaranteeing a debt.

10:36-37. Jesus' questioner would hate Samaritans, yet he is forced to follow the moral example of a Samaritan in

Jesus' story. This parable forced him to answer his own question, "Who is my neighbor?" (10:29).

10:38-42

### The Woman Disciple

This passage challenges the role designations for women in the first century; the role of \*disciple and future minister of Jesus' message is more critical than that

of homemaker and hostess, and is also open to women.

10:38. Being one of Jesus' hostesses would be a lot of work for Martha; he had brought many disciples to feed. Martha's act may fall short of Mary's in this narrative, but her labor represents the best display of devotion she knows how to offer.

10:39. People normally sat on chairs or, at banquets, reclined on couches; but disciples sat at the feet of their teachers. Serious disciples were preparing to be teachers-a role not permitted to women. (The one notable exception in the second century was a learned \*rabbi's daughter who had married another learned rabbi; but most rabbis rejected her opinions.) Mary's posture and eagerness to absorb Jesus' teaching at the expense of a more traditional womanly role (10:40) would have shocked most Jewish men.

10:40-42. Despite the cultural importance of hospitality (the food preparation for guests was normally incumbent on the matron of the house), Mary's role as a \*disciple of Jesus is more important than anything else she could do.

11:1-13

### Jesus on Prayer

11:1. \*Disciples commonly asked their teachers for instruction, and some were known to have asked the proper blessings or prayers for different occasions. Yet it was considered rude and impious to interrupt someone's praying; thus here the disciples wait till Jesus finishes his own prayers before they ask. Different teachers might teach special forms of prayers to their own groups of disciples, although all Palestinian Jews had some prayers in common, except for radical sectarians like the \*Essenes.

11:2. Jewish people commonly addressed God as "Our heavenly Father" when they prayed, although such intimate titles as "Abba" (Papa) were rare (see comment on Mk 14:36). One standard Jewish prayer of the day proclaimed,

"Exalted and hallowed be your... name... and may your kingdom come speedily and soon."

God's name would be "hallowed," or "sanctified," "shown holy," in the time of the end, when his \*kingdom would come. This idea was biblical (Is 5:16; 29:23; Ezek 36:23; 38:23; 39:7, 27; cf. Zech 14:9). In the present God's people could hallow his name by living rightly; if they lived wrongly, Jewish teachers observed, they would "profane" his name, or bring it into disrepute among the nations.

11:3. This petition alludes to God's provision of "daily bread" (manna) for his people after he first redeemed them (Ex 16:4). Prayers for God to supply basic needs-of which bread and water were seen as the ultimate examples-were common (cf. Prov 30:8).

11:4. Jewish people regarded sins as "debts" before God; the same \*Aramaic word could be used for both. Jewish law at least in theory required the periodic forgiveness of monetary debtors (in the seventh and fiftieth years), so the illustration of forgiving debts makes good sense. Parallels with ancient Jewish prayers suggest that "Lead us not into testing" means "Let us not sin when we are tested"-rather than "Let us not be tested" (cf. 22:46 in context).

11:5-6. Hospitality was a crucial obligation; the host must feed the traveler who has graced his or her home by coming to spend the night. Although many homes would have used up their day's bread by nightfall, in a small village people would know who still had bread left over. In modern villages of that region, bread might last for several days, but one must serve a guest a fresh, unbroken loaf as an act of hospitality.

11:7. The children would sleep on mats on the floor of the one-room dwelling; unbolting the heavy bar that was laid through rings attached to the door was a bother and would make noise that would awaken them.

11:8. The continual pounding would awaken the children anyway; unbolting the door would thus no longer pose much problem. The word translated "importunity" (KJV) or "persistence" (NASB, NRSV) means "shamelessness" (sometimes like the impudence characteristic of the \*Cynics; cf. TEV). This term refers either to the boldness of the knocker, lest he be shamed by having nothing to give his guest, or perhaps the shame of the father inside, because the whole village would be humiliated by a bad report about their hospitality.

11:9-10. In the context of the `parable, these verses mean that the knocker receives because of boldness or because the honor of God is inseparably connected with the honor of his servant, the knocker.

11:11-13. This is a standard Jewish "how much more" (qal vahomer) argument. Most people believed that the *Holy Spirit (1) had departed, (2) was available only to several of the holiest people, or (3) belonged to the community* (Dead Sea Scrolls). Thus the promise of verse 13 would have sounded profound; given common beliefs about the Spirit in ancient Judaism (based on the Old Testament), this was essentially a promise that God would make them prophets, anointed spokespersons for God.

11:14-26

Who Is Satan's Real Vassal?

11:14-16. Most pagan exorcists sought to remove demons by magical incantations. *Rabbis in the second century still accused Jesus and Jewish Christians of using sorcery to achieve the miracles they were performing. "Beelzebul" is related to the name of the pagan god called "Baal-zebul" in 2 Kings 1:2; used as an equivalent to "Belial" (2 Cor 6:15), it was a common Jewish name for the devil in the Testament of Solomon. (The rabbis often called him Sammael; Jubilees called him Beliar or Mastema; the \*Dead Sea Scrolls, Belial; by whatever name, ancient Jews understood who the prince of demons was.)*



11:17-18. Jesus does not deny the existence of other exorcists here, but he need not be validating most of them, either: a demon's retreat to draw attention to another of \*Satan's servants would be only a strategic retreat. Their exorcisms contrast with the wholesale exorcising of the masses that Jesus undertakes, which clearly signifies a defeat of Satan (11:20).

11:19. "Your sons" means "members of your own group" (just as, e.g., "sons of the prophets" meant "prophets"); because some of their associates also cast out demons (by methods that would look more magical than Jesus'), they should consider their charge carefully.

11:20. God's "finger" represented his power. Although the phrase occurs elsewhere, Jesus alludes especially to Exodus 8:19, where Pharaoh's magicians, attempting to imitate Moses'

miracles, are forced to admit that the true God is working through Moses but not through them.

11:21-23. Many early Jewish sources report that *Satan or demons were "bound," or imprisoned, after God subdued them. Less relevant to this context, ancient magical texts also speak of "binding" demons by magical procedures.* The parable here about tying up a protective and armed householder (perhaps viewed as a Roman soldier or veteran, or simply an especially zealous householder) means that Jesus had defeated Satan and could therefore plunder his possessions free the demon-possessed.

11:24-26. Here Jesus returns the charge: they, not he, are servants of Satan; he casts demons out, but they invite them back in even greater numbers. Skillful lawyers and \*rhetoricians delighted in subverting an opponent's charge by showing that the opponent himself was guilty and unqualified to bring the accusation.

11:27-36

## The Genuinely Blessed

11:27-28. It was customary to praise the child by blessing the mother; this figure of speech occurs in GrecoRoman literature (e.g., the first-century Roman satirist Petronius), \*rabbinic texts (e.g., sayings attributed to Johanan ben Zakkai) and elsewhere (e.g., \*2 Baruch 54:10).

11:29-30. Jonah's preaching was a simple message of judgment, but that was all that Nineveh required in his generation.

11:31-32. Jewish discussions of the end times included converts from among the poor who would testify against those who said they were too poor to follow God; and similarly converts among the rich, converts among the \*Gentiles and so on. Here Jesus appeals to pagans who converted. Jewish people probably thought of the "Queen of the South," the queen of Sheba, as the queen of Ethiopia, which was considered the southernmost part of the world (cf. Acts 8:27).

11:33. Most Palestinian homes did not have "cellars," but Luke is relating the image to his audience; many Greek homes did have them. Greek houses often placed the lamp in the vestibule, and many Palestinian homes had only one room; whichever architectural style is in view, "those who enter in" would immediately see the lamp.

11:34-36. Jesus speaks literally of a "single" eye versus a "bad" or "evil" one. A "single" eye normally meant a generous one. A "bad" eye in that culture could mean either a diseased one or a stingy one. Many people believed that light was emitted from the eye, enabling one to see, rather than that light was admitted through the eye; here it seems to be admitted through the eye.

11:37-54

## Denouncing Religious Colleagues

As in 7:36-50, a dinner becomes the occasion for moral instruction (this practice

was so common in antiquity that it became a frequent setting in a type of philosophical literature called a symposium). Even more than in 7:36-50, it also becomes the occasion for confrontation.

11:37. The \*Pharisee's behavior would have appeared honorable; see comment on 7:36. Prominent teachers would be invited to lecture at such meals, discoursing on wise topics with others who also liked to show off their education.

11:38. Pharisees were particularly scrupulous about washing their hands, a tradition not practiced in the Old Testament.

11:39-40. Ritual purity was important to the \*Pharisees, so they washed their vessels as well as themselves in ritual baths. The school of *Shammai-the Pharisaic majority in this period-said that the outside of a cup could be clean even if the inside were not; the minority view of Hillel's followers* was that the inside of the cup must be cleansed first. Jesus sides with the school of Hillel on this point, but does so to make a figurative statement about the inside of the heart.

11:41. The *Aramaic word for "cleanses" (Mt 23:26) is similar to that for "give in charity"; it is possible that Luke adopts one nuance of an Aramaic wordplay by Jesus, while Matthew adopts another.*

11:42. Tithes were used especially to support the priests and Levites. "Rue" and Mathew's "dill" (23:23) are similar words in *Aramaic, possibly reflecting an original Aramaic source here. The written law did not explicitly require tithing these dry, green, garden herbs; the question among the Pharisees was whether they counted as foodstuffs.*

11:43. Pharisees were considered quite meticulous in their observance of the \*law, and those regarded as superior in their knowledge of the law were hailed especially respectfully in the marketplaces.

11:44. Nothing spread ritual impurity as severely as a corpse; \*Pharisees believed that one contracted impurity if even one's shadow touched a corpse or grave. Inconspicuous tombs (or limestone ossuaries) would be whitewashed each spring to warn passersby to avoid them and so to avoid impurity, but the Pharisees lack this telltale warning sign. They are impure on the inside, but look religious on the outside.

11:45. Luke is more concerned to distinguish Pharisees from professional legal experts than Matthew is (cf. Mt 23:13-29). Although some Pharisees worked as legal experts and some legal experts were Pharisees, these groups were not identical.

11:46-47. Ancient Judaism emphasized more often than the \*Old Testament had that Israel had martyred its prophets; the Jewish community in this period built tombs as monuments for the prophets and the righteous (including some Old Testament servants of God who were not martyred, like David or Huldah).

11:48. The point of Jesus' saying here is "like father, like son"; corporate sin and guilt continued among the descendants of the wicked unless they repented (Ex 20:5; Deut 23:2-6; 1 Sam 15:2-3; Is 1:4; etc.).

11:49-50. Jewish people commonly believed that fully anointed prophets had ceased at the end of the Old Testament period and would be restored only in the end time. Bloodguilt was a serious matter, affecting the whole community and not just the individuals directly responsible (Deut 21:1-9). God would avenge it (Deut 32:43; Ps 79:10). The \*rabbis considered the place between the porch and altar the holiest place on earth after the holy of holies and the priestly sanctuary.

The Hebrew Bible is arranged in a different sequence from our modern English versions of the \*Old Testament; in it Zechariah is the last martyr (2 Chron 24:20-22) and Abel is the first, as in our Bibles (Gen 4:8). Jewish tradition expanded the accounts of both martyrdoms, declaring that after Zechariah's death a fountain of blood appeared in the temple that even the slaughter of

thousands of priests could not appease. Zechariah prayed for vengeance (2 Chron 24:22), and Abel's blood cried out from the ground (Gen 4:10); to say that their vengeance

would be requited on Jesus' generation was thus to promise unimaginable horrors. This judgment is because his generation would climax the terrible sins of their spiritual ancestors.

11:52-54. Experts in the law supposedly increased knowledge of the law; for Jesus to charge that their detailed expositions of it instead rendered its plain meaning inaccessible was a serious accusation.

12:1-12

### Sound Speech and the Day of judgment

Jesus warns his hearers to evaluate all their values and priorities in view of the day of judgment: their words, their lives and (in 12:13-34) their possessions. Although the world's hostility appears somewhat less pronounced in Luke (who, like *\*Philo and Josephus on the Jewish side, wants his faith to make sense to the broader culture*) than in Mark (who, like many apocalyptic writers, experienced only opposition from the world), Luke reports Jesus' warnings no less plainly than other writers: following Jesus is costly. The costs of not following, however, are eternal.

12:1. From natural acoustic settings (e.g., coves or hills) a powerful speaker could address a vast crowd. A crowd of "many thousands" was rare; had the Romans known of such large crowds in the wilderness, they might have detained Jesus. They did not trust large gatherings of people who met without their sanction and whose potentially revolutionary *\*rhetoric* they could not monitor. (The theater in the Galilean city Sepphoris seated 4,000-5,000 people, but because it was not in the countryside, any anti-Roman rhetoric would have been immediately reported.) The odds of Roman interference at this point are not particularly great, however; they did not patrol the Galilean countryside, and

their highest officers are as yet unaware of Jesus (23:2).

12:2-3. The flat housetops would have provided the most conspicuous forum for shouting news to neighbors; they were in the open, as opposed to the inner rooms. The darkness of night was considered the easiest time to pass along secrets. In this context, 12:2-3 may either warn that one's confession or denial of Christ will be reported by deceptive betrayers (12:1, 4-5) or that it will be reported at the judgment (12:4-10). The day of judgment would bring all deeds to light (cf., e.g., Is 29:15); the wicked would be ashamed and the righteous vindicated (e.g., Is 45:16-17).

12:4-5. All Jewish readers would understand "the one who has authority to cast into hell" as God, the judge, whose power the wise are respectfully to "fear."

12:6-7. Sparrows were one of the cheapest items sold for poor people's food in the marketplace and were the cheapest of all birds. According to Matthew 10:29, one could purchase two sparrows for an assarion, a small copper coin of little value; here it appears that they are even cheaper if purchased in larger quantities. This is a standard Jewish "how much more" argument: If God cares for something as cheap as sparrows, how much more does he care for humans? The hairs of one's head being numbered was an \*Old Testament way of saying that nothing could happen to a person without God allowing it (cf. 1 Sam 14:45; 2 Sam 14:11; 1 Kings 1:52).

12:8-9. Jesus is presented as both intercessor (defense attorney) and prosecutor before the heavenly court, a familiar Jewish image. In many Jewish accounts, the heavenly court consisted

of angels; the angels would certainly be gathered for the day of judgment. God would pass final judgment, but the text implies that Jesus never loses a case before him.

12:10. When Jesus says people "will be forgiven," he means God will forgive

them (Jewish people sometimes used passive constructions to avoid use of God's name). See comment on Mark 3:23-30. In this context, blasphemy against the \*Spirit may refer to a denial of Jesus of which the denier (unlike Peter) never repents.

12:11. \*Synagogues functioned as meeting places for Jewish local courts; transgressors were sometimes beaten there. Punishments meted out by Roman authorities were normally even harsher than Jewish punishments.

12:12. The Jewish people viewed the *Holy Spirit especially as the Spirit of prophecy*; thus when brought before the authorities (12:11) believers would be empowered to speak God's message as plainly as did the \*Old Testament prophets. (Inspiration does not, of course, imply lack of general preparation or discipline in the subject about which one speaks; disciples memorized the sayings of their teachers in both Jewish and Greek culture, and Jesus' disciples would know his teaching as well as being inspired by the Spirit.)

12:13-21

### Materialism and Hell

12:13. People often called upon \*rabbis to settle legal disputes. The eldest son would always receive double what any of the other sons would receive. The proportion of inheritance was thus fixed, and the plaintiff in this case has every legal right to receive his share of the inheritance.

12:14-15. Jesus' answer would strike first-century hearers forcefully: the issue is not whether the plaintiff is legally in the right; the issue is that life, not possessions, is what matters. Even most peasants owned some property (a dwelling), so Jesus' words strike at the very heart of human desire. Only a few Greek philosophers (e.g., Epictetus) uttered words about possessions that sounded as harsh as Jesus' here.

12:16-18. Archaeologists have found large grain silos on farms where wealthy

absentee landowners lived, such as in Sepphoris, one of the largest and most *Hellenized Jewish cities in Galilee*. The image in the parable here is that of a wealthy landowner, part of the extremely small leisured class (generally estimated at less than 1 percent), who need not labor in his own fields. Although many peasants may have taken pride in their labor and few could ever change their social status, the lifestyles of the rich and famous provided natural models for popular envy.

12:19. The *Epicurean-like complacency of the man who would "eat, drink and be merry"* probably refers to the analogous folly of well-to-do Jews in Isaiah 22:13-14. It was the best that mortal life itself could offer a person (Eccles 2:24; 3:12; 5:18-19), but one needed also to consider God's demands (11:7-12:14). Many other Jewish texts also criticize the self-sufficient person who thinks that he or she has it all and does not reckon with death (e.g., Eccles 11:18-19; Syriac Menander's Sentences 368-76; PseudoPhocylides 109-10; 1 Enoch 97:8-10).

12:20. The idea of leaving the fruit of one's labors to others more worthy appears in the \*Old Testament wisdom tradition (e.g., Eccles 2:18); the fear of leaving it to someone who would squander it is also common in ancient literature; the image of life being loaned to a person and required back at death would have likewise been familiar (Wisdom of Solomon 15:8).



# NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS

Rhetoric. Good letters were written according to the standard conventions of \*rhetoric, which was the study and use of proper forms for public speaking. Greek higher education usually concentrated on rhetoric, although some students specialized in philosophy instead. Those who could afford it learned basic reading and writing under a grammaticus, beginning around age eleven or twelve, and the fewer who could afford the next stage proceeded to the sophistes, or rhetorician, around the age of eighteen.

Rhetoric was the indispensable tool of politicians, lawyers and other public figures, an essential focus of upper-class education. Its training included speech imitation and composition, oratory, practice in extemporary exposition on diverse topics, gestures, grammar, proper citation technique and so forth. Those not specifically trained in rhetoric picked up its basic outlines from listening to public speeches; those who wished to learn technical details had a variety of handbooks from which to choose.

Types of Rhetoric. There were three main types of rhetoric: epideictic (or encomiastic), praising or blaming someone in the present; deliberative, convincing someone to act in a particular way (directed toward the future); and judicial (or forensic), the rhetoric of law courts (dealing with actions of the past). Attempts to strictly classify Paul's letters according to any one of these forms usually fails because in practice letters mixed the forms.

Letters. Letters imitated oral forms of rhetoric. Rhetoricians followed the typical Greek penchant for categorization and provided guidelines for the educated to write different types of letters: letters of rebuke (e.g., Galatians), letters of friendship or family, aesthetic letters (read among the elite for enjoyment),

official letters and letter essays. Most of the \*New Testament letters (except Philemon, 2-3 John and Jude) are long even by the standards of literary letters; some, like Romans, are extremely long (about seventy-one hundred words compared to an average of about three hundred in *Cicero* and about one thousand in Seneca).

Rhetoric in New Testament Letters. Because certain rhetorical conventions were simply part of formal speaking in their day, many writers like Paul may not have been conscious of their own rhetorical artistry. It is nevertheless helpful for the modern reader, accustomed to different forms of public speaking and argumentation, to understand the rhetorical techniques that New Testament writers often used. Paul was undoubtedly more conscious of and concerned for his technique in his most formal letters (e.g., Romans) or when challenged by upper-class readers (e.g., in 1 and 2 Corinthians), and my treatment of the rhetoric of these letters is accordingly more detailed than that of his other letters.

Purpose of Letters. Some were written with a long-term purpose, intended for publication and wide circulation even if addressed to an individual. The prophetic letters in the Old Testament (2 Chron 21:12-15; Jer 29; 36; cf. also Rev 2-3) show that in Jewish circles letters could be viewed as inspired if dictated by a prophet (1 Cor 7:40; 14:37).

Letter essays were general treatises that depended more on the author's context than on the situation of the readers. Most letters, however, were addressed to the audience's situation; ancient epistolary theorists stressed adapting letters to the situation of the readers. James is probably a letter essay; probably all of Paul's extant epistles (including Romans) are addressed to specific situations.

Stereotypical Forms in Letters. Different kinds of letters addressed different standard themes (now loosely called *topoi*). Rhetoricians provided standard forms for different topics so that speakers and writers could best adapt their message to the situation they needed to address. For instance, ancient letters of consolation repeated some basic themes, just as modern sympathy cards,

epitaphs or eulogies do. But rhetoricians like Cicero emphasized that one should feel what one was preaching, rather than merely reproduce stereotypical forms emotionlessly. For information on introductions and conclusions of letters, see comment on Romans 1:1-7, 16:21-24 and 25-27.

Reception of Letters. According to some estimates, literacy in the Roman world was around ten percent; although reading was more common than writing, and urban areas had more education than rural areas, many persons in the congregation would be unable to read. Reading was nearly always done aloud even in private; \*churches receiving Paul's letters would have them read publicly in the congregation's services, probably by those who normally read Scripture in the services.

How to Understand Letters. Letters had no chapter or verse breaks when they were first written (these were added later); thus one should read the whole letter to catch the flow of thought and never extract verses from their context. Ancient readers recognized that one should try to understand the author's purpose in writing, and they already knew their own cultural situation. When we read the letters, we must try to assume the original situation and then catch the writer's flow of thought by reading through the whole context.

Collections of Letters. Sometimes the letters of a famous person would be collected for publication. Paul's letters were collected some time after his death, but possibly as early as the end of the first century as local churches shared their own treasures. Tensions Among Letters. Because most letters addressed specific situations, similar phrases could be used to address very different problems. Most writers were eclectic philosophically, drawing from a variety of different sources; even the `Dead Sea Scrolls testify that the same readers could accept different kinds of religious language (law, ritual, apocalyptic, hymns, \*narrative). It is therefore difficult to determine differences of authorship, or to argue for the presence of apparent theological contradictions, based on differences among Paul's or other early Christian letters. Works on Ancient Letter Writing. The most readable introductions to the genre are Stanley K.

Stowers, Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity, LEC 5 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986); and David E. Aune, The New Testament in Its Literary Environment, LEC 8 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), pp. 158-225.

# R O M A N S

## Introduction

*Authorship.* All *New Testament* scholars accept this as a genuine letter of Paul. Churches naturally preserved letters of Paul; it would have been unnatural for anyone to have forged letters in his name during his lifetime or until long after his genuine letters had become widely known and circulated as authoritative. On the basis of letters clearly written by Paul to address specific situations of his day (e.g., 1 Corinthians) and other letters that share a common style with them, even the most critical New Testament scholars rarely dispute the Pauline authorship of particular letters (including Romans, Galatians, 1-2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon).

*Rome's Jewish Community.* Rome's Jewish community was predominantly poor, although some groups of Jewish people there were wealthier than others and better educated; different groups lived in different parts of the city and had their own leaders. It is thought that many of the predominantly Jewish house churches existed in the Jewish ghetto across the Tiber.

The primary language of the Jewish community in Rome was not Latin but Greek, the language in which Paul writes (76 percent of their burial inscriptions are in Greek, 23 percent in Latin and 1 percent in Hebrew or *Aramaic*.) *The Jewish community here was perhaps fifty thousand strong; many Roman conversions to Judaism created resentment among other aristocratic Romans and led to tension between the Jewish and Gentile elements in the city.*

*Situation.* Many of the founders of the Roman church were Jewish Christians (Acts 2:10). But sometime in the 40s A.D., the emperor Claudius, like the earlier emperor Tiberius, expelled the Jewish community from Rome (see Acts 18:2 and the Roman historians Suetonius and Dio Cassius). The Roman church was

thus composed entirely of Gentiles until Claudius's death, when his edict was automatically repealed, and Jewish Christians returned to Rome (Rom 16:3). Jewish and Gentile Christians had different cultural ways of expressing their faith in Jesus; Paul thus must address a church experiencing tension between two valid cultural expressions of the Christian faith.

Theme. Given this situation, what the Roman Christians needed was what we would call racial reconciliation and crosscultural sensitivity. Paul reminds Jewish readers that they are as damned without Christ as Gentiles (chaps. 1-3); that spiritual, not ethnic, descent from Abraham is what matters (chaps. 4, 9); that Jews are also descended from the sinner Adam (5:12-21); and that the \*law does not justify Israel (chaps. 7, 10). He reminds Gentiles that they were grafted into Judaism and therefore dare not be anti-Semitic (chap. 11) and that they must respect the practices of their Jewish siblings (chap. 14). Christ (15:1-13) and Paul (15:14-33) are agents of racial reconciliation, and unity (16:17-20) is the paramount issue.

Genre. Some scholars have argued that Paul's letter to the Romans is a letter-essay, explaining his \*gospel without relating to the specific needs of the Roman church. In view of the previous discussion of situation and theme, however, it seems that Paul lays out the facts of the gospel in chapters 1-11 and then summons his readers to reconciliation and mutual service in chapters 12-15; thus the letter is "deliberative" rhetoric, an argument intended to persuade the readers to change their behavior.

Subsequent History. Protestants have traditionally stressed justification by faith, a doctrine emphasized in Romans and Galatians, because Luther found this doctrine helpful in addressing indulgences and other ecclesiastical corruptions in his day. But it is important to understand not only this doctrine but also why Paul needs to stress it. Most Jews already believed that the Jewish people as a whole were saved by God's grace, and Jewish Christians recognized that this grace was available only through Christ; the issue was on what terms Gentiles could become part of God's people. In arguing for the ethnic unity of the body of

Christ, Paul argues that all people come to God on the same terms, no matter what their ethnic, religious, educational or economic background; Jesus alone is the answer to all humanity's sin. Paul stresses justification by faith, a truth most of his readers would know, especially so he can emphasize reconciliation with one another, a reality they still need to learn.

Commentaries. Two of the most useful shorter commentaries are A. M. Hunter, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Torch Bible Commentaries (London: SCM, 1955), and John A. T. Robinson, *Wrestling with Romans* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979). James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, WBC 38A and B, 2 vols. (Dallas: Word, 1988), is a helpful detailed commentary. For views on the background, see especially Karl P. Donfried, ed., *The Romans Debate*, rev. ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991); Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976). E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), provides a helpful corrective to earlier criticisms of Jewish views on the \*law; for Paul's view on the law in Romans, see especially C. Thomas Rhyne, *Faith Establishes the Law*, SBLDS 55 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1981).

1:1-7

## **Introduction**

Letters customarily opened with the name of the sender, the sender's titles (if any were necessary), the name of the addressees and a greeting. For example: "Paul ... to the church at .. . greetings." Persuasive letters and speeches often began by establishing the speaker's credibility, what the Greeks called *ethos*. This beginning did not prove the speaker's point but disposed the audience to hear him respectfully.

1:1. A slave of someone in high position had more status, authority and freedom than a free commoner; the emperor's slaves were some of the highest-ranking people in the empire, as the Roman Christians would know. In the \*Old

Testament, prophets from Moses on were generally called "servants" or "slaves" of God.

Paul, who had once been an agent or commissioned messenger (\*apostle) of the high priest (Acts 9:2), was now a representative for God. The ideas of being "called" and "set apart" go back to Old Testament language for Israel and, more important here, Israel's prophets.

1:2-3. Paul's words here would appeal to Jewish readers. "Through his prophets" concurs with the Jewish doctrine of the Old Testament's inspiration and final authority; "according to the flesh" (NASB) means simply that Jesus was physically descended from David.

1:4. "Spirit of holiness" was a common Jewish name for the *Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God*. A regular synagogue prayer regarded the future *resurrection of the dead as the ultimate demonstration of God's power*. The phrase "Son of God" meant many things to many different people in the ancient world, but it could strike Ro

man pagans as portraying Jesus as a rival to the emperor; in the *Old Testament it referred to the Davidic line, thus ultimately to the promised Jewish king* (see 1:3; cf. 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7; 89:27). Paul here regards Jesus' resurrection as the *Spirit's coronation of him as the Messiah* and as humanity's first taste of the future resurrection and \*kingdom.

1:5-6. The Old Testament promised that a representative remnant from among the nations would turn to God; Isaiah associated this remnant with the mission of the servant (42:6; 49:6; 52:15). Because the Roman \*church clearly included Jewish Christians, "*Gentiles*" (NIV, NASB, NRSV) is better translated here "*nations*" (KJV; cf. TEV); the term was used to mean both "*nations*," excluding Israel, and "*peoples*," including Israel. Representatives of all Mediterranean cultures resided in the great urban center, Rome. 1:7. "*Saints*" or "*those who have been set apart*" goes back to the Old Testament image of God's people as



set apart for himself. Like Paul (see comment on 1:1), they too are "called" (1:67); Paul embraces them as fellow heirs in the mission, not as inferiors.

The standard Greek greeting was "greetings" (chairein-Jas 1:1) a Greek term related to "grace" (charis); Jewish people greeted one another with "peace," and Jewish letters often began, "Greetings and peace." Paul adapts this standard greeting, a well-wishing, into a Christian prayer: "The grace and peace of God and Jesus be with you." (On "wish-prayers" see comment on 1 Thess 3:11.) Placing the Father and Jesus on equal footing as providers of grace and peace elevated Jesus above the role given to any mere human in most of Judaism. "Father" was also a title for God in Judaism (usually "our Father").

1:8-17

### Paul's Thanksgiving

If one follows all the "fors" or other "cause" words (in some translations, e.g., NASB, NRSV), Paul's argument continues without pause through the chapter. Like prayers, thanksgivings were fairly standard in the openings of the bodies of ancient letters, and when Paul omits one (Galatians) it is conspicuous.

1:8. "All roads lead to Rome"; due to the connections of the whole empire with Rome, Christians everywhere knew about the faith of believers in the capital.

1:9. For "in my spirit" (NASB) the modern idiom would be "from the bottom of my heart," "with all my heart" (TEV; cf. NIV). It was common to call as witness the one who knew one's heart-God-although Paul avoids oath formulas like those mentioned in Matthew 5:33-37 (swearing by something). Recurrent prayer was sometimes described as "remembering," "reminding" or making mention to God.

1:10. Devout Jewish people might spend several hours a day in prayer; many did so at the times of morning and evening offerings in the temple. On "by God's will" or "if God wills" see comment on Acts 18:20; on Paul's plans to go to Rome see Acts 19:21 (the following chapters of Acts relate how he finally got

there).

1:11-12. Longing to see a friend was a conventional matter to mention in ancient letters, which were used to convey a sense of one's presence when the writer and reader were (as often) far apart.

1:13. Addresses such as "beloved" or "brothers and sisters" were common in letters. On "\*Gentiles" see comment on 1:5-6, although in 1:13-15 one should keep in mind Paul's special call to the Gentiles (11:13). Ancient cities

were cosmopolitan, but the closing of sea travel for winter, needs of other churches and the expense of travel could all have delayed Paul's coming.

1:14-15. Greeks considered everyone else in the world "barbarians" (cf. "non-Greeks"-NIV); they also usually considered themselves wise and others foolish. Some educated Jewish people classed themselves as Greeks, but Greeks considered them barbarians. Paul will introduce the Jewish division of humanity in verse 16, but here he uses the Greek one; in both cases, he affirms that God is for all peoples, regardless of race or nationality.

1:16. Verses 16-17 seem to be the *propositio*, or thesis statement, which begins Paul's argument. Paul stresses that the good news is for all peoples (see discussion of the situation in the introduction to Romans); if to both Jews and Greeks (Greeks were the most anti-Jewish), then to all peoples between Jews and Greeks.

1:17. In the \*Old Testament (and in the \*Dead Sea Scrolls), "God's righteousness" is that aspect of his character on account of which he vindicates his people and shows their faithfulness to him to be right. Thus it relates directly to "justification," or legal acquittal and vindication. (In Romans, many English versions translate the same Greek word as both "righteousness" and "justification.")

The Hebrew and Greek versions of Habakkuk 2:4 differ on a pronoun, which

Paul thus omits (since the disputed detail is irrelevant to his argument anyway). In the context of Habakkuk 2:4, the righteous are those who will survive the judgment because they have faith (i.e., are faithful to God). (Biblical saving faith was not passive assent but actively staking one's life on the claims of God. It was a certainty sufficient to affect one's lifestyle; cf. Rom 1:5.) Paul applies this text to those who trust in Christ and so are saved from the final judgment. That his contemporary readers would understand his application is made clear by the similar application of Habakkuk 2:4 in the \*Dead Sea Scrolls.

1:18-23

### Willful Idolaters

Paul's argument is similar to one in the Wisdom of Solomon, a popular Jewish work widely circulated by this period. His arguments would thus have been timely and easy for his readers to follow.

1:18. "Heaven" was a Jewish circumlocution for God, and the phrase is a typically Jewish way of saying "God is angry." (Paul uses "revealed" to parallel v. 17.) The truth that the wicked suppress is the truth of God's character (1:19-20), which they distort by idolatry (1:23).

1:19-22. *Stoic philosophers argued that the nature of God was evident in creation*; Cicero at that time could even assert that no race of humanity was so uncivilized as to deny the existence of the gods, and along with others he argued that the human mind points to what God is like. Jewish people scattered throughout the GrecoRoman world used this argument to persuade pagans to turn to the true God. Even the *rabbis tell delightful stories about how Abraham reasoned back to the first cause and showed his fellow Gentiles that there was really only one true God*. According to Jewish tradition, God had given seven laws to Noah, for which all humanity was responsible (including the prohibition of idolatry). But unlike Israel, who had to keep all 613 commandments in the \*law (according to rabbinic count), most Gentiles disobeyed even the seven laws

of Noah.

1:23. In later Jewish tradition, idolatry was the final stage of sin to which the evil impulse (see comment on 7:10-11) would reduce a person; it was one of the worst sins. Yet the language Paul uses to describe pagan idolatry is drawn from \*Old Testament passages about Israel's idolatry (Deut 4:16-20; Ps 106:20; Jer 2:11); this is a setup for his argument for Jewish readers in chapter 2.

1:24-32

### Other Pagan Deeds

Pagan gods acted immorally in the popular myths; one who worshiped them (1:23) would end up acting the same way. Paul argues that distorting one's view about God's character perverts one's sexual treatment of other people; ancient Jewish people recognized that both idolatry and sexual immorality characterized \*Gentiles.

1:24-25. The refrain "God gave them over" (1:24, 26, 28) tells how God's wrath (1:18) works: he lets people damn themselves as they warp their own humanity. As in the Old Testament, God can turn people over to their own hardness of heart (e.g., Is 6:9-11; 29:9-12; Jer 44:25-27; some writers have called this "penal blindness"); cf. Psalm 81:12 (about Israel).

1:26-27. Greek men were commonly bisexual; not only was homosexual behavior approved (some writers, like speakers in Plato's Symposium, preferred it to heterosexual behavior), but elements of the culture socialized boys in this direction. Men and women were segregated growing up, and male bonds became close. Apparently due to a deficiency in the number of women (which many attribute to female infanticide), marriages were often made between thirty-year-old men and fourteen-year-old women, whom the men saw as children. Men had access to only three forms of sexual release until such late marriages: slaves, prostitutes and other men. (Introducing boys to homoerotic pleasure was a favorite pastime of Greek men in this period.)

Although many upper-class Romans were affected by Greek ideals, many other Romans, especially Roman philosophers, regarded homosexual practice as disgusting. GrecoRoman moralists sometimes opposed gender reversal as "against nature," which would resemble the Jewish argument from God's original purposes in creation (Gen 2:18). Although Jewish texts speak of Jewish adulterers and thieves, they nearly always treat homosexual behavior as a \*Gentile practice. (Socialization clearly affected one's sexual development.)

Paul did not choose this example of sin to be controversial with his readers; his Jewish and Roman Christian readers alike would have agreed with him that both idolatry and homosexual behavior are sinful. But this example is a setup for his critique of sins less often denounced (Rom 1:28-32).

1:28-32. Ancient writers (Greek, Roman, Jewish; cf. also Lev 18) sometimes employed "vice lists," as here. But unlike idolatry and homosexuality (Rom 1:18-27), sins like greed, jealousy, slander, arrogance and ignorance also occur in Jewish lists as sins some Jewish people committed. Like Amos (see Amos 1-2), Paul here sets up his readers for chapter 2: pagans are not the only ones who are damned.

2:1-11

No Partiality

Paul engages in a lively \*diatribe style (a style ancient philosophers often adopted), challenging an imaginary opponent and thereby demolishing possible objections to his position in a vivid manner.

2:1-3. Speakers typically argued on the basis of syllogisms, which consisted

of a major premise (here, 2:1), a minor premise (2:2) and a conclusion (2:3). Both philosophers and Jewish teachers accepted that people should live what they preach, hence few could dispute Paul's point. Philosophers saw sin as a

moral folly, and Jewish teachers saw it as an affront to God but as something everyone did. Paul demands that people be consistent with their denunciations, which meant taking sin more seriously than most people did.

2:4. The \*Old Testament and Judaism agreed that only God's *grace made* repentance possible (e.g., Deut 30:6). This principle never denied a person's responsibility to respond to that grace once it was offered (e.g., Deut 5:29; 10:16).

2:5. The Old Testament prophets often referred to "the day of wrath" (the "day of the Lord"), when God sat as judge in his court and judged the world by his justice (e.g., Is 2:11-12; 13:6, 9, 13; Ezek 30:2-3; Joel 1:15; 2:1-2, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18-20; Obad 15; Zeph 1:7; 1:14-2:2; Mal 3:2; 4:5). Some Jewish traditions speak of treasuring up good works against the day of wrath, but the 'rhetorical opponent Paul addresses here has stored up the opposite (cf. Deut 32:34-35; Hos 13:12).

2:6-11. On verse 6 cf. Psalm 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12. The structure of this passage is chiasmic (i.e., inverted parallelism, an ancient literary form): God's impartiality (vv. 6, 11); to doers of good (vv. 7a, 10b), future rewards (vv. 7b, 10a); to the wicked (vv. 8a, 9b), punishment (vv. 8b, 9a).

Justice in judging was widely emphasized, and God's impartiality was one of the most commonly stressed doctrines of Judaism (although Israel's preferential treatment at the day of judgment was also explained as righteous). Judaism also acknowledged that the wise person worked for long-range rewards (2:7; cf. Prov 21:21; 22:4).

2:12-16

### Stricter Judgment

Paul's point is that everyone should know better than to sin, but those with more access to the truth will be judged far more strictly than those without. Woe to

those who thought themselves righteous by comparing themselves with others! Judaism was right that most pagans did evil; but Jewish people knew God's standard better than the pagans and still did evil. This point underlines Paul's argument of the common predicament of Jews and Gentiles under sin.

2:12. Paul is stricter than most of Judaism here. Most Jews acknowledged that Gentiles could be saved simply by keeping the Noahide (also spelled Noachian) commandments (see comment on 1:19-20), because they did not have the whole \*law. Paul argues that anyone who has sinned with or without the law will be strictly judged (unless atonement for the sin is accepted in Christ, as he argues in 3:24-26).

2:13. Jewish teachers agreed that hearing the law was not enough; one must also obey it. Few would challenge Paul's argument on this point.

2:14-16. Paul plays on the GrecoRoman philosophical view of the law of nature written in people's hearts, according to which all people had some measure of innate knowledge of right and wrong, although it was less explicit than the written law. (Greek moralists and especially \*Stoic thinkers heavily emphasized the knowledge of the "conscience.") That they could know enough to do right some of the time renders them without excuse for ever doing wrong. Only when God's law is fully written on the heart in Christ (8:2; Jer 31:33) will it be internalized enough for people to live out God's righteousness.

2:17-24

### Disobeying the Law

This \*diatribe style often used by philosophers was meant to teach and exhort rather than to attack; the imaginary opponent represents an idealized wrong position, which the speaker or writer destroys *reductio ad absurdum* (by reducing it to its absurd logical conclusion). The opponent of 2:17-29 is the idealized hypocrite but points up the evils of any measure of hypocrisy. (Similar attacks were made on "pretentious philosophers" in GrecoRoman diatribes.)

2:17-18. Jewish sages often warned that sages should be humble and not boast in their knowledge. But Israel could boast in their sole possession of the \*law, because they alone worshiped the one true God.

2:19-20. Some of Paul's language here comes from the *Old Testament* (cf. *Is 42:6-7, 18-20*) and some from typical Cynic-\*Stoic philosophical terminology, which was probably adapted by Jewish teachers outside Palestine. Paul again shows his mastery in relating to his ancient readers.

2:21-23. \*Diatribes often used brief, pointed rhetorical questions. Philosophers typically reviled the inconsistency of their hearers' lifestyles. Temple robbery was considered one of the most impious crimes, and even though Jewish teachers warned against disturbing pagan temples, pagans sometimes thought Jews inclined toward such crimes (Acts 19:37). But those who would rob temples would have to value their contents.

2:24. See Ezekiel 36:20-23. Jewish teachers complained that public sin profaned God's name among the Gentiles; misbehaving Jews could bring reproach on the whole Jewish community. (A case in point was a charlatan in Rome earlier in the century whose behavior had led to the expulsion of Jews from Rome under Tiberius.)

2:25-29

### True Judaism

Moses had complained that Israel was uncircumcised in heart (Lev 26:41), and the prophets had reinforced this conviction (Jer 4:4; 9:25-26; cf. *Is 51:7*). God's people were responsible to circumcise their hearts (Deut 10:16), and someday God would circumcise their hearts (Deut 30:6). The \*rabbis commented little on this issue; Paul makes it central and defines religious Judaism in terms of possession of the \*Spirit (Rom 2:29; an internalized law-8:2; cf. *Ezek 36:27*). Both Jewish and GrecoRoman writers emphasized caring what the deity thinks,



not what other people think (Rom 2:29).

3:1-8

God's Justice: Why Then Israel?

Jewishness was special-but not for salvation. Some might object that Paul thinks God had been unfaithful to his covenant, in which case God would be unjust; but the issue here is that Israel had been unfaithful to the covenant, not that God had been.

3:1. These are the objections of the imaginary interlocutor, a common device for furthering one's argument in a \*diatribe (see comment on 2:1-11). The objections are reasonable: was not Israel a special, chosen people? Determining "profit" (KJV) or "benefit" (NASB) was a common device among philosophers for evaluating the worth of a behavior or idea.

3:2. \*Digression, even long digression, was a normal part of GrecoRoman writing; Paul develops and

completes this "first of all" only in chapter 9. Judaism often emphasized that God entrusted his \*law to Israel, and Paul here agrees.

3:3. "What then?" was a common *rhetorical question used to further the argument of a diatribe*. God's faithfulness to his covenant was good long-term news for Israel as a whole; as in the \*Old Testament (e.g., in Moses' generation, contrary to some Jewish tradition), however, it did not save individual Israelites who broke covenant with him.

3:4. "May it never be!" (NASB) or "Not at all!" (NIV) was also a common rhetorical retort to the rhetorical questions of imaginary opponents (especially in some philosophers like \*Epictetus). It was used to show the absurdity of the opposing objection. Paul declares that God's justice is ultimately unassailable, as wrongdoers must confess (Ps 51:4; cf. 116:11).

3:5-6. "In human terms" (NASB) or "a human argument" (NIV) is similar to a \*rabbinic phrase meaning "a secular argument." God's "righteousness" here is his "justice" (NRSV), as defined in terms of his faithfulness to his covenant word to Israel (3:3).

3:7. "Sinner" was an awful insult in Jewish circles; for Paul to call everyone sinners (Rom 1-2) would be shocking. God could be glorified and his justice vindicated even by its contrast with human rebellion, but this point in no way vindicated the rebellion.

3:8. Philosophers also often had to clear up misrepresentations of their teaching.

3:9-18

#### Proof from Scripture

Stringing together texts ("pearl stringing") was common at the opening of \*synagogue homilies and in the \*Dead Sea Scrolls.

3:9. Another objection from the imaginary protester allows Paul to return to his argument that Jew and \*Gentile are equally in need of salvation. To be "under" sin was idiomatic for being subject to its rule.

3:10-12. Here Paul quotes Psalm 14:1-3 (=53:1-3; cf. 1 Kings 8:46; Ps 130:3; 143:2; Prov 20:9; Eccles 7:20). 3:13-18. The principle for attaching these proof texts to one another is similar to the \*rabbinic principle of *gezerah shavah* (which linked Old Testament texts by a key word). All these verses mention body parts: throat, tongue, lips and mouth (3:13-14; respectively, Ps 5:9; 140:3; 10:7); feet (Rom 3:15-17; Is 59:7-8); and eyes (Rom 3:18; Ps 36:1). Jewish teachers emphasized that the evil impulse (see comment on Rom 7:10-11) ruled all the parts of the body (by later enumeration, 248 parts). The preponderance of mouth-related sins here may be intentional, especially if Roman Christians are complaining about each other (see chap. 14).

3:19-31

### The Law and Righteousness

3:19. The Jewish people were those "under" (see comment on v. 9) the \*law; "the law" could loosely include the Psalms and the Prophets (the rest of the \*Old Testament), as in 3:10-18. People were "silenced" in a law court when they could raise no objections in their own defense (cf. Ps 107:42; Job 40:4-5; 42:6).

3:20. Most of Judaism also agreed that all people sinned sometimes and that they needed God's \*grace; although some Jews suggested exceptions, they considered them extremely rare. Paul here forces his readers to be consistent and to recognize that Gentiles would thus be saved on the same terms as Jews. This verse echoes Psalm 143:2, a psalm that goes on to praise

God's righteousness and faithfulness. The Greek text has literally "all flesh will not be justified" (for which most translations use some variant of the less awkward English "no flesh will be justified"-NASB); "all flesh" is a standard Hebrew expression for all humanity (or, in some contexts, for all creatures).

3:21. "The Law and the Prophets" was one way to speak of the whole Old Testament; in chapter 4 Paul will argue how these texts teach righteousness by faith (v. 22). But God's justice is not dependent on human performance of the law and thus not based on an advantage available only to Israel (3:2). Jewish teachers believed that Israel was special with regard to salvation and that their reception of the law at Sinai vindicated God's choice of them. 3:22. "No distinction" (NASB, NRSV) refers to Jew and *Gentile*; *both must approach God on the same terms, through Jesus Christ. This statement directly challenges the values behind the tensions in the Roman church* (see discussion of the situation in the introduction to Romans).

3:23. Judaism viewed "sin" as a moral offense against God (in contrast to the less dramatic usual Greek sense of the term). Jewish sources agreed that everyone sinned (with rare exceptions, like a young child); Greek moralists said

that some faults were inevitable. "Falling short of God's glory" may allude to the Jewish idea that humanity lost God's glory when Adam sinned (cf. 5:12-21), hence each generation repeats Adam's sin; or it may simply mean that no one lives up to God's standard of justice.

3:24. "Redemption" (freeing a slave) was a standard *Old Testament* concept; *the Old Testament terms always involve the paying of a price, sometimes to get something back. God "re deemed" Israel, making them his people by grace and by paying a price for their freedom (the Passover lamb and the firstborn of Egypt), before he gave them his commandments (cf. Ex 20:2). In Paul's day, the Jewish people were looking forward to the \*messianic redemption, when they would be delivered from earthly rulers; but the malevolent ruler here is sin (3:9).*

3:25. To "propitiate" (KJV, NASB) God was to turn away his wrath; although in Jewish tradition prayers, alms and other good deeds could turn away wrath (Ecclus 3:3, 20; 32:1-3; Wisdom of Solomon 18:20-21), the \*law also required bloodshed: something had to die to appease the wrath properly due a person's sin. The term here may refer to the mercy seat (Ex 25:22). God mercifully "passed over" (Ex 12:13) sins before the cross, in anticipation of the sacrifice that would take place there. (One might compare the *rabbinic view that* repentance defers judgment until the Day of Atonement atones for sin, although nothing in the text suggests that Paul has this idea in mind here.)

3:26. To the Greek mind, justice meant "fair [but not necessarily equal] distribution" (the inequality of justice may be illustrated in that Roman law assigned higher penalties to lower social classes); it was nevertheless agreed that magistrates should rule according to "justice." Judaism emphasized God's justice and recognized that he, like a just judge, could not simply acquit the guilty. Jewish texts in time developed a rift in God's character: his attribute of mercy pleaded before him on Israel's behalf, triumphing over the accusations of his attribute of justice.

Paul allows no such rift; he says that God could be just and simultaneously

vindicate as just those who depend on Jesus, only because the sentence of

wrath was executed on Jesus in their place (3:25). The rest of Judaism believed in God's *grace*; *the differences between Paul and his Jewish contemporaries here are that Paul insists that this grace came at such a great price to God, and that Gentiles can receive it on the same terms as Jewish people.*

3:27-28. "Principle" (NIV) is a mistranslation; Paul poses two ways of approaching the "*\*law*" (NASB): by human effort or by faith (cf. 7:6; 8:2; 9:31-32). Faith is the right way, which the law itself teaches (3:21, 31).

3:29-30. The basic confession of Judaism was God's oneness. Paul thus argues: if there is only one God, he must also be God of the *\*Gentiles* (see Is 45:21-25).

3:31. Jewish teaching contrasted "annulling" and "establishing" the law. Because the law teaches righteousness by faith (as Paul goes on to argue in chap. 4), anyone who teaches this idea upholds the law.

4:1-22

### Abraham Made Righteous by Faith

As Israel's ancestor, Abraham was regarded as the model for their faith; he was also regarded as the model proselyte (convert to Judaism), because he was considered a *Gentile before his circumcision*. *Jewish readers believed that they had been chosen in Abraham and that virtually every Israelite would be saved by God's grace if they maintained the covenant.* Gentiles who wished to become part of the chosen community, however, had to be circumcised and join Israel in doing the righteous deeds of the *\*law*, as Abraham did.

This chapter is a good Jewish *\*midrash*, or commentary, on Genesis 15:6. Jewish and GrecoRoman debaters often proved their cases by examples, and this text was a favorite example used by ancient Jewish teachers.

4:1. *\*Diatribes* typically used rhetorical questions such as "What shall we say

then?" as transitions to the next point. Jewish tradition spoke repeatedly of "our father Abraham."

4:2. If anyone was righteous in Jewish tradition, it was surely Abraham. The model \*Pharisee, he served God from love; the model *proselyte*, he brought many other Gentiles to faith in the one true God. He destroyed idols and stood for God's truth. These extrabiblical Jewish traditions often declared that Abraham's merit sustained or rescued Israel in subsequent generations.

4:3. \*Rabbis appealed to biblical citations, sometimes prefacing them with, "What does Scripture say?" Jewish teachers often commented on Abraham's faith as reflected in Genesis 15:6, which they read as "faithfulness," one of his works. Paul reads it contextually as dependence on God's promise and stresses the word "reckon" (NASB) or "credit" (NIV), a bookkeeping term used in ancient business document for crediting payment to one's account.

4:4-5. Still expounding Genesis 15:6, Paul refers here to Abraham. This "reckoning righteousness" is comparable to the kind of justification one has in a law court-acquittal as one not guilty. But this idea goes beyond a mere declaration of forgiveness, and no ancient Jewish reader would have limited God's pronouncement of acquittal to merely legal terms: when God speaks, he creates a new reality (Gen 1:3); see Romans 6:1-11.

4:6-8. Using the Jewish interpretive principle *gezerah shavah*, which links different texts containing the same key word or phrase, Paul introduces Psalm 32:1-2, which explains what "reckons" means. Omitting the next line on mor

al righteousness (not yet relevant to his point), Paul recognizes that the "reckoning" of the psalm is based on God's grace rather than on the psalmist's perfection (Ps 32:5). Psalm 32 was ascribed to David.

4:9. The "blessedness" (NIV) or "blessing" (NASB) here is that of which 4:7-8 spoke; in standard Jewish fashion, Paul expounds the details of the text he has

cited.

4:10. Here Paul appeals to another Jewish interpretive rule-context. Abraham was made righteous by faith over thirteen years before he was circumcised (Gen 15:6; 16:3-4, 16; 17:24-25; some Jewish interpreters made this even longer—twenty-nine years). This fact challenged the great significance Judaism gave to circumcision, although Jewish teachers were correct that the \*Old Testament had used it as the mark of the covenant.

4:11-12. Circumcision was the "sign" of the covenant (Gen 17:11; *Jubilees* 15:26); *but Paul interprets it also as a sign of Abraham's prior righteousness according to Genesis 15:6. Jewish ears would recoil at Paul's argument, which makes Gentile Christians full heirs of Abraham without circumcision.* It is one thing to say that uncircumcised Gentiles could be saved if they kept the seven Noahide laws, as many Jews believed; it is quite another to put them on the same level as the Jewish people.

4:13. Abraham was told that he would inherit the "land"; but in Hebrew the word for "the land" also means "the earth," and Jewish interpreters had long been declaring that Abraham and his descendants would inherit the whole world to come.

4:14-16. Paul forces the reader to choose between completed righteousness by faith (based on God's *grace*; *Judaism acknowledged grace*) and *completed righteousness by a knowledge of the law*, which would have made Israel more righteous than the Gentiles, regardless of faith.

4:17. Judaism agreed that God could speak things into being (e.g., Gen 1:3). Paul says that God's promise to Abraham was thus enough to transform Gentiles into his children (especially because God decreed Abraham father of many nations just before telling him to be circumcised—Gen 17:5).

4:18-22. Faith as defined in Abraham's experience is not passive assent to what God says; it is an enduring dependence on God's promise, on which one stakes

one's life and lives accordingly. On the level of meaning, Paul and James (Jas 2:14-26) would agree. It is possible, although far from certain, that Paul's analogy here alludes to the offering and survival of Isaac, Abraham's son (Gen 22).

4:23-5:11

### The Believer Declared Righteous

No one could boast before God (2:17; 3:27; 4:2), but there is cause for a different kind of boast in hope of restored glory (5:2; cf. 3:23), in tribulation (5:3) and in God through Christ (5:11).

4:23-25. Paul begins to apply his exposition about Abraham to his readers (the application carries through 5:11). Ancient teachers (Jewish and GrecoRoman) often used examples to exhort their hearers or readers to think and act differently.

5:1. "Peace" meant a relationship of concord between two persons much more often than it meant individual tranquillity; thus here Paul means that the believer is always on God's side.

5:2. "Hope of God's glory" may imply the restoration of Adam's "glory" (3:23); it probably alludes to the *Old Testament* prophecies that God would be glorified among his people (e.g., Is 40:3; 60:19; 61:3; 62:2).

5:3-4. Progressions like this one (tribulations, endurance, character, hope) represent a special literary and 'rhetorical form called concatenation, also found in other texts. Again Paul demonstrates his skill in making his point in culturally relevant ways. Philosophers emphasized that hardships proved the quality of the wise person, who knew better than to be moved by them; the truly wise person should be tranquil in hardships. The Old Testament and Jewish tradition show men and women of God tested and matured by trials (although the Old Testament also includes the internal struggles of its heroes, like David and



Jeremiah, rather than their continual tranquillity).

5:5. Jewish people viewed the \*Holy Spirit especially as the Spirit who had enabled the prophets to hear and speak for God. In this context, Paul means that the Spirit points to the cross (5:68) and so enables Christians to hear God's love for them. In many Jewish traditions, the Spirit was available only to those most worthy; here he is bestowed as a gift. On the Spirit being "poured out" see Joel 2:28.

5:6-9. Well-educated GrecoRoman readers were aware of the Greek tradition in which "the good man" was extremely rare. Greeks considered laying down one's life for someone else heroic, but such sacrifice was not common; among Jewish people it was not particularly praised.

5:10-11. Greeks spoke of people in opposition to each other being "reconciled," being made friends again, but did not speak of people being reconciled to God. The Jewish members of the Roman \*church would be more familiar with this sort of language (from the Old Testament and some early Jewish texts like 2 Maccabees), hence it could strike the *Gentile members more forcefully (if they had not already heard it in church)*.

5:12-21

### A Common Heritage in Sin and Righteousness

Paul's Jewish readers might have argued for their unique descent from Abraham the righteous, but Paul points them instead to their common descent with the *Gentiles from the line of Adam the sinner. His argument would have greater force to his Jewish readers than Genesis alone might imply, because their traditions had made Adam much more prominent than he had been in the Old Testament (he is hardly mentioned outside Genesis)*.

Jewish people in this period sometimes spoke of Adam's immense size (he filled the whole earth!), or more often of his glory, which he lost at the Fall.

They believed that his sin introduced sin and thus death into the world, and that all his descendants shared in his guilt.

Jewish interpreters generally believed that Adam's glory would be restored to the righteous in the world to come. (The structure of Genesis, from Adam to Noah [5:29; 9:1-2, 7] to Abraham [12:1-3] and so on, suggests that God was working to restore humanity, and from Abraham's line the deliverer of Gen 3:15 would finally come.)

5:12-14. "All sinned" (v. 12), even those who, unlike Adam (v. 14), had no direct law to disobey (v. 13). Paul is not, however, denying personal responsibility for sin on the part of Adam's descendants. Jewish writers claimed that Adam brought sin and death into the world (4 Ezra 7:118; \*2 Baruch 54:15), but they also believed that each of his descendants made his or her own choice to follow in Adam's footsteps (4 Ezra 7:118-26;

2 Baruch 54:15), becoming each "our own Adam" (2 Baruch 54:19).

5:15. "The many" here could refer, as in the \*Dead Sea Scrolls, only to the elect; but if Paul meant this, he would also only be claiming that the elect were damned in Adam. More likely, "the many" is an allusion to Isaiah 53:11, where the suffering servant would justify "the many" by becoming a sacrifice on their account. All who were in Adam by birth became sinners; all who were in Christ by true baptism (6:4) became righteous.

5:16-21. Much of the argument of 5:15-21 is a standard Jewish argument, *qal vahomer*, an argument from lesser to greater ("how much more"). GrecoRoman logic also used this interpretive technique; many Jewish ways of arguing from Scripture were part of the general interpretive methodology of antiquity.

Jewish people believed that Israel would reign in the life of the world to come (cf. 5:17), as Adam and Eve reigned before the fall (Gen 1:26-27).

6:1-11

## Dead to Sin

6:1-5. For Jewish people, *baptism was the act by which non-Jews converted to Judaism, the final removal of Gentile impurity*; by it one turned one's back on life in paganism and sin, vowed to follow God's commandments, and became a new person with regard to Jewish law. A person who became a follower of Jesus likewise gave up his or her old life; through participation with Christ's death, Paul says, their death to the old life in sin, which was crucified in Christ, is an accomplished fact.

Ancient Near Eastern religions had long had traditions of dying-and-rising gods, general vegetation deities renewed annually in the spring. Some ancient sources, especially early Christian interpretations of these religions, suggest that initiates into various *mystery cults "died and rose with" the deity. Scholars early in the twentieth century naturally saw in this tradition the background for Paul's language here. Although the evidence is still disputed, it is not certain that the mysteries saw a once-for-all dying-and-rising in baptism, as in Paul, until after Christianity became a widespread religious force in the Roman Empire that some other religious groups imitated. More important, the early Christian view of resurrection is certainly derived from the Jewish doctrine rather than from the seasonal revivification of Greek cults.*

6:6-7. The "old man" ("old self" in many translations) is life in Adam versus life in Christ (5:12-21). When a Gentile slave escaped from a Jewish owner and converted to Judaism by baptism, in Jewish legal theory his or her new personhood made the slave free from the former owner.

6:8-11. Jewish teachers believed that the "evil impulse" (see comment on 7:14-25) would trouble even the most pious until the time of the \*Messiah, when the evil impulse would be slain. For Paul, the Messiah has come, and sin's power has been killed. The finished work of Christ means that the believer has already died to sin and now needs to acknowledge this-to "reckon" it done in faith (6:11; this is the same term for God's reckoning righteousness in chap. 4). Such faith in

God's complete work was not common in ancient religion, nor is it in most religions today.

6:12-23

Free from Sin, Servants of Righteousness

6:12-13. "Instruments" (NASB, NIV) could be more specifically translated "weapons," as in 13:12. If that image is in view here, the image of presenting oneself (more than in 12:1) could allude to soldiers presenting themselves for battle (although it is as slaves reporting for duty in v. 16).

6:14-21. Some scholars have seen here the idea of "sacral manumission": a slave could be freed from the service of one master by officially becoming the property of a god and the god's temple. What is much more clear is that many philosophers regularly used "slavery" and "freedom" in the sense of slavery to false ideas and pleasure, and freedom from such ideas and pleasure as well as from their consequences, like anxiety. Philosophers often emphasized being one's own master.

Judaism could speak of being free from sin. Jewish teachers believed that because Israel had the \*law, the evil impulse that made the \*Gentiles sinful could not enslave them. They also taught that Israel had become God's slaves when they were freed from slavery in Egypt.

6:22. In the \*Old Testament, Israel was "sanctified" (NASB, NRSV) or set apart as special for God; in standard Jewish teaching, *eternal life was the life of the world to come, inaugurated at the resurrection from the dead*. 6:23. Slaves could and often did receive some "wages." Although the slave's owner legally owned the slave's possessions, the slave could use this property or money (called a peculium), sometimes even to purchase freedom. That such wages were normally a positive symbol makes Paul's words here all the more striking.

7:1-6

## Dead to and Freed from the Law

The Jewish people believed that they were saved by God's gracious choosing, not by meticulous observation of the commandments. Nevertheless, with few exceptions they kept the commandments as best they knew how, and this set them apart from *Gentiles, who did not behave as righteously as Israel did*. Paul here addresses another major divider between Jew and Gentile in his effort to bring the two together (see the introduction to Romans), because even a Gentile who converted to Judaism would take years to know the law as well as a Jewish person who had been raised in it did.

7:1. Some later Jewish teachers argued that one who converted to Judaism was a new person-to such an extent that one's former relatives no longer counted as relatives. Paul can use this line of reasoning differently: just as a person became dead to his or her old master (here, sin) at conversion (see comment on 6:1-5), that person became dead to the old law in which he or she was held.

7:2-4. According to biblical law, both death and divorce severed previous relationships; Paul emphasizes the one that fits his analogy in the context. (Because one never spoke of a woman's former husband as her "husband" after the divorce, no one would have understood Paul's words here as ruling out certain kinds of divorce; cf. 1 Cor 7:15.)

7:5. Philosophers often contrasted reason (which was good) with the passions (which were bad); Jewish teachers came to speak of these in terms of the good and evil impulse. See comment on 7:15-25.

7:6. Most of Judaism felt that the *Spirit had departed from Israel with the prophets and would only return with the Messiah's coming*; here Paul contrasts the new act of God in the coming of the Spirit with the old instructions only written on tablets (cf.

Ezek 36:26-27). Greek interpreters had traditionally distinguished between interpreting laws according to principles and according to exact wording;

Palestinian Jewish interpretation was very interested in the exact wording (sometimes even literally to "letters" and spellings of words).

7:7-13

### Sin Unfairly Exploited the Law

Scholars dispute whether Paul here refers literally to his own past life or uses "I" generically for sinners under the \*law. Because there is more precedent for teachers using themselves in illustrations (e.g., Phil 3:4-8) than for them using "I" (as opposed to a rhetorical "you" or "one") generically (but cf. 1 Cor 13:1), Paul probably uses his own previous experience under law, viewed in retrospect, to illustrate life under law in general.

7:7-8. The opening rhetorical question is the natural one after the parallelism of 6:1-23 with 7:1-6. "You must not covet" is the tenth of the Ten Commandments, the only one that goes directly beyond one's actions to the state of one's heart. The point is that one might not regard coveting as transgressing God's law if one were not so informed by the law.

7:9. When a Jewish boy came of age around thirteen (as in the later bar mitzvah, similar to Roman coming-of-age rituals), he became officially responsible for keeping the commandments. Paul may refer to something even earlier in his life, because Jewish boys in upper-class Jewish homes began to be schooled in the law at age five.

7:10-11. Jewish teachers recognized the power of human sin (the evil impulse), but said that study of the law enabled one to overcome it, and that the law brings life. Paul says that the law became instead the vehicle of his death. (Some scholars think that "deceived" alludes to Gen 3:13, where Eve was deceived and death entered the world. If Adam were speaking in the verse, it would fit Rom 5:12-21 better. Although "sinned and died" alludes back to 5:12-21, it is less clear that Paul alludes to Adam here.)

7:12-13. Paul argues in Romans that Jew and \*Gentile come to God on the same terms (see the introduction to Romans), and that the law is not a direct advantage for salvation (2:12-15), although it is valuable for knowing more about salvation (3:2). His whole purpose in this section is to explain that the problem is not the law; it is human sinfulness that leads people to disobey the law in their hearts.

7:14-25

### The Struggle of Human Effort Under the Law

Many commentators have thought that 7:14-25 describes Paul's struggle with sin at the time he was writing the passage, because he uses present-tense verbs. But *diatribe* style, which Paul uses in much of Romans, was graphic in its images, and Paul in the context has been describing his past life under law (7:7-13). Thus it is more likely that Paul contrasts the spiritual worthlessness of religious introspection and self-centeredness (count the "I's" and "me's") in Romans 7 with the life of the *Spirit* by grace in Romans 6 and 8.

Jewish teachers said that 'repentance and learning the law were the only present cures for the evil impulse; here Paul replies that knowing moral truth had not freed him from sin. But Judaism also believed that in the day of judgment the evil impulse would be eradicated. As some \*rabbis later put it, "God will take the evil impulse out in the sight of the nations and slay it"; or as Paul put it, Christians are dead to

sin and freed from its power (chap. 6). Paul's point in the context is that one must receive righteousness (including the power to live rightly) as a gift of God's grace, not as an achievement by human effort (cf. 1:17; 8:4). (This reading of the passage accords with most Greek, as against most Latin, church fathers.)

7:14. On "flesh" (NASB, NRSV) in the sense of human sinfulness, see comment on 8:1-11. The \*Old Testament spoke of God's selling his people into bondage to their enemies, and of God's redeeming his people from slavery to their enemies. Selling into bondage is the opposite of redemption, of freedom from sin in 6:18,

20 and 22. That the law is "spiritual" means that it is inspired by the \*Spirit (see comment on Spirit in 8:1-11).

7:15-22. Philosophers spoke of an internal conflict between the reason and the passions; Jewish teachers spoke of a conflict between the good and evil impulse. Either could identify with Paul's contrast between his mind or reason-knowing what was right and his members in which passions or the evil impulse worked.

7:23. Other moral teachers also described the struggle between reason and passions (or against the evil impulse) in military terms; see comment on 13:12 (cf. also 7:8, 11: "opportunity" was sometimes used in terms of military strategy).

7:24. "Wretched man that I am!" was a standard cry of despair, mourning or self-reproach; some philosophers complained that this was their state, imprisoned in a mortal body. When they spoke of being freed from their mortal bodies, however, they meant that they would be freed simply by death; Paul's freedom came by death with Christ (6:1-11).

7:25. Paul summarizes 7:7-24 here: the dual allegiance of the person trying to achieve righteousness only by human effort, without becoming a new creation in Christ.

8:1-11

### People of the Spirit Versus People of the Flesh

In the \*Old Testament "flesh" could designate any mortal creature but especially designated human beings. It connoted weakness and mortality, especially when contrasted with God and his *Spirit* (*Gen* 6:3; *Is* 31:3; cf. *Ps* 78:39). By the New Testament period, this connotation of weakness was extended to moral weakness, as in the \*Dead Sea Scrolls, and could be translated "human susceptibility to sin," or "self-centeredness" as opposed to "God-centeredness." A life ruled by the flesh is a life dependent on finite human effort and resources,



a selfish life as opposed to one directed by God's Spirit. Paul's use of "flesh" and "Spirit" refers to two spheres of existence-in Adam or in Christ-not to two natures in a person.

"Flesh" per se is not evil in the New Testament writings; Christ "became flesh" (Un 1:14), though not "sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3). (The NIV translation "sinful nature" can be misleading, because some people today think of spirit and flesh as two natures within a person, whereas "Spirit" here is God's Spirit-it is not a special part of a person but the power of God's presence. Romans 7:15-25 describes a struggle of two aspects of human personality-reason and passions-trying to fulfill divine morality by human effort; but this struggle is not in view here, where people either live that struggle by the flesh or accept God's gift of righteousness by the Spirit. The radical bifurcation of a human being into a morally upright "spiritual" part versus an im

moral "bodily" part is a Neo-Platonic idea foreign to Paul. It was first introduced into the interpretation of the New Testament by \*Gnostics and would not have been the natural interpretation to Jewish readers or to Gentile Christians who knew about the Spirit.)

But flesh, mere bodily existence and human strength, is mortal and inadequate to stand against sin (which abuses bodily members that could have been harnessed instead by the Spirit). Although the term is used flexibly in the Bible, in one sense we are flesh (especially in the Old Testament use of the term); the problem is not that people are flesh but that they live life their own way instead of by God's power and \*grace. The New Testament does sometimes distinguish the human body from the soul, but this distinction is not the point of the contrast between walking according to the flesh and walking according to the Spirit (8:4).

The Spirit especially anointed God's people to prophesy in the Old Testament but also endowed them with power to do other things. Here, as in the \*Dead Sea Scrolls and occasionally in the Old Testament, the Spirit enables a person to live rightly (see especially Ezek 36:27). In Judaism, the Spirit indicated God's

presence; here the Spirit communicates the very presence, power and character of Christ.

8:1-4. Paul's point here is that whether the law brings life or death depends on whether it is written in one's heart by the Spirit (Ezek 36:27) or practiced as an external standard of righteousness, which is unattainable by human effort (cf. 3:27; 9:31-32; 10:6-8).

8:5-8. Philosophers often urged people to set their minds on eternal things rather than on the transitory affairs of this world. *Philo condemned those whose minds were taken up with the matters of the body and its pleasures. Philosophers divided humanity into the enlightened and the foolish; Judaism divided humanity into Israel and the Gentiles.* Paul here divides humanity into two classes: those who have the `Spirit (Christians) and those left to their own devices.

Some people believed that inspiration came only when the human mind was emptied, as in some Eastern mysticism. But Paul speaks of the "mind of the Spirit" as well as the "mind of the flesh." Instead of opposing reason and inspiration, he contrasts reasoning that is merely human (and thus susceptible to sin) with reasoning that is directed by God's inspiration.

8:9. Most Jewish people did not claim to have the Spirit; they believed that the Spirit would be made available only in the time of the end. After the 'Messiah had come, all those who were truly God's people would have the Spirit working in them (cf. Is 44:3; 59:21; Ezek 39:29).

8:10. Jewish people in this period usually distinguished soul and body, just as the Greeks did, although for Jews the division usually functioned only at death. (Some Jewish writers were more influenced by Greek categories than others.) But Paul does not say here that the (human) "spirit is alive" (NIV, NASB); literally, he claims that the "Spirit is life" (KJV, NRSV, TEV). Thus he means that the body was still under death's sentence, but the Spirit who indwells believers would ultimately resurrect their bodies (8:11).

8:11. Jewish people believed that God would raise the dead at the end of the age. Paul modifies this teaching by only one step: God has already raised Jesus, and this event is a sure sign that the rest of the \*resurrection will happen someday.

8:12-17

Led by the Spirit

The Jewish people looked back to their deliverance from Egypt as their first redemption and looked forward to the \*Messiah's coming as a new exodus, God's ultimate act of salvation. In this hope they were prefigured by the prophets, who often portrayed the future deliverance in terms of the exodus from Egypt (e.g., Hos 11:1, 5, 11).

8:12-13. Those who lived according to the flesh (as bodily creatures in their own strength) would die, but those who lived by the *eschatological* Spirit (the Spirit who in most Jewish thought and often in the *Old Testament prophets* characterizes the life of the age to come) would be resurrected by him; see comment on 8:1-11 and 8:10-11.

8:14. The Old Testament often comments that God "led" Israel through the wilderness (Ex 15:13; Deut 3:2; Ps 77:20; 78:52; 106:9; 136:16; Jer 2:6, 17; Hos 11:4; Amos 2:10; for the new exodus, see Is 48:20-21; Jer 23:7-8) and called Israel his "sons" or "children" when he redeemed them from Egypt (Ex 4:22; Deut 14:1; 32:5, 18-20; Ps 29:1; Is 1:2, 4; 43:6; 45:11; 63:8; Jer 3:19, 22; Hos 1:10; 11:1, 10). In both devotional and historical language, God's leading was sometimes associated with his Spirit (Neh 9:20; Ps 143:10; Is 63:14).

8:15. Here Paul again plays on the idea of the exodus from Egypt; God's glory led his people forward, not back toward slavery (cf. Ex 13:21; Neh 9:12; Ps 78:14; for new exodus, Is 58:8; Zech 2:5). He adopted them as his children (cf. 9:4). On "Abba" see comment on Mark 14:36; although only a few Roman Jews spoke \*Aramaic, Jesus' special address for his Father as "Papa" had become a

name for God in early Christian prayers (Gal 4:6), perhaps by Jesus' design (Mt 6:9). Roman adoption-which could take place at any age-canceled all previous debts and relationships, defining the new son wholly in terms of his new relationship to his father, whose heir he thus became.

8:16. Philosophers spoke of conscience testifying (cf. 2:15; 9:1); Jewish people believed that the \*Spirit had testified to God's truth against Israel and the nations by the prophets. But here the Spirit's prophetic message is good news to the believer's heart. As a legal act, Roman adoption (cf. 8:15) had to be attested by witnesses; the Spirit is here the attesting witness that God adopts believers in Jesus as his own children.

8:17. God had promised Israel an "inheritance" in the Promised Land, and Jewish people spoke of "inheriting the world to come"; on inheritance and adoption, see comment on 8:15. Many Jewish people believed that a period of suffering would precede God's revelation of glory at the end.

8:18-27

### Birth Pangs of a New World

8:18. Jewish readers would agree with Paul that the righteous would be greatly rewarded for any sufferings in this world. (Many Jewish teachers went beyond Paul and even said that one's suffering atoned for sin; but Paul accepted only Christ's atonement as sufficient for sin-3:25.)

8:19. Following \*Old Testament tradition (Is 66:17-18), Jewish people generally believed that the whole world order would be transformed at the time of the end (although not all believed that it would be cosmic in scope or cataclysmic in scale).

8:20. Greek tradition declared that the world had been declining from its past Golden Age to the present. Jewish

tradition debated whether it was good that humanity had been created, and suggested that Adam's sin had brought harm and the domination of evil powers to all creation. \*Stoic philosophers believed that the elements would come unraveled and nothing but the primeval fire was really eternal. Cosmic pessimism was rampant in the first century; most people believed that decay and Fate reigned supreme. Paul's point that God had subjected creation to this worthless temporal state is bearable only in the light of the future hope he attaches to it (v. 21); like most Old Testament prophets, he includes the assurance of God's faithfulness.

8:21. The GrecoRoman world dreaded "corruption" (NASB) or "decay" (NIV); only the eternal, unchanging things in the heavens would last the human body and everything else on earth would decompose. The language of "being set free from slavery" (NASB, TEV), "God's children" and probably "glory" alludes to the Old Testament exodus \*narrative (see comment on 8:12-17).

8:22. In Exodus, God's people "sighed" or "groaned," and their groaning under hardship was an unintended prayer that hastened God's redemption of them (Ex 2:23). Paul also connects "groaning" (Rom 8:22, 23, 26) with birth pangs here. Some Jewish traditions portrayed the time just before the end as birth pangs (see comment on Mt 24:6-8), the great suffering that would bring forth the \*Messiah and the messianic era. For Paul, the sufferings of the whole present time are birth pangs, meaningful sufferings that promise a new world to come.

8:23-25. "First fruits" was the actual beginning, the first installment, of the Palestinian harvest (Lev 23:10); the presence of the *Spirit in believers is thus the actual beginning of the future world. Believers had experienced redemption (Rom 3:24) and adoption (8:15), but still awaited the fullness of that experience at the resurrection of their bodies by the Spirit (8:11).*

The Israelites were redeemed from Egypt, but the consummation of their salvation was delayed a generation by their disobedience in the wilderness; it was nearly forty years before they entered the Promised Land. Paul can explain

Christ's salvation in the same way, because it is a new exodus (see comment on 8:12-17): the beginning and completion of salvation are separated by the period of God's leading through the tests of the present age (8:14, 18).

8:26. Judaism usually viewed the \*Spirit as an expression of God's power rather than as a personal being; like John (chaps. 14-16), Paul views the Spirit as a personal being (cf. 2 Cor 13:14). Jewish teachers portrayed God's personified mercy or angels like Michael as intercessors for God's people before his throne; Paul assigns this role to Christ in heaven (Rom 8:34) and to his Spirit in his people (8:26). The Spirit joins here in the birth pangs, as eager for the new creation as God's children are (see comment on 8:22-23).

8:27. All Jews agreed that God searches hearts (1 Kings 8:39; 1 Chron 28:9), an idea that occurs repeatedly in the \*New Testament, and in some later \*rabbinic texts even appears as a title for God ("Searcher of Hearts").

8:28-30

God's Eternal Purpose

8:28. \*Stoic philosophers believed that everything would work out for the best—from the vantage point of God, although no other individual being (including lesser gods) would continue. Judaism believed that God was sovereign and that he was bringing

history to a climax, when he would vindicate his people and turn their past sufferings to their advantage as he rewarded them (see comment on 8:18). For Paul, the ultimate good of these hardships is their work in conforming believers to Christ's image in the end (8:29).

8:29. Some Greek thinkers emphasized becoming like the deity, but the "image" ("likeness"-NIV) idea is most prominent in Jewish sources. In Jewish thinking, Wisdom was God's purest image (see comment on Col 1:15), but Jewish texts often speak of Adam or humanity in general as made in God's image (following

Gen 1:26-27; for the sense in Genesis, cf. Gen 5:3). God's children will all be conformed to the image of the firstborn of the new creation, the new Adam (Rom 5:12-21).

8:30. On predestination, see chapter 9. The predication of predestination on foreknowledge (8:29) does not cancel free will; most of Judaism accepted both God's sovereignty and human responsibility. (The idea that one has to choose between them is a post-New Testament idea based on Greek logic.)

8:31-39

### God's Triumphant Love

8:31. The \*Old Testament often speaks of God being "with" or "for" his people (Ps 56:9; 118:6; Is 33:21; Ezek 34:30; 36:9); anyone who challenged them challenged him (see Is 50:8; cf. 54:17).

8:32. On the idea of inheriting all things in the world to come, see comment on 4:13; cf. comment on 5:17.

8:33-34. Here Paul applies the advocacy of God in 8:31 to God's heavenly court in the day of judgment. Jewish texts express confidence that God would ultimately vindicate Israel, as he did each year on the Day of Atonement; Paul bases his confidence of believers' vindication on the advocacy of Christ (see comment on 8:26).

8:35-36. Lists of hardships were common in GrecoRoman literature (especially used to show that the wise man had passed all tests and lived what he believed). "Nakedness" was applied to insufficient dress, not only to complete exposure. "Sword" was the standard mode of citizen execution in this period, and the citation from Psalm 44:22 (applied by second-century \*rabbis to martyrdom) reinforces the certainty that martyrdom is in view here (8:36).

8:37. Verses 35-39 form a chiasm (an ancient literary structure based on inverted

parallelism): nothing can separate us from Christ's love (8:35a, 39b), no matter what it is (8:35b-36, 38-39a), which makes believers more than overcome their opposition (8:37). The center of a chiasm, this verse, would be especially significant to the ancient reader. Israel believed they would triumph in the day of judgment because God was for them; Paul assures believers that they triumph in their present tests because of what God has already done on their behalf (8:31-34).

8:38. Given the context of cosmic opposition here, we should take "principalities" and "powers" (KJV, NASB) with "angels" as referring to the spiritual forces ruling the nations and bringing opposition against God's people. Many ancient Jewish writers used these terms in this way.

8:39. "Height" and "depth" may simply personify the heavens above and Hades (the realm of death) below. Other scholars have suggested that they are astrological terms; the spiritual forces who ruled the nations were often believed to do so through the stars, and most first-century Greeks feared the inevitable power of Fate working through the stars. For Paul, it is not fate, the stars, angelic powers, or heaven or hell that determines the

lives of believers; rather, the faithfulness of Jesus (8:31-34) does.

9:1-5

### Israel's Rightful Place

9:1-3. Paul's love and willingness to sacrifice himself for his people would remind his biblically informed hearers of Moses (Ex 32:32), although God did not permit Moses to sacrifice himself, either (Ex 32:33-34).

9:4-5. "Covenants" may be plural to include an allusion to God's covenants with the patriarchs, or to his frequent renewing of his covenant with his people in the \*Old Testament, also recognized in later Jewish texts.



The blessings Paul had assigned to believers in Jesus (8:2, 15, 18, 29) belonged to Israel, according to the Old Testament. By recognizing Christ as God (NIV and other translations of 9:5; cf. 1:25 for the same construction), Paul makes the point even more emphatically: God himself came to humanity through Israel.

9:6-13

#### Not Saved by Ethnic Descent

Most Jewish people believed that their people as a whole was saved, in contrast to the \*Gentiles. Israel's salvation began with God choosing Abraham (chap. 4). Paul argues here that ethnicity is insufficient grounds for salvation, as the \*Old Testament also taught (e.g., Num 14:22-23; Deut 1:34-35; Ps 78:21-22; 95:8-11; 106:26-27); God can save on whatever terms he wishes.

9:6-9. Abraham had two sons while Sarah was alive, but only one received the promise (Gen 17:18-21).

9:10-13. Isaac had two sons, but only one received the promise. This was determined before their birth (Gen 25:23; cf. Mal 1:2-3). Although God may have chosen Jacob because he foreknew Jacob's heart (8:29), the point here is that God has the right to choose among the chosen line. Not all Abraham's descendants received the promise; the rest of the Old Testament was clear that many Israelites broke the covenant (Ex 32:33-35; Num 11:1; 14:37; 16:32-35; 25:4-5; Deut 1:35). Why do most of Paul's contemporaries act as if things are different in their own time?

9:14-18

#### God's Choice in Moses' Time

9:14-15. In Exodus 33:19, God has the right to choose whom he wills. In the context, he has forgiven Israel as a whole because Moses has found favor in his sight (33:12-17), and God would show Moses his glory (33:18-23) because

Moses is his friend (33:11). God's choice of individuals, however, was not arbitrary but was based on people's response to God (32:32-34), although God had initially called both Israel and Moses unconditionally.

9:16-18. God raised up this particular Pharaoh for the purpose of showing his power, that "the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord," as Exodus repeatedly says (e.g., 9:16). God clearly hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex 9:12, 35; 10:27; 11:10), but not until Pharaoh had hardened his own several times (Ex 7:22; 8:15, 32). In other words, God elevated a particular person to fight against him; but that person also made his own choice, which God foreknew, before God punished him with a continuously hard heart (cf. Rom 1:24-25; 2 Thess 2:10-12). The \*Old Testament affirms both God's sovereignty (e.g., Deut 29:4) and human responsibility (e.g., Deut 5:29), assuming that God is sovereign enough to ensure both (although human choice could not nullify God's word; cf., e.g., 1 Kings 22:26-30, 34-35).

9:19-29

### God Chooses Gentiles

9:19-21. Paul here uses the language of Isaiah 29:16, 45:9 and 64:8, which the *Dead Sea Scrolls* often used in prayers. *The point is that God made people, and God can therefore do with them as he wills. In the context this means that he can choose either Jews or Gentiles, not that his predestination is arbitrary.*

Some nineteenth-century churchgoers reasoned that God would save them if he chose and hence made no effort to seek salvation. Their view misrepresented the point of this passage. Although Paul teaches "predestination," we must understand what he means by that term in the light of what it meant in his own day, not what it has meant in recent centuries' theology (or, as in the case just mentioned, in distortions of that theology).

Most Jewish people believed that their people as a whole had been chosen for

salvation; they viewed predestination in corporate, ethnic terms. Paul here discusses predestination only in the context of the salvation of Israel (9:1-13) and the Gentiles (9:23-29); thus he means only what both context and culture suggest: God can sovereignly choose to elect whom he wills, and that need not be on the basis of descent from Abraham. God's sovereignty means that he is free to choose on another basis than his covenant with ethnic Israel (3:1-8); he can choose on the basis of (foreknown) faith in Christ (4:11-13; 8:29-30).

Some older New Testament scholars, like Rudolf Bultmann, thought that Romans 9-11 had nothing to do with the argument of the letter; but these scholars misunderstood Romans. In this letter Paul puts Jews and \*Gentiles on the same spiritual footing (see the introduction), and Romans 9-11 is in fact the climax of his argument.

9:22-23. Here Paul means that God tolerated those who would remain in evil for the sake of those who would be saved, rather than ending the world immediately (cf. 2 Pet 3:9; cf. Prov 16:4).

9:24-26. In context Hosea 2:23, which Paul cites here, refers to God's restoring Israel, despite his temporary abandonment of them (1:9). If God could abandon but then restore Israel, he could also graft Gentiles into Israel if this were his will.

9:27-28. Here Paul quotes Isaiah 10:22-23: the prophet warned that only a remnant would survive and return to the land after judgment. If God saved only a remnant in the \*Old Testament and promised that only a remnant would survive judgment, Paul asks what makes Jewish people of his own day feel secure that their Jewishness will save them.

9:29. Now Paul cites Isaiah 1:9, which makes the same point as Isaiah 10:22-23 (which he just quoted). In the context in Isaiah, Israel has acted like Sodom, the epitome of sin (1:10); they are fortunate to have any survivors (1:7-9), because God demands justice (1:16-17), not mere sacrifices (1:11-15).

9:30-10:4

### Israel's Wrong Righteousness

Why had Israel so often failed God in the *Old Testament*, with only a remnant surviving? Because they pursued the law in terms of human effort (see comment on 9:29) instead of trusting in God, who transforms the heart. Although the term "faith" is rare in translations of the Old Testament (Paul already used most of the references in 1:17 and 4:3), Paul believes that the idea permeates the Old Testament, where God's people must respond to his \*grace from their hearts.

9:30-32. Israel rightly sought the law but missed its point by stressing works

rather than faith (see comment on 9:29)-faith was the law's point (3:21, 31). The two approaches to the law (one right and the other wrong) are essential to Paul's argument (3:27; 8:2; 10:5-8).

9:33. Here Paul follows a common Jewish interpretive practice of blending texts together (Is 8:14; 28:16). Because Isaiah 28:16 probably alludes back to Isaiah 8:14, Paul's blending of the two is especially reasonable, although perhaps only his Jewish readers caught what he was doing. The point is that the same stone that caused Israel to stumble (Is 8:14, which also speaks of the stone as a sanctuary) would save those who believed (Is 28:16).

10:1-2. Jewish literature from this period often praises zeal for the law, even to the point of violently resisting those who wished to repress Jewish practice of the law.

10:3-4. On God's righteousness see comment on 1:17. "End of the law" can mean the "goal" or "climax" to which the law points.

10:5-10

### Two Approaches to Righteousness

10:5. One approach is based on a particular Jewish interpretation of Leviticus 18:5: those who keep the commandments merit \*eternal life. (This view appears in Jewish texts alongside the view that God elects Israel as a whole to be saved.) This kind of righteousness was unavailable to *Gentiles without years of study of the law*. Paul also established in Romans 1-3 that this kind of righteousness does not work (see comment on 9:30-32).

10:6-7. Paul here does *midrash*, *expounding a text in good Jewish fashion*. In context, "*Who will ascend?*" in Deuteronomy 30:12 means, "*Who will ascend again on Mount Sinai, to bring the law down again?*" "*Who will descend?*" in Deuteronomy 30:13 means "*Who will descend into the Red Sea to cross it again?*" God had redeemed his people at the Red Sea, according to the Old Testament and Jewish tradition; now, God has consummated his saving acts in Christ, and the same principle applies to him.

10:8. Deuteronomy 30:14 refers to the law; as long as it is written in the heart (cf. 30:6), God's people could live out its righteousness (cf. Jer 31:31-34). Paul says that this principle applies all the more to the message of faith that the law teaches (3:31); \*grace, not human effort, leads to righteousness (8:2-4).

10:9-10. Paul emphasizes "mouth" and "heart" here because he is expounding Deuteronomy 30:14 (cited in the previous verse), which speaks of the message of faith in one's mouth and heart.

10:11-21

### Salvation for All Peoples

10:11-12. Paul again cites Isaiah 28:16 (see Rom 9:33), which he is still explaining. His emphasis is on the "whoever" (NASB, TEV), by which he argues that the text must apply literally to \*Gentiles as well as Jews.

10:13. Jewish teachers commonly expounded a text by citing other texts that shared the same key word; hence Paul ties in another verse (Joel 2:32) that has

the word "whoever" to explain that in Isaiah 28:16 "not be disappointed" (NASB) or "not be put to shame" (NIV) means "be saved."

10:14. Paul expounds the implications of Joel 2:32: salvation is meant for whoever will seek it, Jew or \*Gentile, but this availability of salvation presupposes that they must have the opportunity to hear the message.

10:15. Paul also has Scripture to verify that bearers of the good news must be "sent" (this term is the verb form of

the noun translated "\*apostle," hence "apostled"); people are not saved without the opportunity to hear. Isaiah 52:7 announced that there was good news, but heralds still had to bring it to the people.

10:16. Several verses after Isaiah 52:7, Isaiah reports the response to the good news the heralds bring (53:1), and Paul's readers probably know how this text continues: Israel rejected the good news (53:2-3).

10:17. Paul confirms his earlier interpretation of Deuteronomy 30:14 (in Rom 10:8): the saving message is none other than the proclaimed message of Christ.

10:18. Jewish teachers often grappled with the question of whether *Gentiles who had not heard the truth could be held responsible for it. They concluded that Gentiles could at least infer the oneness of God from creation and thus should avoid idolatry (see comment on Rom 1:19-20). The Gentiles may not have heard all of Christ's message (10:17), but creation itself made them hear enough of it to be responsible for doing right. (Psalm 19:4 refers in context to the testimony of creation.) The Jewish Diaspora had more knowledge than the Gentiles had; having the \*law, they had every reason to believe, and word about Christ had already begun to penetrate most Jewish centers of the ancient world.*

10:19. God had promised in the law to provoke Israel to jealousy by another nation. Israel had rejected him for that which was not a god; God would reject them for that which would not be a people-to provoke them to jealousy (Deut

32:21; cf. Rom 11:11, 14).

10:20-21. Here Paul quotes Isaiah 65:1-2, which occurs in the context of God's judgment on Israel (64:8-12), of \*Gentiles being accepted into God's household (56:3-8) and of God restoring the remnant of Israel to himself (65:8-9).

11:1-10

### Always a Remnant

"Remnant" does not presuppose any particular percentage; it is simply the current state of "some" Jewish people following Jesus, rather than "all Israel" (11:26). A few other groups of Jewish people, as represented in the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, also felt that they alone were serving God and the rest of Israel was in apostasy. Because the early Christians believed that Jesus was the Messiah, they believed that rejecting him was like rejecting the law or the prophets, and like the prophets they accused their people of apostasy from Israel's true faith.

11:1. Ancient writers often adduced examples for their arguments, sometimes using themselves. But Paul turns quickly to an example from Scripture (11:2-4).

11:2-4. The Elijah \*narrative in 1 Kings 19:10, 14 and 18 indicates that at the time of Israel's deepest apostasy, a remnant had still avoided idolatry. It may be relevant that some Jewish traditions presented Elijah as zealous for God but not patriotic enough for Israel.

11:5-7. Paul now expounds on 11:24: if there was a remnant even in Elijah's day, there will always be a remnant (i.e., "how much more" now, a common form of argument in ancient times). That God chooses the remnant follows directly from 9:19-29 and from the other texts Paul will marshal in 11:8-10.

11:8. Here Paul cites Isaiah 29:10, which makes clear that God hardened Israel; but this hardening again does not exclude Israel's responsibility. God silenced the prophets (Is 29:10) because Israel refused to hear them (30:10-11); thus God

would make his message plain through the Assyrian invasion (28:9-13). Israel had become blind and deaf to God's word (29:9-10), having excuses (29:11-12) and a pretense of righteousness (29:13-14); but someday they would see and hear again (29:18, 24).

11:9-10. In Psalm 69:22-23, the righteous psalmist prays for the judgment of blindness on his persecutors, implying that God was sovereign over blindness-spiritual (Rom 11:8) as well as physical.

11:11-14

### Provoking Israel to Jealousy

Paul here begins to expound Deuteronomy 32:21, which he cited in Romans 10:19. He does not say that the only purpose for the salvation of the \*Gentiles is to turn Israel back to God (cf. the missionary purpose of Israel in Gen 12:2-3), but he recognizes that it is their primary purpose relating to Israel. Paul's argument in Romans places Jew and Gentile on the same level with regard to salvation (see the introduction); but now he reminds the Gentiles to remember whose faith they have adopted. Gentile racism against Jewish people is as contrary to the focus of Christianity as Jewish prejudice against Gentiles; racism of any sort opposes the message of the *gospel*. *Ancient* rhetoricians considered it acceptable to praise oneself only if the purpose were to stir others to emulation (as here) or to defend oneself.

11:15-24

### The Jewishness of Christianity

*Gentile Christians must remember that they are grafted into a Jewish faith, and that when they are grafted into the Old Testament people of God, they accept not only Israel's spiritual history as their own but also Jews as in some sense their siblings, even if those who do not follow Jesus are fallen siblings. Earlier in Romans Paul had opposed Jewish arrogance against Gentiles; here he opposes*



Gentile arrogance against Jewish people.

11:15. In the biblical prophets, the turning of the Jewish people back to God's ways coincided with Israel's restoration and the end time (which included the \*resurrection of the dead).

11:16. The mention of "dough" alludes to the first fruits of the dough offering in Numbers 15:20-21, which sanctifies the whole offering; Israel's beginnings were holy (Jer 2:3), and God had not forgotten his plans for them. Paul's second illustration (root and branches), however, is the focus of 11:17-24. (Mixed metaphors were common in antiquity.)

11:17-24. \*Gentiles could and did become part of the people of God in the \*Old Testament (e.g., Ruth, Rahab, David's Cherethite guards, etc.); but they were clearly a small minority. Now that Gentile Christians in Rome have begun to outnumber Jewish Christians, it is easier for them to forget their heritage in Israel's history.

Israel was sometimes described as a tree, whose roots were the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). Contrary to standard Jewish teaching, Paul had argued that uncircumcised Gentiles could become part of that people of God through faith in the Jewish \*Messiah (chap. 4). Now he reminds Gentiles to respect the Jewish people, who had brought them their faith. It was easier for Jewish branches to be grafted back into the true form of their own faith than for pagans who had worshiped idols before their conversion to understand the faith they were now accepting. Like other Jewish teachers of his day, Paul does not regard any

particular person's salvation as guaranteed from the human perspective till they have persevered to the end.

Grafting of trees (adding a shoot of one tree to another tree) is reported in both Jewish and GrecoRoman literature. Sometimes shoots from a wild olive tree

would be grafted onto a domestic olive tree that was bearing little fruit in an attempt to strengthen or save the life of the tree. The unproductive original branches would be pruned off, and the new graft was considered "contrary to nature" (as in 11:24NASB).

11:25-32

### The Coming Salvation of Israel

God had promised that Israel as a whole (the surviving remnant after great afflictions) would someday turn to him (Deut 4:25-31; 30:1-6); at this time God would bring about the end (e.g., Hos 14:1-7; Joel 2:12-3:2). Paul's view of the end time here presupposes this return.

11:25. Some *Old Testament prophets had predicted God's witness spreading among the Gentiles*; because the final \*repentance of Israel would usher in the end, God had delayed Israel's final repentance until the fullness of the Gentile remnant could be gathered in (cf. Mt 24:14; 28:19-20; 2 Pet 3:9).

11:26-27. The future salvation of Israel is repeated throughout the Old Testament prophets, although this is one of the few \*New Testament passages that had occasion to address it. Jewish teachers commonly said that "all Israel will be saved," but then went on to list which Israelites would not be saved: the phrase thus means "Israel as a whole (but not necessarily including every individual) will be saved." In other words, the great majority of the surviving Jewish remnant will turn to faith in Christ. Paul proves this point from Isaiah 59:20-21: the remnant of Jacob who turn from sin will be saved by the coming of the new redeemer, when he puts his \*Spirit on them (Paul paraphrases, as was common in ancient citations).

11:28-29. Unlike some interpreters today, Paul does not regard God's promises to ethnic Israel as cancelled only deferred (cf. Deut 4:25-31); God still had a covenant with the fathers (Deut 7:8). Most readers today subscribe to one of two systems: Israel and the \*church are separate and irreconcilable entities, and

Israel will be restored; or Christians become the true Israel and ethnic Israel has no more purpose in God's plan. Paul would have rejected both extremes, believing that ethnic Israel as a whole would return to the covenant in the end time, joining the \*Gentiles and Jewish remnant that already participate in it.

11:30-32. Paul's point here is that all peoples have sinned and all peoples must come to God through his mercy in Christ. This point addresses the cultural-ethnic conflict in the Roman church (see the introduction to Romans).

11:33-36

### Praising God's Wisdom

Like the writers of some \*Hellenistic Jewish documents, Paul concludes this section of his letter with a doxology, or praise to God. Using the language of Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11 (which refer to God's sovereignty in and over creation), Paul praises God's wisdom in designing history as he has so that salvation would be available to all peoples (chaps. 9-11).

\*Stoic philosophers believed that God controlled all things and that all things would ultimately be resolved back into him. In this context Paul's words in 11:36 mean instead what Jewish

people normally meant by such words: God is the source and director of human history, and all things—even the evil choices of sinful humans—would in the end glorify him and the rightness of his wisdom.

12:1-8

### Serve One Another

Having laid the theological groundwork for reconciliation in the Roman church (chaps. 1-11), Paul now turns to practical counsel. (Some other ancient letters of exhortation followed this pattern.) He emphasizes that God's will is for believers to think rightly: to recognize the equal value of all members of the body and to

use all of one's gifts to build up the body. 12:1. Ancient Judaism and some philosophical schools often used "sacrifice" figuratively for praise or for a lifestyle of worship; hence it would be hard for Paul's readers to miss his point here. When he speaks of "your rational [cf. KJV 'reasonable'; not 'spiritual'-NIV, NASB, NRSV] service," his word for "service" alludes to the work of priests in the temple, and "rational" to the proper way to think (as in 12:2-3). The \*Old Testament called sacrifices that God accepted "pleasing" (NIV, TEV) or "acceptable"; people also spoke of sacrifices being "holy"; but "living" sacrifices strains the metaphor in order to present the sacrificial lifestyle as a continual experience.

12:2. Judaism generally believed that evil powers dominated this age but that all peoples would acknowledge God's rule in the age to come. Here Paul says literally, "Do not be conformed to this age." In contrast to some ecstatic Greek worship that played down rationality and the amoral ritual formalism of most Roman and many public Greek cults, Paul emphasizes the proper use of the mind: those who discern what is good, acceptable (v. 1) and perfect will know God's will.

Jewish wisdom writers and Greek philosophers could have agreed with Paul's emphasis on renewing the mind; they understood that one's attitudes and values affected one's lifestyle. But Paul's basis for renewal is different from theirs; he bases it on the new kind of life available in Christ, which most of Judaism expected only in the world to come.

12:3-5. That each class in society had a special function, like members of a body, had long been argued by philosophers defending the status quo of the state; 'Stoic philosophers had also applied the image of head and body to God and the universe. But Paul may be the first writer to suggest that each member of the religious community has a special function within the one body, abolishing the priesthood-laity distinction of most ancient religions. By affirming that each member has "a measure of faith" (NASB; not "the measure of faith"-KJV, NIV, NRSV) apportioned for different functions (12:6-8), Paul affirms diversity

within unity. He will apply this principle to the ethnic conflict in the \*church (see the introduction) in chapter 14.

12:6. Most of ancient Judaism regarded \*prophecy as supernatural in a way different from the other gifts Paul lists here. God could use the other gifts here, but most of ancient Judaism saw them as activities one did for God, whereas they thought of prophecy as a divine "possession" that was very rare in their own day. That Paul regards all these gifts as divine empowerments and prophecy as one among many suggests how thoroughly he expects the God who worked miracles in the *Old Testament to continue to work this way regularly in the life of the church*. 12:7-8. Although "serving" may have

a broad meaning (cf. 15:25), its position between prophecy and teaching suggests that it refers to an office in the church (diakonos; see comment on 16:1). "Showing mercy" probably refers to charity-caring for the sick and the poor, and so forth; although all Christians did this work to some extent, some had a special gift for it.

12:9-21

### General Parenesis

One of the styles ancient moralists used is called parenesis, which strings together various moral exhortations that have little connection among them. Paul uses parenesis here but has a general theme that applies to most of his exhortations: Get along with one another. This theme fits the situation of Romans (see the introduction).

12:9-10. Ancients emphasized honor highly. Soldiers swore never to "give preference to another" in honor above Caesar. Some philosophers recommended that "inferior" people prefer "superior" people above themselves. Paul's admonition sounds more like that of Jewish teachers, who emphasized that each of their \*disciples should look out for the others' honor as much as for the disciple's own.

12:11-13. Jewish people believed in taking care of needs in their community, and the Christians of Paul's day no doubt agree (v. 13); the modern phenomenon of well-to-do and hungry Christians in the same city would have shocked the moral sensibilities of ancient Jews and Christians (though not pagans). In antiquity "hospitality" meant putting up travelers (without charge) in one's home while they were in town; they would normally carry letters from those trusted by their hosts, attesting that they were to be accepted as guests.

12:14. Like some other exhortations in the context, this one may well echo Jesus' teaching (Lk 6:28); it was common to repeat the sayings of famous teachers, and Jewish teachers always cited their own teachers and the \*law. In a *Cynic* or Stoic context, the exhortation would sound like a call to ignore suffering; but although Cynic philosophers disregarded reputation, they were adept at returning wisecracks. The counsel of Jesus and Paul has more to do with the Jewish conviction of a final judgment and that believers could let matters rest with God's justice (12:17-21).

12:15. Weeping with those who mourned was a proper expression of sympathy in most of ancient culture. Although philosophers and moralists often warned against weeping too much, because it "does no good," Jewish weddings and mourning ceremonies (including funeral processions, in which the public joined) presupposed the principle Paul states here.

12:16. Humility was a Jewish virtue, definitely not a Greek one (except, Greeks thought, for the socially lowly, who ought to be humble). Whereas many writers emphasized knowing one's proper place, Christian literature goes beyond other ancient literature in suggesting that believers go out of their way to associate with the lowly.

12:17-18. Not repaying evil for evil may come from Jesus' teaching (Mt 5:39), although some other Jewish teachers had also recommended nonretaliation (as early as Prov 20:22). Doing what is respectable in the opinions of other people

was a virtue not only to aspiring GrecoRoman politicians but also to Jewish people in their dealings with \*Gentiles. But while Jewish people adopted stricter guidelines than the surrounding culture for the sake of witness, they never compromised their own beliefs; the point of the admoni

tion is to protect their witness and prevent unnecessary opposition.

12:19. \*Stoic philosophers opposed seeking revenge; they believed that Fate was sovereign, and one's best resistance to Fate was to cooperate with it and refuse to let one's will be manipulated by circumstances. Jewish pietists likewise condemned vengeance; they trusted God to vindicate them. The practice was, however, more difficult than the principle. The later Gentile massacres of Jews in Palestine invited bloody reprisals; unfortunately, only the most devout usually live out what to others are pious theories. Paul cites Deuteronomy 32:35, but the concept appears elsewhere in the \*Old Testament as well (2 Sam 22:48; Prov 20:22; Jer 51:56).

12:20. Here Paul quotes Proverbs 25:21-22; although Solomon might have meant "heap burning coals upon his head" as the enemy's emotional misery, in Paul's context of vengeance (Rom 12:19) this expression may mean that one's enemy will be punished all the more severely in the day of judgment. This is also the sense in which the \*Dead Sea Scrolls viewed nonretaliation.

12:21. Some Greek and Jewish thinkers suggested that one should turn an enemy into a friend instead of retaliating. Sometimes, however, the one who does good to the evildoer will be vindicated only in the future day (12:20).

13:1-7

### Submission to Civil Authorities

Loyalty to the state was a standard literary topic among ancient writers (e.g., the Stoic writer Hierocles, *How to Behave Toward One's Fatherland*); it appears in lists and discussions alongside proper treatment of parents, elders and friends.

Philosophers and moralists commonly wrote on how government officials should act but also wrote on how citizens should behave toward the government. According to \*Plato, Socrates even refused to escape execution lest he undermine the state with its good laws as well as its bad laws.

When Jewish people felt repressed for their ethnic and religious practices, submission to civil authorities was the ultimate example of nonresistance (12:17-21), an attitude that they did not always achieve. Paul is well aware that only roughly a decade before his letter the Jewish community had been expelled from Rome-possibly in debates over the identity of the \*Messiah that Jewish Christians provoked (see comment on Acts 18:2).

Jewish people had to be concerned about public opinion, especially in Rome, where their maintenance of economic ties with Palestine was viewed with suspicion. Because many people viewed Christianity as a minority sect within Judaism, Christians had even more reason to be cautious. Jews and Christians publicly stressed their good citizenship, against the popular slander that they were subversive. This emphasis does not mean, however, that they would avoid denouncing injustice (cf. 2 Thess 2; Jas 5; Jewish \*apocalyptic).

13:1-2. Nero was emperor at this time, but he had not yet begun persecuting Christians or repressing other groups; he was still under the benevolent influences of \*Seneca and Burrus, rather than the reprobate Tigellinus. Nero was always popular in Greece, from which Paul was writing.

Although some Palestinian Jews already advocated the revolt against Rome that would take place in little more than a decade, other Palestinian Jews reportedly swore to nonresistance, believing that God had ordained

all civil authorities (in the *Old Testament*, cf. *Is* 45:1; *Jer* 25:9; *Dan* 4:32). *Jews in Rome certainly upheld this position and would have been embarrassed by any other. Judaism generally believed in submission (which is a matter of nonresistance or nonviolence, not always of obedience), unless it involved a*



*conflict with obeying God's law.* The Old Testament clearly taught God's sovereignty over earthly rulers (Prov 16:10; 21:1).

13:3-5. Here Paul offers standard ancient moral exhortation. The Roman state did many evil things; even its court system was based on social class. But the Romans generally advocated justice and toleration, and at this point the Christians have nothing to fear from them. Paul thus does not need to qualify the general principle he is articulating at this time. "The sword" refers to the standard method of execution in this period (beheading); in earlier times the ax had been used. Swords were carried in front of Roman officials to indicate their authority over life and death.

13:6-7. The empire as a whole levied a property tax (often about 1 percent) and a head tax; local provinces or kingdoms added further taxes; there were also customs duties. Taxes were used to finance roads and run the government but also to support Roman armies and temples devoted to the worship of the emperor. Officials expected and received honor by virtue of their position.

13:8-10

### Fulfilling the Law

Paul reminds his Jewish readers concerned about *Gentiles' lax observance of the law* that the best way for them to fulfill the law is to get along with each other (see the discussion of situation in the introduction to Romans). 13:8. Moralists often emphasized not being in debt (cf. Prov 22:7); sometimes even whole essays were written on the subject (e.g., by \*Plutarch). Judaism always stressed love of one's neighbor and sometimes recognized it as a commandment that summarized God's law.

13:9-10. No readers, whether Greek, Roman or Jewish, would disagree with the commandments Paul cites here, except for some Gentiles who might disagree about coveting. Treating one's neighbor as oneself is a recurrent admonition of ancient ethics, although ancient moralists found many different ways to

summarize ethics; Paul follows the specific summary advocated by Jesus (Mk 12:31).

13:11-14

### Waking for the Dawn

13:11. Philosophers sometimes spoke of a soul inattentive to spiritual matters as being asleep. Paul's image of sleeping in the light of Christ's impending return probably harks back to Jesus' own teaching (Mt 24:43; Mk 13:36). Most Greeks expected history to continue as normal or believed that the universe moved in cycles; but most Jews, like Paul, were anticipating its climax in the imminent future.

13:12. Many Palestinian Jews were expecting an end-time battle that would include the overthrow of the \*Gentiles, but Paul here intends this image much more in the sense that Jews outside Palestine would have used it. Philosophers often described their battle with the passions in athletic and military images. This imagery also influenced non-Palestinian Jewish writers; for instance, one document portrays Moses' armor or weapons as prayer and incense (Wisdom of Solomon 18:21). Some of these documents also use the image of clothing oneself

spiritually, and Judaism could speak of persons' being "clothed" with God's *Spirit* (*cf. also* Old Testament images listed in comment on Eph 4:20-24).

13:13-14. Jews often characterized Gentile behavior in terms of wild drinking parties and premarital sex, and in general they were not far off the mark. These activities were done at night (drunken parties often lasted well into the night), like sleeping (v. 11) and burglaries.

14:1-23

### Don't Be Divided over Foods or Holy Days

Paul's exhortation to unity between the Jewish and *Gentile Christians in Rome now reveals some of the cultural divisions being experienced there. Jewish people did not expect most Gentiles to observe their food laws or holy days but did expect Gentile converts to Judaism to do so, perhaps including Gentile Christians. (Leviticus 11:44-45 deals with holiness as separation and may suggest that God gave special food laws to Israel particularly to keep it separate from other nations, because most cultures had their own special dietary practices. This approach would no longer be productive in the New Testament period in the light of Paul's missions strategy. Its principle of moral separation could be retained without cultural separation.)*

Gentiles, particularly in Rome, had long ridiculed Jewish people for their peculiarities on especially these two issues (plus circumcision, which seems not to have been an issue in the Roman \*church). Paul emphasizes primarily eating practices. (Although he addresses a different kind of division over foods in 1 Cor 8, he applies similar principles.)

14:1-4. Most distinct cultures in the ancient world had their own food customs; some philosophical schools also had their own food rules. But few cultures were as insistent as the Jewish people that a deity had assigned their food laws; in the two centuries before Paul many Jews had died for refusing to eat pork, a meat Greeks thought delicious. Although we know that some Hellenistically educated Jews in Egypt took the food laws symbolically, most Jews continued to keep these laws regardless of where in the Roman Empire they went.

14:5-6. The precise time for festivals was such an important issue in Judaism that different Jewish groups broke fellowship with each other over the issue. (Not much later in history, different Christian groups followed suit.) Pagans had their own festivals, with different nations having their own ancestral customs and calendars. But \*Gentile writers especially reviled the Jewish sabbath. Romans reasoned that Jews were just lazy and wanted a day off from work. (This was not the first time in history that someone viewed Jewish worship in such terms-Ex 5:17.) Paul also alludes to the Jewish custom of giving thanks

over food.

14:7-9. Like their separate food laws, their sabbath regulations forced Jews to form their own moderately selfsufficient communities in the GrecoRoman world, and Gentiles often regarded Jews as separatistic and unsociable. This situation increased the social distance between most Jews and Gentiles.

14:10-12. "Judgment seats" were common in the GrecoRoman world; officials like Pilate or Gallic, would make their judgments from such a bema or rostrum (Acts 18:12). God judging all people before his throne was a common image in Jewish portrayals of the end. It is natural for Paul to apply Isaiah 45:23 to the final judgment, because the chapters around it speak of God delivering

Israel in the end and calling the nations to account before him so that they acknowledge that he is God.

14:13. Other ancient texts also used the "stumbling block" as a metaphor. Jews called one another "brothers," as did members of Greek religious clubs. Christians regarded one another as spiritual siblings, and Paul reinforces the conviction that Jewish and \*Gentile Christians must regard one another in these terms.

14:14. Jews classified foods as "clean" or "unclean," based on the Bible (Lev 11). For Paul to say that this classification is no longer literally relevant would put him in agreement with some philosophically minded Jews in the GrecoRoman world (most of whom nevertheless kept the food laws), but it would shock the vast majority of ancient Jews.

14:15-16. Precisely because foods do not matter, one should be willing to forgo eating them for the sake of what does matter: preserving the unity of the body of Christ. Paul is not telling \*Gentiles to keep kosher; but he is telling them not to try to talk Jewish Christians out of doing so.

14:17-19. Jewish people often spoke of the perfect future time of God's *kingdom*

(see 1 Cor 6:9), when the Spirit would be made available and all people would be at peace with one another (Rom 14:17). For Paul, the coming of the `Messiah and the coming of the Spirit have also inaugurated the working of the kingdom, hence believers should be at peace with one another (14:19).

14:20-21. The issue here is not eating meat or drinking wine per se, but that *Gentile meat (suspected of having been offered to idols or not having the blood properly drained) and Gentile drink (some of it possibly used for libations to gods) were suspect to Jews. But like a good rhetorician, Paul calls his readers to concede his point even in the most extreme case, requiring abstinence from all meat or wine (and if it applies to the extreme, "how much more"-following a standard style of argument-to all lesser cases). (Although some Jewish groups abstained from wine for periods of time-Num 6:3; cf. Jer 35:5-6-diluted wine was a normal part of meals; thus the language here is probably \*hyperbolic; see comment on Jn 2:9-10.)*

14:22-23. Jewish teachers erected a "fence around the \*law" to keep people from areas of "doubt," areas that were unclear and where they might be sinning. Paul's point is that total commitment to God means doing one's best to find out what is right and avoiding what one does not know to be right.

15:1-13

### Christ as a Minister of Racial Reconciliation

Ancient writers commonly used examples to argue their points. Opponents were more hesitant to challenge the example of a virtuous teacher. Continuing his argument from chapter 14, Paul begins with the ultimate and indisputable example for Christians: Christ.

15:1-3. Psalm 69:9 makes good sense in this context-Psalm 69 is a psalm of the righteous sufferer; thus the \*New Testament often applies it appropriately to Christ (the ultimate righteous sufferer).

15:4. Paul's can say that Scripture "was written for our instruction" (NASB) because he believes, like his Jewish contemporaries, that it is God's Word and remains relevant to new situations. This statement does not mean that he thought it was intended only for his own generation, as some commentators have suggested on an analogy with their views of scriptural com

mentary in the \*Dead Sea Scrolls; indeed, "for our instruction" could easily refer directly to Moses' words in Exodus 24:12. The Jewish people found comfort in the teaching of the Scriptures (2 Macc 15:9).

15:5. Being of "one mind" means thinking in unity (1 Chron 12:38)-in this case a unity of love, not of complete agreement (chap. 14).

15:6. Praising God "with one voice" means in unanimity; cf. Exodus 24:3 (this chapter may be fresh in Paul's mind; cf. Rom 15:4) and 2 Chronicles 5:13.

15:7-12. That Christ accepted not only Jews but *Gentiles Paul demonstrates from Scripture (Ps 18:49=2 Sam 22:50; Deut 32:43 [cf. Rom 12:19]; Ps 117:1; Is 11:10). Paul provides citations from different parts of the Old Testament and could have provided others to make his case that God seeks the praise of the Gentiles as well as that of the Jewish people (e.g., 1 Chron 16:31; Ps 22:27; 96:10; 102:22; Is 49:23; 60:3, 9-14). His last citation, Isaiah 11:10, was a clear prophecy of Gentiles turning to the Messiah and being saved in the end time; Isaiah also has other prophecies about Gentiles being incorporated into God's people (19:23-25; 56:3-8).*

15:13. Letters often included a prayer or well-wishing for someone's health, especially in the opening; Paul's letters, which focus on spiritual issues, naturally include more prayers than most ancient letters (15:5-6, 33, etc.). Jewish people customarily used wish-prayers like this one in the same way that they used direct intercession, and Paul no doubt means for God as well as his Roman audience to hear this prayer.

15:14-33

## Paul as a Minister of Racial Reconciliation

Often a speech's epilogue would repeat points made in the proem (opening); Paul employs such repetition in this letter but in a more personal tone characteristic of especially affectionate letters or speeches. The end of a speech was often the place to stress what the Greeks called pathos, or emotional appeals.

15:14. Greek writers often expressed their confidence in their addressees; this expression helped the readers to listen more favorably to the rest of the letter and sometimes served as a polite way to make a request. Although it was customary in letters of advice, it was less appropriate in letters of reproof (cf. Galatians). "Admonition" (KJV, NASB) was the gentlest form of correction offered by public speakers and by skilled writers in "letters of blame," and Paul here notes that they can supply this instruction to one another.

15:15. "Reminding" was a common feature of ancient moral exhortation.

15:16. One popular Jewish expectation of the end time was that Israel would rule over the `Gentiles, who would finally acknowledge the one true God, and the Gentiles would send tribute to Jerusalem (e.g., Is 60:11-14). Jerusalem Christians may have viewed Paul's collection for the saints there (15:25-27) as a fulfillment of this vindication of Israel's faith.

15:17-18. Philosophers used their lifestyle as well as their teaching to demonstrate their principles and could call attention to it as an example. Paul limits his credentials to what has been demonstrated in his life and ministry.

15:19. Illyricum was north of Macedonia, across from Italy on the eastern Adriatic coast, on the west of the Yugoslav/Serbo-Croatian region. The Roman province was called Illyricum; Greeks included this region and some more territory farther south (including

Dyrrhachium on the Via Egnatia in Macedonia) in what they called Illyria.

15:20. Illyricum (15:19) may have been one of these previously unevangelized areas; Spain would be another (15:28).

15:21. Here Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15, which in its context clearly refers to *Gentiles ("kings")*, who contrast with the Messiah's own people, Israel, who would not recognize him (53:1-4).

15:22-23. Ancient letters often dealt with business, including planned visits.

15:24. "Assist" (NIV) or "help" (NASB) implies that they would cover his expenses for the trip. This would be a great expression of hospitality, but one which the Roman \*church would probably consider an honor if they could afford it. There is little evidence of any major Jewish settlement in Roman Spain before the third century A.D.; Paul's missionary work there would probably be among those who knew nothing of the Bible. At the farthest western end of the Mediterranean, Spain was counted by geographers such as Strabo as at the end of the earth (with India on the opposite, eastern side of the world); cf. Acts 1:8.

15:25-26. "The poor" became a title for the pious of Judea in some circles (especially members of the 'Qumran community)-perhaps mainly because most of them were poor. Jewish teachers considered the laws requiring care for the poor to be a major test of whether a \*Gentile convert had genuinely accepted God's \*law. Sending money to Jerusalem was a common Jewish practice in the Mediterranean, especially with regard to the annual temple tax. Jews throughout the world expressed their solidarity with Jerusalem and the homeland through the temple tax; here the Gentile Christian offering for Jerusalem expresses solidarity between Gentile and Jewish Christianity. This is a practical example of humble racial reconciliation, important to Paul's case in Romans.

Paul's letters more frequently identify \*churches by cities in which they are located than by provinces. The churches probably viewed themselves in these terms because inhabitants of large urban areas identified themselves more by the cities in which they lived than by the political boundaries of Roman provinces.



Regional cultural ties existed, however, and this passage may indicate regional cooperation among churches.

15:27. Jewish readers steeped in the \*Old Testament had a much better sense of corporate responsibility from members of one people to another than is common in individualistic Western society (Deut 23:3-4; 2 Sam 21:1-9). The Roman government collected tribute from the rest of the world, but in the second century the church in Rome was known for sending funds to needy churches elsewhere in the empire, to free Christian slaves from the mines and so forth.

15:28. Ancient letters often anticipated personal visits. It was impossible for any traveler to find a direct route from Syria or the East to Spain; eastern vessels would go to Rome, from which a traveler would have to transship to Spain. A seafarer would voyage to Tarraco there; one could also travel overland by roads to southern Gaul and across the Pyrenees to Tarraco. It was a trip of more than a thousand miles; overland from Rome to Cordova was about seventeen hundred miles. "Put my seal on this fruit" (NASB) refers to the seal used in commercial documents, guaranteeing the correct contents of merchandise (hence "made sure"-NIV); Paul would inspect and oversee the offering's delivery.

15:29-33. That Paul's journey to Je

rusalem could involve some danger is attested by the account in Acts 21-22; see comment on that passage.

16:1-2

Letter of Recommendation for a Minister

Jewish travelers normally carried letters of recommendation attesting that they should be received; they were generally bearers of such letters themselves. (The only mail service was by imperial couriers for the government; Paul thus had to send the letter by a traveler.) Paul no doubt emphasizes Phoebe's spiritual qualifications for two reasons: Jewish and GrecoRoman circles did not usually

have high regard for women's religious wisdom; and she will need to minister to them, explaining to them by word of mouth anything in Paul's letter that the hearers would not understand.

16:1. "Servant" (KJV, NASB, NIV) is the Greek diakonos, which is sometimes translated "deacon" (e.g., NRSV), probably the owner of a home in which \*churches met. The term for "deacon" probably corresponds to the chazan of the \*synagogue, who was in charge of the building (see comment on 1 Tim 3:8 for the meaning of "deacon"). If deacons filled this office or the office of charity overseers, they held an office that was respected in Jewish synagogues (and not normally assigned to women). But the New Testament usually applies the term diakonos to "ministers" of God's word, like Paul and his colleagues; Paul may have this meaning in view here (although ancient Judaism did not allow women to teach the law publicly to men).

Cenchrea was the eastern port city of Corinth, close to the isthmus. It had naturally come to host a variety of foreign religions and thus had an atmosphere of religious toleration.

16:2. "Helper" (NASB) or "help" (NIV) translates a Greek term applied especially to \*patrons. A patron of a religious association was normally a well-to-do person who allowed members of a religious group to meet in his or her home. The patron was generally a prominent and honored member of the group and generally exercised some authority over it. Although most patrons of religious associations were men, some women patrons are known.

16:3-16

Greetings to Friends in Rome

"All roads led to Rome," and many people in the ancient Mediterranean migrated there; this would be especially true of Jewish Christians who had returned after Claudius's death annulled his expulsion order, such as Aquila and Priscilla (16:3; cf. Acts 18:2). Many ancient letters closed with greetings to friends, often by

name, but this letter makes it clear how many friends Paul had, even in a city he had not yet visited.

Many of the names are Greek or Jewish, but this is not unusual; perhaps as much as 80 percent of the inhabitants of imperial Rome were descendants of freed slaves from the East. One could bear a Latin name without being a Roman citizen, although the list probably includes several indigenous Romans.

It is noteworthy that although Paul greets roughly twenty-eight individuals and only about eleven are women, he specifically commends the work of six (over half) the women and six (about one-third) the men. This disproportion may be because, in that culture, the women needed more affirmation in their ministry (see comment on 16:1-2). 16:3. Husbands were normally mentioned first unless the wife was of higher status, which may suggest Pris

cilia's superior status in society (by birth) or in the \*church. "Prisca" is the Latin diminutive form of "Priscilla."

16:4. "Laying down one's neck" (KJV) seems to have been a figure of speech for risking one's life on someone else's behalf, probably derived from the Roman method of execution by beheading.

16:5. Small \*synagogues sometimes had to meet in homes before they could purchase buildings; many Greek religious associations did the same; *churches did so for the first three centuries, using their income to buy slaves' freedom, feed the poor and so forth, rather than to build edifices. In Rome, many well-to-do apartments existed above shops in multistory tenement buildings; Aquila and Priscilla probably lived above their artisan shop. The Roman house churches might especially be threatened with disunity among themselves, because Rome (unlike the cities of the East) did not allow Jews to assemble on any level larger than local synagogues, and Christians were regarded as Jews. "Epenetus" was a common name among slaves and freedmen, though not limited to their ranks.*

16:6. "Maria" could be a Latinized form of the Jewish "Miriam" (normally translated "Mary" in the \*New Testament), or possibly a Latin nomen, probably indicating citizenship.

16:7. "Andronicus" is elsewhere attested as a \*Hellenistic Jewish name. "Junia" is a Latin nomen that should indicate her Roman citizenship. Against attempts to make "Junia" a contraction of the masculine "Junianus," this form is not attested in Rome; ancient Christian readers recognized that Junia was a woman. Because she and Andronicus traveled together without scandal, and singleness was unusual, they were undoubtedly a husband-wife team; husband-wife teams were known in some professions, like doctors and lowerclass merchants. The most natural way to read the Greek phrase is that both were `apostles; some modern interpreters have rejected this reading mainly because they presuppose that women could never fill this office. "Kinsmen" (KJV, NASB) can mean countrymen (cf. TEV; see also 9:3; 16:11).

16:8-9. "Ampliatius" and "Urbanus" were common slave names in Rome.

16:10. "The household of Aristobulus" may refer to freed slaves of Aristobulus, Herod the Great's grandson, who spent his life in Rome. But "Aristobulus" is a common Greek name, so the phrase could refer to a house .church or family headed by a different Aristobulus.

16:11. "Household of Narcissus" may mean the \*freedpersons formerly belonging to Narcissus, himself a freedman who was one of the empire's most powerful people under Claudius.

16:12. "Tryphaena" and "Tryphosa" are Greek names sometimes used by Jewish as well as Greek women. One scholar, noting that both names come from a root meaning "delicate," thinks that Paul may be playing on their names ironically when he says they "labor hard"; this proposal is weakened by the same phrase in 16:6. "Persis" is attested as a slave name but was also used by free persons.

16:13. "Rufus" is a Roman name, sometimes born by Jews (some commentators think this is the Rufus of Mk 15:21); it was a common slave name. Greetings at the close of letters could include affectionate terms of intimacy such as "father" or "mother" (e.g., one ancient letter addresses two older men as "fathers"). Here "mother" could be a simple mark of endearment toward an older woman, or it may imply that she was a benefactor who

helped support Paul's ministry.

16:14. Like Greeks, Jewish people in the ancient Mediterranean often used Greek names compounded from the names of pagan gods, like Hermes or Apollo. "Patrobus" is short for the rare name "Patrobius"; some scholars have linked this name with the household of one of Nero's wealthy freedmen. "Phlegon" was also a common slave name.

16:15. "Julia" is a Latin nomen (not just a praenomen) and may indicate that she was a Roman citizen. (By contrast, other commentators have noted that it was instead a common name for female slaves.)

16:16. Kisses were a common form of affectionate greeting for family members, intimate friends or those who were objects of respect (e.g., Gen 33:4; 45:15; 1 Sam 20:41). Due to abuses, in subsequent centuries the \*church limited the practice of the liturgical kiss of fellowship to men kissing men and women kissing women, although this was not the initial practice.

16:17-20

### Concluding Exhortation

16:17. In keeping with the point of the letter (see the discussion of the situation in the introduction), those who cause schisms and divisions are Paul's main object of warning.

16:18. Philosophers ridiculed those who were "slaves" to their passions; on

Paul's phrase here see comment on Philippians 3:19. Philosophers and moralists also distanced themselves from populist public speakers who sought to flatter their audiences; but they emphasized that they themselves told people what they needed to hear rather than what they wanted to hear. 16:19. Paul probably alludes here to Adam and Eve seeking fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:9; 3:6); see comment on Romans 16:20. He may also intend a contrast with Jeremiah 4:22: "wise to do evil, but ignorant of how to do good." 16:20. Genesis 3:15 promised that the serpent who deceived Adam and Eve to partake of the fruit (cf. Rom 5:12-21) would ultimately be crushed beneath the feet of Eve's seed. In many Jewish traditions the serpent represented *Satan or his instrument*. *Some texts seem to have understood Eve's "seed" as Israel, others (perhaps including the LXX of Gen 3:15) as the \*Messiah*; but here Paul applies it more broadly to the Messiah's followers as well. His point is that they should persevere to the end, and their opposition will be defeated.

16:21-24

### Greetings to the Church in Rome

It was not uncommon to attach supplemental greetings; these, however, are from Paul's colleagues in Corinth to the \*church in Rome. Although this is a basic list of greetings, it may have also served the purpose of attestation of witnesses, which also came at the end of documents.

16:21. "Lucius" was a GrecoRoman name sometimes used by Jews; its shortened Greek form is "Lucas" (i.e., Luke). For the names "Jason" and "Sosipater" (possibly but not necessarily the same people), see Acts 17:6, 9 and 20:4 ("Sopater" was another form of "Sosipater").

16:22. "Tertius" was a Roman name (often used for a third child), sometimes used by Jews. Most of the ancient world was too illiterate to write letters, certainly letters as sophisticated as this one; they depended instead on scribes. Those who were highly literate were also wealthy enough that

they could dictate letters to scribes as well, sometimes their own secretaries, who were usually literate slaves. Paul's host may have lent him his scribe, or Tertius may have been a professional scribe; in any case, Tertius seems to be a believer, because scribes did not normally add their own greetings. That Paul followed the common practice of signing dictated letters (1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; Col 4:18; 2 Thess 3:17) indicates that he used scribes regularly.

16:23-24. The \*church in Corinth met in Gaius's home; Paul is probably also lodging there. For his house to accommodate "the whole church," it must have been larger than most of the house churches.

"City treasurers" (NASB) were often public slaves or \*freedmen, but they were generally wealthy. In other cases public jobs like this one were assigned to well-to-do persons as part of their civic responsibilities. If this is the same "Erastus" who is attested in a Corinthian inscription as an aedile in this period (and this is likely), he must have been a wealthy benefactor of the city, part of the municipal aristocracy.

16:25-27

### Closing Benediction

The conclusions of GrecoRoman letters varied considerably but often ended with a wish for the recipient's health and then "Farewell." \*Synagogues, however, closed prayers, readings and services with benedictions, and Paul anticipates that his letter would be publicly read in house churches' worship services.

16:25-26. Some ancient Jewish texts like Daniel and the \*Dead Sea Scrolls spoke of God revealing what were once mysteries, special knowledge previously unavailable except by divine revelation. For Paul, this mystery of \*Gentile ingathering was already taught in the Scriptures (Paul cites many of them in his argument in Romans; cf. also, e.g., Is 19:18-25; 56:3-8; Zech 2:11) and is finally being understood.

16:27. Here Paul offers the sort of

standard Jewish doxology used to close \*Hellenistic Jewish religious works (except, of course, for "through Jesus Christ"). "Amen" was the standard closing at the end of prayers and a number of Jewish books.



# 2 CORINTHIANS

## Introduction

**Authorship and Unity.** Although virtually all scholars agree that Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, scholars differ over whether it is one letter or a composite of several. Some of the proposed partitions in the book have more in their favor than others; the most obvious break in tone is between chapters 1-9 and chapters 10-13, the latter chapters shifting to an outright heated defense. But although ancient letter collections often removed openings and closings of letters, such collections generally retained the distinction between one letter and the next (e.g., *Cicero*, *Seneca*). Dividing 2 Corinthians into two letters is a possible way to read the evidence, but the burden of proof should remain on those who wish to divide it rather than on those who argue for its unity.

**Situation.** Scholars vigorously debate the precise setting of some books in the \*New Testament, including 2 Corinthians. Reconstructing the exact problem depends somewhat on the issue of the book's unity. Virtually everyone agrees that Paul addresses tensions caused by opponents, at least in chapters 10-13, but views on the nature of the opponents vary. Gnostics (though developed `Gnosticism first appears in extant sources over half a century after Paul), Palestinian Jewish Christians, non-Palestinian Jewish Christians and others have been proposed as Paul's opponents here. Paul's reference to their descent from Abraham in 11:22 at least makes clear that they are Jewish, but this need not make the division a particularly Jewish issue. The dividing issue seems to be over views of ministry more than over theology as it is usually defined: Paul came as a servant and labored among them, whereas his accusers have a high view of themselves more appropriate to upper-class ideals of leadership in antiquity than Paul's was.

**Purpose.** Paul wishes to reestablish his converts' trust in him and their role of

intimate friendship. He thus writes a letter of selfcommendation, a particular form of letter of recommendation especially necessary if one were defending oneself against charges. Chapters 10-13 are an ironic self-defense to the Corinthian Christians. The letter includes elements of various ancient letter styles: reproof, comfort and especially friendship. Another concern is also at issue: for the sake of the poor in Jerusalem, Paul needs the Corinthians' money (chaps. 8-9). Unlike the opposing missionaries who have sought to replace him, Paul has never asked the Corinthians for money for himself, and this has offended upper-class members of the congregation who believed that the community should pay their teachers, who should not be self-supporting artisans (the well-to-do despised artisans).

Commentaries. Among the most helpful are C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, HNTC 8 (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); and F. F. Bruce, *I and 2 Corinthians*, NCB (1971; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980). More detailed works like Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB 32 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984); and Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, WBC 40 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1986), are useful to more advanced students. Of more technical and specialized works, John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel*, SBLDS 99 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), is one of the most useful (some of his insights are incorporated in this commentary); H. D. Betz, *2 Corinthians 8-9*, *Hermeneia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), is also useful on many points in chapters 8-9; see also Peter Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians* (Tubingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987).

1:1-7

### Opening Greetings

1:1-2. Paul opens following standard letter-writing conventions; see the introduction to New Testament letters and comment on Romans 1:1-7.

1:3. It was customary in the ancient world to include a prayer or offering of thanks to a deity in letters of substantial length (as most of Paul's extant letters are). One of the most common forms of Jewish prayer was a benediction or praise that began, "Blessed [praised] be God, who ..."; this was a way of glorifying God for his works. A regular \*synagogue prayer addressed God as the "merciful Father" (so TEV here), which is what "Father of mercies" (cf. "Father of compassion"-NIV) means.

1:4. God would bring his final comfort to his people with the *Messiah's coming* (e.g., *Is 40:1; 49:13*), but he also comforted them in their hardships during the present (e.g., *Ps 94:19*). The principle that suffering teaches one how to treat others is rooted in the Old Testament (*Ex 23:9*). Paul's specific comfort in this verse is that he found Titus well and with good news about the Corinthians (*2 Cor 7:4, 6-7, 13; cf. 2:2-3*).

1:5. Some Jewish people spoke of the "pangs of the Messiah" as a period of tribulation for God's people before the end, and commentators have naturally read "we have a share in Christ's many sufferings" (TEV) in these terms (Paul seems to have meant this also in *Rom 8:22-23*). But more is at work here than this image alone. Jewish people also believed that they corporately shared the experience of those who had gone before them. They were chosen in Abraham, redeemed with their ancestors in the exodus from Egypt and so on. Paul believed that Jesus' followers became sharers in his cross in

an even more intimate way by his \*Spirit who lived in them.

Greek philosophers often taught that one should ignore pain; Paul taught that pain should drive one to trust God for help.

1:6-7. In GrecoRoman tradition, the way a sage endured the sufferings sent by God helped others by setting an example of virtuous conduct. Paul involves the Corinthians in Christ's mission being carried on by himself and Christ's other witnesses; they share Paul's sufferings and victory through prayer (1:11). Such

an expression of solidarity may have parallels, but they are rare-and in practice the Corinthians may not have been as supportive of his mission as Paul was wishing (chaps. 10-13). One standard type of letter in antiquity was the "letter of consolation"; Paul may hope to communicate comfort in this letter (2:7), after having written the sorrowful one (2:4; 7:7-13).

1:8-11

### Paul's Sufferings

Speeches and letters often included a brief \*narrative section (1:8-2:13), usually following the introduction, that explained the circumstances necessitating the speech or letter.

1:8. "Asia" is the Roman province by that name, in what is now western Turkey. Its capital was Ephesus, Paul's missionary headquarters during this period in his life (1 Cor 16:8). Some scholars have argued that Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus during this period, but it is more likely that he simply refers to chronic opposition climaxing in the riot of Acts 19:23-41.

1:9-10. "Carrying about a death sentence" or "we had the sentence of death within ourselves" (NASB) may be a figurative allusion to the way a condemned man carried the charge that mandated his execution on the way to the cross; at the least it means that Paul had already embraced the martyr's call Jesus demands of all who will follow him (Mk 8:34-38). Jewish daily prayers celebrated God's power by noting that he was "mighty to raise the dead." Paul has accepted a proleptic experience of the power of *resurrection as well as of martyrdom, witnessed in his escapes from death; proleptic thinking was natural for early Christian readers of the Old Testament* who saw God's previous redemptive acts as a history of salvation that climaxed in Jesus.

1:11. That the Corinthian Christians' prayers could affect Paul's work and that God's ultimate glory through the work was his goal presupposes a radical trust in God's activity in the world. Many ancient pagans tried to barter with the gods

through sacrifices and offerings; there is none of that here. But even by Jewish standards, Paul's faith and commitment would have shown him to be very devout.

1:12-22

### Paul Had a Reason for Not Coming

Hospitality was important in antiquity, and it was an honor to host a prominent guest. For Paul not to have come could have seemed like both a breach of his word-and thus of his honor and integrity-and an insult to their hospitality. \*Rhetoricians (trained public speakers) recommended that one defending himself defuse the audience's negative attitudes before addressing the more serious charges (chaps. 10-13).

1:12-14. Many ancient letters focused on praise or blame; many moralists both chided and encouraged their pupils. It was also normal to open a speech or letter with compliments, which helped the hearers to be more

open to the point of the speech or letter. Ancient writers sometimes praised themselves discreetly (thus essays like \*Plutarch's "How to Praise Oneself Inoffensively"), but Paul's boast (1:12a<sup>NIV</sup>) is in his students. By this period moralists customarily defended their motives whether they had been attacked or not, because so many charlatans existed; but if chapters 10-13 are part of 2 Corinthians (see the introduction), Paul is already defending himself against real opposition here.

1:15. This verse means that Paul had been to Corinth once and had meant to return to benefit them spiritually again. Well-to-do benefactors were greatly extolled for bestowing gifts on persons of less means; hence Paul's certainty that he could bestow spiritual benefits is realistic, not arrogant. But unlike worldly benefactors (or the opponents of chaps. 10-13), he asks for no status in return (1:24).

1:16. From Troas in Asia (1:8), one could sail to Macedonia, and come overland down to Corinth, as Paul had done before (Acts 16:11-12) and planned to do again (1 Cor 16:5), and finally did later (Acts 20:1-3).

1:17. Paul had been unable to fulfill his stated intention. As he says in 1:23, his decision not to stop at Corinth was to "spare" them; instead he sent Titus ahead with a harsh letter (1:23-2:11; 7:7-12). When Titus did not return to the appointed meeting place in Troas, Paul feared for him (given the dangers of traveling in antiquity) and went on into Macedonia (2:12-13). There Paul met up with Titus again, who gave him good news about them (7:5-16).

1:18-20. *Digressions were standard in ancient writing, and Paul here digresses (1:18-22) to assure them that he indeed had a good reason for not coming; he was a representative of the God who always kept his word, and he proclaimed a faithful gospel. "Amen" functioned as a positive affirmation at the end of a prayer, and Christ became the amen and yes to all the biblical promises of a truly faithful God.*

1:21. The term translated "stand firm" (NIV) or "establish" (NASB, NRSV) or "confirm" was often a business term confirming a sale; it is thus related to "down payment" ("deposit"-NIV) in verse 22. In the \*Old Testament "anointing," pouring olive oil over someone's head, attested that God had set that person apart for ministry (royal, priestly, etc.); Paul adopts that image here. Both 1:21 and 1:22 signify that God attests to Paul's integrity.

1:22. Documents and jars of merchandise were sealed to show that no one had tampered with their contents. The stamp of the person witnessing a document would be pressed into the hot wax, which then dried over the string tied around the rolled-up document. Paul means that God attested the contents of the ministry of himself and his colleagues (cf. 3:2-3). Judaism generally associated the \*Spirit with the end of the age (e.g., Ezek 39:28-29; Joel 2:28); Paul says that they had the Spirit in the present as a "down payment" ("pledge"-NASB; "deposit"-NIV; "first installment"-NRSV), the first taste of the life of the world to

come.

1:23-2:13

### Paul Delayed Coming in Order to Spare Them

Paul's reason for changing his mind about coming and for only sending Titus with a letter was to spare them his harshness (1 Cor 4:21).

1:23-24. Social superiors often acted arrogantly toward their inferiors and expected praise or even groveling. Unlike the world's authority models (and those of his opponents in chaps. 10-13), Paul counts his converts as coworkers.

2:1-4. Paul's letter suggested severe discipline of the offender (2:5-10). Scholars dispute whether this offender is the same as the one in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5; but whether or not it is, Paul had written a letter after 1 Corinthians to tell the Corinthians to discipline him (this one sent with Titus). This letter has probably been lost. (Some scholars think this harsh letter between 1 and 2 Corinthians is 2 Cor 10-13, which they believe was originally a separate letter. This passage mentions nothing about a particular offender, however, and it is therefore more likely that the intervening letter was simply lost. One might not blame the Corinthians for misplacing this one.)

2:5-7. "The majority" is undoubtedly a way of saying the community of believers (as in the *Dead Sea Scrolls*). Pharisaic Judaism also stressed receiving back \*repentant offenders. Groups like the one reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls, however, required a time of punishment to elapse before the repentant could be fully restored to the community, and Roman and Greek law assumed the carrying out of a sentence. The Corinthian Christians may thus wonder what to do with the man now that he has repented.

2:8. "Confirm" (KJV; "reaffirm" NASB, NIV, NRSV) was often used in legal settings with reference to confirming the verdict; here the Corinthians are to

confirm their love instead.

2:9-11. Playing into the hands of \*Satan's "devices" (KJV; "schemes" NASB, NIV) might mean to leave the disciplined person in Satan's hands after his \*repentance (cf. 1 Cor 5:5). One of Judaism's most basic convictions about Satan was that he was a deceiver and could come in various disguises.

2:12. But Paul received good news about their compliance and the man's repentance from Titus (2:12-13; 7:516). Troas is Alexandria Troas, the port in Asia from which one sailed across to Macedonia, and thence walked or sailed to Corinth. The "opened door" means freedom to minister (see comment 1 Cor 16:9); Paul stayed in Troas long enough to leave some possessions there (2 Tim 4:13).

2:13. Paul and Titus would be able to check for each other at any of the \*churches along the way, just as Jewish people knew how to find fellow Jews through the local Jewish communities when they traveled.

2:14-17

### Witnesses to Christ's Triumph

\*Digressions were common in ancient letter writing. Paul begins a digression here defending the sincerity of his ministry-a common topic of GrecoRoman moralists-that lasts through 7:4.

The view that 2:14-7:4 is not a digression but a separate letter accidentally inserted into the middle of another Pauline letter has little to commend it, because the first copies were on scrolls (codices were later), which preclude accidental insertions. This section makes more sense as a natural digression than as a separate letter. 2:14-16. Roman conquerors would lead their shamed captives in a "triumphal procession." Christ had triumphed and now led believers in him as his captives (the image is similar to that of being Christ's servants); cf. Psalm 68:18, used in Ephesians 4:8. The Roman senate normally decreed public



thanksgivings before the triumphal processions, so they were great celebrations for the victors and great humiliations for the defeated. But Paul glories in the image of Christians as peoples taken captive by Christ (cf.

1 Cor 4:9, etc.), and this prisoner of war himself offers the thanksgiving!

When sacrifices were offered in the \*Old Testament and elsewhere in the ancient world, incense was burned to offset the stench of burning flesh, and the same would have been true at Roman triumphal celebrations. (Ecclesiasticus 24:15 described Wisdom as having a pleasant "aroma"; Paul and his fellow witnesses for Jesus Christ fulfill here the role which that book ascribed to Wisdom, but it is unlikely that he intends an allusion to that book here; the image was a natural one.) The Old Testament has precedent for acknowledging one's own inadequacy (Ex 3:11) but God's adequacy (Ex 3:14; cf. 2 Cor 3:5). 2:17. Professional speakers had long been accused of changing truth into error for gain (like a merchant providing impure products to save money). Philosophers had come under the same charge in some circles, because most made their living by their teaching or, in the case of the \*Cynics, by public begging. The public often perceived wandering teachers and holy men as charlatans, no doubt because many of them were. Thus many philosophers and moralists felt the need to repudiate the charge, as Paul does here.

3:1-6

Adequacy from God

3:1. Jewish travelers often carried letters of recommendation indicating that Jewish householders could trust them and give them lodging on their journey. In GrecoRoman society, higher-class \*patrons would write letters recommending their subordinates; such recommendations naturally carried more weight than the person's own claims. Anyone who was trusted could write letters on someone else's behalf (Acts 15:25-27; 18:27; 1 Cor 16:3), and by such letters a sender could also authorize a messenger (Acts 9:2). Selfcommendation was considered

acceptable when necessary to defend oneself or to make a point (see comment on 5:12).

3:2-3. The first *law was written by God's fingers on tablets of stone* (Ex 31:18; Deut 5:22), but the prophets had promised a new giving of the law (Is 2:3) to be written on the heart (Jer 31:31-34), as it had always been meant to be (Deut 30:6, 11-14). Ezekiel had prophesied that God would remove his people's hard heart, a heart of stone, and write his word on soft hearts of flesh, by the Spirit (Ezek 11:19-20; 36:26-27). \*Old Testament prophets appealed to their divine calls, and some Greek philosophers, eager to distinguish themselves from charlatans (2:17), also claimed divine rather than merely human ordination.

3:4-5. Jews outside Palestine sometimes spoke of God as "the Sufficient One" (see v. 5-KJV; cf. 2:16).

3:6. GrecoRoman legal scholars distinguished between the letter and the intent of the law. Perhaps more relevant here, Jewish teachers sometimes gave detailed attention even to the very letters in the law; the letter was thus the written law by itself, which "killed" simply by pronouncing its death sentence on the morally guilty. The \*Spirit, however, wrote the law's morality in the hearts of God's people, by God's own gracious gift (Ezek 36:26-27).

3:7-18

### The Glory of Two Covenants

Anyone in the Roman Empire who knew much about Judaism knew that Moses had been an important Jewish leader; many people saw him as a "divine man," one of those ancient heroes with special powers from God. But the glory revealed in Christ is much great

er-though more subtle-than that revealed to Moses; thus \*apostles like Paul are in some sense superior to Moses. Here Paul responds to Corinthian criticisms (perhaps fostered by the arrogant opponents in 11:13); Paul is even greater than

Moses-but only because he preaches a message greater than that of Moses. If his opponents were appealing to Moses for their authority (cf. 11:22), Paul effectively short-circuits their claims here.

3:7. When Moses returned from beholding God's glory, his skin was shining so much that the people were afraid of him (Ex 34:29-30, 35). Jewish tradition had expanded on this \*narrative extensively, so Paul's readers have probably heard other expositions of this passage before, although they could understand his exposition simply from the \*Septuagint of Exodus.

3:8. The prophets had compared the new covenant favorably with the old (Jer 31:31-34) and spoken of the \*Spirit and the internalized \*law to come as the ideal (Ezek 36:26-27). Thus no one could deny that the Spirit of God in one's heart was better than a law scroll before one's eyes.

3:9-11. Paul reasons according to the Jewish principle *qal vahomer*, "how much more": if the giving of the law on stone tablets was revealed in great glory, how much more the greater giving of the law of the Spirit?

3:12. Paul continues explaining his confidence throughout this section of the letter (4:1, 16). Moralists and other speakers commonly used his word for "boldness" (NASB, NRSV) here to explain that they spoke forthrightly; they thus contended that they were not flatterers like the demagogues who sought popular support but did not care about the masses.

3:13. Moses' glory had to be covered-unlike Paul's forthright speech (v. 12)-and would always fade away-unlike the glory of Paul's message, revealed through the \*Spirit who came to reside in believers. Jewish men in Paul's day did not cover their heads unless they were ashamed or mourning.

3:14. The law of Moses was read aloud regularly in \*synagogues. Only in the new covenant in Christ could the glory be revealed openly, when it would come internally by the Spirit. The future coming of the Spirit (in contrast to the present

dearth of the Spirit in the world) was a common Jewish belief.

3:15-16. Paul says that the full glory present in the law still cannot be heard (human nature being unchanged since Moses' day), until one turns to Christ (3:14, 16) and has the law written on one's heart (Jer 31:31-34). In the same way, Moses, who had an intimate relationship with God, did not need a veil (Ex 34:34).

3:17. Following a standard Jewish method of interpretation, Paul shows the correspondence between figures in the first giving of the law and those under the new covenant: "The Lord" in the text about Moses corresponds to "the \*Spirit" today.

3:18. Greeks told many stories of people who became "metamorphosed" or "transformed," but Greek philosophers spoke of being transformed toward divinity by contemplating divine things. The \*Dead Sea Scrolls spoke of the righteous reflecting divine splendor. But although Paul could be relating to his readers in such culturally relevant images (minus the divinization), the basis of his image is simply how Moses reflected God's glory, as in the context. Those under the new covenant behold God's glory even more plainly than Moses could (Ex 33:20); thus, like Moses, they are transformed to reflect God's glory by the Spirit. On

the "mirror" (NASB, NRSV) see comment on 1 Corinthians 13:12.

4:1-6

True Messengers of God's Glory

4:1-2. Merchants sometimes "adulterated" (cf. NASB here) substances by mixing in something cheaper to cheat their customers; philosophers often accused professional speakers of doing the same, because they were more concerned about speaking ability than about correct content. Like a good GrecoRoman teacher, Paul denies that the charge applies to himself or to his

colleagues.

4:3-4. Paul continues his exposition from 3:1-18: the good news remains veiled (3:13) to some; Christ is the complete revelation of God's glory (cf. 3:18). Christ thus fills the place assigned to preexistent, divine Wisdom in Jewish tradition. Other Jewish teachers did not explicitly speak of 'Satan as the "god of this age" (NIV), but most of them recognized that the nations (everyone but themselves) were ruled by spiritual powers under Satan's command.

4:5. To be the slave of a high official in the GrecoRoman world often meant to hold more honor and to control more wealth than the majority of free people. When Paul calls himself a "slave of Christ" (e.g., Rom 1:1), this is a title of honor, similar to the \*Old Testament's calling the prophets "servants of God." But here Paul uses the image of the hired servant: Jesus has lent him to them to serve them on Jesus' behalf. Moral teachers like Paul would always have to be ready to refute the charge leveled against some philosophers that they proclaimed themselves, a charge that Paul seems to refute here.

4:6. God spoke light into being at the first creation (Gen 1:3); he similarly could make the light of his glory shine in the hearts of those who saw greater glory than Moses had-the glory in Christ. In various Jewish traditions the light in Genesis 1:3 represented the light of God's law, of the righteous or of God himself; cf. comment on John 1:4.

4:7-18

### Fading Flesh but Enduring Glory

The message of Jesus' witnesses is greater than Moses' message because Moses' glory could fade and the \*law could be ignored, whereas the glory of God lives through Jesus' witnesses even in death.

4:7. Many Greek writers felt that philosophers' contentment in suffering displayed special power. But whereas philosophers were often hailed as strong

and unswayed by testing, Paul reminds his readers that his power is from God alone.

"Earthen" or "clay" jars, as opposed to bronze ones, were readily discarded; because clay was always available, such containers were cheap and disposable if they were broken or incurred ceremonial impurity—an odd container for a rich treasure. Some Greek writers similarly described the body as the soul's container; for Paul, however, the contrast is not between body and soul but between humanity and God.

4:8-9. As an example to others, \*Stoic philosophers often listed their various sufferings to show their commitment to a life of contentment and perseverance. Thus they remained content in illness, in hardship, in death and so on. Jewish people often appealed to prophets and martyrs of the past as examples of endurance.

4:10-12. On Paul's proleptic experience of Christ's death and \*resurrec

tion, see comment on 1:9-10; here the glory is Christ himself living in Paul and other believers through the \*Spirit, as the context makes clear. Paul's term for "bearing around" (cf. "carry around"—NIV) the dying of Jesus was typically used for pallbearers, implying that Paul not only preaches but also carries around Jesus' dying in the persecutions he faces daily. The word he uses for Jesus'"dying" (KJV, NASB) includes the stench and rotting of a person who was dead or dying; hence Paul describes his participation in Christ's sufferings quite graphically.

4:13. Paul here offers one way to translate Psalm 116:10, the way followed by the most common recension of the \*Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) in Paul's day. Jewish teachers accepted arguments based even on short phrases, and Paul simply uses the quotation to establish a principle explaining why he boldly proclaims Christ despite the opposition he receives.

4:14. Judaism believed in a \*resurrection at the end time, when everyone raised would be presented to God for the judgment (cf. 5:10). While acknowledging Christ's resurrection in the past, some of the Corinthian Christians had been more skeptical about future resurrection and judgment, especially of the body; the idea was foreign to Greek thought (see comment on 1 Cor 15).

4:15. The *Old Testament had prophesied that the Gentiles* would also give thanks to God in the end time, and Paul is zealous to see this \*prophecy fulfilled in his day (1:11).

4:16. Following \*Plato's lead, some Greek thinkers (and a few Greco-Jewish writers) distinguished between physical decomposition and the survival of the soul. \*Stoic sages emphasized that inner choices, not outer circumstances, were what mattered. Adapting the Corinthians' own Greek language where it is relevant, Paul the master missionary seeks to convince them with their own language that the glory of proleptic resurrection is present even in proleptic dying (see comment on 4:7-12).

4:17-18. Plato and many philosophers after him rightly contrasted the temporal and the eternal. (By Paul's day many Platonists thought that bodily things were heavy and weighed down the soul, but that the soul was light; once freed by the body's death, it would soar up to the pure heavens from which it had originated. Paul here inverts the image but perhaps partly for a play on words that a few Jewish readers skilled in Hebrew exposition might catch: "glory" and "weight, heaviness," represent the same Hebrew word.)

Plato also believed that the world of ideas was the real, unchanging world, whereas the temporal, changing world of sense knowledge was only a world of shadows. Paul does not deny the reality of the visible world but does agree that it is subject to decay, whereas the unseen world is eternal. In making this statement, however, Paul is still contrasting his ministry with that of Moses: he does not teach an outward law written on stones, but the law written in his inner person by the \*Spirit (chaps. 3-4).

5:1-10

## The Present and Future Life

\*Pharisees accepted both the immortality of the soul and the future 'resurrection of the body, and many Jewish writers described the experience of heaven after death as a proleptic experience to be completed in paradise after the resurrection. Unlike some modern readers, Paul has no problem accepting both the soul's continuance after death

and bodily resurrection. (Those who think Paul's view changed after 1 Cor 15 should compare Phil 1:21-23 with Phil 3:20-21, where Paul includes both views in what is almost certainly the same letter.)

Although Paul finds some common ground with his Greek readers on the righteous soul's endurance (4:16-18), he is quick to bring them back to the future hope that is the basis for it. Like the Greek sages, Paul is ready to face death; unlike them, he has a hope of future bodily life.

5:1. Greek writers described the body as a vessel, a house, a tent and often as a tomb; Paul says that a better body awaits.

5:2-4. "Groaning" may allude to Exodus 2:23 (the same word in the \*LXX); or it may relate to birth pangs (Rom 8:22-23), in the light of some Jewish teachings that the \*resurrection would be preceded by a period of suffering described as birth pangs. At any rate, groaning was behavior characteristically ascribed to those in agony.

Paul's longing here is not for death (as in Greek views of the body as a tomb, which made even suicide acceptable if life became too difficult) but for the resurrection, when he will receive a new body. Although Greeks regularly exercised in the nude, all Jews except those who had surrendered to Greek custom abhorred nakedness in public. For Paul, the image of "nakedness" is thus an unpleasant one.



5:5. The term translated "pledge" (NASB) or "deposit guaranteeing" (NIV) was used in business documents for "down payment," a first installment. Because the Old Testament (e.g., Is 44:3; Ezek 39:29) and much of early Judaism associated the outpouring of the \*Spirit with the future age, the present experience of the Spirit is the Corinthians' initial experience of the \*resurrection life to come, "guaranteeing" (cf. NRSV, TEV) its fulfillment (1:22).

5:6-9. Jewish accounts of the righteous dead in heaven portrayed them as experiencing a measure of the future glory now, while awaiting the resurrection. Although this state was inferior to the resurrection (5:4), it meant an end to the present toils-and Paul's continual experience of gradual martyrdom (4:8-10).

5:10. As the Corinthians know, Paul had appeared before their governor's "judgment seat" (Acts 18:12), but Paul's allusion here is directly to the standard Old Testament and Jewish image of the day of judgment, in which God's throne became the ultimate judgment seat. Paul's emphasis on judgment for deeds in the body reiterates his opposition to any remaining elements of common Greek ideas disparaging the body, which Paul had refuted in 1 Corinthians 6:12-14.

5:11-19

#### Paul's Ministry of Reconciliation

5:11. The "fear of the Lord" was a common motivation for righteousness in Jewish texts, often associated with a recognition that God would judge (5:10).

5:12. In ancient culture, selfcommendation was generally offensive (see also 3:1; cf. Prov 25:27; 27:2); one needed a good reason to employ it, like defending oneself or bringing pride to a group of people who should identify with the speaker. Paul here employs the inward-outward contrast of 4:16-18 against his boastful opponents.

5:13. Greek sages often indicated that others considered their usual way of life "insane" (TEV here; the standard meaning of "beside oneself" KJV, NASB,

NRSV), although they believed that they themselves were the

only truly sane ones (cf. also Wisdom of Solomon 5:4); similarly, ecstasies often described their experiences in these terms. Paul's contrast between his behavior toward the Corinthians and his behavior toward God probably derives from Moses' behavior in Exodus 34:33-34 (see comment on 2 Cor 3:7-18); he would have revealed more of his ecstatic side to them had he thought it helpful (see comment on 12:1-7; cf. 1 Cor 14:18-19).

5:14-15. Here Paul means that all who are in Christ participate in his death and \*resurrection and should thus experience this proleptically in ministry; see comment on 4:10-12.

5:16-17. The new person on the inside, participating in Christ's resurrection, means more than the decaying outer person observable to human eyes (see comment on 4:16-18). Judaism applied the language of "new creation" in various ways. (For example, in later *rabbinic texts one who made a .proselyte was considered as if he or she had created the proselyte; the New Year was also given some significance as a new beginning, because sins were shortly thereafter absolved on the Day of Atonement.*) But in early texts like Jubilees and the \*Dead Sea Scrolls, "new creation" language applies especially to the world to come.

This was the most obvious application of new creation language, since it referred to the life of the world to come in the \*Old Testament (Is 65:16-18). For Paul, that the *Messiah Jesus has come means that believers have already begun to participate in the resurrection life of the coming world* (see comment on 4:10-12).

5:18-19. By "us" as "ministers of reconciliation" Paul refers to himself and his associates-not to the Corinthians in their present state (5:20). Paul styles his words here in a relevant way to a Greek audience: Greek speakers often spoke on the subject of "concord," thereby urging reconciliation and unity. The term

translated "reconciliation" applied especially to relations between people; but here, as in the *Old Testament*, *reconciliation between people and God presupposes* repentance and atonement by blood sacrifice (here by Christ's death).

5:20-6:10

### A Plea from Christ's Suffering Ambassadors

Having established that he and his colleagues are Christ's representatives, Paul entreats the Corinthian Christians to be reconciled to God again by being reconciled again to himself (7:2; cf. Mt 10:40); treatment of a herald reflected one's attitude toward the sender.

5:20. An "ambassador" was a representative of one state to another, usually applied in this period to the emperor's legates in the East. This image fits "apostles" as appointed messengers (see comment on 1 Cor 12:29-30), just as the Old Testament prophets had been (Ex 7:1). (The prophets frequently delivered messages in the form of a covenant lawsuit or in words to kings used by messengers of suzerain [supreme] kings to vassal [client] rulers.) In the context of a plea for reconciliation, Paul as an ambassador urges the Corinthians to make peace with God the King; emperors normally took action against unrepentant client states that had offended them, and no one took such warnings lightly.

5:21. Here Paul means that Christ became sin's representative when he bore its judgment on the cross, and Paul and his associates become righteousness's representatives when they proclaim his message. This verse carries on the representative idea set forth in 5:20.

6:1-2. Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8, which is in the context of the \*messianic redemption, a time that Paul says has arrived in Christ (5:17). His argument would also be quite relevant to his readers: Greek sages frequently discussed appropriate moments for speaking, especially for bold speech about

reconciliation (concord, harmony; see comment on 5:18-19).

6:3. "Giving no offense" (KJV) was important for those in public office or for those whose behavior would influence public perceptions of their group; this topic was widely discussed by ancient political theorists, public speakers and minority religions. (The "ministry" is the ministry of reconciliation-5:18.) 6:4-5. Philosophers often listed their hardships, sometimes in triads, as Paul does here; these catalogs of hardships verified their commitment to contentment and thus the sincerity of their message. Some of Paul's words are essentially synonyms; as in ancient \*rhetorical style, they are repeated for effect.

6:6-7. Philosophers also often described themselves by catalogs of virtues, which made their lives models for those of their readers. Because charlatans were abundant, true teachers had to stress their pure motives and that they acted on knowledge of what was real. Paul's defense here would impress a Greek audience who thought that Paul was out of touch with their culture's proper speaking conventions (see 1 Cor 2). By "weapons" Paul may refer to the shield, which was carried on the left, and the spear or sword, which was carried on the right.

6:8-9. Paul again relates to issues that other speakers on moral issues faced in GrecoRoman society. Paradox, contrasting apparently irreconcilable opposites, was a standard literary and *rhetorical technique*. *Some philosophers (particularly Cynics)* often used paradox and the similar technique of irony, especially for turning the comments of their accusers (insane, foolish, shameful) against them, proclaiming themselves truly wise and rich (see comment on I Cor 4:8). They proclaimed that the opinions of foolish men (nonphilosophers) did not bother them; \*Stoics often reflected on their lack of worldly honor.

But many philosophers avoided unnecessary criticism when possible, lest their message be dishonored; moralists often even sought to learn some truth from false accusations leveled against them. Both Greek and Jewish traditions stressed being honorable and irreproachable, and most people cared about public opinion.

"Well-known" here presumably means known to the one who counts-God. On "dying" and "living," see 4:10-12 and perhaps Psalm 118:17-18.

6:10. Although usually better off than peasants, artisans (Paul had earned his living as a leatherworker-Acts 18:3) toiled, remained poor and had little social status; this was especially true of those who moved around, as Paul did. \*Cynic philosophers gave up all possessions to pursue their lifestyle but considered themselves spiritually rich. Cynic and \*Stoic philosophers claimed that, although they owned little or nothing, all the world belonged to them, because they were friends of the gods who owned it; as a servant of the true God, Paul has all the more reason to apply the phrase "possessing all things" to himself.

6:11-7:4

Receive Christ's Ambassadors

By refusing to be reconciled to Paul, the Corinthians are in effect refusing to be reconciled fully to God, whose agent

Paul is (cf. Mt 10:40). In 6:14-7:1, Paul calls the Corinthians to give up their intimate ties with the world; in the context of 6:11-13 and 7:2-4, his point is that they should instead resume their intimate ties with him and other true representatives of God. Thus Paul here offers a calculated insult to his spiritual opposition in Corinth.

6:11-13. A "mouth speaking freely" and a "heart bared wide open" fit Paul's emphasis on "open speech," an important motif in ancient speaking (see comment on 3:12). Paul's words here are deeply affectionate, again beseeching them to return his love. Recording deep feelings and reasoning on an emotional level were not out of place but were a normal part of ancient public speaking and writing. Public speakers purposely appealed to their hearers' emotions; often they even claimed not to know what to say because they were so moved by their subject (cf. Gal 4:20). Of course, these speakers were supposed to feel these emotions genuinely, not merely pretend to have them.

6:14. In 6:14-7:1 Paul makes a digression, a common literary device; given the close parallels with the \*Dead Sea Scrolls and differences from Paul's own style here, in this section Paul might be using some sermonic material or ideas he gleaned from an earlier source. He bases 6:14 ("unequal yoking"-cf. KJV) on Deuteronomy 22:10 (cf. Lev 19:19), which may have been meant to reinforce the \*law's prohibition of interreligious marriage with pagans (cf. Deut 7:3; Ezra 9:12; Neh 13:25).

The lack of concord between the wise and the foolish was a Greek proverb; more prominently, the division between wise and foolish, righteous and wicked, and Israel and the \*Gentiles was central to *Old Testament and Jewish thought*. *Very religious and less religious Jews could work together, but the more religious Jews imposed some limitations. Rhetorical questions were a common part of rhetorical style*, and Paul has several successive ones in verses 14-16.

6:15. "Belial" or "Beliar" (NRSV) was another Jewish name for \*Satan.

6:16-17. Jewish \*law forbade doing business with \*Gentiles on pagan festival days or in any other way that would bring associations with idolatry. Jewish people did not try to interfere with pagan temples, but when an emperor planned to set up an idol in Jerusalem's temple less than two decades before Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, the Jewish people were ready to revolt rather than to allow it.

Portraying the Corinthian Christians as God's temple (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19) who have no fellowship with idols (1 Cor 10:20-21), Paul can cite relevant \*Old Testament texts: verse 16 cites Leviticus 26:12 (in the context of God dwelling among his people-26:11); cf. similarly Ezekiel 37:27-28 and 43:7. Verse 17 cites Isaiah 52:11, addressing the time of the new exodus of the \*messianic salvation (52:7-15); cf. Leviticus 11:31, 44-45 and 22:4-6.

6:18. God's people were his sons and daughters (e.g., Is 43:6; Jer 3:19), who would be restored to their special relationship with him in the time of the end.

Paul blends the language of several texts (probably including 2 Sam 7:14), as Jewish writers sometimes did; here he may also add his own prophetic word (cf. 1 Cor 14:37-38).

7:1. Non-Palestinian Jews often spoke of pure and undefiled hearts; undefiled flesh normally referred to ceremonial purity (hand washing or ritual immersion). Here Paul refers to purity in body as well as in spirit (see comment on 5:10 and on 1 Cor 6:20)-abstention from sin.

7:2-3. Paul uses language of great affection; see 6:11-13. The greatest expression of devotion in GrecoRoman literature was willingness to die with someone (which also makes sense outside Greek culture; see 2 Sam 15:21; Jn 13:37; 15:13).

7:4. GrecoRoman speakers often emphasized their confidence in their hearers for the purpose of establishing intimacy and to secure willing compliance.

7:5-16

#### Reconciliation Between Paul and the Corinthians

7:5-7. \*Old Testament texts often emphasized God's comfort for his people (e.g., Is 49:13; 51:3; 52:9); Paul here continues his opening theme (1:3-6). Paul crossed over from Troas to Macedonia to find Titus, whom he had sent to the Corinthians with a harsh letter (2:12-13). He was comforted not only by Titus's safety but by their response. 7:8-9. Ancient teachers of speaking and letter-writing skills warned that open rebuke should be reserved for the most extreme circumstances; people were more likely to listen if one mixed in praise with blame. In the technical language of such teachers, "rebukes" were meant to generate shame and \*repentance.

7:10. Like the Old Testament (e.g., Amos 5:6-11) and Judaism, pagan philosophers sometimes recognized that divine judgments were not only acts of justice but also attempts to bring the guilty to repentance.

7:11-12. Piling up related terms was an acceptable expression of Greek \*rhetoric and simply added emphasis to the point of the terms.

7:13. Titus received great hospitality; hospitality to travelers was emphasized in antiquity, especially in Jewish and Christian circles.

7:14. Whereas selfcommendation had to be done discreetly, boasting about one's friends was always considered acceptable in antiquity.

7:15-16. If the Corinthian Christians received Titus with such respect, it means that they saw him as Paul's own representative; one was always to receive a representative with the same honor one would grant the person being represented.

8:1-9

### Models of Giving

Concerned with an active symbol of the unity of Jewish and *Gentile* churches (Rom 15:25-26) and relieving genuine poverty (Gal 2:10), Paul is forced to do here the very thing that he has so assiduously avoided in his own ministry (1 Cor 9)-asking for funds. Although he had previously told the Corinthians about the need (1 Cor 16:1-3), higher-class members of his congregation would be offended at what they would see as inconsistency. They had wanted Paul to accept pay as a regular philosophical teacher rather than maintain himself as a lowstatus artisan (12:13; cf. 1 Cor 9); by identifying himself with the poor in the congregation, Paul had risked alienating their well-to-do friends who despised artisans. Paul thus defends the collection in chapters 8-9.

8:1. Moral writers frequently offered positive role models. Public speakers used a standard \*rhetorical technique called "comparison," which often served to stimulate moral competition. Many speakers, including Paul, were willing to appeal to ancient city and other geographical rivalries to spur their hearers on to greater zeal. Macedonia and Corinth were such rivals.



8:2. Some GrecoRoman aristocrats ridiculed those who lived simply, but other writers praised the simple lifestyle that enabled its followers to give

generously. Macedonia was not altogether poor, but persecution and ostracism may have increased the financial hardship of the Christians there.

8:3. One was to give alms according to one's ability (Deut 15:14; cf. Ezra 2:69; Tobit 4:8, 16), but the Macedonians went beyond this rule.

8:4-5. The term translated "participation" (NASB), "sharing" (NIV, NRSV) or "fellowship" (KJV) was used technically in business documents of Paul's day for a "partnership." It could also signify an institution of Roman trade known as the *societas*, by which members contracted to supply whatever they had to fulfill their goal. Whether Paul conceives of this "partnership" officially or unofficially, it is clear that the Macedonians saw support, like hospitality, as a privilege. Judaism used the term here translated "service" (NIV) or "support" (NASB) technically for distributing alms for the poor.

8:6. Titus had raised this issue of support as well as the issue of the harsh letter when he was among them.

8:7. They have important spiritual gifts (1 Cor 1:5-7; 12:28) and other expressions of God's work among them. Paul uses praise as a basis for exhortation, as moralists often did.

8:8. Because contributors in antiquity were often forced to support public works (occasionally this forced support could bankrupt someone less well-to-do than the tax roll had indicated), speakers and writers calling for funds had to be particularly careful to stress the voluntary nature of the contributions. (Later Jewish teachers even charged charity collectors who pressured the poor for contributions with "oppressing the poor.") Paul alludes to the rhetorical technique of comparison he has used (8:1).

8:9. Moralists often appealed to role models, and Paul here uses the supreme

one, insisting that the Corinthian Christians follow Christ's example of using their prosperity to enrich the poor. Like both Jewish and non-Jewish writers of his day, Paul can use the language of wealth figuratively as well as literally, but he may mean Christ's enrichment of believers literally, as provision through one another (8:14).

8:10-15

### Give According to What You Have

8:10-12. The Corinthians had already eagerly committed themselves to supporting the Jerusalem church (1 Cor 16:1-3). *(Commentators note that the phrase translated "last year" or "a year ago" could mean from nine to fifteen months earlier.)* Because their church was more prosperous than others (8:1-2), however, they had contributed more, and some felt that they were contributing an inordinate percentage of the collection. Paul employs a common argument for why they should continue what they have begun: many ancient arguments were weighed by a principle here translated "advantage" (NASB) or "what is best" (NIV) (see, e.g., 1 Cor 6:12); Paul explains the advantage in 8:13-15. The Old Testament normally described gifts and sacrifices as "acceptable" only if they reflected the best one had to give (e.g., Lev 1-4). ^

8:13. The Corinthian Christians may have resented having to provide a large portion of the offering, but Corinth was a prosperous city. One common definition of friendship was that "friends share all things in common" and are "equal," even though this principle came to be applied even to wealthy *patrons who sponsored poorer* clients. Ancient speakers and writers stressed "equality" as much as "concord" (see comment on 5:18-19),

and the Corinthians could not miss Paul's point: their conversion made them "friends" to other Christians and required a more equitable distribution of provision within Christ's body.

8:14. Jewish wisdom writers exhorted their readers to remember famine when they were prospering (Ecclus 18:25); although Corinth was extremely

prosperous and the Christians there probably could not conceive of their own poverty, Paul's principle may be analogous to some forms of health insurance today: if they are ever in need, someone else will supply their need. God always supplies enough to the whole body of Christ, but it is up to Christians to make sure that the "enough" is adequately distributed.

8:15. In case 8:14 sounded too good to be true, Paul introduces the principle of God's provision by way of the manna in the wilderness: God meant everyone to have just what they needed, no more and no less (Ex 16:18).

8:16-24

Envoys for the Collection

8:16-18. Here Paul provides a letter of recommendation (3:1) for Titus and his companion.

8:19. Just as \*synagogues throughout the Mediterranean would send their annual tribute to the Jerusalem temple via local representatives of high reputation, this offering is also to be administered in an irreproachable manner: envoys would be "appointed by the churches." The term for "appoint" could indicate election by a show of hands or (more loosely) a casting of ballots, as was common in Greek administration.

8:20-21. In a culture obsessed with shame and honor, GrecoRoman writers were quick to emphasize that leaders and other beneficiaries of the public trust must be open and of irreproachable moral credentials. Judaism also stressed that charity collectors must act irreproachably to prevent even false accusations. Verse 21 echoes the \*Septuagint of Proverbs 3:4 and the proverbial saying that grew out of it; Jewish teachers stressed doing what was good in the sight of both God and people.

8:22. Both Jewish and GrecoRoman moralists recommended that potential leaders be "tested" in lower positions before achieving public office. This

brother (distinct from the one mentioned in 8:18) had already been proved in ministry.

8:23-24. As "delegates" (literally "\*apostles") of the churches, they were commissioned representatives of those churches. As such, they were like the representatives of local Jewish communities who would band together and travel to Jerusalem to deliver the temple tax each year. Titus is Paul's representative in the group. Thus they are to be received hospitably, as hospitably as Paul and the other churches would have been received. Throughout the ancient Mediterranean envoys were to be respected and received with honor. On "boasting" see comment on 7:14.

9:1-5

### Boasting in Advance

Citizens' first loyalties were to their cities, and bitter rivalries often arose between cities. Paul appeals to their civic pride to make sure that the well-to-do Corinthians do their part. Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaia, south of the province of Macedonia (which included Philippi and Thessalonica). Thus Paul employs here the \*rhetorical techniques of endearment (by boasting about them) and comparison. By boasting about the Corinthians, however, Paul has laid his honor on the line. If chapters 10-13

are part of the same letter, Paul may have some reason to worry (cf. especially 12:16-18)!

9:6-15

### Sowing and Reaping

9:6. Reaping what one had sown reflects an ancient proverb, related to many other agricultural images prevalent in antiquity (cf., e.g., Job 4:8; Prov 11:18; 22:8; Hos 8:7; 10:12; Eccles 7:3; Cicero; Aristotle); the specific image of

sowing and consequently reaping sparingly seems to have also been in general circulation.

9:7. Paul here cites standard Jewish wisdom; the first part of his exhortation may allude to Exodus 25:2, 35:5, 21-22 and Deuteronomy 15:10 (cf. 1 Chron 29:6-9; Ezra 2:68), suggesting that Paul had a fairly developed theology of giving based on the *Old Testament*. "*God loves a cheerful giver*" is from an addition to *Proverbs 22:8* in the Septuagint ("God blesses a cheerful and giving person"). The term rendered "cheerful" often applied in Jewish texts to gifts for the poor.

9:8. "Sufficiency" (KJV, NASB) is especially a technical term of Greek philosophers, usually applied to the sage's contentment in all circumstances. Although some Greek traditions emphasized that one could be selfsufficient without anything to live on, most Greek thinkers would have agreed with Paul that basic needs had to be met before a person could be selfsufficient. For views on possessions and wealth in antiquity, see comment on 1 Timothy 6:3-10.

9:9. This quotation from Psalm 112:9 refers in the context of that psalm to the behavior of a righteous person; thus Paul may be saying in 9:8-9 that their reward for sowing seed (giving money) to the poor is that their righteousness will stand forever.

9:10. Because the Corinthians are to be righteous "sowers" ("scattering" seed-v. 9), Paul cites Isaiah 55:10: "He who provides seed for the sower and bread for food," which proves that God will continue to supply them so they can continue to give and hence have a greater reward of righteousness (v. 9). Paul uses the second text (Is 55:10) to apply the first text (Ps 112:9, cited in 9:9) to their situation; linking together texts with a similar key word or concept was a common practice in Jewish interpretation.

9:11-15. Jewish people believed that God heard the cries of the poor (Deut 15:9-10); Paul's readers would understand his point that their aid to the poor brought direct glory to God in praise (2 Cor 9:11-12; cf. 1:11) and would also benefit the

Corinthians through the prayers of the poor in Jerusalem (9:14). (God's "gift"-v. 15 may thus be his strategic provision to the Corinthians by which they can benefit the poor of Jerusalem.)

10:1-18

### Not Like Paul's Opponents

Paul's drastic change in tone here, from a cautious affection to addressing opponents, has led many scholars to believe that chapters 10-13 belong to a separate letter. Others believe that Paul received new information just before penning these words, or that he saved his real \*diatribe for the concluding chapters of the letter.

10:1-2. Paul's harsh letter (2:4; 7:8; letters of hortatory blame were reserved for the severest circumstances) had provoked a hostile reaction among some members of the congregation: ancient \*rhetoricians insisted that letters ought to reflect the same personality that the person exhibited when present. Christ's "meekness and gentleness" probably alludes to Jesus' say

ing later recorded in Matthew 11:29; this was a good reply to the Corinthians' complaint that Paul was too meek (1 Cor 2:3); Greek culture did not usually regard meekness as a virtue (cf. the modern colloquial expression "wimp"). 10:3-5. Greek sages sometimes described their battle against false ideas as a war, in terms similar to those Paul uses here. Like those sages, Paul claims to be doing battle with false ideas. "Arguments" (NIV, NRSV, TEV) or "speculations" (NASB) is a technical term for \*rhetorical or philosophical reasonings; the prisoners of war in this extended metaphor are human thoughts. Cf. Proverbs 21:22.

10:6. Rulers generally executed vengeance on those who had rebelled against them after the war was finished (e.g., 2 Sam 12:31). Paul may mean that the believers must work harder to make up for time lost through disobedience.

10:7. The Corinthians' preoccupation with outward appearances matched that of sophists concerned with proper and persuasive speech, but true philosophers constantly ridiculed this attitude (4:16-18). The more well-to-do members of the Corinthian \*church were enamored with Greek philosophy; Paul thus rebukes them on their own terms here.

10:8. Paul's "authority" was an issue in 1 Corinthians 9:5 (where the same term is generally translated "right"); some wealthier Corinthians are assailing him for not conforming to their cultural standards (i.e., for working as an artisan although he is a moral teacher). \*Old Testament prophets were called both to build up and to tear down (e.g., Jer 1:10), but Paul is called only to build up the Corinthians (2 Cor 12:19; 13:10).

10:9-10. A basic rule of ancient letter writing was that one's letters should be appropriate to one's personality when present, because letters in some sense communicated one's presence. Philosophers who failed to be consistent in this manner were typically attacked verbally.

"Weighty and powerful" (KJV) letters would be the sort written by a respectable authority figure (Romans valued a virtue called *gravitas*, which included sternness), whereas Paul's speech reflects insufficient \*rhetorical training to impress the powerful people of society. His (literally) "bodily presence" (KJV, NRSV) was also unimpressive, perhaps meaning that he did not dress as a good philosopher would, or (more likely) that he was awkward in gestures, an important element of delivery in public speaking that rhetoricians stressed. In other words, Paul was a better writer than public speaker.

10:11. Philosophers and Jewish teachers often contrasted words and deeds; deeds weighed more heavily. Even if Paul was an inferior speaker, his life backed up everything he said.

10:12. "Comparison" was a standard .rhetorical and literary technique; here Paul mocks his opponents: they are so foolish that they do not realize that one cannot

compare oneself with oneself. Higher-class *patrons* would usually write letters of recommendation for socially inferior clients, but sometimes people were forced to commend themselves; selfcommendation was to be accepted only if done discreetly, but Paul paints his opponents as pretentious—a vice in Greek culture.

Paul satirically declines to compare himself with such teachers—satire was a common argumentative device. One of the rules of "comparison" was that one could not compare dissimilar items; yet the dissimilarity turns out to favor him in 10:13-18.

10:13-16. Teachers of rhetoric and

philosophy in cities throughout the Mediterranean competed for students and their fees. One means of self-advertisement was to compare oneself favorably to rival teachers; Paul uses the ancient literary device of irony and turns his opponents' advertising on its head, refuting them while satirizing their very form of boasting. The language of a "sphere" (NASB) or "proper limits" (NIV) was sometimes applied to the extent of a public servant's service in a district or region; Paul could also mean it in terms of the language of Roman imperial conquest (cf. 10:3-6). 10:17. On Jeremiah 9:23-24 see comment on 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.

10:18. Applying Jeremiah 9:24, Paul notes that selfcommendation is obviously out of place—unless, like Paul, one were forced to resort to it by unpleasant circumstances (e.g., to defend oneself). Public speakers used selfcommendation but recognized that it was offensive unless done carefully and with appropriate reasons.

11:1-15

Countering False Apostles' Boasts

In contrast to Paul, who humbled himself by taking a socially demeaning role



(11:7), his opponents have boasted. Paul therefore parodies their boasting with his own brag sheet, following the form of ancient self-praise. At the same time, however, he inverts his opponents' values in the light of the values of God's \*kingdom, using another common literary technique called satire (11:16-33).

11:1. In Greek literature "madness" (here, "foolishness") was sometimes a divine punishment for insolent arrogance, hence some commentators have suggested that the Corinthian opponents had charged Paul with arrogance and madness. More likely, he is simply implying that, while he assumes the guise of a madman for \*rhetorical purposes (being able to assume various styles was part of rhetorical training), it is his opponents who generally boast and hence are truly mad.

11:2. Being jealous over God's people with God's jealousy (cf. Ex 20:5) would have been viewed as pious (cf. Num 25:11). Fathers normally pledged their daughters in marriage, and Paul compares the Corinthian *church with a daughter* (1 Cor 4:14-15) *whom he has pledged in marriage to Christ* (cf. Jewish depictions of God marrying his son Israel to the law). (Other commentators see Paul as presenting the bride, as the best man would, rather than as a father betrothing her.)

11:3. In some Jewish traditions, 'Satan, disguised as a good angel (cf. 11:14), deceived Eve sexually. Given the image of the betrothed virgin (11:2, perhaps betrothed to Christ, the new Adam), Paul could have this tradition partly in view here. More certain is the biblical allusion to Genesis 3, where the serpent deceived Eve. Paul presents his opponents as adulterers who corrupt betrothed virgins—a crime punishable by banishment under Roman law and death under \*Old Testament law (Deut 22:23-27).

11:4. The Old Testament and later Jewish literature often portrayed false prophets as those who claim to have God's \*Spirit but are really moved by a different one. Paul offers mock praise of their acceptance of this bad treatment (cf. also 11:19-20), using the common ancient device of satire.

11:5-6. \*Rhetoric was important in GrecoRoman society, including in Corinth (see comment on 1 Cor 1:5). By rhetoric one showed that he was educated and truly worthy of being heard by the well-to-do. Philosophers, however, stressed their genuine knowl

edge over others' persuasive speech, and their ideas had also gained influence in Greek society; Paul appeals to the latter model against the former one to defend himself.

Paul's statement that he is "unskilled in speech" (NASB) need not mean that he is a terrible speaker; even the best speakers played down their oratorical skills to lower audience expectations. He seems to have been accused of inadequate rhetorical skill by others, however; his writings attest a higher level of rhetorical sophistication than possessed by most people of his day, but no matter how hard he worked at it, he did not have the early rhetorical training of an aristocrat, and some elements of delivery would not come to him as naturally as they might to others (see comment on 10:10).

11:7. Teachers were supposed to gain support by a \*patron's sponsorship, by charging fees or even by begging, but never by engaging in a working-class job (1 Cor 9:6). Paul's opponents appeal to higher-status Corinthian Christians embarrassed by Paul's labor as an artisan; they, at least, are professional enough to take payment. Paul may have avoided accepting payment to keep from appearing as a common sophist who is teaching for monetary gain, or to avoid appearing dependent on them as a \*client. "Humility" was a Jewish virtue, but Greeks saw it as "humiliation" and considered it appropriate only to those of very low status. 11:8. Paul embraces low status: he became the Corinthians' servant (contrast whom his opponents serve 11:15). Accepting wages from one employer while genuinely working only for another was naturally viewed as dishonest, hence Paul's use of "robbed"; robbery was naturally considered even lower-status than manual labor! (The term could also be used for "plundering" a defeated enemy's spoils after a military campaign. In conjunction with this sense, "wages" [KJV, NASB] later in the verse may mean "soldier's wages.")

11:9. \*Patrons could view *clients, their social dependents, as "burdens."* Sometimes teachers were clients of wealthy patrons, but Paul is not dependent on, hence not a client of, the Corinthian church. Thus he need not answer to them.

11:10-12. Boasting was considered acceptable if it was for someone else's sake and not simply for one's own. For example, \*Plutarch permitted self-praise if it were mixed with praise of one's audience.

11:13-15. In some Jewish traditions \*Satan disguised himself as an angel or in other ways (e.g., as a beautiful woman to some \*rabbis or as a beggar to Job's wife; for one tradition, see comment on 11:3); Judaism regarded Satan as a deceiver. Although Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 do not in context refer specifically to Satan (against a common view today), a large body of Jewish tradition taught that Satan and other evil spirits were originally angels who had fallen in Genesis 6:1-3.

11:16-21

### Paul's Apology for Boasting

11:16-18. \*Rhetorical teachers like *Quintilian and moralists like Plutarch* warned their readers never to boast of themselves unless forced to do so by the necessities of a defense or some other very good reason (like making oneself a model for moral imitation). Although some wise men felt it appropriate to boast, popular opinion disliked it. Autobiographers had to come up with ways to decrease the potential offensiveness of their own claims. Paul's opponents had apparently laid themselves open to Paul's at

tack-indicating their own lack of \*rhetorical skill.

11:19-20. Irony was a common rhetorical technique. A blow on the face, like spittle, was a grievous insult to one's honor (see comment on Mt 5:39). Taking

"advantage" (NASB, NIV) sometimes connotes sexual exploitation, an awful offense. The ideology of the upper classes (shared by Paul's opponents) held that persons of truly noble character, those suited for freedom, could never tolerate being slaves.

11:21. Continuing the irony (11:19-20), Paul confesses his "shame" or "dishonor"-one of the most grievous offenses one could endure in status-conscious society. He uses again the \*rhetorical technique of "comparison" to mock the boasting self-appointed \*apostles who have come to Corinth and undermined his own standing.

11:22-33

### Boasting in Sufferings

Aristocrats typically boasted in their heritage, their accomplishments and so forth; but they did not normally boast in their sufferings. Some philosophers listed the sufferings they endured as a model for emulation. (In other contexts, lists of sufferings could prove one's devotion to another cause; e.g., in a romance novel by Chariton, Leucippe's letter recounts what she suffered for her beloved Clitophon.) But those who list sufferings to prove endurance do so to boast in their strength, not in their weakness. For Paul, if one boasts, one should boast in the values of the \*kingdom (10:17), humbling oneself for God's glory.

11:22. Even in GrecoRoman Corinth, the *church recognized its Jewish roots; and traveling Jewish Christians, especially those with Palestinian roots, could claim authority in a tradition earlier than Paul. (This "Are they...?So am I" reasoning seems to have been persuasive in antiquity; cf., e.g., Josephus Life 40, §199.)* "Israelites" and "descendants of Abraham" refer in the parlance of ancient Judaism to anyone Jewish; "Hebrews" may mean the same thing, although it might apply especially to Palestinian Jews (see comment on Phil 3:5).

11:23. The term translated "servants" here may be a term of respect ("ministers"-KJV, NRSV); if it means "slaves of Christ" in this case, they are high-status

slaves (see comment on Rom 1:1). On "insane" (NASB) see comment on 2 Corinthians 11:1. Paul begins by boasting in the very cause of the Corinthians' reproach: his lowstatus "labors" (see comment on 11:7). Some philosophers boasted in ignoring beatings; Jewish people praised those beaten and martyred for their faith.

11:24. Under Jewish law, some sins (like sabbath violation or being a false prophet) merited stoning (because the Jewish people could not legally enforce this penalty in this period due to Roman restrictions, they usually just excluded capital offenders from the community). Other, lesser sins required only a beating of thirty-nine lashes with a whip (Deut 25:2-3); a `synagogue court decided such cases, and the synagogue attendant administered the beating. As in the case of violations of festivals or ritual laws, this penalty was administered only after the person had been warned and yet persisted in the offending behavior.

11:25. Roman citizens were not supposed to be beaten with rods, but officials sometimes overlooked these rules (see comment on Acts 16:22). On Paul's stoning see Acts 14:19. Frequent travelers were also well aware of the danger of shipwrecks, and death at sea was the most frightful form of death in antiquity (partly due to the pagan be

lief that the spirits of those who died at sea roamed forever because they were not properly buried). Because there were no lifeboats per se (see comment on Acts 27:30) or life jackets, shipwrecked victims could spend a long time in the water and often did not survive.

11:26. Travel was one of the more dangerous activities in antiquity; a later Jewish tradition even speaks of priests' praying and fasting two days a week for travelers' safety. Rivers were often used to navigate inland from the coast to cities, and robbers occasionally attacked incoming boats, especially in Asia Minor; or Paul could refer here to the danger of crossing swollen rivers. Robbers were one of the most dreaded dangers of land travel and one reason many parties did not travel at night. Pirates had become much less common on the sea than in

earlier times; although land robbers had also decreased in the period of the Empire, they remained a frequent danger. The climax of Paul's "dangers," however, is probably ironically pointed at his opponents: "perils among false brethren" (KJV).

11:27. Sleeplessness is probably due to potentially dangerous night travel (ministry itself would be limited at night because nearly everyone went to sleep early except watchmen and those who went to drunken parties, although people might stay up to tell stories and converse); insomnia is possible (cf. 11:28-29) but less likely at this point in the list (one would expect that with the anxieties of v. 28). One traveling to the interior of Asia Minor would face "cold"; coupled with "nakedness" (sometimes used, as here, to mean inadequate clothing), this was a serious hardship.

11:28. Paul's "anxiety" (NRSV; the same term translated "worry" in Mt 6:34) over the state of God's people is motivated by love (11:29-30), as the \*Old Testament prophets' concern for Israel had been. Philosophers emphasized that one should never be anxious (also Phil 4:6), but Paul's anxiety is one of love, not a selfish kind (2 Cor 2:13; 7:5-6; 1 Cor 7:32-same word; 1 Thess 3:5).

11:29-31. Paul's identifying with the "weak" would again offend the socially powerful leaders in the Corinthian \*church, who would view it as a sign of low status. To boast in his weakness inverts his opponents' entire position.

11:32. Aretas IV controlled Nabataea, the region around Syrian Damascus, and may have controlled Damascus itself about A.D. 34-39 (he died about 39-40). If he did not actually control Damascus, he certainly wielded political influence beyond his immediate sphere of legal jurisdiction. Because most of the caravan trade from the east passed through his kingdom, it was the strongest and wealthiest of the minor kingdoms of the Near East.

11:33. The "window" Paul mentions would have belonged to a house built along the city wall; many houses were built on such walls. Paul's strategy was

borrowed from the \*Old Testament (Josh 2:15; cf. 1 Sam 19:12). Acts 9:25 mentions this escape. This was hardly the sort of heroism in which high-status people would boast, because they did not value being in trouble with the authorities, even for the cause of Christ.

12:1-10

### Revelations and Weakness

12:1. Although Paul spoke of his spiritual experiences only when forced to do so (e.g., 1 Cor 14:18), it is clear that he, like many \*Old Testament prophets, regularly experienced visions and revelations. Some Jewish writers of Paul's day diligently cultivated visionary experiences with fasting and

sleep deprivation, but there is no indication that Paul sought visions; rather, he was "caught up" (v. 2; see comment on Rev 4:2).

12:2-4. "Fourteen years ago" was perhaps a decade after Paul's conversion. Because later Jewish teachers sometimes used "that person" as "you" or "I," it is possible that Paul here relates his own experience in the third person to avoid boasting. Some Greek writers suggested that one should describe one's experience as another's if one were ashamed to speak of it openly; analogously, some Jewish \*apocalyptists may have transferred their own visions to those heroes of the past in whose name they composed their writings. Willing to boast only in his weaknesses, Paul will not accept any praise for his personal revelations (cf. Prov 27:2).

Greek writers spoke of ascents of the soul, especially after death, as did Jewish mystics and apocalyptists. Jewish visionaries sometimes described their mystical experiences of heaven as being "caught up"; although they could mean that only their souls saw heaven, the experience was sometimes so vivid that the whole person seemed to be caught up (Ezek 2:2; 3:14, 24; 8:3; 11:1, 24), and some texts explicitly included the body in this experience (as in \*1 Enoch). (The Jewish ascent stories sometimes emphasized the danger of the ascent, as in the

case of the four *rabbis*, only one of whom reportedly escaped unscathed. But except for Philo, all the Jewish stories are either pseudonymous or later than Paul, so it is difficult to reconstruct the exact nature of Jewish mystical experience in Paul's day.)

Visions given by God are not the same as the practice of some Greek sorcerers and wonderworkers and spiritist experiences in many cultures today, where the soul could travel abroad in astral projections; even Philo, the Jewish philosopher most influenced by Greek thought, saw ecstasy as the soul's experience with God, not simply wandering around on the earth.

In Jewish texts, "paradise," the new Eden that was the opposite of hell (\*Gehenna), would exist on earth in the world to come but was reserved in the heavens in the present time. Different texts varied in the number of heavens they envisioned (from three to 365); three and seven were the most common numbers, and paradise was often thought to be located in one of these heavens. Paul's "third heaven" probably means he thought in terms of three heavens, with paradise in the highest. (The lower atmosphere was usually regarded as the lowest "heaven.") Many Greek readers thought that the pure soul would ascend to the highest heaven at death, so the Corinthian Christians would have no problem understanding Paul's words here.-

Revelations of deities in the Greek *mystery cults* were also "*forbidden to be uttered*"; some Jewish writers like Josephus and \*Philo applied this description to God's highest wisdom or to the divine name.

12:5-6. One common \*rhetorical device was to say, "I could say this, but I won't"; Paul uses this device here (also in Philem 19). If his opponents are boasting about their visions, Paul here outdoes them while maintaining the foolishness of their boasting.

12:7-8. "Flesh" here need not indicate a physical ailment (like the one in Gal 4:13), as is often supposed (so TEV); Paul may allude to the "thorn in Israel's



side," the Canaanites God left in the land to keep Israel from exalting themselves (Num 33:55; Judg 2:3; cf. Josh 23:13; Ezek 28:24). Scholars debate exactly what Paul's "thorn" was, but in

view of the context and Paul's "buffeting" (KJV, NASB) in this verse (cf. 1 Cor 4:11), it may be continuing persecutions; or this "messenger of *Satan*" *might be an ironic insult against his opponents themselves (11:14-15)*. As in the Old Testament and most Jewish thought, God is here sovereign even over Satan and his angels.

12:8-10. Philosophers spoke of selfsufficiency, either to endure trials or sometimes because there were none. Paul's idea here is quite different: God's grace is sufficient, providing the power Paul needs. In paganism, divine power was especially displayed in magical wonders; for Paul, it is God's power enabling one weak in himself to endure. Miracle reports in pagan temples often followed the same form as Paul's request (v. 8) but concluded with the deity's appearing to heal the person. Although Paul had performed many miracles (12:12), he would not boast in his miracles, as his opponents perhaps boasted in theirs; instead he boasts in his weakness.

12:11-18

### Paul's Closing Irony

12:11. Many ancient writers advised that one could praise oneself inoffensively only if one were compelled to praise oneself, especially to defend oneself. Philosophers usually considered public speakers "nobodies," and someone may have applied this term to Paul.

12:12. Appealing to readers' own eyewitness knowledge was one way of deflecting some of the offensiveness of self-boasting (so, e.g., the earlier Greek \*rhetorician Isocrates).

12:13. The well-to-do in the Corinthian \*church want an *apostle they can be*

*proud of-one who conforms to their high-society expectations for a professional moral teacher. Thus they want Paul to stop working and to accept support from them, to become their client or dependent (see 1 Cor 9). Paul avoids playing into the hands of the well-to-do faction of the church (see the situation in the introduction to 1 Corinthians) by accepting support from others instead; here he replies in irony: "Forgive me!"*

12:14-15. The well-to-do Corinthians want Paul to be their *client and they his patrons* (12:13), but Paul reminds them that he is their father (1 Cor 4:15). Thus he reverses their own position: he refused their support not because he was socially ignorant, but because they were his dependents rather than his being their dependent. (Once a Roman father declared a child to be his, parents supported the child growing up and helped young couples establish themselves. Clients and children were both viewed as dependents in the Roman household.)

12:16-18. The same people who criticize Paul for not accepting their support-so their faith could appear more respectable to their social peers-also apparently accept his opponents' arguments against his offering for the poor in Jerusalem (chaps. 8-9). Occurring this close to the end of Paul's argument, his request for funds for the poor may have been at the center of his opponents' accusations against him: this Paul would not accept your support when it was socially appropriate, but now he wants money to help others you do not know!

12:19-13:4

### Paul's Coming to Discipline

Paul, who had been "weak" among them before, would now be strong (13:3).

12:19. An "apology," or defense speech, was a standard type of writing, but Paul explains his ironic defense and display of

\*rhetoric as motivated only by love for the Corinthians, rather than a genuine defense of himself.

12:20. One standard theme of GrecoRoman moralists was "harmony"; they commonly attacked strife, envy and so forth. Ancient writers also attacked anger, among other attitudes. The Corinthians cannot possibly defend their behavior even on the basis of their own culture's ethics.

12:21. The powerful members of the Corinthian \*church despised humility, as did most of their pagan colleagues; but if they worried that Paul had been too humble before (11:7), their wretched spiritual state (12:20) is about to humiliate him further. So much for his boasting of them (9:3)!

13:1-2. Moses' law (Deut 17:6; 19:15) and all subsequent Jewish (and Christian-Mt 18:16; 1 Tim 5:19) law required a minimum of two witnesses in the case of a charge against someone. Paul is treating his next visit to Corinth as a courtroom battle (cf. 1 Cor 6:3-4), and promising them that he is going to win his case.

13:3-4. Because Judaism talked of God speaking by the prophets, Paul's appeal to "Christ speaking in" him is probably an appeal to his prophetic gift. Paul often drives home God's power revealed in the weakness of the cross to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:182:8), mainly because the Corinthian Christians, like their pagan culture, valued \*rhetorical and miraculous power that drew attention to speakers and miracle workers, not to the supreme God.

13:5-10

### True Power and Weakness

13:5-6. Philosophers often urged self-evaluation or testing. Paul, who preaches the true \*gospel, has Christ in him (13:3-4), but the Corinthians must decide whether Christ is in them; if Christ is in them, then he is certainly in Paul, their spiritual father.

13:7-9. Philosophers generally reasoned that it did not matter what others thought of them; but many reasoned that they should guard what others thought of them, not for their own sake but for the sake of bringing others to philosophy.

Paul is unconcerned with what others think of him but wants his friends to be built up. 13:10. On Paul's authority in this regard, see comment on 10:8.

13:11-14

### Closing Words

13:11. This closing exhortation to

unity fits GrecoRoman "harmony" speeches well enough that even pagans in Corinth would agree with its moral message.

13:12. Kisses were used as a sign of affection among family or friends.

13:13. Letters often included greetings from others present where the writer was.

13:14. Most Jewish people thought of the \*Holy Spirit as a prophetic, divine force from God. Thus, for Paul to parallel Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit as he does here probably indicates his belief that Jesus is also divine and that the Spirit is also a personal being like the Father and Son.

# GALATIANS

## Introduction

**Authorship.** Virtually all scholars recognize Galatians to be Pauline.

**Type of Letter.** Although Galatians has apologetic elements (i.e., points where Paul seems to defend himself), Paul is not concentrating on the kind of \*rhetoric used in law courts. Rather, Galatians is predominantly "deliberative rhetoric," the kind of argumentation ancient speakers and writers used to persuade people to change their behavior. The argument itself is very rational, and the emotional language of the letter was standard rhetoric characteristic of stern letters (Galatians includes elements of ancient "letters of rebuke").

**Date.** Some scholars have argued for a very early date (making this one of Paul's earliest letters), because Paul does not explicitly appeal to the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15; but that Paul can refer to taking Titus to Jerusalem with him (Gal 2:1) means that he had already completed his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14) and thus that the Council had probably taken place (Acts 15). Galatians may thus date to the late fifties.

**Situation.** Paul is clearly battling opponents who have settled in Galatia (for the location, see comment on 1:2; if one adopts the South Galatian theory for the location of Paul's readers, Acts 13-15 provides especially helpful background for the letter). These are Jewish Christians who would rather circumcise the Galatians thus alienating them from their own \*Gentile culture than allow Judean Jews back home to think that Christian missionaries were lax (4:29; 5:11; 6:12-13). Unlike Paul, a more seasoned missionary, these missionaries want to impose their own culture on the Galatians.

**The Issue.** At an earlier time, some Judean Christians had insisted that Phrygian

(maybe Galatian; see comment on 1:2) believers be circumcised to be saved (Acts 15:1). Although the Jerusalem Council had apparently settled this issue, side effects lingered: could *Gentiles be part of God's people without circumcision?* Some of the strictest Pharisees may have required circumcision for salvation, but many Pharisees believed that any Gentiles who kept the few laws given Noah would be saved. But even for this more lenient class of Pharisees (cf. Acts 15:5), one could not become part of the people of God without circumcision; very few Jews were so lenient as to accept Gentiles on such terms. Indeed, circumcision had even become a major cultural symbol of fidelity to Judaism: attempts to restrict the practice led to revolts both before and after Paul's time.

Some Judean Christians were now arguing that one must become culturally Jewish to become a full Christian, fully righteous; after all, the Bible itself made this requirement for one who wished to belong to God's people (Gen 17:10-14). Further, they may have reasoned, if Paul argued for \*baptism (a post-Old Testament Jewish addition to circumcision), why could Judean Christians not require circumcision, even though it drove away potential converts? Paul argues forcefully against this view.

Commentaries. Among the useful commentaries on Galatians are those by Donald Guthrie, *Galatians*, NCB (1973; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981); F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982); and Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990). Helpful specialized works include George Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography: Toward a New Understanding*, SBLDS 73 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985). Hans Dieter Betz, *A Commentary on Paul's letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), has helpful insights, although his model of judicial (courtroom) \*rhetoric for the book was severely criticized by George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1984), and others (see comment on "Type of Letter" above).

1:1-5

## Introduction

Like many polite ancient letters, Paul's letters characteristically include a thanksgiving at the outset, but Galatians lacks one. This lack suggests that Paul is angry, and following the proper \*rhetorical style for a letter of blame, he does not mind expressing his anger explicitly.

1:1. Letters normally opened with the sender's name; less often, they included a description of the sender, where that was necessary. An "apostle" was a commissioned messenger; although Paul had once been a humanly appointed agent (Acts 9:2), he is one no longer. Already he challenges his opponents, who claim authority from Jerusalem (cf. also Judea in general-Acts 15:1). (The status that Jerusalemites had in the eyes of many other Jewish people may be illustrated by the authority others ceded to \*Josephus's opponents from Jerusalem in one of his accounts.) 1:2. Scholars dispute whether Paul here addresses those in Galatia proper (which scholars often call North Galatia, a region in Asia Minor settled by Celts, not mentioned in Acts and only slowly Christianized) or the so-called South Galatian region (which some scholars call Phrygia-Galatia). If Paul uses the term technically, he must mean North Galatia (which includes Ancyra, Tavium and Pessinus); if he uses it generally, as some other ancient writers did, it may instead cover the Phrygian region addressed in Acts 13-14 (including Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe).

1:3. Paul here adapts standard Jewish greetings; see comment on Romans 1:7.

1:4-5. Nearly all Jewish people in this period divided history into two main ages: the present age (under the dominion of evil nations) and the future

age (when God would rule unchallenged). Because the future *Messiah has already come the first time*, Paul can argue that Christians are already citizens of the future age of God's kingdom. On the ransom, cf. Isaiah 53:10-12 and 43:3-

4.

1:6-9

### True and False Gospels

Paul minces no words in these verses; although speeches and letters often opened with praise of the hearers or a polite thanksgiving, Paul begins with a direct rebuke. This literary convention is found only among the harshest of ancient letters.

1:6. Letters of blame, especially in their harsher forms, typically used the expression "I am amazed" (NASB). Paul's readers will have no doubt that he is quite upset.

1:7. Messengers who distorted the contents of their message were subject to legal penalties. Those familiar with the \*Old Testament would think of those who distorted the divine message in terms of false prophets (e.g., Jer 23:16), for whom the penalty was death (Deut 13:5; 18:20).

1:8-9. Some Jewish mystics of the period claimed revelations from angels (especially in \*apocalyptic literature). Oaths and curses were familiar in ancient religion, magic and everyday life. Paul may allude here to the curses of the covenant leveled against those who failed to keep Moses' law (Deut 27:28); more significant is the use of this same word for "curse" in the 'Septuagint of Deuteronomy 13: false prophets and those who listened to them were to be destroyed.

1:10-17

### Not Revealed by People

Speeches and letters often included a long \*narrative section, normally in chronological order. Narrative could sometimes be autobiographical, and Paul here uses standard themes of ancient autobiography to bolster his argument.



Themes in ancient argument included divine attestation, examination of character and behavior, and comparisons between figures personifying different values or sides of the dispute. In deliberative speeches, the speaker first had to demonstrate the integrity of his character and conduct if it were in question.

1:10. Pleasing God rather than people echoes a common theme of philosophers. Demagogues who flattered the masses were unpopular in aristocratic circles and were commonly denounced publicly. Paul paints his opponents as pleasers of people (6:12-13).

1:11. "I make known to you" or "I would have you know" (NASB) was sometimes used to introduce the \*narrative portion of a speech. Like philosophers and moralists who presented themselves as models of the virtuous life, Paul can present himself as a model of the \*gospel. But anything that could be interpreted as boasting or self-exaltation was offensive to ancient ears, unless one had proper reasons for it; defending oneself or claiming to be boasting on behalf of another (here, God) was, however, considered sufficient reason.

1:12. In argumentation, firsthand knowledge counted highly. "Received" was sometimes used for the passing on of human traditions, as Jewish scholars did; here Paul refers to his experience in Acts 9.

1:13-14. "Advancing" (v. 14) is the technical language of philosophical schools for progress in one's studies, but it was also current in \*Diaspora Judaism and could naturally be applied, as here, to a \*rabbinic student. The Palestinian Jewish image of "zeal" was com

monly rooted in the models of Phinehas (Num 25:11) and the \*Maccabees, who were willing to kill for God. "Traditions" could refer to general community customs, but given Paul's \*Pharisaism (Phil 3:5), it probably refers to Pharisaic traditions, on which Jews discussing Pharisaism generally commented. (Pharisees were known for their adherence to oral tradition.) Paul actually understands the Palestinian Jewish piety of his day far better than his opponents

do. His position and activities are reported in greater detail in Acts 8:1-3 and 9:1-2.

1:15. That God set his servants apart even before birth is clear from Jeremiah 1:5 (see also Gen 25:23; Ps 71:6; Is 44:2; 49:1); Paul presents his own call in the light of those of the `Old Testament prophets.

1:16. "Flesh and blood" (KJV, NASB) was a common figure of speech for "mortals" (see "any man"-NIV-and "any human being"-NRSV).

1:17. "Arabia" refers to Nabataea, the area around Damascus in Syria. This area was prosperous; Greek cities like Petra (Aretas's capital), Gerasa and Philadelphia (modern Amman in Jordan) belonged to the Nabataean Arabs, and Bedouins traveled through the land. Damascus was next to Nabataea and at this time may have been controlled by Nabataea's king, Aretas IV (see comment on 2 Cor 11:32).

1:18-24

Return to Judea

In 1:11-24 Paul makes clear that he did not receive his \*gospel as a tradition from the Jerusalem *apostles*; *he is not, therefore, their subordinate* (as a disciple passing on tradition from his teachers would be). If his opponents claim direct tradition from Jerusalem, Paul can counter their claims by pointing out that he is an equal of the Jerusalem apostles and has his own information firsthand.

1:18-19. On ancient reckoning, where part of the first year counts as the whole, "three" can mean either two or three. Hospitality was important in Jewish homes.

1:20. Oaths like this one ("before God") could be used in court to underline one's integrity; breaking the oath invited divine judgment, and most people had enough piety to believe that God (or the gods) would execute judgment on one who took such an oath (i.e., called the gods as witnesses) in vain.

1:21. Whether or not Paul means the whole province of "Syria-Cilicia" (as he could have in this period), Paul spent time both in Cilicia (Tarsus) and Syria proper (Antioch, its capital); cf. Acts 9:30, 11:25-26 and 13:1.

1:22. Paul means "*churches of Judea*" generally, not Jerusalem; his fluency in the highest and most Hellenized circles of Palestinian Jewish education (evident from 1:14 and Paul's \*rhetoric) almost certainly places his education in Jerusalem, as Acts 22:3 also suggests.

1:23-24. The few Jewish stories that culminated in the conversion of a persecutor always emphasized the greatness and power of God. Paul's genuine \*repentance would naturally produce the same response among Jewish Christians.

2:1-10

### The Jerusalem Council

Although the matter is disputable, it seems likely that Paul here reports the relevant features of the Council that Luke records in Acts 15. Paul uses a variety of ancient literary devices to make his point in this passage (e.g., aposiopesis or ellipsis, antithesis). Given the probable claims of his opponents

that Paul is relaxing biblical requirements to gain more converts, and that their views emanate from Jerusalem, the Jerusalem \*apostles' support bolsters Paul's case.

2:1. The "fourteen years" here probably refers to his previous visit to Jerusalem, about three years after his conversion; if the Council met around A.D. 48, Paul's conversion may have occurred around A.D. 31, within perhaps a year of Jesus' \*resurrection.

2:2. Paul sought first the support of the Jerusalem leaders for his revelation, before the assembly gathered to make a decree. On the importance of majority

rulings in ancient Jewish groups emphasizing consensus, see comment on Acts 15:22.

2:3-5. Although many Jews believed that nonidolatrous *Gentiles would be saved, almost no one believed that they were adopted into the covenant on equal terms with Jewish people until they were circumcised. That some Jewish Christians wanted to force circumcision on Titus is thus not surprising (cf. Acts 15:5); that Paul's side won out in the Jerusalem church* means that the Jewish Christians had diverged significantly on this issue from the majority views of their culture. Paul graphically describes the other side as "spies" (TEV), infiltrators who seek to betray the Christian camp and finally enslave them as prisoners of war.

2:6-8. Those of "reputation" (2:2, 6NASB) are the Jerusalem \*apostles (2:9). But Paul regarded God's opinion more highly than any human opinion, no matter how highly reputed. Whenever a Greco-Roman speaker argued against tradition or custom, that speaker had to assume the burden of proof; divine revelations were, however, regarded as important evidence even among pagans. Among Jewish teachers, the majority opinion of the sages was normative, weighed more heavily by some than a direct voice from heaven; but Paul circumvents an appeal to such tradition by appealing instead to the standard Jewish doctrine that God is an impartial judge. In 2:79, even the "pillars" themselves recognized Paul's equal (but different) task.

2:9. Ancient writers sometimes used "pillar" as Paul does here (occasionally for prominent \*rabbis); Paul may refer to these apostles' place in the new temple (cf. Eph 2:20). Receiving one another's right hands usually connoted greetings and welcome; but sometimes, as here, it indicates an agreement or treaty. "Cephas" is \*Aramaic for Peter.

2:10. Palestinian Judaism sometimes called the pious "the poor"; but the literal poverty of the Jewish Christian masses in Jerusalem is more likely in view here. The \*Old Testament and Judaism heavily emphasized alms for the poor, and Paul's collection (e.g., 2 Cor 8-9) was undertaken to alleviate this need.

2:11-14

## Confrontation in Antioch

2:11. Paul extends the *rhetorical technique of comparison* (used positively in 2:7-8), contrasting Peter's refusal to comply with the decree of the Jerusalem Council with Paul's defense of it. The Galatians should thus recognize that even if Paul's opponents had been authorized by the Jerusalem apostles—which is not the case (2:1-10)—the Jerusalem apostles would have been wrong to have authorized them. Antioch was the largest city of Syria-Palestine, a few hundred miles north of Jerusalem, and the center of the Jewish Christian mission to the \*Gentiles (Acts 11:20; 13:1-3; 14:26-27).

2:12. Pious Jews were not supposed to engage in table fellowship with Gen

tiles (Acts 10:28; 11:3). The Jerusalem Jewish leaders may have agreed with Paul on paper (in theory), but they also had to keep peace within their own Jerusalem constituency and maintain their witness to their culture, with its rising anti-Gentile sentiments. Peter probably saw his actions here the way Paul saw his own in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22—appealing to everyone—but the qualitative difference is enormous: withdrawing from table fellowship with culturally different Christians made them second-class citizens, violated the unity of the \*church and hence insulted the cross of Christ. Although Peter and others undoubtedly claimed to oppose racism, they accommodated it on what they saw as minor points to keep peace, whereas Paul felt that any degree of racial separatism or segregation challenged the very heart of the \*gospel.

2:13-14. Jewish piety demanded that reproof be given in private; for Paul to reprove Peter publicly suggests that he regarded the offense as quite serious and urgent. "Hypocrisy" or pretense was universally regarded negatively; philosophers and Jewish wisdom writers alike attacked it. (Some scholars have argued that before the New Testament period the term occurs only in its literal usage for actors in the theater; but earlier use in Jewish wisdom sources

contradicts this view.)

2:15-21

### Paul's Case in Antioch

Paul seems to summarize the substance of Galatians here, whether or not this paragraph is the thesis statement of the book (as Betz, who classifies Galatians as judicial \*rhetoric, thinks). Paul's response to Peter may continue through verse 21 (as in NIV), although this is unclear.

2:15-16. Paul argues that Jewish Christians are also made righteous by faith, which does not give them any advantage over \*Gentiles who must come to God on the same terms. Jewish people regarded Gentiles as different by nature, because they believed that Gentiles' ancestors were not freed from the evil impulse at Sinai as Israel was.

2:17-18. Paul then argues-refuting opposing arguments in advance-that righteousness by faith does not lead to sinful living. He uses the objection of an imaginary interlocutor to make his point, as was standard in ancient \*diatribe.

2:19-20. *The law itself taught Paul the way of Christ and Paul's death to sin in Christ. The closest parallels to the divine empowerment of Christ's indwelling are Old Testament teachings about empowerment by God's Spirit (although the New Testament writers develop these teachings much further).*

2:21. Paul continues his point that righteousness (both before God and in one's behavior) comes through Christ's life in the believer (through the Spirit-3:1-2; cf. 5:13-25). Christ would not have died if salvation could have been provided another way. Jewish people normally believed that all Jews were chosen for salvation in Abraham and were saved unless they were very disobedient; by contrast, \*Gentiles might be saved without conversion to Judaism but could attain to Israel's full status as members of the covenant only if they converted. By insisting that righteousness is through Christ alone, Paul places Jew and

Gentile on the same terms with regard to salvation.

3:1-5

Consistency with Their Conversion

Paul's style here is 'diatribe-a vivid

teaching style often characterized by imaginary interlocutors, rhetorical questions and intense reasoning which lasts through 4:31.

3:1. Good public speakers were known for their dramatic gestures and vivid accounts, enacting before their audience the very events they narrated. All major ancient writers on public speaking emphasized this vividness of speech, in which the events narrated seemed to appear before the hearers' "very eyes" (NIV, TEV). Here Paul no doubt means that he acted out the crucifixion through his own lifestyle (2:20). The term translated "bewitched" refers to the evil impact of spells (see TEV) or the "evil eye," a jealous look with magical efficacy.

3:2. Many Jewish sources link the \*Spirit with human merit: for example, it was said that no one in a given generation could receive the Spirit because the generation was unworthy, even if the potential recipient were worthy. But the Galatian Christians had a different experience; they had received the Spirit shortly after leaving paganism, in keeping with the Christian teaching that the future outpouring of the Spirit on God's people had been made available to all in Christ. 3:3. Although Paul's opponents do not seem to have denied that the Galatians received Christ and the Spirit before knowing the *law*, *they insisted that "perfect" (cf. KJV, NASB) or complete Christianity included obedience to the law. Judaism stressed that the Jewish people had been saved through grace, but that Jews who rejected the law were lost; in their view, \*Gentile converts to Judaism also had to prove the genuineness of their conversion by obeying all the details of the law. Many philosophers and pagan cults spoke of "perfection" or "maturity" as the ultimate stage of moral or (in the case of the cults) religious advancement.*

3:4. Here Paul asks whether their conversion by grace and consequent persecution were meaningless. An appeal to the readers' own experience would constitute the ultimate eyewitness argument and was \*rhetorically effective.

3:5. Not only their conversion but also the miracles continuing among them were by \*grace. Although ancient peoples were more open to miracles than modern secularists are, the idea of a religious community (in contrast to a pagan healing shrine of Asclepius) where miracles occurred regularly would have been spectacular even in antiquity.

3:6-14

### Abraham's Blessing and the Law's Curse

Paul here refers five times to the law of Moses and once to the Prophets, making a case from Scripture that those who claimed to respect the \*law had to accept. He contrasts the message of faith (3:6-9, 14) with works directed toward the law (3:10-13), as in 3:5. (The two major interpretations of this passage are that \*Gentile Christians believe as Abraham did-the traditional position, followed here-or that they are saved by Abraham's faith [as in Judaism] and hence Christ's faith, i.e., Abraham's and Christ's fidelity to the covenant.)

3:6. Paul cites Genesis 15:6, a popular Jewish proof text for showing how Abraham modeled the work of faith. Paul will expound it differently from the traditional Jewish interpretation. 3:7. Jewish people used "sons" (so NASB here) both literally (genetically) and spiritually (those who acted like their moral predecessors). They normally applied the title "Abraham's offspring" (or "children"-KJV, NIV-or

"descendants"-NRSV, TEV) to the Jewish people but occasionally referred specifically to those who excelled in righteousness-although Jewish people would never have applied this designation to \*Gentiles. Here Paul demonstrates that those who believe as Abraham did are his spiritual offspring (Gen 15:6, quoted in Gal 3:6).



3:8-9. Because Gentiles could believe as Abraham did (3:7), they could also be made righteous as he was. (Jewish teachers saw Abraham as the model convert to Judaism and consequently would be forced to respect Paul's argument more than they would like.) Like a good Jewish expositor, Paul proves his inference from this passage by appealing to another text dealing with the promise to Abraham (Gen 12:3 = 18:18; cf. 17:4-5; 22:18). God's purpose all along had been to reach the Gentiles, too, as had been stated at the very opening of the Abraham \*narrative. In Jewish thinking, the righteous (Israel) were saved in Abraham; here, believing Gentiles are saved (blessed) in him.

3:10. Both Genesis 12:3 and the blessings of the law in Deuteronomy 28 contrast the curses of those who oppose Abraham or those who break the covenant with the blessings of Abraham's descendants or those who keep the covenant. Reasoning by opposites was a normal Jewish method of interpretation. Paul thus gives the verdict on righteousness sought by the "works of" (KJV, NASB) or by "obeying" (TEV) the law: imperfect obedience brings a curse (Deut 27:26, the summary of the curses). According to Jewish teaching, human obedience was always imperfect, and God could therefore not require perfect obedience as a condition for salvation; but like a good \*rabbi, Paul interprets Deuteronomy 27:26 for all that he can get from it-after all, God was in a position to demand perfection.

3:11. Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 (on which see comment on Rom 1:17) as evidence that a righteousness based merely on human obedience is inadequate. Paul's knowledge of the \*Old Testament is thorough: he has selected the only two texts in the entire Old Testament that speak of both righteousness and faith together (in v. 6 Gen 15:6; here Hab 2:4).

3:12. Because Habakkuk 2:4 connects righteousness and life, Paul cites the other Old Testament text that refers to both, again demonstrating his Jewish exegetical skill (Jewish interpreters regularly linked texts on the basis of key words they shared). Paul contrasts the faith method (3:11) with the works method of Leviticus 18:5 (cf. Ex 20:12, 20; Lev 25:18; Deut 4:1, 40; 5:33; 8:1; 30:16, 20;

32:47; Neh 9:29; Ezek 20:11, 13; 33:19). Although these Old Testament texts speak of long life in the Promised Land, Paul knows that many Jewish interpreters applied these texts to the life of the world to come; hence he responds: "This is the works method." His opponents may have been using this text to make their case that faith was not enough. Paul agrees that the righteousness of the law has to be fulfilled, but he believes that it is fulfilled by being in Christ and living by his \*Spirit (5:16-25); his opponents believe that a Gentile has to achieve it by obeying the details of the law, especially the initial act of circumcision.

3:13. Again following the Jewish principle of linking \*Old Testament texts on the basis of key words they shared, Paul cites Deuteronomy 21:23 to show that Christ took the "curse" that belongs to all who fail to perform the whole law (Gal 3:10).

3:14. In Jewish expectation "the

blessing of Abraham" includes the whole world to come; here Paul says that believers have the down payment of that world (cf. Eph 1:3, 13-14) in the blessing of the \*Spirit (cf. Is 44:3). (For the relationship of the promise of land to the promise of the Spirit, cf. also Hag 2:5 with Ex 12:25; 13:5.)

3:15-20

#### The Law Does Not Annul Abraham's Covenant

Greeks usually used the term Paul uses for "covenant" for a "testament" or "will" (a legal document opened at someone's death). Although Paul means "covenant" in the \*Old Testament sense rather than as "testament," he can play on the legal nuances of the latter. Judaism stressed the covenant made at Sinai, but most Jewish writers saw that same covenant foreshadowed (or, less accurately from an Old Testament standpoint, actually practiced in advance) in Abraham (Gen 17:9-14).

3:15. Like other legal documents, testaments or "wills" (NRSV) were sealed so they could not be altered. In Greek law, wills were irrevocable; one could not impose new conditions or remove an heir, even if one added a supplementary testament. (This was no longer true in Roman law of this period, but it applied to some Jewish wills; compare a possible precedent in Deut 21:15-17.) Under Greek law, testaments were confirmed by their deposit with the municipal records office; if a new testament would interfere with an older one, it was rejected.

3:16. Paul means that Christ is the ultimate seed of the promise through whom the nations will be blessed; this thesis makes good sense of the promise motif in Israel's history. But he argues his case the way the \*rabbis often did: by attention to a grammatical peculiarity that was not actually peculiar. (As in English, the Hebrew term for "seed" could convey either the singular or the plural [a collective], which Paul well knew-3:29. But *rabbis argued in this manner, too; "sons of Israel" meant either "sons and daughters" or only the men, depending on what the rabbis needed it to mean in a given text. Paul's opponents no doubt read Scripture this way, and Paul responds in kind; he takes "seed" as singular, a sense that the term can have in general but that does not seem to fit any of the Genesis texts to which he may refer [13:15-16; 17:8; 24:7], because he already knows, on other grounds, that Christ is the epitome of Abraham's line. When later rabbis applied "Abraham's seed" to one person, it was naturally to Abraham's son Isaac.) Judaism nearly always took "Abraham's seed" as Israel, which Paul would agree is usually what it means (Rom 9:7, 29; 11:1). But his argument in Galatians 3:6-9 permits him to apply this expression to Gentile Christians who are in Christ, hence in Abraham.*

Roman law allowed testaments to stipulate that property be left first to one heir and then to another after the first one's death. If Paul expected his readers to know this sort of custom, this may explain how his argument for them can move in principle from Christ as the heir to all who are in Christ.

3:17-18. On the legal principle of 3:15, God would not institute a law that

retracted his earlier promise based on faith. Paul might be responding to an opposing argument that the new covenant could not alter the old; if so, Paul responds that the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34) returns to the original covenant. "Four hundred thirty years" comes from Exodus 12:40.

3:19. *The law's function of restraining transgressions would have also made sense to non-Jewish readers: Greco-Roman philosophers felt that law was necessary for the masses but that the wise were a law for themselves. In his image of the guardian in 3:23-25 Paul elaborates on this function of the law, meant to last till the promise could be fulfilled; such an addition could not change the earlier covenant (3:15). According to post-Old Testament Jewish tradition, the law was given through angels, and (as in the Old Testament) the mediator was Moses himself.*

3:20. Mediators intercede between two (or more) parties; if the law was given through a mediator (3:19), therefore, it was adapted to the needs of both parties. But the promise was not given through a mediator; it was a unilateral enactment of the one God (God's oneness was the most basic belief of Judaism). Paul again argues from analogy in a manner that would be persuasive in his readers' culture.

3:21-29

Before Faith Came

3:21. Jewish teachers said that life did come by the \*law, both in this world and in the world to come (cf. 3:12). But Paul here concludes his argument (3:15-20) that the law was never meant to do the work of the promise.

3:22. In contrast to Romans 3:10-18, Paul has not argued humanity's universal sinfulness from Scripture in Galatians (Gal 3:10-12 at most implies it). Humanity's sinfulness could be safely assumed, however, because Jewish teachers in his day agreed that all people had sinned; Paul simply takes the consequences of that sin far more seriously than other teachers did, in that the death of God's Son was needed to cancel them.

3:23. Jewish traditions divided human history into various stages; Paul does the same, viewing the law as a temporary guardian till the original promise was fulfilled.

3:24. "Put in charge" (NIV) is better translated "tutor" (NASB) or, better still, "guardian." The slave assigned to this role would watch out for the student on his way to school and help him with his manners and schoolwork, but he was not the teacher himself. Children sometimes resented but often grew fond of their slave guardians and later freed them. Such guardians were also normally better educated than the free masses; the image is not intrinsically demeaning. But it was hardly the way most other Jewish teachers would have described the law. (They occasionally describe Moses as Israel's "guardian" till Israel grew up. Philosophers spoke of philosophy as a "moral teacher," and Judaism spoke of the law as a "teacher.")

3:25. The coming of faith is described in terms of coming of age, when a boy would achieve adulthood (about thirteen or fourteen years old in various Mediterranean cultures).

3:26. Israel was called God's "children" in the \*Old Testament and often in Judaism. In contrast to standard Jewish teaching, Paul says here that one becomes a spiritual descendant of Abraham (3:29) and child of God through faith, not through ethnic participation in the covenant.

3:27. Ancient writers sometimes spoke of being spiritually "clothed"; Judaism occasionally spoke of being "clothed" by the *Spirit* (*see also comments on Rom 13:12; Eph 4:20-24*). Gentiles who wanted to convert to Judaism were \*baptized. By putting on Christ in converting to Christianity, Gentiles took his status as Abraham's seed (3:16, 29) and God's child (3:26).

3:28. Some Greco-Roman cults claimed to ignore social divisions like those Paul mentions here, although they rarely erased them (most cults were expensive

enough to exclude all but the well-to-do). But the early Christians were especially distinctive in surmounting such divisions. They formed the only bridge between Jews and Gentiles and had few allies in challenging class (slave versus free) and gender prejudices.

3:29. The Jewish people were called "Abraham's seed" (KJV, NIV) or "offspring" (NASB, NRSV; see comment on 3:16), heirs of the promise; Paul's argument in this chapter has transferred this position to `Gentile Christians.

4:1-11

### Sons, Not Slaves

Under ancient law, sons were heirs, destined to inherit what belonged to their fathers; in contrast, slaves were part of the inherited property. The contrast between slaves and children appears elsewhere in ancient literature. But in household codes, which explained the proper relations of all members of a household with the head of the household, minor children were subordinated just as slaves were; only after leaving the home did a child achieve freedom in practice. Paul here continues the image of the slave guardian versus the child (3:24).

4:1. Under Roman law, the status of the minor still under a guardian was roughly that of a slave.

4:2. Minors were required to be under legal "guardians" even if their father was deceased; this guardian was normally chosen from the father's will, or, if this were unspecified, the role fell to the nearest male relative from the father's side of the family. The "managers" (NASB) or "trustees" (NIV, NRSV) or "stewards" of estates were often slaves or \*freedmen but wielded considerable power.

4:3. In their previous, pagan state, the Galatians had revered the elements of the universe as deities (Judaism had long since demythologized them as angels who ruled over nature, like those implied in Ps 148:2-4). Most ancients feared

the personified, tyrannical power Fate, which was thought to exercise its will through the astral spirits, the gods who ruled the stars. Paul believes that even the Jewish people were enslaved by such evil spiritual powers apart from Christ; see comment on 4:9.

4:4. Jewish texts often speak of the fulfillment of appointed times in history as a way of recognizing God's perfect wisdom in and sovereignty over history. (Some commentators have compared "the fullness of the time" NASB to how ripe Greco-Roman culture was for the spread of Christianity; yet others could counter by citing the almost insurmountable obstacles that this culture presented to the early Christians.) Here Paul compares this fulfillment to the point at which a boy attains maturity and is considered an adult (about thirteen or fourteen years old). "Born under \*law" means that Jesus was obligated to keep the law of Moses.

4:5. Greek law combined adoption with heirship; the same seems to have been true in the case of childless persons in ancient Near Eastern law (cf. Gen 15:2). Paul uses common \*Old Testament imagery to make his point, however; God had made Israel his children (e.g., Ex 4:22), and the Old Testament repeatedly speaks of the land as Israel's "inheritance," bestowed on them by God (without any thought of God's dying, of course).

4:6. Roman adoptions required a wit

ness of the transaction: the *Holy Spirit performs this function here. That the Spirit should testify is natural, because Judaism understood the Spirit especially as the one who inspired the prophets; the Spirit here inspires believers, speaking to them as he did to the prophets, to remind them of their calling as God's children. "Abba" is the Aramaic word for "Papa," a term of special intimacy rarely if ever used in Judaism to address God directly (see comment on Mk 14:36; Rom 8:15).*

4:7. The Galatians are now freed from the slave guardian of 3:24-25, for the time has come (4:4).

4:8. Jewish people often said that the pagans did "not know God," and that their gods, which were creations of the true God, were "not gods at all." (Philosophers often decided the moral value of an idea or action by how it corresponded to nature; Paul and other Jewish and Christian writers recognized that worshiping a created object as if it were the Creator failed this criterion. Some pagan thinkers, following an ancient Greek philosopher named Euhemerus, distinguished between real gods, which were evident "by nature" [sun, moon, planets and stars], and those invented by people [other deities].) Jewish people, because they were in covenant with God, said that they "knew" God truly.

4:9. As was fitting in \*rhetorical rebuke, Paul uses harsh language: he is not sure that the Galatians "know" God even now. The "elemental things" (NASB) or "principles" (NIV) to which they are returning are presumably the "spirits" (cf. NRSV, TEV) of nature they used to worship as gods (4:8). Foremost among these would be the astral spirits (4:3), associated with special days and seasonal rituals (4:10).

4:10. Judaism had its own special calendar of holy days, new moons, sabbatical years and so forth. Paul is saying that by returning to a ceremonial, calendrical religion, the Galatians return to pagan bondage under these spirits in the heavens (4:3, 9). From a technical standpoint, this argument is standard \*rhetorical exaggeration: Judaism and paganism felt that they had little in common. From the standpoint of experience, however, they would relinquish the *Spirit* (3:2; 4:6) *for tradition and custom*. Some commentators think that Paul here links the deified elements of paganism (4:8-9), which correspond to Judaism's angels of nature, with the angels who gave the law (3:19); although that linkage is uncertain, Paul's image here is negative, at best that of an adult going back under the guardianship of a slave.

4:11. The prophets sometimes complained of pleading with Israel to no avail; disappointed servants of God hoped that their devotion was not "in vain" (so KJV, NASB here), that is, not unrewarded (Ps 73:13; cf. Is 49:4; 65:23); even God's judgments were "in vain" when Israel did not return to him (Jer 2:30). The



image was always that of great labor expended with no return, due to the recipients' obstinacy (Phil 2:16; cf. 1 Thess 3:5) or the ineffectiveness of a message (1 Cor 15:2, 14, 17, 58).

4:12-20

### Paul's Plea

Although Galatians is clearly a "letter of blame," it is not the harshest sort of blame; Paul does not intend to break fellowship with his readers. In this section, Paul employs standard themes found in "letters of friendship," emphasizing that he still loves the Galatians deeply. Ancient \*rhetoricians emphasized appropriate expressions of emotion as well as logic in persuasion, and recognized the need to lighten the

tone after a section of heavy reproof. Paul's words here would thus sound entirely appropriate.

4:12. Especially in Greek culture, "friends" (so NRSV here) were viewed as "equals" (although the Roman idea of friendship between \*patrons and their dependents was likewise widespread). "I became as you are" means that Paul relates to them as equals, not only as their father in the faith (4:19).

4:13. Paul's first visit (Acts 14:1-20 as opposed to 14:21-25, if we follow the South Galatian theory; see comment on 1:2) or preaching was occasioned by some "infirmity" (KJV); the term could be applied either to sickness or to injuries inflicted by persecution. \*Stoic philosophers said that sickness should not affect one's attitude, and the Galatians may have been impressed with how Paul bore up under an infirmity. Some scholars have suggested (on the assumption that South Galatia is in view; see the introduction) that Galatia was a good area for someone sick to go to recuperate.

4:14. Physical infirmities were quite often regarded as the curse or punishment of the gods; this belief in sickness as divine retribution appears often even in

Jewish texts. Receiving Paul as God's "angel" (cf. Acts 14:12) or "messenger" (the term can refer to human as well as supernatural messengers) meant receiving him with the hospitality due the one who sent him, Christ Jesus. Messengers were to be received as representatives of their senders. (The wording need not imply that Christ is present as an angel; cf. 1 Sam 29:9; 2 Sam 14:17, 20; 19:27; Zech 12:8. Many second-and third-century Jewish Christians did portray Christ as the chief angel, because of the limited categories available in Judaism to communicate him to their culture. The image was discontinued in the fourth century due to its exploitation by the Arians, who regarded Christ as deity but created, although the image fit earlier use by Ebionites who rejected Christ's divinity. Some Jewish writers, like \*Philo, portrayed the Word as the supreme angel, but earliest Christianity lacks any direct evidence for this portrayal.)

4:15. Sacrificing one's eye for someone else was a figure of speech for a great sacrifice (\*Petronius attributes it to some \*rhetoricians). Thus Paul's statement that the Galatians "would have dug out your own eyes to give them to me" need not mean that his infirmity (4:13-14) was an oozing eye sore, as some commentators have suggested. In Greek culture, friendship was especially demonstrated by sacrifice; Paul here reaffirms the bond that exists between himself and the Galatians.

4:16-17. Demagogues who told people what they wanted to hear became popular through their flattery. Moralists thus always pointed out that the flatterers were not concerned for their hearers' good; those who told them the truth openly were those who really loved them (cf. similarly Prov 27:6).

4:18. In contrast to the Galatians' response to his opponents' flattery (4:17), the Galatians had sought Paul in genuine love (4:13-15)-as long as he was with them to defend himself

(4:16). In ancient thought, letters were a surrogate for one's presence; Paul here hopes to reverse their questioning of his teaching.

4:19. Teachers were often viewed as "fathers." Galatians well understood the Roman custom of the ruling father, whose authority over his children was absolute. But Paul appeals to a different aspect of ancient parenthood: that of affection and intimacy. Although the image of affection was also applied to the father, Paul here takes

the role of the mother as well. Labor pains were regarded as the severest pains humans experienced, and even with skilled midwives, mothers often died in childbirth. Paul's image of his love and sacrifice-and of their apostasy-could not be more graphic.

4:20. \*Rhetoricians like Isocrates recommended honestly confessing, "I am at a loss as to what to say," when confronting an emotionally stirring and painful situation. Letters were considered a surrogate for one's presence (4:18) and were supposed to reflect the same character the person would display if present. But it was easier for Paul to write stern letters than to be stern in person (2 Cor 10:10-11); indeed, even when he was writing a letter of blame, it hurt him worse than it hurt them (2 Cor 2:4).

4:21-5:1

### The Hagar-Sarah Analogy

If Genesis derives from the period of Moses and the exodus, the literary function of the Hagar *narrative includes a warning to the Israelites against going back to Egypt (Gen 16:1), although Hagar is ultimately more a positive than a negative character. Further, the entire section of Genesis (chaps. 16-21) emphasizes that the child who came according to God's promise (the promise Abraham believed in Gen 15:6; cf. Gal 3:6, 14) was the key to everything else God had promised Abraham; the child conceived "according to the flesh," by merely human means, was blessed by God but had nothing to do with the promise. Unlike the interpretations of Philo and some other interpreters of his day (and not a few modern sermon illustrations), Paul's "allegory" is an analogy controlled by the*

biblical text, not merely by what he wants to say.

4:21. "Tell me" was one way of addressing an imaginary opponent in a *diatribe*. In common Jewish parlance, "the law" included Genesis, hence the Hagar-Sarah story.

4:22-23. When Abraham and Sarah tried to have a son by human means (apart from a divine intervention), they had Hagar bear a son to Abraham (Gen 16:1-4, 15). (Some scholars have suggested that they were following an ancient Near Eastern custom of using the barren wife's handmaid as a surrogate mother.) But God still planned to send a son miraculously, a son who would inherit the covenant God had made with Abraham (Gen 17:15-21). Paul is still playing on the slave-free image of 3:23-4:11.

4:24. Given his pedagogical views, \*Philo naturally interpreted Hagar as imperfect training, but Sarah as perfect virtue. Paul instead draws an analogy between the slave, who produced according to the flesh, and those who seek to fulfill the law's righteousness according to the flesh. Hagar was from Egypt (Gen 16:1) and thus could have reminded the first Israelite readers of Genesis of their own slavery in Egypt; Mount Sinai was near Egypt.

4:25. "Arabia" included Mount Sinai, south of Judea, as well as the northward area mentioned in 1:17. The Nabataean Arabs were viewed as Ishmaelites, descendants of Hagar, in Paul's day, thus making the connection clearer to ancient readers familiar with eastern Mediterranean geography. Commentators have suggested that Paul answers his opponents' claims here, because an allegorical style of argumentation is rare for him. His opponents may have identified Sinai with the new Jerusalem, the place from which the law would go forth in the future (Is 2:2-4; cf. 65:17-19).

4:26. Many Jewish texts in Paul's day reinforced the \*Old Testament hope of a new Jerusalem, often speaking of a heavenly Jerusalem that would come down

to earth. These texts also sometimes spoke of Jerusalem (present or future) as "our mother." Because Judaism associated the *Messiah and the Spirit* with the end time, Paul would naturally identify followers of the Messiah Jesus with the future Jerusalem rather than with the present one.

4:27. It was natural for some Jewish teachers to connect Isaiah 54:1 (which Paul cites here) with Genesis 21:2: Sarah's giving birth typified her descendants' giving birth after the suffering of the captivity to a restored Israel and Jerusalem. That Isaiah himself intended such an allusion is at least possible (Is 51:2).

4:28. Paul's opponents argued that one must be circumcised to enter the covenant of Abraham and Isaac and become their spiritual descendants. Although they could make a strong case from Genesis 17:10-14, Paul goes beyond Jewish tradition (which generally expected the law to be strengthened, not radically changed, in the end time). He believes that the coming of the Messiah has inaugurated a new era in which the old rules no longer strictly apply (Gal 4:4, 26). Under this new covenant, these \*Gentile Christians are children of Isaac, and their circumcising opponents are spiritual Ishmaelites.

4:29. That the inferior are envious of the superior was a frequent moral in antiquity; cf. 1 John 3:12 or \*Philo's work entitled "That the Worse Attack the Better"; the Old Testament likewise often illustrated that the wicked persecute the righteous (e.g., Ps 37:32). Paul uses this idea to explain why his Jewish Christian opponents are succumbing to the pressure of non-Christian Jewish opinion (cf. 5:11; 6:12-13).

4:30-31. Paul's opponents felt that uncircumcised \*Gentiles were excluded from the covenant; Paul here argues the opposite. Completing his analogy, he cites Genesis 21:10: Hagar's line could not inherit with Sarah's, and Sarah demanded that Abraham expel Hagar and Ishmael. Paul calls on his readers to do the same—to expel his opponents, the spiritual Ishmaelites. 5:1. On the "yoke" see comment on Acts 15:10.

5:2-6

### The Real Law

In 5:2-6:3 Paul emphasizes that the real law is of the \*Spirit and of love, not of the flesh.

5:2-3. Most Jewish teachers allowed that righteous *Gentiles could be saved by keeping merely the seven laws believed to have been given to Noah; but any Gentile who converted to Judaism was responsible to keep all 613 commandments given to Israel at Mount Sinai (according to rabbinic count)*. Rabbis said that the \*law was a whole, and one had to keep all of it; rejecting any part of it was tantamount to rejecting the whole thing.

5:4. Although most Jewish people believed that they were born into the covenant by virtue of being Jewish, they recognized that one could be cut off from the covenant by refusing to obey it. But because salvation is only by Christ (2:21), Paul declares that seeking it any other way leads to being "cut off" (NRSV).

5:5-6. Most Jewish people believed that the \*Spirit had been active in the *Old Testament and would become active again in the end time*. For Paul, the Spirit activates the power of the future kingdom in believers' lives in the present, thus enabling them to experience the "righteousness" or "justification" that will be fully revealed at Christ's return. See comment on 6:15.

5:7-12

### Paul Castigates His Opponents

5:7-8. Ancient writers on moral topics often compared the moral life to running a race. Paul here speaks of someone "cutting in" (NIV, literally; "hindered"-NASB), which throws the runners off balance and perhaps out of the race. \*Rhetoricians liked to play with words, and Paul here alludes to circumcision (which involved cutting), as in 5:12 ("cut off"-KJV).

5:9-10. One of yeast's most basic properties is that it spreads throughout the dough; Paul uses the same idea, possibly an ancient proverb, in 1 Corinthians 5:6 to warn of the negative effects of an unchecked spiritual malignancy.

5:11. If Paul were simply converting \*Gentiles to Judaism in the ordinary manner (circumcision for the men, \*baptism for both men and women), he would not be experiencing Jewish opposition-to which his opponents in Galatia, more sensitive to their own culture's expectations than to those of the Galatians' culture, have succumbed (6:12-13). (If his readers are in South Galatia, Acts 13-14 records some of the persecutions.)

5:12. "They were cut off" (KJV) or "cutting themselves off" could mean to cut themselves off from the community, but most commentators take the words as meaning "mutilate" (NASB), "emasculate" (NIV) or "castrate" (NRSV, TEV) themselves: while they are circumcising others, they ought to make a full sweep of themselves and remove the whole organ. Although Paul's language purposely avoids being explicit, there is no reason to think that such an insult is beneath him; witty insults were the mark of good public speakers in the heat of debate, and Paul is far more impassioned in his criticism of his opponents than in his blame of the Galatians themselves. Many pagans thought of circumcision as a form of mutilation, and the Roman emperor Hadrian later outlawed it under an anticastration law. But as Paul knew, Jewish people particularly abhorred eunuchs, castrated men (Deut 23:1).

5:13-18

### Fulfilling the Law

5:13-14. Other Jewish teachers also summarized the humanward commandments of the \*law in terms of this quotation from Leviticus 19:18; Paul prefers this summary to all others, however, because this was the summary Jesus offered (Mk 12:31).

5:15. The ancients (especially in the \*Old Testament and Jewish sources, e.g.,

Prov 30:14) used the metaphor of being eaten by others as a grotesque description of a horrible fate or inconceivable wickedness (literal cannibalism horrified ancient sensitivities even more than it does modern ones).

5:16. The Old Testament and Judaism spoke of "walking" (so KJV and NASB here) in the way of the Lord, in righteousness, in the law, *etc.* (e.g., Lev 26:3); it meant "behaving" in these ways. Jewish teachers described their moral laws derived from the Old Testament law as *halakah*, which literally means "walking." Although this expression was not common in Greek, Paul's readers (especially those becoming more acquainted with the Old Testament and Judaism) would understand his point. He may allude here to Ezekiel 36:27: when God put his \*Spirit in his people in the end time, they would walk in all his commandments, even though they had failed to keep the law's righteousness in their own strength.

5:17. "Flesh" is human weakness and mortality ("human nature"-TEV; not merely "sinful nature"-NIV), and

means the best (or worst) anyone can do in himself or herself. Because flesh has nothing in common with God's power, one can be either a person of the Spirit (a Christian) or a person of the flesh (one who runs his or her own life without depending on God); one cannot have it both ways (5:16, 18). See comment on the introduction to Romans 8:1-11.

5:18. Philosophers often said that the wise man needed no laws, because he would simply choose to do what was right by the law written in his heart; the Old Testament also speaks of the law's being written in one's heart, a benefit that characterizes especially the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34). The Old Testament often described Israel's being "led" by God, especially in the wilderness after he redeemed them from slavery in Egypt.

5:19-26

Flesh Versus Spirit



When "flesh" referred to people in the *Old Testament*, it meant humans viewed in terms of their finiteness, creatureliness and mortality. The Dead Sea Scrolls thus often apply this idea especially to the moral weakness of humans in themselves, their susceptibility to sin.

The *Spirit of God*, however, energized people in the *Old Testament* to speak and do God's works miraculously. In the *Old Testament*, flesh and Spirit had nothing in common (Gen 6:3). (The view that Paul contrasts the human body with the human spirit, rather than human weakness and God's Spirit, is based on a Platonic misreading of Paul, the sort that led to *Gnosticism*. Despite its strong condemnation of *Gnosticism*, the later church was influenced by some of the same Greek philosophical ideas.) Paul thus declares that those who have God's presence living inside them by the Spirit have new moral ability and are able to reflect God's own character; for Paul, this was the only way for believers to live out the new life.

5:19-21. Ancient writers commonly used lists of vices, as here, although Paul is much more forceful (v. 21) than pagan writers (who said one merely needed to avoid excess in most vices). Ancient moralists also could use lists of virtues (5:22-23; in the *Old Testament*, cf. Ps 15). Laying them side by side to contrast them would also relate to Paul's ancient readers; the standard moral image of the "two ways" (the good and bad ways) or two dominions is frequent in both Jewish and non-Jewish texts. "Works" (KJV) recalls the "works of the law" that Paul has disparaged throughout the letter (e.g., 3:2), but "of the flesh" (KJV, NASB, NRSV; not "sinful nature"-NIV) tells why: they are merely human, without God's empowerment.

5:22. The *Old Testament* also uses the metaphor of God's people bearing "fruit" (e.g., Is 27:6; Hos 10:1; 14:8). Here Paul contrasts "fruit" with "works" (5:19) because fruit is simply produced by the nature of the tree, and for Paul, believers' nature has been made new in Christ (5:24).

5:23. Self-control was one of the virtues most emphasized by philosophers and respected in Roman society. Philosophers often taught that the wise needed no law to regulate them, because their virtue itself was a law. Paul says that people of the \*Spirit fulfill the moral intent of the law (5:14) by means of the Spirit guiding their lives.

5:24. Philosophers warned about the dangers of unchecked passions. Paul speaks here not of controlling passions, however, but of a completed death with Christ (2:20; 6:14). Paul nearly always uses verbs in the past tense for

this death; one does not die to sin gradually (which the imperfect or present tense would suggest) by works, but one accepts one's completed (the aorist and perfect tenses he uses signify the action is completed) righteousness by faith and learns to live accordingly (5:19-23).

5:25. Believers "live" or "have life" (cf. TEV) by the \*Spirit; they should then "behave" or "walk" (KJV, NASB) the Spirit's way, which will fulfill the moral principles of biblical law (5:16).

5:26. Paul returns (5:15) to a call to harmony, a common theme of ancient speakers. For Paul, true depth of relationship with God must be expressed in one's relationships with others.

6:1-5

### Restoring Others Meekly

Paul continues his exposition on the true law of the \*Spirit, the law of Christ (6:2). The gentleness that comes from the Spirit (5:23) is the proper way to correct faults; conversely, the legalist who is obsessed with addressing his or her own spirituality by fleshly means will have little patience with the spiritual needs of others.

6:1. A variety of ancient sources, including Greek and Jewish wisdom traditions

and the \*Dead Sea Scrolls, stressed wise reproof for the other person's good, and often stressed examining oneself before correcting others. Judaism (unlike Greek culture) considered humility one of the greatest virtues, even for the most noble.

6:2. The image of bearing another's "burden" or "weight" (the term was also applied metaphorically to griefs) might remind readers of slaves or of impressment (Roman soldiers could require local people to carry something for them). In either case, it is an image of subservience that demands more than convenience. "Bear burdens" in this context must include helping a fellow Christian deal with sins (6:1). Many take "law of Christ" as referring to a saying of Jesus, but in the context of Galatians it more likely refers to his example and the character of Jesus imparted by the Spirit (2:20; 5:14).

6:3-5. Greek literature includes some maxims similar to "each one shall bear his own load" (6:5, NASB), which usually stress self-sufficiency; but Paul gives the idea a different twist. In the context of stressing humility in dealing with others (6:1, 3-4), bearing one's own load (6:5) means answering to God himself for what one has done (6:7-8).

6:6-10

### Providing for Others

This passage seems to have a financial emphasis, although it is probably not limited to the collection for the Jerusalem \*church (1 Cor 16:1), as some commentators have suggested.

6:6. Many teachers charged fees for their instruction; many Greek teachers insisted that they and their students should share all things in common, and some groups of teachers and \*disciples lived communally. In Asia Minor (including Galatia), a fee was exacted from those entering temples. Here Paul urges the Galatian Christians to support their teachers who could provide sound teaching (unlike that of his opponents).

6:7. Reaping what one sowed was a familiar image in antiquity (in the \*Old Testament, e.g., job 4:8; Prov 22:8; Hos 8:7; 10:12; cf. Prov 11:18; Is 3:10; Jer 12:13; widespread in other Jewish literature). Paul elsewhere used sowing as a monetary image (2 Cor 9:6); thus here he probably continues the thought of 6:6. "Do not be deceived" was a familiar phrase in ancient moral exhortation.

6:8-9. On the flesh's mortality, see the introduction to 5:19-26; Paul often associates the \*Spirit with \*resurrection of the body.

6:10. With the exception of the \*Cynics, philosophers and moralists advocated working for the common good; no one would have complained about a group that lived accordingly. Paul's emphasis is especially on (though not limited to) ministering to the needs of one's fellow believers.

6:11-18

Crucifixion, not Circumcision

Greeks and Romans viewed circumcision as a mutilation of the flesh, but it in no way compared with the most shameful and painful form of death employed in the Roman world-crucifixion.

6:11. Most letters of this length were dictated to scribes, who wrote small to finish the task quickly. Paul, who may be unaccustomed to writing full letters (or whose hands may have been weakened by leatherworking in cold artisan shops in the winter), cannot write small and quickly. Some documents also seem to have called attention to especially important points at their beginning or end by using larger letters. Whatever the purpose of "large letters" here, the main point is that not a scribe but Paul himself writes this section, as the handwriting shows. Paul's special effort indicates that they must pay special attention.

6:12-13. The metaphor here is grotesque: Paul has been assailing those who live "by the flesh," by merely human, mortal power, ignoring God; physical circumcision was commonly said to be "in the flesh" (so also KJV, NASB,

NRSV here). Here Paul speaks of these culture-bound missionaries as if they want to take the Galatians' foreskins back to their senders. See comment on 4:29 and 5:11.

6:14. Paul boasts in a wounding far more severe than circumcision: crucifixion. He is thus unafraid to face persecution from unsatisfied Jewish leaders; see the introduction to this section.

6:15. "New creation" means that the life of the future world has begun in believers now (see comment on 5:5-6; 2 Cor 5:17). Again Paul appeals to the product of God's power, as opposed to any merely human effort.

6:16. Paul blesses those who "walk by this rule" (NASB) as opposed to the "rule" of Jewish halakah (see comment on 5:16). The phrase "peace be with/ on" someone was common in Judaism; it is one of the most common phrases on Jewish tombs. "Peace be on Israel" was also a regular `synagogue prayer, the final benediction of the Amidah (its basis is as early as Ps 125:5; 128:6); it is a fitting antithesis to the curse against the `law's distorters in 1:8-9. Scholars dispute whether "Israel" here means the faithful Jewish remnant or

all believers as spiritual heirs of Abraham (chap. 3), although more seem to favor the latter sense.

6:17. Some slaves, criminals and prisoners of war were tattooed, as were devotees of some religious cults in Egypt and Syria. Greeks and Romans normally associated tattooing with barbarians, and branding was usually reserved for horses. Paul's term is the one normally used for tattooing rather than branding, but could more commonly apply simply to any mark or puncture wound. In this context, Paul simply means that he was crucified with Christ (6:14)-probably as evidenced by "scars" (TEV) from his past persecutions (5:11; 6:12-13).

6:18. The term translated "brothers" means "siblings" (i.e., "brothers and

sisters"-NRSV; in Greek, a masculine plural form can include women). It was regularly applied to those of one's race or nationality, but members of religious associations also typically addressed one another in this manner; see comment on Acts 9:17.

# EPHESIANS

## Introduction

Authorship. Although scholars often dispute the authorship of Ephesians, most of the so-called non-Pauline words, phrases and stylistic features appear at least occasionally in letters that everyone agrees were written by Paul. Many differences between Ephesians and earlier Pauline letters are insignificant. For example, some note that "the genuine Paul" speaks of Christ as the head (1 Cor 11:3) and the church as his body (Rom 12:4; 1 Cor 12:12) only separately. But ancient philosophers sometimes used the body metaphor with the head and sometimes without it, and requiring Paul always to express himself the same way in his few extant letters, although other writers did not, is hardly fair to Paul.

Unlike many of his earlier letters, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians seem to have been written after Paul had experience in presenting Christianity in an ancient academic context, where he would have used philosophic language to communicate to his hearers (Acts 19:9). That Paul could adapt his language to his audience, including those to whom the sort of \*Stoic language in Ephesians appealed, is evident elsewhere in his writings (e.g., Rom 1; 1 Cor 8); such language is more pervasive in Ephesians and Philippians, with somewhat more Middle Platonic language in Colossians. Although the dispute over the authorship of Ephesians will continue in scholarly circles, this commentary works from the position that Paul wrote it.

Genre. Paul's exhortations in the letter cover several main themes, all of which the recipients' situation seems to have elicited (although he uses standard forms to describe them). This point would argue against the idea that Ephesians is merely a "letter essay" communicating general truths.

The abundant parallelism and repetition in the letter have been compared with Hebrew poetry, but they were also used in epideictic \*rhetoric (i.e., in orations of praise concerning gods or humans). Worship language is more common in the first three chapters of the letter, which elaborate the sort of introductory prayer and thanksgiving that often appeared in ancient letters. As he usually does, Paul here blends the different ancient categories of rhetoric: the exhortation parts of his letter are "deliberative," intended to persuade the readers to a particular course of action; other parts of his letter are "epideictic," such as where he praises God and praises the church that is to reflect God's glory to creation.

It is possible that Paul, drafting other letters at the same time (e.g., Colossians), used a scribe for some letters to help him adapt his basic message for different situations in different churches.

**Situation.** Paul writes this letter from prison, probably in Rome. As readers in the Ephesian region of Asia Minor would know, he had been arrested on the charge of having brought a `Gentile into the temple (Acts 21:28-29; 28:16). Racial or cultural division between Jew and Gentile was a major issue in the Ephesian church (cf. Acts 19:17), and Paul was one of the best qualified writers of antiquity to address both sides intelligently.

From his detention under Roman authorities (probably in Rome), Paul is also aware of the possibility of imminent persecution and the need for the church to be a good witness in society (cf. especially comment on Eph 5:21-6:9). He is also aware of the church's struggle with its own background in the occult practices of Asia Minor-magic (Acts 19:19), astrology and attempts to escape the astrological power of Fate (cf. comment on Eph 1:8-11, 19-23; 3:9-11).

**Commentaries.** The most thorough and useful are Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, AB 34, 34A, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974); and A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990). Those unable to wade through the Greek, however, may prefer another commentary, such as G. B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison*, New Clarendon Bible (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University



Press, 1976); George Johnston, *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon*, Century Bible (Greenwood, S.C.: Attic, 1967). For a fuller discussion of Ephesians 5:18-6:9, the reader may consult Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992), pp. 133-224, 258-79.

1:1-2

## Introduction

As notes in most translations point out, not all manuscripts include "in Ephesus" (v. 1). Many scholars have argued that Ephesians was originally sent to a number of \*churches, of which Ephesus was only the most prominent. (Thus it would be a "circular letter," like imperial edicts.) But because all these churches would presumably be in the area around Ephesus, the history of the Ephesian church will help us understand the background to this letter (see Acts 19:1-41).

"\*Grace" and "peace" were variations of standard greetings; what is significant here is that they are "from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." See further the introduction to Paul's letters and comment on Romans 1:1-7.

1:3-14

## Praise for Salvation

The opening, or exordium, of Paul's letter includes a benediction ("Praise be to God"-NIV, or "God be praised") and a prayer; ancient letters commonly included either prayers or thanksgivings, although Paul's elaboration of them here is unusual. Many Jewish prayers would begin with "Praise be to God who [helps his people in some way]." In Greek, 1:3-14 is one long praise to God; this one recounts, as Jewish prayers often did, God's redemptive plans and acts on behalf of his beloved people.

In these verses as many as eleven different terms used for Israel in the *Old Testament* are applied to believers in Jesus. Because the church in Ephesus

comprised both Jews and \*Gentiles (Acts 19:17), and Jews and Gentiles had different cultural practices, the church may have had cultural and ethnic tension. Paul reminds be

lievers that whatever their ethnic or cultural background, they are all one people in Christ and must work together for God's purposes.

1:3. Today we distinguish between "the heavens" in a scientific sense (i.e., the outer atmosphere and the rest of the universe except the earth) and the spiritual place God lives. But in Paul's day he did not need to make this distinction to communicate to his readers; they divided "the heavenly realms" differently from the way we do. Almost everyone in the ancient world believed that the heavens had numerous levels (often three or seven), that different spiritual beings (various kinds of angels, demons, stars, etc.) lived in different levels and that God or the purest spiritual beings lived in the highest heaven. In much Jewish teaching, the spirits of the righteous would live with God there after death. "Heavenly realms" (NIV) can thus mean both "where God is" (as here) and "where the angelic powers live" (as often in Ephesians).

1:4-5. The Old Testament declares that God "predestined" or (literally) "chose" Israel in Abraham to be his covenant people and adopted them as his children, but that his people often fell short of the covenant. Paul explains that in a practical sense one becomes a member of God's covenant by Christ, not by one's background.

1:6. One reason God chose Israel was for them to bring him glory (Is 60:21; 61:3; Jer 13:11); so central was revealing his glory that even his acts of judgment were meant to turn people to him (Ex 7:5; Amos 4:6), the real source of life (Jer 2:13).

1:7-8. God had redeemed Israel (i.e., freed them from slavery) through the blood of the Passover lamb. The blood of animal sacrifices in the Old Testament indicated that the price paid for forgiveness was a life. Paul blends these images

here.

1:9-12. It was a common Jewish belief that history was moving through many stages to its climax, when everything would be put under God's rule. Some philosophers argued that the whole universe was permeated by God and would be absorbed back into him. Like Jewish writers who adapted the language of such philosophers, Paul believes that history moves toward a climax of subordination to God, not absorption into him. The Old Testament and Judaism recognized that God had a sovereign plan in history to bring it to this climax. On "inheritance" (KJV, NASB, NRSV) see comment on 1:13-14. On God's ultimate purpose here, see comment on 3:8-11.

1:13-14. A wax seal would have a mark of ownership or identification stamped in it, identifying who was attesting what was inside the container that had been sealed. Because it was commonly understood that the \*Spirit would be made especially available in the time of the end, Paul here speaks of the Spirit as a "deposit" (NIV)-a term used in ancient business documents to mean a "down payment." Those who had tasted the Spirit had begun to taste the life of the future world that God had promised his people.

After God "redeemed" (see comment on 1:7-8) Israel from slavery in Egypt, he led them to their "inheritance" or "possession" in the Promised Land. Later Jewish literature viewed the world to come as Israel's ultimate "inheritance," and early Christian writers used this language the same way (Mt 5:5; 25:34; Rom 8:17; 1 Cor 6:9; Jas 2:5). For Paul, Christians are God's people, redeemed but waiting for the completion of their redemption; as with Israel of old, God's presence among them is the assurance that he

will take them into the land he has promised (cf. Hag 2:5).

1:15-23

Prayer for Revelation

1:15-16. Like pious Jews, pious Christians apparently had a time set aside for prayer each day. Many pious Jews prayed several hours a day, and if Paul continued such a custom we can understand how he could pray for all his \*churches.

1:17-18. Jewish people commonly prayed for enlightened eyes to understand God's Word; the \*Old Testament also spoke of opening one's eyes to God's Word (Ps 119:18) or to other spiritual realities (2 Kings 6:17). Some Jewish sources characterized the \*Spirit of God as the "Spirit of wisdom" (the Old Testament especially emphasizes this: e.g., Ex 28:3; 31:3; 35:31; Is 11:2; cf. Deut 34:9).

\*Rhetorically skilled writers often introduced major themes in their introduction, and Paul is no exception. He is about to explain the points that he has been praying for them to understand. On "inheritance" see comment on 1:13-14.

1:19-20. A daily Jewish prayer viewed God's ability to raise the dead in the future as the ultimate example of his power. Paul agrees, but for Paul the decisive event has already happened: the first installment of the future `resurrection has taken place. The position to a ruler's right was a position of great honor and authority; to be seated at God's right hand was to be enthroned as ruler of the cosmos, even if not all his enemies had been destroyed (Ps 110:1). On "heavenly places" see comment on 1:3.

1:21-23. Exorcists and magicians tried to manipulate powerful spirits by invoking their names (see comment on Acts 19:13); the supremacy of Jesus' name above all other names means that he is higher than all the spiritpowers being invoked and could not be exploited.

Paul uses standard terms of his day for the demonic and angelic powers at work behind the political structures of the world, powers that were thought to direct the earthly rulers and peoples (v. 21). Most people in Paul's day believed

that the world was run by Fate, which was usually expressed by the stars (which were viewed as heavenly beings), and most of these people did not believe one had any hope of escape from Fate. Some of the \*mystery cults, however, like the cult of Isis, gained popularity by claiming power to free initiates from Fate.

Jewish people commonly believed that the heavenly powers ruled all the nations except Israel; some later teachers explained that Israel had been lifted above those heavenly powers in Abraham their ancestor. Paul says that those united with Christ had also been raised above those powers. His words would be a great encouragement to Christians who had been converted from an occult background (cf. Acts 19:18-20).

Jewish people especially viewed these heavenly powers as "angels of the nations," spiritual beings who stood behind earthly rulers and guided their rule (cf. Dan 4:35; 10:13). (Although the details are developed more in later Jewish texts, the roots of the idea are as early as Daniel and the \*LXX of Deuteronomy.)

Such beings were the ultimate expression of the spiritual division among different peoples, but Paul says that this distinction has been transcended in Christ-again making a point relevant to a congregation experiencing ethnic or cultural tensions. Thus Christ's body is "that which is filled by him who fills

all"- "all" indicating especially representatives of all peoples in the \*church (4:6-10; cf. 3:19; 5:18).

2:1-10

Exalted with Christ Above Sin

Paul continues to explain God's gracious exaltation of the Christian with Christ.

2:1-2. Most Jewish people believed that \*Satan or the chief of the heavenly angels of the nations ran the whole world except for Israel. "Ruler with authority

over the realm of the air" was a natural title for his dominion; it was commonly believed that evil spirits dominated the lowest realm of the heavens (i.e., the atmospheric realm), far below the realm of God's highest angels and his throne. "Air" was the usual term for the atmospheric heaven.

2:3. Many Jewish people sought to explain all sin as the direct result of demonic activity (cf. especially the "spirit of error" in the \*Dead Sea Scrolls). Paul does not see sin as always directly inspired by demons but thinks that the world is pervaded with the devil's less direct influence (including in racial division-1:21-23); one is not delivered from this influence by one's Israelite ancestry but (vv. 4-6) through faith in Jesus.

2:4-7. This picture of God's delighting to bestow his love on his people forever develops \*Old Testament pictures of his special love for his people (e.g., Deut 7:6-9).

Scholars have compared the image of the exaltation of the believers in 2:6 with the fairly common Jewish image of the righteous enthroned in the world to come; Christians have begun to experience the life of the coming age in advance (see comment on 1:14). The context would drive an additional point home especially forcefully to readers once enslaved by fear of Fate or the stars: to be "seated with Christ" means in 2:6 what it meant in 1:20-21-to be enthroned over the evil powers. Christians need not fear demons, Fate or anything else; their lives are ruled by God.

2:8-10. Good works flow from what God does in us, rather than God's work in us flowing from our works. God redeemed Israel before he gave them commandments (Ex 20:1); it was always his purpose for good works to flow from his \*grace, even if Israel (like many people today) did not always grasp that point (Deut 5:29; 30:6, 11-14). Most Jewish people in Paul's day agreed that they were saved by God's grace in the covenant, but they did not extend this idea to non-Jews, who could not inherit the covenant by virtue of birthright.

2:11-22

### United in the New Temple

2:11-13. In ancient Jewish beliefs, non-Jews could never participate in the fullness of the covenant without circumcision, although they could be saved by keeping some basic commandments. To be circumcised was to be grafted into the community of Israel, to become part of God's covenant people.

2:14-16. Paul writes this letter from prison because he has been falsely charged with taking a non-Jew inside the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 21:28). Taking a non-Jew beyond a particular dividing point in the temple was such an important breach of Jewish law that the Romans even permitted Jewish leaders to execute violators of this law. Paul's readers in Ephesus and Asia undoubtedly know why Paul is in prison (Acts 21:27, 29); thus for them, as well as for Paul, there can be no greater symbol of the barrier between Jew and non-Jew than "the dividing wall" of

verse 14. But Paul says that this dividing wall is shattered in Christ. "He is our peace" might (but need not) reflect the Hebrew of Micah 5:5.

2:17-18. Isaiah 57:19 could be understood as referring to the scattered seed of Israel as those "who were far away," but not long before this passage God had promised that his house would be for foreigners too (Is 56:3-8). This text thus fittingly expresses Paul's point concerning the unity of Jew and Gentile in the new temple (cf. also Acts 2:39).

2:19-22. In the \*Old Testament, the only division in the temple was between priests and laity, but by Paul's day architects had added barriers for non-Jews and for women (contrast 1 Kings 8:41-43); Paul says these barriers are abolished in God's true, spiritual temple. Some other Jewish writers spoke of God's people as his temple, but only Paul and other early Christians recognized that this new temple included non-Jews. (Paul derived the image of Christ as the cornerstone from Ps 118:22, probably via Jesus' teaching; see comment on Mk 11:10.)

Around the time Paul was writing these words, arguing for racial unity in Christ, Jews and Syrians were massacring each other in the streets of Caesarea, a city where he had been not long before (Acts 23:23). Here Paul does not simply mimic a common stand against racism in his culture; he condemns racism and segregation of a religious institution even though he has to challenge his culture to do so.

3:1-13

### The Mystery of a Unified People

The Bible had already taught that God would seek out non-Jews to join his people (Rom 16:26; e.g., Is 19:25); King David and others had welcomed non-Jews into the fellowship of God (e.g., 2 Sam 6:10-11; 8:18; 15:18-22; 18:2; 20:23; 24:18-24; 1 Chron 11:41, 46; 18:17). But to be full members of the covenant, male non-Jews had to be circumcised; by this period, men and women were also usually required to immerse themselves in water to become ritually pure. But the coming of Christ had made it clear to his \*apostles and prophets that by faith in Christ everyone could now approach God on the same terms.

Public speakers and writers frequently used a standard element of persuasion called pathos, an emotional appeal. By reminding his readers of what he their apostle had suffered for the ideal, multiethnic people that God was building, Paul appeals to them not to nullify his labors. The universal \*church should be all that it is called to be, a united interracial people in all its glory.

3:1-2. "Stewards" were household managers, often slaves or freedmen, with great responsibility and prestige in a wealthy home.

3:3-5. The term translated "mystery" was used in *mystery cults and elsewhere, but the main background for Paul's use of the term is in Daniel 2 and in Jewish writings (especially the Dead Sea Scrolls)* that follow Daniel. There it means especially God's plan for history, encoded in the Scriptures but understandable



only to the wise or to those with the *Spirit's insight*. Because most of Judaism believed that full-fledged prophets had ceased after the Old Testament prophets died, Paul's claim that God has now actively unveiled his truth through "apostles and prophets" would underline for his hearers the uniqueness of the Christian claim.

3:6. "Heirs" refers to the Old Testament idea that the Promised Land was

Israel's inheritance; the "promise" was also a sole possession of Abraham's descendants (and those who joined that nation by circumcision). To make uncircumcised \*Gentile Christians part of this same covenant would have sounded like heresy to many Jewish readers, jolting their ethnic sensitivities.

3:7. The \*Old Testament often spoke of divine empowerment for God's servants (e.g., Ex 31:3; Judg 15:14); see comment on Ephesians 3:16.

3:8-11. Some pre-Christian Jewish texts also speak of God showing the angels his power and glory through his people, and thus receiving their praise. Because these heavenly "rulers" were viewed as angels of the different nations, the unity of the \*church displayed the rule of God, whose authority transcended that of the angels and all earthly boundaries. On "stewardship" see comment on 3:1-2; on "mystery" see comment on 3:3-5. The point is that the church, a people destined to bring eternal glory to God, represents God's ultimate purpose in history (see 1:9-12), and all Christians should find their life's purpose in their role in that ultimate purpose (see 4:11-13).

3:12. "Boldness" often applied to the sort of frank speech appropriate among friends; here, conjoined with "confident access" (NASB), it probably relates to the certain place all members have in the household of God (2:18).

3:13. Many Jewish and Christian writers believed that a certain measure of suffering would have to be fulfilled before the end would come (cf. Rev 6:11). If Paul alludes to this idea here, he may be encouraging his readers that, as their

missionary, he is experiencing some of the \*church's requisite suffering that is to usher in the end. He may also mean that they share his glory because they have helped him in his ministry (cf. Mt 10:41) or that he suffers for the purpose of serving the body of Christ as a whole. Cities could view their local athletes as competing on their behalf in regional contests.

3:14-21

### Prayer for Empowerment

3:14. Jewish prayers were usually offered standing, but kneeling or prostration was sometimes used (in the *Old Testament* cf. *1 Kings* 8:14, 22, 54; Gentiles typically prostrated themselves also before rulers). Greeks rarely knelt to pray; like Jewish supplicants, they normally stretched out their arms with hands facing the gods being invoked (in the heavens, in the sea or toward statues).

3:15. Here Paul may mean that all peoples and families ("every fatherhood"; see notes in NIV, NRSV) reflect God's own fatherhood over the world; thus one would have to expect God's concern for all peoples (e.g., Gen 12:3). (Families "in heaven" may refer to the guardian angels of the nations.) Ancient writers often spoke of God as father and sometimes spoke of paternal authority in families as deriving from the example of God. The Roman father was also a supreme authority figure, with the right to rule all descendants as long as he lived.

3:16-17. Although Paul derives some language from the Greek world (see comment on 2 Cor 4:16 for "the inner person"), his ideas here are not particularly Greek. *Old Testament* accounts associated the Spirit especially with prophetic endowment but also with purity, strength and prowess or ability to fulfill whatever God calls one to do; the Old Testament sometimes also presents internalizing the Bible as a way to overcome sin (e.g., Ps 119:11). Israelite piety also recognized God as the source of strength (e.g., Ex 15:2; Ps

18:1-2; 27:1; 59:17; 119:28; Jer 16:19). When Paul speaks of the ability to live

rightly because Christ himself lives in the believer through the Spirit, these points from the Old Testament are probably the closest parallels to his idea in ancient literature; rarely did anyone suggest that one's moral life would be empowered by the presence and activity of God. Paul advocates total reliance on \*grace, even in the believer's ability to perform righteousness.

3:18-19. Many take "breadth and length and height and depth" to describe how all creation is filled with God's glory or as a description of the immeasurable vastness of his love. Some have suggested that Paul continues the temple image (2:18-22), describing the perfect cube proportions of the holy of holies in the Old Testament, although the idea is not explicit here. But the text almost certainly applies the language of divine Wisdom (e.g., job 11:5-9; cf. Job 28:12-28; Eccles 1:3) to God's love; cf. "manifold" (multifaceted) wisdom in 3:10.

3:20-21. Jewish people customarily ended their prayers with a blessing to God; sometimes the blessings closed with "forever and ever" (cf. 1 Chron 16:36; Ps 106:48). It was likewise customary to respond to prayers and benedictions with "Amen."

4:1-16

### One Body, Many Members

Ancient persuasive speeches and letters often engaged in a detailed argument, but Paul to this point has mainly used "epideictic," or "praise" \*rhetoric. He has praised the \*church, calling it to be what God had planned for it to be. He now turns to a standard part of persuasive rhetoric, however, the exhortatio, or exhortations. This type of argument fills the rest of the book until the closing peroratio, or rousing conclusion, of 6:10-20.

4:1-2. Although gentleness was a recognized virtue, most Greek writers viewed "meekness" in the sense of "humility" negatively, unless it was the socially appropriate self-abasement of a social inferior to a superior. On Paul's captivity (probably in Rome), see comment on 6:20.

4:4-6. Some Jewish texts (especially in \*Philo and 2 Baruch) suggested that Israel was united because God was one. These texts would never have united Jew and Gentile in one people, however, even though all the nations were admittedly joined in common humanity. Paul's language sounds closer to Stoic philosophical language about the unity of creation. But even the common Greek rhetorical theme of concord (unity, peace) does not match Paul's emphasis on the unity that believers in Jesus share and must live out.

4:7-8. Paul adapts the text of Psalm 68:18, as ancient expounders of Scripture often did, to make his point (a later *targum of the Psalms* rewords it the same way he does). This psalm refers to God's "going up" at Mount Sinai, as Jewish interpreters recognized, and Paul applies the principle of God's arising to Jesus. (In some Jewish traditions, Moses ascended all the way to heaven to receive the law; if Paul or any of his readers knew such traditions, it would make the application of this psalm to Jesus all the more vivid. But it is questionable how widely known this tradition was in Paul's day.) Paul's point is in harmony with the image of the psalm, although he changed its language; once a conqueror had received tribute and plunder from the defeated (as in Ps 68:18), he distributed most of these spoils to his soldiers (as here).

4:9-10. Paul interprets and applies the text just cited, the way a good Jew

ish teacher would. "Lower parts of the earth" probably means the realm of the dead, hence that Jesus had died (Ezek 32:24), although it could mean his descent from heaven to become a servant at his incarnation (Phil 2:7; cf. Ps 139:15).

4:11. "Apostles" were literally commissioned messengers carrying out their sender's mission; as such, they were backed by the sender's authority to the extent that they accurately represented that commission; in the New Testament, the term applies to commissioned agents of Christ authorized in a special way (more authoritatively than others) to declare and propagate his will. "Prophets" were spokespersons for God, whose role was known from the *Old Testament*

*and continued in the church*; apostles were to prophets perhaps as prophetic judges (e.g., Samuel and Deborah) or leaders (e.g., Elijah and Elisha) were to other Old Testament prophets-with special rank and authority.

"Evangelists," as proclaimers of good news (the message of Christ), were seen as "heralds," again a type of messenger. "Pastors" were literally "shepherds" (used for overseers in the Old Testament, e.g., Jer 23:2-4), elsewhere in the New Testament identified as overseers of local congregations (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet 5:1-2); they were called to shepherd God's people by declaring his message accurately (Jer 23:18-22). "Teachers" were expounders of the Scriptures and of the Jesus tradition; if they functioned like Jewish teachers, they probably offered biblical instruction to the congregation and trained others to expound the Scriptures as well.

As in many ancient lists, some of these terms may overlap considerably (the Greek indicates an especially strong overlap between "pastors" and "teachers"). They share a common focus and basis of authority as bearers of Christ's message. The authority is resident in their message and spiritual gifting; as in the case of Jewish teachers of God's message (as opposed to the chief priests), none represents institutional authority in the sense of a supralocal \*church hierarchy, which does not seem to appear until the early second century. Together these ministers of God's Word were to equip all God's people for their ministry (4:12-16).

4:12. The term for "training" or "equipping" was used in the Greek world to describe the work of philosophers and teachers.

4:13-16. The images of a person growing into maturity and a ship being tossed about by waves were common in Paul's day. The image of growing to maturity was rarely applied to a whole community of people as here, but the point would have been no less easy to grasp. Paul's image is a generic one, lacking standard Jewish images for the end time; he probably therefore refers to the church's need for maturity in general, rather than specifically predicting its completion in the

end time.

4:17-5:2

### Living the New Life

4:17-19. Greek writers often developed their moral exhortation by contrasting opposites, as Paul does here. Literature from this period demonstrates that most Jewish people would have described non-Jews in language similar to that which Paul uses (cf. also Lev 18:3, 24-30; 20:23-24; Deut 26:16-19). What is significant is that Paul refuses to call ethnically \*Gentile Christians "Gentiles" any longer; they may be ethnically Gentile, but they are to be ethically Jewish. Premarital sex, homosexual intercourse and idolatry were

typically Gentile sins from which nearly all Jews abstained. By contrast, pagans were raised this way; many Greek boys were ushered into "manhood" by an older man's molestation. "Walk" (KJV, NASB) means "behave"; see comment on Gal 5:16; "hardness of heart" is common in the Old Testament (e.g., Ex 4:21; Ps 95:8).

4:20-24. The "new self" (v. 24) is literally "the new person," who is (literally) "created according to God," which means according to his image or likeness. Paul probably alludes to the way God originally made Adam and Eve in his image, and says that the new person that a Christian has become is equipped with moral purity because he or she is made like God morally. Thus, he points out, one should live like it-as blamelessly as Adam and Eve did before they disobeyed. "Clothing" and "unclothing" provide a natural image, used in the Old Testament and Greek literature, for "putting on" and "putting off" or "removing" some kinds of behavior (Job 29:14; Ps 109:18; especially is 61:3, 10; see comment on Rom 13:12), other attributes (2 Chron 6:41; Ps 93:1) and so forth.

Jewish wisdom writers and Greek philosophers could have agreed with Paul's emphasis on "renewing the mind"; they understood that one's attitudes and values affected one's lifestyle. But Paul's basis for renewal differs from theirs; he

bases it on the new kind of life available in Christ, a kind of life that most Jewish people expected only in the world to come (after the \*resurrection of the dead).

4:25. Except for 4:30 and 4:32-5:2, most of Paul's moral exhortations in 4:25-5:2 are the sort that most ancient moralists uttered. Exhortations to truthfulness, labor, opposition to slander and so forth were standard. These are not sins attributed only to \*Gentiles (cf. 4:17-19) but those with which Jewish people also struggled.

Paul's way of overcoming moral problems differs from that of other ancient moralists (4:22-24, 32), but he can find common ground with many moralists in his culture who oppose the same wrongs that he does. Despite many points in common with the ethics of his culture, however, Paul often cites the \*Old Testament as his ethical authority; his exhortation to truthfulness here echoes a line from the commandments listed in Zechariah 8:16-17, where truthfulness may be opposed to false witness in a legal setting.

4:26. The exhortation to avoid sinning while angry is from Psalm 4:4; on the wickedness of those who hold anger overnight, cf. Hosea 7:6; the \*Essenes and some Greek philosophers also required that disputes be settled the same day. Learning to speak in the most helpful way (4:29) was also stressed.

4:27. The image here is probably one of warfare, and that the one who sins surrenders ground to the devil's side (cf. 6:10-20).

4:28. Judaism valued laboring with one's hands and sharing with the poor. Although Greek artisans no doubt prided themselves in their work, the aristocracy throughout the Mediterranean world disdained work with one's hands as the duty of the lower classes.

4:29. Ancient wisdom literature often emphasized learning to speak rightly (cf. 4:25; 5:3-4); many sayings in Proverbs emphasize the idea, including the encouragement to speak gracious, uplifting words (e.g., 12:25; 15:23; 25:11; cf.

Zech 1:13).

4:30. "Grieving" the *Spirit reflects a serious offense*; in *Isaiah 63:10* (one of only two Old Testament texts to use the title "holy spirit"), it refers to Is

rael's rebellion in the wilderness, which led to their rejection by God. Similarly, Israel's rebellion against the Spirit led Moses to sin with his mouth according to Psalm 106:33 (cf. Num 20:10; Deut 3:26). On "sealing" as a sign attesting that no one had tampered with the sealed merchandise, see comment on Ephesians 1:13-14. The Ephesians must preserve their attestation for the day when their redemption would be complete (the Old Testament "day of the Lord," when he would judge the world and vindicate his people).

4:31. Vice lists were a common literary form in the writings of ancient moralists; sometimes all the vices listed pertained to a particular topic, as here (anger).

4:32-5:2. Other moralists, including Greek and Roman nonChristians and \*Philo, appealed to the imitation of God for a standard of ethics. But nonChristian writers of Paul's day could not cite the example of a god who had lovingly sacrificed himself for his people (4:32-5:2). (Some scholars have appealed to the example of the Titan Prometheus, who suffered for his betrayal of divine secrets to people. But it is not clear that Prometheus expected the severe punishment he received, and the example would not have been prominent; given the punishment of the Titans and wounds inflicted on immortals in Greek mythology [e.g., the wounding of Ares in the Iliad], Prometheus cannot offer a pre-Christian parallel to the Christian idea of Jesus, who, though divine, voluntarily offered himself for humanity. Furthermore, the qualitative difference between Greek and Jewish conceptions of deity makes comparison between the stories of Prometheus and Jesus even less likely.)

On God's accepting someone as a fragrant aroma, cf. Ezekiel 20:41 (his saved people); Ephesians 5:2 means that God accepted Jesus as a sacrifice (see Gen 8:21; Ex 29:18).



5:3-20

### More Exhortations

5:3-6. Premarital and other immoral sex, insolent speech and sexual humor were as common in ancient pagan society as they are today. Paul did not water down God's standards to accommodate the culture; instead he warned that those who engaged in this lifestyle would not be among God's people in the world to come. On vice lists and "inheriting" the kingdom of God, see comment on 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.

5:7. Here Paul does not advocate total separatism (like that of the wilderness community of the \*Dead Sea Scrolls), or even the partial separatism that Judaism's food and sabbath laws imposed on \*Diaspora Jews. But many in Greco-Roman society would have branded Christians as antisocial for refusing to take part in immoral conversation and, even more, in the pervasive civic religious cults which were regarded as a mark of local loyalty.

5:8-13. Jewish texts often used "light" and "darkness" to contrast good and evil, and Paul milks this image here. Some Greek religious groups known as "\*mystery cults" emphasized night initiations, and some of them were also connected with sexual immorality; because some Roman critics of all foreign religions associated Christians with immoral cults, Paul has all the more reason to wish to dissociate Christianity from cults he already regards as pagan. People could enact deeds in darkness of which they would have been ashamed in public (cf. Is 29:15; 47:10).

5:14. Some commentators have sug

gested that here Paul cites an expository paraphrase of Scripture, like a *targum* on a text such as Isaiah 60:1 or perhaps Daniel 12:2. Others think that Paul cites an early Christian prophecy or song, composed by either Paul or another prophet (cf. 1 Cor 14:37). Either suggestion is possible, or a combination of the two (a prophecy or song based on biblical texts); in any case the quotation was

no doubt familiar to both Paul and the letter's first hearers.

5:15-17. "Redeeming the time" (KJV, literally) probably means "making the most of the time"; cf. Ps 90:12. The \*LXX of Daniel 2:8 uses the phrase for trying to gain a delay. (The other possible interpretation is bringing redemption to the present evil age.) That a "time of evils" would affect how the prudent behaved is also expressed in Amos 5:13. In Jewish tradition "wisdom" and "foolishness" had much more to do with morality than they did in pagan thought (e.g., Jer 29:23).

5:18. In Greek, the commands of verses 19-21 flow out of Paul's command to "be filled with the \*Spirit" and express the nature of Spirit-filled living. Drunkenness was scandalous behavior in Judaism (cf. Prov 23:20-35).

Many people in the ancient world believed that drunkenness could produce a sort of inspiration or possession by Dionysus, god of wine. Dionysus's most active worshipers yielded control of themselves to him and performed sexual acts or acts full of sexual symbolism (often to the distaste of conservative Romans). Here Paul may contrast this behavior with inspiration by God's Spirit. People did not think of Dionysus every time someone became drunk, however; drunkenness was more commonly associated simply with loss of self-control. It was standard practice in both the late-night banquets of the rich and the taverns of the poor.

5:19. Both Greeks and Jews commonly believed that music could come by inspiration, an idea that appears in the *Old Testament as well*. *Paul emphasizes the kind of worship that Jewish people celebrated in the temple (e.g., psalms and hymns); we cannot be sure whether most other Jewish gatherings, such as those in synagogues, included the singing of psalms and hymns in this period.* "Spiritual songs" probably refers to Spirit-inspired songs (cf. 1 Chron 25:1-6), possibly spontaneous, which would clearly distinguish Christian worship from nearly all worship in antiquity (cf. 1 Cor 14:15).

5:20. The only ancient writers (Jewish writers and some Greco-Roman, especially \*Stoic, writers) who stressed thanking God for everything were those who believed that God (whether the Stoic Fate or the personal God of Judaism) ruled the course of events.

5:21-33

### Wives and Husbands

The section 5:21-6:9 addresses what we call "household codes." In Paul's day, many Romans were troubled by the spread of "religions from the East" (e.g., Isis worship, Judaism and Christianity), which they thought would undermine traditional Roman family values. Members of these minority religions often tried to show their support for those values by using a standard form of exhortations developed by philosophers from \*Aristotle on. These exhortations about how the head of a household should deal with members of his family usually break down into discussions of husband-wife, father-child and master-slave relationships. Paul borrows this form of discussion straight from standard Greco-Roman moral writing. But unlike most ancient writers, Paul under mines the basic premise of these codes: the absolute authority of the male head of the house.

5:21. The final expression of being filled with the Spirit is "submitting to one another" because Christ is one's Lord. All the household codes Paul proposes are based on this idea. But although it was customary to call on wives, children and slaves to submit in various ways, to call all members of a group (including the paterfamilias, the male head of the household) to submit to one another was unheard-of.

5:22-24. Most ancient writers expected wives to obey their husbands, desiring in them a quiet and meek demeanor; some marriage contracts even stated a requirement for absolute obedience. This requirement made sense especially to Greek thinkers, who could not conceive of wives as equals. Age differences contributed to this disparity: husbands were normally older than their wives,

often by over a decade in Greek culture (with men frequently marrying around age thirty and women in their teens, often early teens).

In this passage, however, the closest Paul comes to defining submission is "respect" (v. 33), and in the Greek text, wifely submission to a husband (v. 22) is only one example of general mutual submission of Christians (the verb of v. 22 is borrowed directly from v. 21 and thus cannot mean something different).

5:25. Although it was assumed that husbands should love their wives, ancient household codes never list love as a husband's duty; such codes told husbands only to make their wives submit. Although Paul upholds the ancient ideal of wifely submission for his culture, he qualifies it by placing it in the context of mutual submission: husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the \*church, by willingly laying down their lives for them. At the same time that he relates Christianity to the standards of his culture, he subverts his culture's values by going far beyond them. Both husbands and wives must submit and love (5:2, 21).

5:26. This "washing" probably alludes figuratively to the bride's prenuptial washing (of course, washing was natural before any occasion on which one wished to impress another positively). After this washing the bride was perfumed, anointed and arrayed in wedding clothes. The betrothal ceremony in Judaism also came to be called "the sanctification of the bride," setting her apart for her husband. The "word" naturally refers to the saving \*gospel of Christ (1:13).

5:27. After the bride's preparation (5:26), the next stage in a Jewish wedding was the bride's removal from her father's house to the groom's house, followed by the bride's introduction into the groom's home. "In glory" (NASB) or "splendor" (NRSV) also fits the image of the passage, appropriate to the bridal array.

5:28-32. Although Greek and Roman moralists sometimes alluded to the unity of husband and wife, the image was especially prominent in Judaism, which shared

Paul's and Jesus' dependence on Genesis 2:24, mentioned explicitly in Ephesians 5:31. The headbody analogy of 5:23 here becomes an image of unity rather than one of authority.

5:33. Writers sometimes closed a book or section with a concluding summary; Paul here summarizes the point of 5:21-32: the wife should respect her husband, and the husband should love his wife. Although ancient moralists expected wives to respect their husbands (and Jewish teachers also expected the reverse), moralists usually also emphasized the wife's "obedience";

Paul's exhortation to wives here would thus strike most ancient readers as quite weak.

6:1-4

### Children and Fathers

Jewish and Greco-Roman writers unanimously agreed that children needed to honor their parents, and, at least till they grew up, needed to obey them as well. The command to honor one's parents was in the \*Old Testament (Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16) and included living in such a way as to bring honor on them in a godly society (Deut 21:18-21). Many Jewish writers believed that honoring one's parents was the most important commandment.

At the same time, children were often taught through beating, which was standard in child rearing and education; fathers were considered responsible for their education. Paul is among the minority of ancient writers who seem to disapprove of excessive discipline (6:4). (Greek and Roman society was even harsher on newborn children; because an infant was accepted as a legal person only when the father officially recognized it, babies could be abandoned or, if deformed, killed. Early Christians and Jews unanimously opposed both abortion and abandonment. This text, however, addresses the discipline of minors in the household.)

6:5-9

### Slaves and Masters

Masters often complained that slaves were lazy, especially when no one was looking. Paul encourages hard work but gives slaves a new hope and a new motive for their labor.

Paul says that slaves, like wives, should submit to the head of the household as if to Christ, but this duty is again reciprocal. Only a few writers in the ancient world suggested that slaves were in theory their masters' spiritual equals (cf. Job 31:13-15), and so far as we know only Paul goes so far as to suggest that in practice masters do the same for slaves as slaves should do for them (6:9).

When \*Aristotle complained about a few philosophers who thought that slavery was wrong, the philosophers he cited did not state matters as plainly as Paul does here. Paul confronts the practical issue of how slaves can deal with their situation, not whether slavery should be abolished (an issue not relevant to his point in the context of household codes); even a violent revolution could not have ended slavery in the Roman Empire. But the way he deals with the issue leaves no doubt where he would have stood had we put the theoretical question of slavery's abolition to him: people are equals before God (6:9), and slavery is therefore against God's will. For more on slavery in general, see the introduction to Philemon.

6:10-20

### Divine Armor

Although Paul does not follow a formal \*rhetorical outline in Ephesians, 6:10-20 functions as a peroratio, a rousing conclusion. Philosophers sometimes described their conflict with wicked ideas as wrestling in an athletic contest or a war; they also used lists of virtues, the general idea of which Paul incorporates here. Aspects of Paul's conclusion resemble the exhortations that generals gave to

their armies before battle.

The \*Old Testament has many pictures of Israel as God's warriors, and God himself appears as a warrior in full armor, dealing out his justice (Is 59:17; cf. Wisdom of Solomon 5:17-20). But although Paul borrows his language

from the Old Testament, the image Paul's words in this paragraph would have evoked for most of his readers is that of a Roman soldier ready to do battle. Most adults who heard his letter read would have seen Roman soldiers and could relate this image to their spiritual warfare against the demonic powers at work in the world; God who fought for them had supplied them his armor.

Paul omits some pieces of the Roman soldier's armor in his description; for instance, since he mentions only one offensive weapon, he uses the sword but omits the lance (the pilum). Paul probably has no particular purpose in correlating specific strengths of the Christian with specific armor body parts (cf. I Thess 5:8); rather, he wants his readers to know that they need all of them to be victorious.

6:10-11. In the day of battle, Roman soldiers were to stand their ground, not retreat. As long as they stood together on a flat, open field and did not break ranks, their legions were considered virtually invincible.

6:12. Some people in the *Old Testament* learned that the nature of their battle was spiritual (cf. Gen 32:22-32; Dan 10:10-21), although in both Daniel and Paul the battle was fought by prayerfully submitting to God and doing his will, not by directly addressing the hostile powers (Dan 10:12-13, 21). Some pagan deities were called "world rulers," and terms for high ranks of good and evil angels were becoming popular in this period; "spiritual beings of wickedness" is idiomatic Greek for "evil spirits," a Jewish and New Testament term.

6:13. The "evil day" could refer generically to any time of judgment or testing (e.g., Amos 6:3), but some scholars think it applies specifically to the period of

intense tribulation Jewish people expected prior to the end of the age (cf. Dan 12:1), which Paul elsewhere may have regarded as present (cf. Rom 8:22-23). For "stand" see comment on 6:10-11.

6:14. The "belt" or "girdle" may refer to the leather apron beneath the armor or to the metal belt protecting the lower abdomen. The "breastplate" normally consisted of leather overlaid with metal, and it protected the chest in battle; like the helmet (6:17), it was used only in battle, not for normal wear. Roman soldiers were to face forward in battle, side by side, so the armor needed to protect only their front. In view of Isaiah 59:17 (cf. Wisdom of Solomon 5:18), this "breastplate of righteousness" is truly "God's armor" (6:13).

6:15. Soldiers needed to wear sandals or boots (technically the Roman caliga, a half boot) so they could advance toward the enemy undistracted about what they might step on; this gear was essential to their "preparation" for battle. Paul takes the image especially from the herald of Isaiah 52:7 who announces good news: sharing the message of Christ advances God's army against the enemy's position.

6:16. Roman soldiers were equipped with large rectangular wooden shields, four feet high, the fronts of which were made of leather. Before battles in which flaming arrows might be fired, the leather would be wetted to quench any fiery darts launched against them. After Roman legionaries closed ranks, the front row holding shields forward and those behind them holding shields above them, they were virtually invulnerable to any attack from flaming arrows.

Because the Greek and Roman god of passion (called Eros and Cupid, respectively) was said to strike with flaming arrows, some of Paul's readers

may have thought specifically of the temptation of lust in this verse, although Paul probably intended the image to cover more than that danger (cf. Ps 11:2; 57:4; 58:3-7; 64:3; perhaps 120:1-4; Prov 25:18).

6:17. The bronze helmet, equipped with cheek pieces, was necessary to protect



the head; though essential garb for battle, it was normally not worn outside battle. For the phrase "helmet of salvation" see Isaiah 59:17; cf. comment on Ephesians 6:14. The sword (gladius, 20-24 inches long) was a weapon used when close battle was joined with the enemy and the heavy pikes that frontline soldiers carried were no longer practical. Thus Paul implies that the battle is to be joined especially by engaging those who do not know God's word (the \*gospel) with its message, after one is spiritually prepared in the other ways listed here. Paul's ministry was thus particularly strategic, because it included close-range battle advancing into enemy ranks (vv. 19-20).

6:18-19. If prayer for one another (v. 18) continues the figurative image of warfare in the preceding context, it might relate to how the soldiers had to stand together in their battle formation, covering one another by moving as a solid unit. A Roman soldier by himself was vulnerable, but as a unified army a Roman legion was virtually invincible. "Watching" or "being alert" may also be military language (suggested by Jesus; cf. Mk 14:38). Prayer in the \*Spirit probably implies inspired prayer (cf. 1 Cor 14).

6:20. Ambassadors were to be received with all the respect due the ones who sent them; as heralds, they were to be immune from hostility even if they represented an enemy kingdom. Paul, an "ambassador" of the greatest king and the greatest \*kingdom (6:20) is instead chained in Rome for his mission of peace (6:15). In Greek literature, a true philosopher was characterized by his "boldness," or frank speech.

Like 3:1-13, this section adds pathos, or feeling; although its most important function is to solicit prayer, it also sets an example for the \*church.

6:21-24

Closing Greetings

6:21-22. Mail and other news were

normally carried by travelers, because the Roman Empire had no official postal service except for imperial business.

6:23-24. The \*Old Testament promised God's covenant love to all who loved God (Ex 20:6; Deut 5:10; Neh 1:5; Dan 9:4; cf. 1 Kings 8:23); here the promise applies specifically to those who love the Lord Jesus Christ.

# PHILIPPIANS

## Introduction

**Authorship.** The vast majority of New Testament scholars accept Philippians as an authentic letter (or letters) by Paul.

**Unity.** Some scholars have divided Philippians up into smaller units. Sending letters by messengers was no easy task, and Paul was more likely to send one large than several short letters, unless travelers were going to Philippi for other purposes. The division of Philippians is not, however, impossible: short letters were often sent in antiquity, and Paul maintained regular contact with the Philippians. Two factors ultimately support the letter's unity: (1) the burden of proof is on those who would divide it, because different letters are usually distinguishable in letter collections; (2) the arguments for division are based on modern letter-writing conventions that completely overlook ancient \*rhetorical and epistolary conventions.

**Structure.** Chapter 1 addresses topics of Paul and the Philippians' common labor in the \*gospel (using motifs from ancient friendship letters). Chapter 2 provides models for imitation (in which he includes letters of recommendation). Chapter 3 includes a `digression (common in ancient letters). Chapter 4 turns to the main business of the letter (a thank-you note eager to avoid any suggestions of the common ancient `patron-"client ideology).

**Situation.** Paul states that the purpose of Philippians is to thank them (4:10-20); but writing from prison (probably in Rome), he also wishes to address some other issues, including the likely further persecution the \*church will face and an exhortation to work together. As much as the Philippian church (probably made up of several house churches) loved Paul, its members were divided among themselves; thus the recurrent exhortations to unity (1:27; 2:2, 14) and mutual

service (2:3-11). At least part of the division revolves around disagreement between two of Paul's fellow laborers, possibly leaders of separate house churches (4:2-3). If opposition to Paul exists, it probably involves Jewish Christians who advocate circumcision, if Paul believes they have already arrived in Philippi (3:2-21).

Commentaries. Most useful are Fred B. Craddock, *Philippians, Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985); and Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians, WBC 43* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983). Ralph P. Martin, *Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), and F. F. Bruce, *Philippians, NIBC* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1989), can also be helpful.

1:1-2

## Introduction

1:1. The title "servants" is not demeaning in either a Jewish (the prophets had been called "servants of God") or GrecoRoman (slaves of the emperor and other high officials wielded far more power than independent free persons) setting. On "overseers" and "deacons," see comment on 1 Timothy 3:1, 8, where these terms also occur together.

1:2. Paul here Christianizes a customary ancient greeting form (see comment on Rom 1:7).

1:3-11

## Thanks to God for the Philippians

Thanksgivings were common in ancient letters; Paul is particularly fond of them, omitting them in congregational letters only to the Galatians, and there for obvious reasons.

1:3-4. Jewish language sometimes connects prayers with "memorials" or "rememberings" before God (as in Rom 1:9); here Paul probably means he

thanks God during his regular prayers for the Philippians (cf. Phil 4:6).

1:5. The term translated "participation" (NASB) or "partnership" (NIV) was often used in an economic sense for those who "share" (cf. NRSV) monetarily. Here it includes the financial help the Philippians have given (4:10-20). 1:6. "Day of Christ Jesus" adapts `Old Testament language for the "day of the Lord," and so assumes that Christ is divine. Paul's confidence in their perseverance is based on 1:5, 7.

1:7. Letters of friendship often mentioned the writer's longing for his friends. Given his imprisonment and legal situation, Paul also naturally uses language common in legal proceedings: the "defense" and "confirmation," or vindication, acquittal.

1:8. Ancients commonly called on a

deity as a witness, assuming the deity's knowledge; to lie under such conditions was to invite the deity's wrath.

1:9-11. As Paul does here, philosophers also stressed the need to discern what was good from what was bad. On the source of "righteousness" (v. 11), see also comment on 3:9.

1:12-26

### The Profit in Hardship

Greek philosophers typically declared that neither imprisonment nor death mattered; only one's attitude did. Paul partly agrees with this view but for very different reasons: God's sovereign use of hardship for his glory (1:12-14, a Jewish and \*Old Testament belief), and the superiority of undistracted devotion to Jesus (1:21, 23). Letters, like speeches, usually included a \*narrative component leading up to the circumstances of writing or filling in the readers on recent news.

1:12. \*Stoic philosophers argued that imprisonment, like death, was not a bad thing. On "progress" (NASB, TEV) see comment on Galatians 1:14, although the idea in Philippians 1:12 (unlike 1:25) would more naturally evoke the image of an army's "advance" (NIV) than a scholar's advance.

1:13. Some commentators have suggested that "palace" or "praetorium" here may refer to a provincial governor's residence, such as the place of Paul's detention in Caesarea (Acts 23:35); Paul was often detained (2 Cor 11:23), and a detention in Asia or in Syria-Palestine would clarify the presence of so many helpers in Colossians 4:10-15. Others, taking "Caesar's household" (4:22) literally, think that "praetorium" here refers to a Roman imprisonment by the "praetorian guard" (NASB), as in Acts 28:16; the centrality of Rome in the Empire attracted many people, which could account for the presence of the ministers in Colossians 4:10-15. No army was allowed in Italy, but the Praetorian Guard consisted of about thirteen to fourteen thousand free Italian soldiers. They were the emperor's elite bodyguard under the praetorian prefect. Viewed as \*clients of the emperor (thus part of his household), they were kept loyal with the highest pay in the Roman military; they were also kept loyal by the leadership of a prefect who could never legally become emperor (being a knight rather than a senator).

1:14-18. Jewish teachers allowed that serving God from impure motives was better than not serving him at all. They also unequivocally insisted, however, that those who used the \*law only for their own gain would not share in the world to come.

1:19. "Salvation" (KJV) often meant physical "deliverance," sometimes from prison, and in this context it must have this meaning. Citizens of Philippi were Roman citizens (see comment on 3:20) and as such enjoyed certain legal protections. But Paul's fate in court as a Christian who was also a Roman citizen would set a legal precedent that could affect their own legal standing, so they would have more than one reason for concern about how his case turned out.

1:20-23. Philosophers often argued that death was neutral, not evil; it was either annihilation or the migration of the soul from one place to another. Paul sees it as an evil (1 Cor 15:26) but also as a way to pursue Christ undistracted. Most Palestinian Jews emphasized the future *resurrection of the bodies of the righteous but believed that the souls of the righteous dead were meanwhile in heaven with God; Paul agrees with them. Many GrecoRoman writers expressed a desire to die and so be free from sufferings*; Old Testament writers did not usually take this posi

tion (Ps 30:9), but some became depressed enough to do so (1 Kings 19:4), or even to wish that they had never lived (Job 3:1-19; Jer 15:10; 20:14-18).

1:24-26. Paul's remaining would help them by virtue of his continuance as a teacher, and perhaps also for legal precedent: see comment on 1:19. Nero was not particularly interested in legal questions, and in A.D. 62 he freed Jewish hostages that the procurator Felix had previously sent him. Paul was likely released at this time (see comment on Acts 28:30-31).

1:27-30

Endure in Hope

1:27. "Conduct yourselves" uses the Greek language of a citizen in a free state (cf. 3:20), language that Jewish writers used to describe their people obeying God's \*law (as in Acts 23:1). On the athletic image (here undoubtedly implied in the Greek word that KJV and NASB translate "striving together"), see comment on Philippians 1:30.

1:28. The confidence that Paul suggests here alludes to the \*Old Testament and Jewish hope that God would destroy his people's enemies in the end time but vindicate and save his people.

1:29. Although Jewish people sought to avoid persecution when possible, they extolled the martyrs who preferred death to disobeying God. (One could perhaps

distinguish public attitudes, such as praise for past heroes, from personal attitudes, such as the price individuals paid in daily life for their convictions. In the case of Paul, however, he was daily confronted with the personal choice and in his own life modeled commitment to the point of martyrdom.) Paul regards suffering for Christ as a privilege (cf. similarly Acts 5:41). The idea of sufferings indicating the nearness of the end (as in Jewish thought) might also be present here.

1:30. Like many Greek moralists, Paul applies the language of ancient athletic competitions ("contest" or "conflict"-KJV, NASB) to the life of the moral person. Here the issue is persecution; on the Philippians' sharing in Paul's fate, see comment on 1:19.

2:1-11

Be Servants like Christ

Paul continues his exhortation of 1:27-30, advocating unity (1:27) and fearlessness in the face of martyrdom's reward (1:28; 2:9-11; cf. 3:20-21). Ancient moral writers often adduced examples to prove their points, and Paul here adduces Jesus (2:5-11), himself (2:17-18), Timothy (2:19-24) and Epaphroditus (2:25-30). Correspondences between 2:6-11 and 3:20-21 indicate the extent to which Paul uses Christ as a model for believers here. (The majority of scholars accept Phil 2:6-11 as a pre-Pauline hymn, based on the structure and language of the passage. Others point out that Paul could be responsible for the hymnic features himself. Greek authors peppered their writings with quotations from Greek poetry, and Paul's use of an earlier Christian hymn is possible, although it cannot be regarded as proven.)

2:1-4. Paul borrows language commonly used in Greek *homonoia* speeches, which advocated harmony and unity among the hearers.

2:5-6. Some scholars suggest that Christ's being in the "form of God" alludes to Adam being formed in God's image (Gen 1:26). Unlike Adam, who being human



sought divinity (Gen 3:5), Jesus, being deity, relinquished his rightful position of honor. Even more to the point here is that Jewish texts described divine Wisdom as the perfect, archetypal image of God ("form" may mean "role" more than "image" here; cf.

2:7b, "form of a servant," although this phrase parallels "likeness" in 2:7c).

2:7. The "servant" of Isaiah 53 also was "poured out" or "emptied himself," though not in incarnation but in death (Is 53:12; cf. Phil 2:8). (Paul, however, uses a more explicit Greek word for "slave" [so NRSV] here than appears in the \*LXX of Isaiah.)

2:8. Judaism prized obedience to the point of death in stories about its martyrs. Crucifixion was the most degrading form of execution, reserved for non-Roman criminals who were slaves or free persons of the lowest status.

2:9. Some commentators have seen in the language of this verse an allusion to the exaltation of Isaiah 52:13. If, as is likely, that verse refers to suffering rather than glory (52:14-53:11), Paul either does not refer to it here or contrasts the exaltation accomplished by God with the suffering Jesus experienced among people.

2:10-11. Isaiah 45:23 ("every knee will bow ... every tongue will declare") refers to the final submission of all nations to God; that Paul applies the text to Jesus (especially with an \*Old Testament divine title, "Lord," in v. 11) is telling. Those "in heaven" would include the angels, probably the rebellious angels who rule the pagan nations (see comment on Eph 1:19-23). Greeks worshiped gods in the heavens, earth, sea and underworld; traditional Greek mythology also placed the shadowy existence of departed souls in the underworld. Paul announces that whatever categories of beings there are, they must acknowledge Christ's rule, because he is exalted above them. One often bowed the knee in obeisance before a ruler or deity.

2:12-16

## Live Right

Paul here continues his exhortation to the believers to live in unity (2:1-11).

2:12-13. Letters were often used as proxies for one's presence; Paul thus entreats the Philippians through the letter to obey his teaching as if he were present. They secure their ultimate "salvation" by persevering together (see 1:27-28). The reward of this obedience is implied by the parallel with Jesus' obedience in 2:8-9. The teaching that they are enabled to obey by God's power is virtually unparalleled in preChristian literature except for *Old Testament teachings on the Spirit*; see comment on Galatians 2:19-20.

2:14. "Grumbling" and "disputing" (NASB) had characterized Israel in the wilderness and were condemned in the Old Testament; see comment on 1 Corinthians 10:9-10.

2:15. Jewish tradition often compared the righteous with "lights" in a dark world; cf. especially Daniel 12:3 (the term Paul uses here was especially applied to heavenly bodies, reflecting an image like the one Daniel uses).

2:16. The "day of Christ" is modeled after the Old Testament "day of the Lord" (see comment on 1:6).

2:17-24

## The Examples of Paul and Timothy

Paul continues to model the servant lifestyle by examples.

2:17-18. Ancient religions regularly poured out libations to the gods, usually wine but sometimes water or another substance. Paul is being poured out (cf. 2:7) as such a "drink offering" to the true God, a willing offering on their behalf that joined their own sacrifice.

2:19-21. Both Greek philosophers and \*Old Testament prophets complained about the scarcity of those fully devoted to the cause. Paul offers many "letters [or passages] of recommenda

tion," a common ancient form of writing (see comment on Rom 16:1-2), but he places Timothy, his special emissary, in a category by himself, offering the highest commendation.

2:22. Messengers were often sent as personal representatives, to be received with the same honor accorded the sender (e.g., 2 Sam 19:37-38). Teachers and \*disciples often developed an intimate relationship described in terms of "father" and "son."

2:23. News was difficult to send, because it had to be carried by messenger-a sometimes dangerous undertaking given travel conditions at various times of the year (cf. 2:30). Paul therefore wants to wait until he can give a full report of the outcome of his trial.

2:24. Letters were used as surrogates for one's presence but also often announced one's coming.

2:25-30

### Epaphroditus's Sacrificial Service

Epaphroditus had been the Philippians' messenger, bringing their gift to Paul in prison (4:18); he no doubt carried Paul's letter back to them. Travel conditions were dangerous and harsh, especially at sea in late fall and early spring, and these conditions decreased one's resistance to antiquity's many diseases (vv. 26-27). Because "Epaphroditus" is a common name, no conclusions about his origin may be drawn from it, but the context suggests that he was from Philippi.

Pagans prayed to their gods for healing (especially certain deities associated with healing, most notably Asclepius); Jewish people prayed to and praised the

true God as the healer of body as well as the forgiver of sin. Jewish prayers for healing were sometimes described as prayers for "mercy." "Risky" (in "risking his life"-v. 30) was often used as a gambling term, and some scholars have noted that gamblers invoked Venus, goddess of gambling, with the term *epaphroditus*; Paul could be making a wordplay on his friend's name. Although God usually healed those in the Bible who prayed to him, his activity could not be taken for granted; even some of his most faithful servants had died from sickness (2 Kings 13:14; cf. 1 Kings 1:1; 14:4).

3:1-16

### Righteousness Not from Human Works

The section from 3:1 to 4:1 is a clear digression. A number of scholars have suggested that it was a different Pauline letter accidentally inserted into the middle of Philippians, or one combined with several other Pauline letters to the Philippians. But digressions were common in ancient speaking and writing, and this section need be nothing more than such a digression. Literary connections with the rest of the letter strengthen the suggestion that it is part of a unified letter.

3:1. The expression translated "finally" here sometimes indicated the end of a letter (cf. "in conclusion"-TEV), but just as often functioned as a transition device within a letter.

3:2. The opponents here are not Jewish persecutors, who would be unlikely in Philippi, which had a very small Jewish community. Rather, they are like the traveling Jewish Christian teachers Paul had encountered in Galatia who want to circumcise \*Gentiles. It is not clear whether they have already come to Philippi or are simply traveling about, and Paul is warning that they may come there.

\*Cynic philosophers were regularly called "dogs," but given the specific error Paul refutes in this passage, he

clearly does not use it as a reference to these philosophers; that use merely illustrates to what a great extent the term was one of disdain. More to the point, Jewish teaching considered dogs unclean and sometimes sexually immoral; the *Old Testament applies the title to male cult prostitutes (Deut 23:17)*. Such a title would certainly make the pietists who were demanding circumcision recoil. *There were "beware of dog" signs even in ancient Rome, where they were pets and watchdogs (Petronius Satyricon 29)*, no doubt reinforcing the biting sarcasm of Paul's phrase. Here Paul uses another word for "circumcision" (NASB), which means "mutilation" (NIV, NRSV; cf. the LXX of 1 Kings 18:28); see comment on Galatians 5:12 for the cultural significance of this idea.

3:3. Paul says that spiritual circumcision (Deut 10:16; 30:6; cf. Lev 26:41; Jer 4:4; 9:25-26) is what really matters to God. Because ancient Judaism usually associated the *Spirit with prophecy*, "worship in the Spirit" (NASB, NRSV) may refer to charismatic worship of the sort depicted in 1 Chronicles 25:1-6; because most Jewish people believed that the Spirit was no longer available in that fullness in their own time, Paul lays claim to an experience of the *church that confirms the Messiah's arrival* and that most of Judaism would not pretend to match.

3:4. Lists of virtues or vices were common in epideictic (praise and blame) speeches, and in *narrative form they characterized epideictic biographies*. Self-commendation was considered appropriate if one were defending oneself or using oneself as a legitimate model for others. By claiming to have greater merit than his opponents even on their own terms, he turns this self-commendation into an occasion to undermine them; professional speakers and writers often used the standard rhetorical technique of "comparison" to accomplish this end.

3:5. Lists of virtues typically included items such as noble birth or beauty as well as character traits like prudence or steadfastness. Those born Jewish males were circumcised the eighth day; by this virtue Paul eliminates any competition from *proselytes converted by his opponents later in life-proselytes had lower social status in Judaism than those born Jewish*. "Hebrew of Hebrews" could indicate a

*Palestinian Jewish origin, although this is not clear; however, that Paul lived in Palestine before his conversion is clear from the fact that he was a Pharisee (in Acts, cf. comment on 22:3). Although Pharisaic piety was known elsewhere, Pharisees themselves seem to have lived only in Palestine and been concentrated around Jerusalem. They were noted for being the most meticulous observers of the \*law-something his opponents now claimed to be.*

3:6. "Zeal" for the law did not always include violence, but the chief models for such zeal included Phinehas (Num 25:7-13) and especially the Maccabees, and Jewish patriots called themselves "\*Zealots" in the war against Rome not long after Paul wrote these words. By defining his legalistic righteousness in terms of his persecution of Christians, Paul associates his opponents' position of "zeal" for the law with opposition to the Philippian Christians' faith.

3:7. Appealing to the Christian faith shared by himself, his readers and (according to themselves) even his opponents, Paul dispenses with his worldly credentials-and thus the only credentials to which his opponents could lay claim at all; see comment on 2 Corinthians 11:16-18. "Gain" (or "profit"NIV, TEV) and "loss" are marketplace terms, like other terms later in the let

ter (4:10-20); Paul had to sacrifice all his former spiritual assets to follow Christ, who was what really mattered.

3:8. "Dung" (KJV) or "rubbish" (NIV, NASB, NRSV) usually meant either excrement or food to be thrown away, which dogs might enjoy (3:2). (Ancient speakers valued skill in producing insolent insults.)

3:9. As in 3:6, the problem is not the law but that the righteousness is Paul's own, hence inadequate. Both biblical psalmists and later Jewish ones whose hymns appear in the \*Dead Sea Scrolls waited on God for their vindication or acquittal, and Paul likewise had to receive his justification, or righteousness, from God alone.

3:10. The greatest yearning of \*Old Testament men and women of God was to "know" him (Ex 33:13), a relationship available to all the people of the new covenant (Jer 31:34). This language reflects both the covenant relationship (on the corporate level) and intimate fellowship with God (on the personal level experienced by the prophets). But Paul also connects knowing Christ with sharing his sufferings and glory.

3:11. The ultimate sharing of Christ's \*resurrection occurs at the future resurrection of the righteous (in which most Jews believed). Many Jewish people believed that a period of sufferings would precede the resurrection, and this seems to be Paul's view as well (clear in Rom 8:18-22, possibly reflected in Phil 3:10-11).

3:12-13. In the language of athletic competition-often used metaphorically by ancient moralists-Paul describes his striving for the future hope of 3:11. GrecoRoman sages sometimes admitted that they were not yet "perfect" but spoke of themselves as the "mature," the wise, as opposed to those who were still novices. (Commentators note that the \*mystery cults described the highest stage of initiation as "perfection" or "completion," but this is probably less relevant here than the language of sages.) "What is behind" (NIV) belongs to Paul's image of the race; to win, one must keep one's eyes on the finish line; Greek runners normally ran in a straight line and back.

3:14. At the end of each race, officials had their heralds proclaim the winner and call him up to receive his prize (in the Olympic games, a palm branch). In Paul's metaphor, the prize is the full revelation of Christ at the \*resurrection (3:10-11).

3:15. Advanced philosophers, as opposed to novice students, were described as "mature" (NIV, NRSV; "perfect"-KJV, NASB).

3:16. Although not looking back to one's past (3:13) and not yet complete (3:11-12), they were to maintain what they had already achieved. "Live" here can mean "walk" (KJV); perhaps here Paul adapts his race metaphor from 3:12-14,

although this is not certain.

3:17-4:1

### Judgment and Salvation

Teachers like Paul would make it to the resurrection of the righteous by staking their righteousness on nothing but Christ (3:9-11); his opponents, however, like dogs interested in dung (3:2, 8), were headed for destruction, as were those who followed them (3:18-19).

3:17. Ancient teachers often used themselves as examples. (Paul had given four examples, using himself for one, in chapter 2, and again used himself in 3:4-14.)

3:18. Displays of emotion were considered appropriate in public speaking, but Paul's earlier expressions of outrage (3:2) fit the ancient norm better than "weeping." "With tears" (NIV, NRSV, TEV) or "weeping" (KJV,

NASB) indicates his love for his opponents.

3:19. GrecoRoman philosophers and non-Palestinian Jewish writers (especially \*Philo) repeatedly railed against those ruled by their passions, often remarking that they were ruled by their "belly" (KJV, NRSV) or their (sexual or culinary) "appetite" (NASB), disdaining their neglect of eternal things. Gluttony especially became part of Roman culture, and its practice by the aristocracy was a frequent butt of satirists' humor. But being ruled by one's "belly" meant more than gluttony; it was used to mean any fleshly indulgence (cf. "bodily desires"-TEV). This would be a serious insult to those who thought they were zealous for the \*law; but Paul had already "shamed" their "glory" by his own example in 3:4-8.

3:20. Citizens of Philippi, a Roman `colony, were automatically citizens of Rome, sharing all the rights and privileges of Roman citizens even though most of them had never been there. (Not everyone who lived in Philippi was a full citizen of Philippi, but the citizenship held by much of the \*church, especially



owners of homes in which it met, would raise the status of the whole movement there.) Paul's readers in Philippi therefore understand quite well what it means to be citizens of the supreme city while not yet living there. ("Citizenship" is not "conversation," as in the KJV.)

Many deities in Philippi were called "saviors," as was the emperor; although this title for Jesus derives from \*Old Testament language for God, it provides a stark contrast with the paganism Christians outside Palestine had to confront daily.

3:21. Paul's view of the \*resurrection is that it involves the body, but one distinct in nature from the current body (Greek culture considered the idea of a bodily resurrection vulgar superstition; see comment on 1 Cor 15). As in Judaism, the resurrection occurs at the time of the ultimate battle, when God subordinates all his enemies (cf. also 1 Cor 15:25-28).

4:1. That the Philippians are Paul's "crown" indicates that they are in some sense his prize (cf. 3:14; 1 Thess 2:19 and comment on 1 Cor 9:24-25). They must stand firm against Paul's opponents and persevere if Paul is to receive the reward he seeks for his labor for them-their salvation. There were different sorts of crowns. Heroes could be rewarded with public crowns, but the term applied especially to athletes' wreaths; Judaism also used the image for rewards at the end time.

4:2-9

### Work Together

Moral writers often strung together short, unrelated statements of moral advice. Paul similarly lists several admonitions here, although a common theme runs among them.

4:2. "Euodia" and "Syntyche" are Greek names; because Philippi was a Roman \*colony, their Greek names might indicate that they are foreign merchants like

Lydia (Acts 16:14; see comment on Acts 16:21), although this is only a surmise (some commentators suggest that one of them is Lydia). Their prominence as Paul's coworkers may have been more acceptable at Philippi than it would have been in some other parts of the Empire; inscriptions indicate heavy involvement of women in the religious activities of this city.

4:3. Clement may be the author of 1 Clement, a late-first-century Christian letter from Rome to Corinth, as tradition suggests, although Clement is a common Roman name. The "book of life" is an \*Old Testament image further developed in ancient Judaism

(e.g., Ex 32:32-33; Dan 12:1; Mal 3:16; the \*Essene Damascus Document 20:19; Jubilees 36:10).

4:4-5. "The Lord is near" could refer to the Second Coming (3:20-21) but more likely means that the Lord is close to his people and hears their cries (Deut 4:7; Ps 145:18).

4:6-7. "Peace" (v. 7) could indicate tranquillity, although in the context of unity it may have its usual meaning of peace with one another (as in GrecoRoman homonoia speeches). If any connotations of the latter use are present, the image of such peace "standing guard" (if pressed in a military sense) over hearts and minds is striking. Jewish prayers (some based on Num 6:24) often asked God to keep his people from harm.

4:8. Like many writers, Paul resorts to a full list of virtues, including arete, "excellence," which was central to the Greek concept of virtue. Throughout this list he borrows the language of Greek ethics, although nothing he says would have been objectionable to Jewish or Christian readers. (He omits some traditional Greek virtues, like "beauty" and "goodness" per se, but the last omission need not be viewed as significant, because such lists were never intended to be complete.) Greek and Roman philosophers repeatedly emphasized thinking such virtuous thoughts, and Jewish writers repeatedly borrowed their

language the same way Paul does to communicate to Greek-speaking Jewish readers.

4:9. Teachers often exhorted students to live what they had been taught and to follow the example set by the teacher.

4:10-20

### Paul's Thank-You Note

Paul avoids a direct "thank you" in this section while expressing his appreciation. (Gratitude may have been particularly important in Macedonia, of which Philippi was a part; in earlier times an ungrateful man was said to have been liable to prosecution there\*Seneca On Benefits 3.6.2.) In the ancient world, *patrons showed hospitality to and looked out for their* clients; if Paul had said "thank you" forthrightly, he might have cast himself in the role of a subordinate, dependent client.

4:10. Letters of friendship, when responding to a friend's letter, generally opened with a statement of joy about receiving that friend's letter.

4:11-13. Greek moralists, influenced by *Stoic thought*, *praised those who could be content with little as well as with much*. (Cynics went so far as to prove their contentment in little by making certain that was all they ever had.) It was said that the wise man needed no one but himself and was completely independent. But although Paul uses the language of contentment in all circumstances (being able to do "all things," as in 4:13) common among Stoic philosophers and others, the idea of persevering and enduring for God's sake was commonly lived out by the \*Old Testament prophets, Jewish martyrs and other servants of God.

Paul's "abundance" (NASB) would have been meager and simple by modern standards; artisans were better off than the poor, but far below the standard of living enjoyed by the modern Western middle class or by the well-to-do of antiquity. ("Moderation"-seeking a mean between two extremes was central to

most Greek discussions of virtue, especially in \*Aristotle; it also appears in *Diaspora Jewish ethics*. But Paul nowhere seeks such a mean; like the best of Greek philosophers, he can live in any situation. His language is thus Stoic-\*Cynic rather than Peripatetic [Aristotelian]. Unlike such philos

ophers, who depended only on themselves, however, he is "self-sufficient" only by virtue of Christ, who works in him.)

4:14-16. The language of "sharing" (partnership-4:14-15) is the language of ancient business documents; it may even suggest a special account from which the Philippians sent Paul help when he was in need. "For my needs" (NASB, NRSV) also occurs in business documents specifying the purposes of a disbursement. The form he uses for the title "Philippians" is bad Greek but was what the Roman citizens of Philippi called themselves; it is thus a mark of sensitivity to their local traditions and culture.

4:17. "Profit" (NASB, NRSV, TEV), "what may be credited to your account" (NIV), is literally "fruit" (KJV), but because many business transactions involved crops this was a natural extension; Paul trusts that God will reward the Philippians with interest for their sacrifice on his behalf.

4:18. "I have received" was the most common standard phrase in receipts; Paul acknowledges their gift in regular business terms. But he also uses \*Old Testament language for a sacrifice ("sweet-smelling"-TEV, "acceptable"); in being partners with this missionary, they are partners with the God who sent him.

4:19-20. Verse 19 may be a wish-prayer, as some commentators have suggested (see comment on 1 Thess 3:11); others take it as a statement. On either reading, the point is much the same: Paul cannot pay back the Philippians, but he trusts that God will. Although ancient writers often used wealth as a metaphor for spiritual riches like wisdom, in this context Paul no doubt means that he trusts that God will reward them for their faithfulness to his work (cf. Deut 15:10; Prov

19:17). "Needs" in the case of most of the Philippian Christians were genuine, basic needs (see 2 Cor 8:1-2), not "wishes" (as some readers take it today). "In glory" (KJV, NASB, NRSV) can be translated "in a glorious way" or "glorious riches" (NIV).

4:21-23

## Conclusion

4:21. Greetings were common in ancient letters. Because Paul knows most of the believers in Philippi, he keeps his greeting general. Letters also commonly included greetings from others, because mail had to be sent via travelers and thus could not be sent frequently.

4:22-23. The "household of Caesar"

could refer to anyone in the Roman civil service directly dependent on Caesar, including all his slaves and freedmen; it always indicated great prestige. It most likely refers here to the Praetorian Guard (see comment on 1:13); if Paul was in Rome at this point, anyone who guarded him (Acts 28:16, 30) would naturally be exposed to his teaching. Even Caesar's slaves wielded more power and prestige than most well-off free persons; the Praetorian Guard itself held the prestige of the Roman military's elite, often rewarded by Caesar himself. Paul's greeting would impress his readers: his imprisonment has indeed advanced the \*gospel (1:12-13).

# COLOSSIANS

## Introduction

Authorship. Not all scholars agree that Paul wrote Colossians. Some think that a `disciple of Paul wrote the letter in Paul's name (probably with his approval, or posthumously in faithfulness to his teachings). Others think that Paul simply dictated this letter to a scribe, as he did most of his previous letters (e.g., Rom 16:22); in either case the probable date of the letter was in Paul's lifetime (see "Situation," below).

Although Paul may borrow language from some of the false teachers to make his case against them, most of the language that is used in Colossians has parallels in his undisputed writings (which also differ from one another). Given the brevity of the letter, the possible use of a scribe, similarities with undisputed Pauline letters, and the lapse of several years since his earlier letters, the differences between Colossians and the undisputed Pauline letters need not require different authors. Pseudonymous letters existed but were normally written long after the death of the person in whose name they were written.

Colossae. Colossae was in Phrygia, where religion was practiced with intensity and sometimes frenzy (e.g., the famous mother-goddess cult of Cybele). There is evidence for a Jewish presence in Phrygia as early as the sixth century B.C.; this Phrygian Judaism seems to have mirrored its culture to a significant extent. Christianity likewise exhibited unorthodox tendencies in this region in subsequent centuries. Colossae was a small and socially unimportant city by this period; it is probably only one of many cities in which Paul's students had founded `churches (Acts 19:10). The city was severely damaged or destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 61, hence many scholars think that Paul wrote before that date.

Situation. Colossians 2 may indicate that Christians were attracted to mystical or *apocalyptic elements in a Judaism thoroughly influenced by Phrygian culture*. (A great number of backgrounds have been proposed for the error at Colossae: *`mystery cults, broader Hellenistic mysticism, Hellenistic Judaism, Qumran-type Judaism and so on*. The merit of considering these sources is that they all reflect some broader cultural ideas that played into the problems Paul confronted in Colossae; even Qumran parallels, while limited to Palestine, provide evidence for some more widespread Jewish beliefs in this period. The one suggestion with little merit to sustain it is \*Gnosticism, since full Gnostic systems cannot be dated this early. But that the Colossian error reflects one synthesis of different streams of thought that later developed toward Gnosticism is quite possible.)

That some Jewish Sibylline oracles may issue from that region and the activity of later Christian Montanists there both suggest the possibility of ecstatic elements in local Judaism (2:18). Acts testifies that Paul was preaching Christ to philosophically minded audiences in this period (see comment on Acts 19:9), and letters like Ephesians and Colossians give us an indication of Paul's grasp of Greek philosophy and also some of the popular philosophical ideas that permeated both \*Gentile and Jewish thought in midfirst-century Asia Minor.

Commentaries. J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (1879; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1959), is still helpful; Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, NCB (1974; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981), is also helpful. Both Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, trans. W. R. Poehlman and R. J. Karris, *Hermeneia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), and Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), are important and useful scholarly commentaries, providing more detail for advanced work.

1:1-2

Introduction

The opening follows the standard form of ancient epistolary prescripts (name of sender, name of recipients and greeting). As is customary in Paul, "greetings" (Greek *charein*) becomes "grace" (Greek *charis*); "peace" was a standard Jewish greeting, sometimes combined with "greetings" in Jewish letters.

1:3-13

### Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Fruit Bearers

Thanksgivings to God or gods were customary in the openings of ancient letters. In Paul's letters, they often introduce major themes, which were on his mind from the beginning of the letter. Thus they often function the way that exordia did, introducing what follows and beginning the letter with a positive relationship with the readers.

1:3. Regular Jewish prayer times included many blessings, and Paul's prayer times clearly include many thanksgivings to God; hence this is not merely a conventional expression of thanks for the purposes of the letter.

1:4. The Colossians' spiritual condition was reported to Paul by Epaphras, apparently Paul's student working among them (1:7; cf. Acts 19:10), who was originally from their city (Col 4:12).

1:5. Jewish texts spoke of future rewards already reserved for the righteous, hence early Christian readers would be familiar with the idea.

1:6. The image of God's message bearing fruit may go back to Jesus' teaching (Lk 8:11); the \*Old Testament often compares Israel with a vine or other plant and summons them to bear fruit for God (e.g., Hos 10:1; 14:7-8; cf. Gen 1:28).

1:7-8. "Epaphras" was a common

name; this may well be the same Epaphras of Philemon 23. But Philippi and Colossae are too distant geographically for us to think that this is the same person as Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25, although that name could



legitimately be contracted as "Epaphras.

1:9. For unceasing prayer see Exodus 28:30 and 1 Samuel 12:23. Although philosophers sought "wisdom" and "knowledge," Paul here emphasizes the Old Testament moral sense of the terms (e.g., Prov 1:2-7).

1:10-11. On fruit bearing and growing, see Genesis 1:28 ("growing" appears especially in the \*LXX); and see comment on Colossians 1:6. On "walk" (literally; KJV, NASB) or "live" (NIV, TEV), see comment on Galatians 5:16. Greek temples expected priests to act in a manner appropriate to their priesthood, "worthy of the god" in whose temple they served, although it is not clear that Paul alludes to that language here. In Jewish tradition, "worthy" could mean "appropriate to" (2 Macc 6:23-24, 27), "deserving of (reward)" (2 Macc 15:21); Wisdom sought those worthy of her (Wisdom of Solomon 6:16), and the righteous who persevered would be "worthy for God," like an acceptable offering (Wisdom of Solomon 3:5).

1:12-13. In the *Old Testament*, the "saints" or "holy" or "set-apart ones" were Israel. Israel's "inheritance" was first of all the Promised Land but in Jewish tradition pointed toward the ultimate possession of the world to come. Christians become heirs of these promises in Christ. "Light" and "darkness" were regularly contrasted as good and bad respectively (e.g., Ps 27:1; Is 9:2; 42:6; 49:6; 58:8-10; 59:9; 60:1), and this was often applied to the conflict between good and evil realms (in the Dead Sea Scrolls and often in ancient literature). (Since many peoples in the ancient Near East had been uprooted by powerful rulers and settled elsewhere, some scholars have suggested that this image lies behind the "transferral" from one kingdom to another here. But the image of a provincial achieving Roman citizenship or *Gentiles accepting the yoke of God's kingdom* in Judaism might have been more natural images to Paul's readers; see also comment on 1:14.)

1:14-23

## The Supremacy of Christ

Some of those in error at Colossae want to emphasize the forms of rigorous human spirituality found in their culture (see comment on 2:16-23); Paul insists that Christ is enough (cf. 2:615) and describes him in the language Judaism normally reserved for personified Wisdom. This image was a natural one for early Christians to describe Christ; Judaism personified God's Wisdom as divine, and the roots of the image in Jewish tradition go back at least as far as Proverbs 8. (It is possible, as some have suggested, that Paul cites a two-stanza Christian hymn in 1:15-20; such citations occur without notice in other ancient literature. But despite the evidence and scholarly consensus that favor it, the theory falls short of proof either for or against it.)

1:14. "Redemption" meant freeing a slave by paying a price for that slave; in the Old Testament, God redeemed Israel from their slavery in Egypt by the blood of the firstborn and the lamb. This would fit the image of transferring a captive people from one realm to another (1:13). \*Philo also believed that the Logos, God's Word, participated in redemption; but this background might be more relevant if it were mentioned as part of 1:15-17.

1:15. Here Paul describes Christ in

terms Judaism reserved for divine Wisdom, which was portrayed as God's archetypal image by which he created the rest of the world. Philo describes God's Logos, his Word, as his image and firstborn son.

"Firstborn" could refer to the position of authority and preeminence given to the firstborn son in the Old Testament (Gen 49:3-4). (A related word for "firstborn" could translate the Hebrew word for "chief" in 1 Chron 5:12 \*LXX. Jewish texts most commonly applied the term to Israel. Ancient Near Eastern texts applied equivalent terms to other deities, e.g., Amon-Re in Egypt, and kings were sometimes acclaimed as sons of gods at their enthronements.) This term could also refer to the redemptive role of the firstborn (cf. Col 1:14) or be

another title for God's "Son" (1:18; see Ps 89:27, although David was the youngest of eight sons). Both Greek and Jewish religion describe God or supreme deities as "First."

1:16. The "invisible" creations of God refer especially to the angels in heaven who correspond to earthly rulers (see comment on Eph 1:19-23). Ancient Judaism accepted that God created both visible and invisible worlds. Many Jewish writers, including \*Philo, gave angels or subordinate divine powers a role in creation; other Jewish and Christian writers (like Paul) are prepared to combat that view, as here.

Many Greco-Roman thinkers said that all things derived from, were held together in and would return to the Logos or nature or the primeval fire. In Jewish tradition, all things were created through and for God's Word or Wisdom. (In variants of that tradition, they were created for the righteous who upheld his word in practice.)

1:17. Many Greco-Roman philosophers said that all things were held together by Zeus or by the Logos, divine reason; by this they meant to emphasize the unity of the cosmos. Greek-speaking Jewish writers like Philo also emphasized that God's Logos held the creation together, further identifying Logos with divine Wisdom. In \*Stoic thought, the Logos gave form to the primeval fire; in Judaism, Wisdom existed before all things and through it God created and then shaped the world.

1:18. "Head" could mean "authority" (2:10), "most respected or honored part" or "source" (2:19); on "body" see comment on Romans 12:3-5 or 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. God was sometimes called "the beginning" in Jewish tradition, and the term was even more often applied to Wisdom and the Logos; it was a natural term for the one from whom all things began. (In v. 18, it could be applied to the beginning of the new creation, however, as with "firstborn" here.) On "firstborn" see comment on 1:15. The \*resurrection of the dead was expected at the end of the age; Jesus' resurrection ahead of that time was seen as the proleptic

beginning or inaugurating of that future event (1 Cor 15:23).

1:19. The \*Old Testament speaks of God's choosing a place for his name to dwell, and delighting to dwell among his people, to dwell in Zion and so forth. "Fullness" may refer to God's wisdom or glory filling the world (as in the Old Testament and Jewish tradition), or to the fullness of God's presence or attributes (as in \*Philo and other Jewish sources).

1:20-22. The reconciling even of the invisible powers (1:16) refers to their subordination rather than their salvation (2:15), "peace" being an end to hostilities. Paul denies not their continuing activity in the world (2:8) but their real power to challenge Christ's \*kingdom. (One may compare Enoch's mission to proclaim judgment against fallen angels in some early Jewish stories.)

1:23. Paul may intend the statement that the \*gospel was announced throughout creation to counter the false teachers who claim secret, esoteric revelations (2:18). If "all creation" is meant literally, it might refer to the witness of creation (Ps 8:1; 19:1; 89:37; 97:6; cf. Rom 10:18). But here it is almost certainly a cosmic way (Is 51:16) of portraying that the gospel of Christ is for all peoples (Rom 1:8, 13; Mt 24:14). Jewish people generally believed that a person who rejected the covenant would be cut off from God; Paul similarly requires perseverance from those who profess Christ.

1:24-2:5

### Paul's Labor for Them

Because Paul can describe his labor in terms of conflict suitable to an athletic contest (1:29), it is significant that Greek athletes traditionally strove in pan-Grecian competitions not only for their own honor but also for that of the cities they represented. Paul's sufferings are thus on the \*church's behalf (1:24; 2:1).

1:24. Many Jewish people believed that some suffering had to be fulfilled before the end would come. Many scholars have thus read 1:24 as saying that Paul was

taking an extra share of these afflictions, sometimes called "the \*Messiah's birth pangs" because they presaged the messianic era. (He suffers "for their sake" [NASB, NRSV], apparently meaning as their representative, because they are part of the church; it is certainly not vicarious suffering, because Paul clearly believes that Christ's suffering was sufficient in that regard; cf. 1:14; 2:8-10, 14.)

1:25. "Stewards" (cf. NASB) were managers of large household estates; they were often slaves or \*freedmen of high status. The phrase "fulfill the word of God" (KJV, literally) was sometimes used for obeying God's word, sometimes for being an instrument in bringing it to pass; Paul here both obeys and fulfills God's word by making it available to the \*Gentiles.

1:26. The \*Dead Sea Scrolls and other texts speak of "mysteries" in the Scriptures that only the spiritually enlightened can understand; for Paul, Christians are now enlightened (1:9, 12). This statement would refute mystics who claimed special, elite revelations belonging only to themselves (2:18).

1:27. That this mystery would be made known among the *Gentiles had been prophesied (e.g., Is 66:19) and was now being fulfilled (1:25)*. Old Testament writers often said that God dwelled "among" his people Israel (Num 35:34), and on a personal level, "within" some of them (Gen 41:38; Num 27:18; Dan 4:8, 18; 5:11, 14; 1 Pet 1:11; more often, "filled," "rested on"). But no one expected him to dwell among the Gentiles-indeed, on the personal level, within them (Col 2:12; 3:4, 16).

1:28. This teaching leads to their maturity or completion; cf. 1:22, 2 Corinthians 11:2 and comment on Philippians 3:12-13. Thus teaching Christ would lead to the hearers being prepared for the final day (1:22-23). "We" includes Epaphras (1:7) and other proclaimers as well as Paul; "every person" again stresses the free inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan (1:27).

1:29. Philosophers commonly used metaphors from athletic competition, such as "strive" (KJV, NASB) here (the image is much rarer in the \*Old Testament, e.g.,

Jer 12:5). Divine empowerment "within" (NASB, NRSV) has few ancient parallels apart from Old Testa

ment texts about the \*Spirit's enabling God's servants; Paul's language here would have impressed ancient readers in a special way (see introduction to Rom 8:1-11).

2:1. He continues the athletic image of 1:29 ("struggle"). Although Paul had never met most of the Colossian Christians personally, he expresses his longing for them; this was a normal element of ancient "letters of friendship."

2:2-3. Ancient sages (especially those in the \*Old Testament and Jewish wisdom writers) often spoke of wisdom as the true wealth (in the Old Testament, see Job 28:12-19; Ps 19:10; 119:14, 72, 127, 162; Prov 3:13-15; Is 33:6). Writers sometimes also spoke of "hidden" treasures, a dream especially valued by the impoverished multitudes.

2:4. Sages often criticized professional public speakers for their unethical use of persuasion at all costs, regardless of truth. Many educated people in antiquity were trained and skilled in persuasive speech.

2:5. Letters were meant as a surrogate for one's presence while one was absent, as ancient writers sometimes pointed out. Saying that one remained with someone "in spirit" was an expression of intimacy and affection. The point is intimacy, not metaphysical unity (see comment on 1 Cor 5:3).

2:6-15

Complete in Christ

2:6. "Walk" (KJV, NASB) or "live" (NIV) was a regular term for behaving according to God's laws (see comment on Gal 5:16), and "receive" was often used for Jewish teachers of the \*law passing traditions on to their students. Paul thus exhorts the Colossians to continue in what (and whom) they were taught,

not according to mere human traditions (2:8).

2:7. Paul combines agricultural and building images here, as in I Corinthians 3:9 (see comment there). The \*Old Testament prophets used this language for Israel (if they obeyed God, they would take root, be planted, built up, etc.), and early Christians probably took this language from their preaching of the Old Testament.

2:8. Paul uses philosophical language in his letters (including this one), but his source of knowledge is God's revelation in Christ (2:2-3, 6), not the finite human reasonings of philosophers (2:4). Even though only the most educated went on to study \*rhetoric or philosophy, the influence of these disciplines permeated the ancient world. Because philosophy in this period grappled especially with moral and ethical issues, new Christians in the culture now struggling with the same questions would naturally be interested in philosophers' ideas. *Diaspora Jewish writers praised "philosophy," and some, like Philo, combined it readily with ecstatic experiences (cf. 2:18). (\*Josephus, a Palestinian Jew writing for a non-Palestinian Gentile audience, even calls Judaism a "philosophy"-Apion 2.4, 47-and describes the different Jewish movements as philosophical sects. The Letter of Aristeas, Philo, and even \*Justin's Trypho approved of and were skilled in Greek philosophy, and many Jewish apologists, including Philo and Josephus, accused the Greek philosophers of plagiarizing Moses.)*

On "traditions," which characterized especially \*Pharisaic teachers in Palestine, see comment on 2:6; Greek \*disciples also "passed on traditions" of their teachers' sayings. "Elementary principles" (NASB) or "basic principles" (NIV) translates a term that can refer to the personified forces of nature, spirit beings or "spirits" (NRSV, TEV), as in Galatians 4:9 (cf. Colossians 2:10); but here it may refer, as usually, to elementary principles (the term is often used of the alphabet). If this is the case, Paul affirms that the simple message of Christ is much more profound than the greatest secular wisdom could be.

2:9. \*Stoics spoke of the deity as being filled by all things, usually in a

pantheistic sense; Greek-speaking Jewish writers modified this language to refer to God's rule encompassing all things. For *Philo*, the "fullness" can be the sum total of the powers manifesting God's rule, denoting God's all-sufficiency in himself; much later Jewish mystics spoke of the heavens around God's throne as his fullness. Other Jewish writings spoke of God's Spirit, wisdom or glory filling the world, as in the \*Old Testament, which may be more to the point here.

Whatever precise sense Paul means by "fullness," he clearly means that access to all that God is and does is available only through Christ, a function ancient Judaism often attributed to divine Wisdom.

2:10. "Rule and authority" (NASB) probably refers to the angelic powers thought to rule the nations of the world (see 1:16; see comment on Eph 1:19-23), a doctrine that is somehow central to the erring persons wishing to influence the Colossian Christians (see comment on 1:16; 2:18). Of the various possible meanings for "head" (1:18), "authority" or "ruler" makes most sense here, although Jesus is also their "source" (1:16).

2:11-12. Physical circumcision was normally said to be "in the flesh" (Gen 17:11). The \*Old Testament and some Jewish (mainly *Essene*) texts speak of "spiritual" circumcision (Deut 10:16; 30:6), which in the Dead Sea Scrolls can enable one to overcome the evil impulse (see comment on Rom 7:14-25). Paul may here play on the Greek idea of the body as a "tomb" from which one must escape for mystical experiences and for ultimate deliverance in death; if this view has been a temptation for his readers, Paul is saying that they have already experienced all the deliverance from flesh's power that they need.

2:13-14. The term translated "written code" (v. 14-NIV) was used for "handwritten" (see KJV) notes, usually "certificates of debt" (NASB) with penalties attached. Paul intends his readers to think of an IOU before God; Jewish tradition also portrayed sins as "debts" before God. Jewish people used the term translated "decrees" (NASB) or "regulations" (NIV) for God's laws. The Jewish people believed that their sins were forgiven when they repented; records



of sins would be blotted out on the annual Day of Atonement. Paul says the atonement occurred when the debt was nailed to the cross in Christ and thus paid.

2:15. On "rulers and authorities" (NASB, NRSV) see comment on 1:16 and 2:10. In 2:8 Paul used a word that could mean "take as a prisoner of war"; here the cosmic powers themselves are shown off as captives in Christ's triumphal procession, an image familiar to Romans and presumably known to others throughout the Empire (see comment on 2 Cor 2:14). In Roman triumphs, the general dressed as the chief god Jupiter and led behind him humiliated captives, stripped of their possessions; prominent captives were the most impressive. Here Christ displays his triumph over the most prominent captives possible.

2:16-23

### Avoid Human Religion

Christ is sufficient (2:6-15); ascetic additions to the \*gospel would only detract from faith in it.

2:16. \*Asceticism was growing in paganism, and many viewed it as a means of achieving spiritual power or revelatory experiences. But this text clearly refers to Jewish customs; although much of Palestinian Judaism opposed asceticism, Judaism and Christianity in other parts of the Empire often took on the characteristics of the surrounding culture, and pagans sometimes associated local Judaism with asceticism (even linking the sabbath with fasting, although the forms of Judaism we know about would not have fasted on the sabbath). \*Gentiles mocked Jews as separatists especially on three issues: circumcision (2:11), special laws about food and drink, and special holy days. The "new moon" celebration was used to greet each new month; the sabbath was a weekly festival.

2:17. \*Plato distinguished the "real" world of ideas from the shadow world of sense experience. *Philo developed Plato's concept to argue that the invisible*

*God was known through "shadows," or copies, of his character, rather than through sensory vision. Writers by this period distinguished substance or body, the original reality, from shadows or mere copies; adapting their language, Paul believes that the Old Testament prescriptions testified to genuine principles, but that those principles are fulfilled in Christ.*

2:18. Jewish literature often conjoined "humility" ("self-abasement" NASB, NRSV) in a positive way with fasting. But when taken to an extreme, "humility" referred to ascetic practices designed to open oneself to "visions" and ecstatic experiences. Such practices became popular in second-century Christian \*asceticism. (Insufficient protein and sleep deprivation are known to induce hallucinations today as well.)

"What he has seen" (NIV) is the language of visions. It suggests that the erring people in Colossae may have been like the Jewish mystics who regularly sought to achieve the heavenly vision of God through ecstatic revelations of God's throne. Although these were attempts to simulate the experience of biblical visionaries like Ezekiel, the biblical visionaries sought only to walk close to God, not to achieve mystic experiences per se. On vain visions cf., e.g., Jeremiah 23:32 and perhaps Ecclesiastes 5:7.

Jewish mystics and \*apocalyptists sometimes claimed communications from angels (cf. Gal 1:8; in a positive vein, Acts 27:23; Rev 1:1). In Colossae, angels were probably being venerated; although this veneration was against the teachings of *Pharisaism*, some evidence indicates that many common Diaspora Jews addressed prayers and petitions to angels, a practice that overlapped with magical spirit invocations. (Some Jewish literature, especially the \*Dead Sea Scrolls but also other texts, spoke of the earthly community entering into the worship of the heavenly community, and some scholars think Paul attacks that idea here; but the book of Revelation seems to approve of that idea, and it is unclear that Paul would have reason to attack the practice.)

2:19. Ancient medical literature sometimes described the head as the source of

life for the rest of the body.

2:20-21. Union with Christ in death was sufficient (cf. 2:11-12); adding ascetic rules (2:18) was useless (on "elementary principles" see comment on 2:8). The "decrees" (NASB) or "rules" (NIV, TEV) may be Jewish "regulations" (NRSV), as in 2:14. (Although the language with which Paul describes them in v. 21 has been compared to descriptions of \*Pythagorean \*asceti

cism, the language could fit \*Old Testament purity rules just as well.) Most Jews outside Palestine still kept the food laws, and some Jews forbade even touching particular foods (Letter of Aristeas 129); other Old Testament laws explicitly decreed one impure for touching some things. (This application would be especially appropriate if Paul thought of people adding to those rules, as Jewish teachers noted that Eve or Adam her tutor apparently added "Do not touch" to God's "Do not eat"-Gen 2:17; 3:3.)

2:22. Those influenced by philosophical thought recognized that transitory, perishable things were much less valuable than what was eternal. "Human commands and teachings" (NIV, NRSV) is an allusion to Isaiah 29:13, which Paul's hearers might recognize from the Jesus tradition (Mk 7:7).

2:23. Pagan philosophers (especially *Stoics*) *often spoke of freeing oneself from bodily pleasures so one could concentrate on the contemplations of the soul. Some elements of paganism were tending toward* asceticism, which became still more prevalent in the second century. (Pagans converted to Christianity may have also thought Christianity tended toward asceticism, with its countercultural emphasis on avoiding premarital sex and drunkenness; Judaism was sometimes similarly misinterpreted as ascetic. This misinterpretation of Jewish and Christian morality may have disposed some of the converts toward genuine asceticism after their conversion.) But for Paul, "beating down the flesh" is worthless for dealing with fleshly passions.

3:1-11

## Living Out the Dead Life

Paul's premise is that the Colossians have died with Christ (2:20); therefore trusting the finished work of Christ and living as what they are in him, rather than following human religious regulations (2:21-23), will produce holy living.

3:1-4. In *Plato's famous parable of the cave*, centuries before Paul, shadows on the wall merely reflected the real world above. Many people by Paul's day believed that the heavenly realms were pure and eternal, in contrast to the temporal and perishable world below. Jewish apocalyptic writers also distinguished between the heavenly and earthly realms, emphasizing the purity of God's realm in the upper heavens.

The Jewish mystics creating problems at Colossae were probably seeking these upper realms through mystical experiences (2:18), but Paul only mentions one thing specifically in heaven: Christ. In the context, he includes heavenly values centered around Christ, available because those who died and rose with Christ were also exalted with him (cf. Eph 2:6). The phrase "heavenly matters" was sometimes used this way.

3:5-7. Other Greco-Roman writers (including Jewish ones like the author of \*4 Maccabees) also listed vices and warned against passions. Paul speaks of their "earthly" body because the erring people influencing church members had adopted a Greek view in which one's soul was heavenly and eternal but one's body earthly, perishable and thus unimportant. Paul uses their own language ironically, to emphasize that it does matter what one does with one's body.

Paul does not believe in "beating down the body" (2:23), but he is willing to speak of amputating appendages or "putting them to death" in a figurative sense. Perhaps borrowing an image from Jesus (Mk 9:43, 45, 47), Paul here describes passions as "members of the

body." (\*Philo speaks occasionally of the soul's needing to extinguish the body;

but most thinkers recognized that morally therapeutic amputations were ineffectual, such as postadolescent castration, which did not remove sexual desires; they would mean such statements metaphorically. The so-called Orphic view of the body as a tomb-soma-sima-was widespread in this period.) But one puts to death the sinful lifestyle by depending on one's finished death in Christ (3:3-4), not by harsh treatment of the physical body (2:18, 20-23). The sins Paul lists here are typical sins Gentile converts to Judaism would have committed before their conversion.

3:8. Greco-Roman (the *Stoic Zeno*) and Jewish teachers (see 4 Maccabees and the rabbinic commentary Sifra) sometimes had a second list of subordinate or less obvious vices following the first list, announcing that these, too, should be removed. In contrast to the more obvious vices of 3:5 practiced primarily by Gentiles, even Jewish people grappled with the sins listed here.

3:9-10. "Take off" and "put on" (NIV) may reflect the image of armor used by Greco-Roman moralists or Jewish tradition's occasional image of being "clothed" with the *Spirit*. *But Paul could have simply concocted his own image of spiritual clothing (which he uses frequently; see comment on Rom 13:12); there is nothing profound in the fact that ancient peoples had to put on and take off clothes. (Some scholars have argued that this is a baptismal image. Because Pharisaic baptisms in Jewish ritual baths were performed naked, disrobing and being clothed again afterward would make sense. We can hardly imagine, however, that John's public baptisms in the Jordan [Mk 1:51-which probably included men and women-were done in the nude, and we have no clear evidence of how non-Palestinian churches practiced baptisms in this period.)*

"Old person" and "new person" probably allude respectively to Adam, in whom the old humanity lived (in the light of Jewish concepts of corporate personality and the use of 'adam as a term for "man" in Hebrew), and to Christ. An allusion to Adam is the likely import of "image" and "created" in 3:10 (see Gen 1:26). The language of "renewing" fits Jewish teaching about a new creation arriving at the end of the age, which Paul believes has been inaugurated in

Christ, the new Adam (see comment on 2 Cor 5:17); it has come, but believers living out the life of the new age in the old age must continually realize their participation in this newness to behave accordingly. The renewal may also reflect the language of the \*Old Testament (Ps 51:10; cf. Ezek 18:31), especially language about God's work in his people at the end (cf. Ezek 11:19-20; 36:26-27).

3:11. Of all peoples in the Empire, Greeks, fiercely proud of their own heritage, were usually the most intolerant of Jewish people. Circumcision divided Jews from non-Jews. In the Greek language, which was widespread by Paul's time, "barbarians" technically still meant all non-Greeks, although some non-Greeks broke down these categories differently (i.e., some Alexandrian Jews claimed to be Greeks, even though this claim infuriated Alexandria's ethnic Greeks). Scythians were generally considered the most barbaric, cruel and anti-Greek people (although some ancient writers portrayed them as "noble barbarians"). "Slave and free" was one major way of dividing humanity socially, although some slaves were more advanced socially than many free persons. "Christ

is all" may mean thus that he, rather than any human divisions, rules all of human life.

3:12-17

### Rules for the Christian Community

The parallels with Ephesians here are so close that many scholars believe that Ephesians copied and expanded Colossians. When a letter purportedly from Paul diverges significantly from another Pauline letter, some scholars attribute the different letter to another author. But when the letter with differences also exhibits similarities to another Pauline letter, some scholars say one writer copied the other one. Actually neither line of argument is adequate without substantial evidence for non-Pauline authorship. Paul may have sent out similar instructions to different \*churches in this period of his life, or even allowed an

assistant to revise some basic instructions for different congregations (see comment on 4:16).

3:12-13. "Chosen," "holy" and "beloved" (NASB, NRSV) were all terms that the \*Old Testament applied to Israel. For "put on" (KJV, NASB) see comment on 3:10. Paul includes a list of virtues, also a standard literary form in his day.

3:14-15. Love often appears as an important virtue in antiquity (sometimes as the chief virtue in Judaism), but it appears repeatedly in early Christian literature as the supreme virtue, in a manner not consistently paralleled in any other body of ancient literature. "Peace" (v. 15) probably means "among one another," in unity (v. 14); this virtue was highly valued in both Jewish and other Greco-Roman literature.

3:16. Whereas Ephesians 5:18-19 emphasizes the 'Spirit in worship, Paul in Colossians is concerned with erring persons who have not recognized the full sufficiency of Christ; he thus emphasizes the "word of Christ" here. On the worship see comment on Ephesians 5:19.

3:17. Ancient culture was pervasively religious, but most pagan religious practices were ritual observances that did not cast moral influence over one's daily life and ethics. For Paul, in contrast, every aspect of life must be determined by Christ's lordship.

3:18-4:1

#### Rules for the Household

\*Aristotle had developed "household codes" directing a man how to rule his wife, children and slaves properly. By Paul's day persecuted or minority religious groups suspected of being socially subversive used such codes to show that they upheld traditional Roman family values. Paul takes over but modifies the codes considerably. See the more detailed discussion on Ephesians 5:22-6:9.

3:18. All ancient moralists insisted that wives should "submit" to their husbands, but few would have stopped short of using the term "obey," as Paul does here (cf. 3:20, 22; see comment on Eph 5:33).

3:19. Although the ancient instructions to husbands normally stressed how he should rule his wife, Paul stresses instead that he should love her.

3:20. Throughout the ancient world (including under \*Old Testament law, Deut 21:18-21), minor children were expected to obey their parents; although Roman law allowed the father to demand obedience even of adult children, adults no longer living with their parents were normally expected only to honor their parents.

3:21. Most ancient fathers and educators beat their children as a matter of course; like a minority of ancient moralists, Paul advocates a more gentle approach to child rearing.

3:22-25. Ancient law viewed slaves as being property as well as people, and their obedience was expected. Many, however, considered slaves generally lazy (an attitude easy to understand, since slaves rarely shared the profit of their own labors). The admonition that slaves devote their work to the Lord relativizes the master's authority (cf. 4:1); "not as menpleasers" (KJV) was also common advice in ancient Jewish ethics. For more on slavery in general, see the introduction to Philemon.

4:1. Some Greek and Roman philosophers warned that masters themselves could become slaves someday (unlikely as this was), so they should treat their slaves rightly. \*Aristotle attacked philosophers in his own day who said that slavery was against nature and therefore wrong. By contrast, Paul clearly believes all people are by nature equal before God; although he does not address slavery as an institution here, what he does write thus suggests that he does not favor it. Although he has no control over the system, he can warn masters to keep in



mind their status before God. For an example of a situation in which he does have more potential influence, see Philemon.

4:2-6

### Rules Beyond the Community

4:2-4. For an "open door" as opportunity, see comment on 1 Corinthians 16:9.

4:5. The *New Testament often uses "outsiders" for "those outside the church."* It may be related to a term used by later Jewish teachers for those who did not understand the law, *but it is a natural image by itself, perhaps more analogous to the way Jews viewed Gentiles in general.* "Redeeming the time" (KJV, literally) probably means "making the most of the time" (NRSV). (Cf. Ps 90:12. The \*LXX of Dan 2:8 uses the phrase for trying to gain a delay.)

4:6. "With \*grace" (KJV, NASB) can mean with gracefulness, pleasantness and so forth (closer to the classical Greek usage of "grace" than the usual New Testament usage); see comment on Ephesians 4:29. Salt was a preserving and flavoring agent; thus Paul probably refers to speech designed to make sense to outsiders and be relevant to them. When a particular \*rhetorician recommended salting one's words properly, he seems to have meant sarcastic wit; in this context, Paul seems to mean instead a gentle answer (cf. Prov 15:1).

4:7-18

### Closing Greetings

Letters often closed with greetings from others, because letters went out irregularly and undependably (whenever someone was traveling to the recipients' area).

4:7-8. News was often carried by word of mouth via travelers. Hosts usually asked their guests about people they both knew elsewhere. Such news bearing was thus normally only incidental, but Paul sent Tychicus for the purpose of

bearing news.

4:9. Because Paul is writing from imprisonment (4:18), this Onesimus could be the same one as in Philemon 10 (cf. perhaps 2 Tim 1:16), at a later period. An Onesimus became bishop of Ephesus by the early second century, although we cannot be certain if it is the same one Paul mentions here.

4:10. Both Aristarchus (Acts 20:4) and Mark (Acts 13:13; 15:37-39; 2 Tim 4:11; cf. 1 Pet 5:13) were junior colleagues of Paul in ministry.

4:11. "Jesus" (which can also be translated "Joshua"-TEV) was a common Jewish name. Many Jewish people used a second Greek or Latin name resembling their more traditional Jewish name, and this "Jesus" bears also the Latin name "Justus." That Paul sent greetings from Jewish and Gentile workers engaged in spiritual ministry together would have struck ancient readers as far more profound than most modern readers can guess.

4:12. "Striving" ("wrestling"-NIV, NRSV; "laboring"-NASB) is a term of conflict or athletic competition signifying great exertion; philosophers often used it metaphorically (see comment on 1:29; cf. Gen 32:24?). Paul thus depicts prayer as a form of spiritual conflict or discipline crucial to their mission (4:2-4).

4:13. The three largest cities of the Lycus Valley in Phrygia were Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis; in this period Colossae was the least significant of the three. Hierapolis hosted healing cults, a temple to the emperor and the reported entrance to the underworld; it also had a significant Jewish presence in this period. Laodicea was a wealthy commercial center, despite its somewhat remote location.

4:14. Physicians were well educated but were often slaves or \*freedpersons, with relatively low social status. Although most physicians were men, women physicians besides midwives are known. It is possible that Luke studied medicine in Laodicea (where there is evidence of a prominent medical practice)

or practiced for a healing cult in Hierapolis (before his conversion); the readers seem to have heard of him. Demas's ethnic background is uncertain; \*papyri attest that some Jews did bear the Greek name "Demas" (cf. 2 Tim 4:10), but in this context he seems to be a Gentile.

4:15. Early manuscripts differ on the gender of "Nympha," but scribes would more likely change a woman's name into a man's name here than the reverse; hence the feminine form "Nympha" is probably original, making her leader of a house church.

4:16. Paul's letter to the Laodiceans is no longer extant, although some scholars have suggested that it is our current letter to the Ephesians (but see comment on Eph 1:1); like Ephesians, it may have been similar to Colossians. Virtually all reading was done aloud, and letters to groups would naturally

have been read to the whole group by one person, because most people could not read well. In a \*church service, Paul's letter may have been read alongside \*Old Testament Scripture, although it is unlikely that either Paul or his earliest readers guessed that some of his letters would become Christian Scripture.

4:17. Archippus may have been Philemon's son or at least a colleague in his house church (Philem 2).

4:18. Writers usually dictated letters to scribes but closed with a signature in their own handwriting.

# 1 T H E S S A L O N I A N S

## Introduction

**Authorship.** The vast majority of scholars acknowledge 1 Thessalonians to be Pauline, most recognizing it as Paul's first extant letter.

**Date.** First and Second Thessalonians may be the earliest of Paul's extant letters, written shortly after the evangelization of the Thessalonians, hence by about A.D. 50, within two decades of Jesus' \*resurrection.

**Situation.** While preaching Jesus as \*Messiah (the Jewish king) in Thessalonica, Paul had been accused of preaching another king besides Caesar (Acts 17:7). The very young Thessalonian *church continued to experience persecution after Paul's departure, but he encourages them with the promise of a future hope, which applies even to those who have already died (1 Thess 4:13-18).* Paul borrows much of the language used by Jesus and Jewish apocalyptic motifs that had become part of the early Christian movement.

**Form.** Most of Paul's letters include a thanksgiving, but some commentators think that his thanksgiving in this letter extends from 1:2 to 3:13; thus they characterize this as a "letter of thanksgiving," a particular epistolary category in antiquity. Others characterize it as a "letter of comfort" or a "parenetic letter" (a letter telling them how to behave); it also contains substantial elements of a "letter of praise," commending the Thessalonians, and features from "letters of friendship." Like most ancient letters, 1 Thessalonians is a mixture of various types, borrowing themes as necessary from each type without concern for formal categories; its closest parallels, however, are to parenetic letters.

**Unity.** Nearly all scholars today acknowledge that 1 Thessalonians is a unity (the change of tone in chaps. 4-5 is characteristic of Paul's and other letters of this

type), except for 2:14-16, which some scholars think (on content grounds) were added later to Paul's letter. Chapters 1-3 seem to exhibit a slightly modified chiasmic (inverted parallel) structure, however, which suggests that even these verses belong: thanksgiving (1:2-5; 3:9-10), victory in suffering (1:6-10; 3:6-8), apostolic care (2:1-13, 17-20) and suffering (2:14-16; 3:1-5).

Commentaries. I. Howard Marshall, *I and 2 Thessalonians*, NCB (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), is very helpful; F. F. Bruce, *I and 2 Thessalonians*, WBC 45 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1982); and Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NICNT, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), are also helpful. The article by Abraham J. Malherbe, "'Gentle as a Nurse': The Cynic Background to I Thess ii," *Novum Testamentum* 12 (April 1970): 203-17, represents a crucial advance in the study of this letter; see further Abraham Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

## 1:1-10

### Introduction and Thanksgiving

It is uncertain where (or if) Paul's thanksgiving breaks off; because Paul did not write in paragraphs but according to flows of thought and \*digressions, one cannot always outline his letters as we might outline discussions of topics today.

1:1. This was the standard way to open a letter. "Silvanus" is Silas's Latin name as a Roman citizen; a Jewish Roman citizen's parents often chose for their child Jewish (\*Aramaic) and Latin names that sounded similar.

1:2. Thanksgivings were a common feature of ancient letters. Verses 2-10 are a proem, the customary opening designed to secure the readers' goodwill, although Paul also wishes at the same time to encourage them; he is lavish in his epideictic \*rhetoric (i.e., language meant to praise them). On "mentioning" in prayers see comment on Philippians 1:3-4.

1:3-4. "Chosenness" (v. 4) was a term the Jewish people applied exclusively to themselves; Paul applies it here to a \*church that includes many \*Gentile converts.

1:5. Parenetic letters often reminded readers of what they already knew. Appealing to readers' own eyewitness knowledge was an irrefutable technique of argument.

1:6. Philosophers often called on students to imitate them, and this call was common in parenetic letters; but Paul claims that they have already begun to do so. The common Jewish association of the \*Spirit with divine inspiration might suggest inspired or even ecstatic joy (perhaps in jubilant worship), although the Spirit was associated with other activities as well. Most of pagan culture reacted angrily to Jewish people's converting pagans from the religion of their ancestors;

because a greater percentage of Christians were converts from \*Gentile backgrounds, they would face still greater hostility.

1:7. Achaëa, south of Macedonia, was well aware of events in that nearby province.

1:8. Travelers usually carried news with them, and the other \*churches may have heard of the Thessalonians through the Philippian messengers, also from Macedonia, who brought Paul support (2 Cor 11:9; Phil 4:15-16), or through any other Jewish or Christian travelers. Cf. Psalm 19:4.

1:9. Jewish texts often described the radical change required of pagans converting to Judaism in terms like those Paul uses here; the Roman writer *Tacitus also criticizes Judaism for making proselytes despise the gods and so reject their own countries and families*. Foreign religions could become accepted in Thessalonica, however. Among major cults in Thessalonica were the Egyptian cults of Serapis and Isis, as well as those of the more traditional Greek gods like Dionysus; some of the upper class sponsored the cult of Cabirus from the

Aegean island of Samothrace.

1:10. Jesus' *resurrection was the advance installment of the resurrection of all the righteous dead at the end of the age (which figured prominently in Jewish teaching from Dan 12:1-2 onward); Jesus will thus deliver the Thessalonians from wrath at the time of their resurrection.* The Old Testament often applied the term "wrath" to God's judgments within history, but this term was often extended, as nearly always in Paul and the \*New Testament, to the outpouring of God's wrath in the final day of the Lord, the day of judgment when, according to the New Testament, Christ returns to punish the wicked (e.g., Is 13:9, 13; 26:20; 30:27; Zeph 1:18; Rom 2:5).

2:1-12

### The Nature of the Apostles' Coming

Speeches and letters often contained a strong \*narrative element near the beginning, recounting the events leading up to the circumstances of the speech or writing. As in much other parenetic (i.e., moral exhortation) writing, Paul contrasts proper and improper lifestyles by antithetical parallels ("not ... but").

Paul need not be responding to actual opponents in this section, as some earlier commentators thought (although given the persecution the *church in Thessalonica faces, it is not unlikely that he suspects that standard charges have been raised against him in his absence*). *Wandering philosophers were often criticized and hence developed some traditional themes that they emphasized whether or not they were defending themselves, themes that Paul also uses here.* As Malherbe points out, Dio Chrysostom, a public speaker who lived a generation after Paul, accused most Cynics (wandering beggar philosophers) of error, impurity, deceit (2:3), flattery (2:5), and love of honor (2:6) and money (2:5). In contrast, Dio Chrysostom also observed that a true philosopher is gentle, like a nurse (2:7).

2:1-2. Dio Chrysostom criticized false philosophers, who feared insulting

treatment from the masses, and he described their speech as vain. True philosophers, he said, spoke with boldness even in the face of opposition. Paul and his companions were "insulted" (NIV, TEV) or "mistreated" (NASB, NRSV) in Philippi shortly before arriving in Thessalonica; this term means that they were scandalously treated in a humiliating manner, being

publicly stripped and beaten without a hearing (Acts 16:22-23).

2:3. Spurious philosophers were charged with speaking out of error, impurity and deception. ("Impurity" here probably alludes to the philosophical idea that one should use reason to purify one's mind from its slavery to human lusts. In 4:7 it refers to sexual impurity, but that does not seem to be the context here. Given the complaints about Judaism and eastern cults seducing women away from their husbands' religions, it is possible that charges of sexual impurity could have been raised against the sponsors of Egyptian, Jewish and Christian religious associations in Thessalonica; cf. Acts 17:4. But the usual philosophical use of the term is more probable here and requires less speculation.) Religious and philosophical charlatans were widespread in the ancient Mediterranean, and genuine philosophers were thus at pains to distinguish themselves from the phony variety by denying these characteristics.

2:4. This contrasting style ("not ... but") was a common way of emphasizing the point, whether or not these exact charges had been leveled against Paul and his companions. Pleasing God rather than people was an important part of \*Diaspora Jewish ethics. Divine authorization and inspiration were accepted as a sure sign that one was not a charlatan, although not everyone who claimed such inspiration was believed.

2:5. Despite the encouraging proem (opening) in this letter (1:2-10), Paul disclaims dishonest flattery. False philosophers were often guilty of flattery, which could earn them more money by begging; demagogic politicians likewise catered to the masses, becoming "all things to all people" (cf. comment on 1 Cor 9:19-23). But most philosophers and moralists complained that flattery was not



for the hearers' good; although one should speak gently, a true teacher ought to correct faults boldly. Contempt for flatterers is thus one of the most common characteristics of ancient moral literature (cf. also Prov 28:23; 29:5).

2:6. Sages claimed the right to rule all things because of their wisdom. Seeking honor for oneself was seen in a negative light.

2:7. Although flattery was to be avoided (2:5), Dio Chrysostom and others despised vulgar \*Cynics who simply cursed those from whom they were begging; one should mix praise with the blame, making one's message gentle enough for the hearers to be able to respond to it. (Paul's extant letters include no complete "letters of reproach," the harshest form of blame in ancient \*rhetoric.)

Well-to-do Romans often had slave or free wet nurses to care for young children, as did some, though fewer, lower-class Romans. According to the ideal of the educated Romans who could afford them, wet nurses should be educated so they could teach the young children; their most important trait, however, was their gentleness. They often endeared themselves to young children, who when they grew older frequently freed those nurses who had been slaves. The harshest \*Cynics criticized those who were gentle like wet nurses or the aged; others, like Dio Chrysostom, insisted that such gentleness should be cultivated.

Many moralists, e.g., \*Plutarch, recommended that mothers nurse their own children rather than delegate the task to nursemaids, and this was no doubt the common practice for most people, who could not afford wet nurses anyway. The image could thus

be one of a nursing mother, although all Paul's readers would have known of the custom of wet nurses as well. The particular image-wet nurse or nursing mother-does not affect Paul's point: gentleness. People in the eastern Mediterranean, where nursemaids were less frequent, often considered mothers more affectionate than fathers (see \*4 Maccabees 15:4), although Roman culture frequently emphasized mothers' severity.

2:8. Dio Chrysostom claimed that a true philosopher (like himself, he noted) would give no thought for personal danger but speak truth out of concern for his hearers. Passionate lovers also said things like, "I love you ... as if you were my own spirit" (Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 5.6). In contrast to most writers who made such claims, Paul had demonstrated the truth of his claim to endanger himself for the Thessalonians while he was among them.

2:9. The Thessalonian Christians were poor (cf. 2 Cor 8:1-2) and did not share some of the Corinthians' objections to manual labor (see comment on 1 Cor 9:6). The Christians in Philippi had sent him funds while he was in Thessalonica (Phil 4:15-16), but Paul still had to labor as an artisan. Because he could have set up shop in the marketplace, he could have done work and gained customers even if he was there only a brief time (Acts 17:2). Many Jewish teachers in this period had another trade besides teaching, often learned from their fathers.

"Night and day" was a common phrase, which could mean parts of the night and parts of the day. A manual laborer began work around sunrise and could talk with visitors while working; but from the early afternoon on Paul could use his time for more direct evangelism.

2:10-11. Although Romans valued the dignity of the stern father, most ancient portrayals of fathers (including Roman ones) stress their love, indulgence and concern for their children. True philosophers compared their concern for their hearers to that of a father as well as to that of a nurse (2:7), and \*disciples often saw teachers as paternal figures.

2:12. "Worthy" can mean appropriate to the dignity or standards of the person being honored (see comment on Col 1:10-11); Jewish wisdom texts sometimes spoke of the righteous being "worthy of God." To new Christians who could no longer participate in the civic cult that honored the emperor in Thessalonica (1:9), God's "kingdom" may have had political overtones; recognizing their exclusive allegiance to God's kingdom would be costly (see comment on Acts 17:7).

2:13-16

### Nature and Cost of the Thessalonians' Reception

Far from being non-Pauline, as some scholars have suggested, this paragraph reflects Paul's \*apocalyptic expectations of judgment on Israel. Against the interpretation of some scholars, Paul does not here deny that the remnant will be saved or that Israel will turn in the end time (Rom 11). His words instead fit the apocalyptic Jesus tradition (the body of Jesus' sayings about the end time) that Paul uses later in the same letter (1 Thess 4:13-5:11). \*Digressions were a standard feature of ancient letter writing.

2:13. Antiquity was replete with stories about people who rejected divine messengers, thinking them only charlatans; Paul is grateful that the Thessalonians embraced himself and his companions more appropriately.

2:14. Virtue was often taught by advocating imitation of a good example.

The Thessalonian Christians were persecuted by others in Thessalonica, as Judean Christians were by Judean nonChristians (as Paul of all people could attest-Gal 1:13). That Paul's readers have had some problems with the local Jewish community is also likely (Acts 17:5-7); although they did not make up the majority of the \*church's opposition (Acts 17:8), they would account for the elaboration on Jewish opposition in verses 15 and 16.

2:15. The Jewish people nurtured the tradition that their ancestors had killed the prophets, intensifying the Old Testament account. Opposition to missions-minded, Greek-speaking Jewish Christians had been increasing among Palestinian Jews as Jewish- \*Gentile tensions increased there (see comment on Acts 21:20-22 describing a situation that existed within a decade of this letter). Jewish practices led Jewish people to band together in an often hostile environment, leading many Gentiles to accuse them of hatred toward humanity; but Paul's meaning here is quite different, referring only to their opposition to the Jewish Christian missionary outreach to the Gentiles.

2:16. "Filling up the measure of sins" (NASB) is an \*Old Testament idea (e.g., Gen 15:16) also used by Jesus (Mt 23:32). In keeping with Paul's teaching elsewhere (Rom 11), "wrath has come on them to the end" (the literal translation) may mean "wrath has come on them until the time of the end" (cf. Lk 21:9, 23), rather than "forever" or simply the equally natural "fully" or "finally" (cf. "at last"-NIV, NRSV, TEV). The Old Testament prophets said that after many judgments the remnant of Israel would turn with their whole hearts toward God, and then he would restore his people and bring in the new age of his rule (e.g., Jer 29:11-14; Ezek 34:11-31; Hos 14:4-7; Amos 9:11-15).

2:17-3:10

### Longing for His Friends

Emotion was appropriate even in persuasive speeches, and still more in letters of friendship; Paul's letters are full of emotion, and this passage is one of the clearest examples of it.

2:17. Letters of friendship commonly expressed a longing to see the other person and often noted that they were apart only in body, not in spirit. (Today we would say, "My heart is with you.") Paul goes beyond these conventions by protesting (literally), "We were orphaned without you" (see NRSV); though emphasizing gentleness, most philosophers would have considered such language too passionate.

2:18. Ancients sometimes spoke of Fate hindering them. Given the geographical proximity of Paul to Macedonia, "\*Satan's hindering" (KJV) here must refer to some concrete obstacle preventing his return to Thessalonica-either the Jewish opposition he mentioned in 2:14-16 or opposition from city magistrates and its consequences for his friends there (Acts 17:8-9).

2:19-20. Crowns and garlands were used for rewards throughout Jewish and GrecoRoman literature of this period; not a royal crown but a victor's wreath is

in view. Crowns (cf. Is 28:5; 62:3) and garlands (cf. Is 61:3) sometimes appeared as symbols of future reward in the \*Old Testament and in ancient Judaism. Paul's reward, however, is simply the perseverance of the Thessalonians themselves (cf. similarly 3 John 4).

3:1-2. Letters of friendship often expressed longing to see another person; even when the expressions were formulaic, however, they were no less genuine (compare modern greeting cards for various occasions). Timothy and probably Silas accompanied Paul to

Athens, and he dispatched them back to Macedonia while he labored alone in Athens. Luke omits some of these details in the account in Acts (Acts 17:14-16; 18:5), as one would expect; any author who has written a readable \*narrative knows that one cannot report every detail and must smooth the narrative out. But the correspondences between the accounts are striking, and the divergences indicate that Luke could not have simply derived his account from this letter.

3:3-4. Jesus, the \*Old Testament and some Jewish *apocalyptic writers had predicted a period of sufferings just before the impending end of the age. These sufferings would accompany, the gospel's proclamation* (according to Jesus; cf. Mk 13:9-11) and help bring about the \*repentance of Israel (according to the Old Testament, e.g., Jer 30:7; Dan 12:1; cf. Deut 4:30; Is 26:20-21). If this is in view here, Christians were destined to endure this suffering but were also destined to escape the wrath at the Second Coming (1:10; 5:9; cf. Acts 14:22).

3:5-8. Ancient letter writers often complained that their feelings were hurt when they did not receive letters back promptly; this complaint was meant as a sign of their affection. Because letters had to be carried by travelers, however, Paul would not expect to have heard from them, especially if they had not known where to find him; it would be easier for him to send someone to them than the reverse. Yet his complaint about not knowing their situation expresses affection, like that of a worried parent. On "living" in verse 8, see comment on 2:8.

3:9-10. Paul resumes, completes or adds a thanksgiving (see comment on 1:2); cf. Psalm 116:12. Most people slept during the night, and prayer during the night was a mark of special devotion in the \*Old Testament and Jewish literature (in the Old Testament, e.g., Ps 22:2; 42:8; 63:6; 77:2, 6; 119:55, 148). "What is lacking" in their faith (3:10) may be adequate hope (3:6; cf. 1:3; 5:8), which Paul seeks to supply in 4:13-5:11.

3:11-13

### Paul's Prayer

In most letters, the prayer immediately follows the thanksgiving; because the prayer in 1 Thessalonians begins in 3:11, some commentators suggest that Paul finishes the thanksgiving only in 3:9-10. But Paul might simply be following a format in this letter different from his later, more customary one.

3:11. "Wish-prayers" ("Now may God ..." addressed to those for whom the prayer is offered) were considered genuine prayers in Judaism and were offered with the expectation that God would hear them. Paul continues the motif of longing in verse 11.

3:12. Thanksgivings and prayers could introduce topics to be taken up later in the letter, especially in Paul's letters; he returns to "love" in 4:9 and to "outsiders" in 4:12.

3:13. The \*Old Testament, Judaism and Jesus' teaching also looked forward to a future hope that gave meaning to endurance in the present. The "saints" or "holy ones" here could refer to God's people (4:14) or to the holy angels (Zech 14:5); both were called "holy ones" regularly in Jewish literature. Paul usually uses the term for the former.

4:1-8

### Sexual Purity

The issue throughout this passage is adultery (4:6). Paul may have heard of a specific instance in the congregation, or he may still be concerned because of the known sexual looseness of pagans, reinforced during his stay in proverb

ially immoral Corinth. Unmarried Greek men (i.e., Greek men below the age of thirty) commonly\*indulged in intercourse with prostitutes, slaves and other males; Greek religion and culture did not provide any disincentive for doing so.

4:1-2. This is the ancient Jewish and Christian language that scholars call traditioning: passing on an earlier teacher's words. Paul and his companions spent much of their time in Thessalonica teaching the new believers Jesus' sayings, to some of which he plainly appeals in 4:13-5:11.

4:3. Greek and Roman practice allowed for intercourse with prostitutes and slaves; premarital sex was prohibited for males under Roman law only if an aristocrat were doing it with an upper-class woman (this was called stuprum). Judaism was much stricter, reserving sex for marriage (although the literature indicates that some Jewish men did fall prey to premarital and extramarital temptations). Paul condemns all sexual immorality, although he moves to a specific example in 4:6. He shares the \*Old Testament view that premarital sex with someone other than one's future spouse is adultery against one's future spouse and thus as sinful as other adultery (Deut 22:13-29). (This statement does not imply that premarital sex with one's future spouse was not prohibited in Judaism by the Old Testament view of marriage as covenant; it is only to affirm that premarital sex with anyone else was viewed as a capital offense against one's future spouse.)

4:4. "Vessel" (KJV, NASB) was commonly used as a metaphor for one's "body" (NIV, NRSV) in Greek and "Diaspora Jewish literature; it was occasionally applied to one's wife (in some Jewish texts and, on one interpretation, in 1 Pet 3:7). It probably means "body" here, although the matter is not beyond dispute.

4:5. Adopting more \*ascetic GrecoRoman ideals, some Diaspora Jewish writers

decided that sex was permissible only for procreation, and passion even toward one's wife was unacceptable. Because Paul elsewhere sees marriage as the only appropriate place to release passion (1 Cor 7:2-9), it is more likely that he opposes only adulterous passion (1 Thess 4:6), not sexual pleasure in marriage. Jewish people viewed nearly all *Gentiles as sexually immoral* (later rabbis argued that one could not assume the virginity of a Gentile woman over three years and one day old); most Gentile men were immoral. Although many of Paul's readers are ethnically Gentiles, he expects them to recognize that they are spiritually nonGentiles by virtue of their conversion to the biblical faith (cf. Rom 2:29).

4:6. Adultery, or "wife stealing," as it was often considered, was punishable by banishment under Roman law; in some circumstances, a couple caught in the act could be killed on the spot. Adultery seems to have been common and usually unpunished, however; but a husband who learned that his wife was committing adultery was required by law to divorce her or himself be prosecuted on the charge of lenocinium-"pimping." Palestinian Judaism could no longer execute the Old Testament death penalty for adultery, but Jewish people believed that what they could not execute, God would (especially on the day of judgment).

4:7. From the standpoint of temples throughout ancient culture, intercourse generally made one ritually impure for a time. This impurity could be extended metaphorically, however, to spiritual impurity in the case of sexual sin. "Sanctification" (NASB) or "holiness" means being "set apart" to God; Israel in the Old Testament was "set apart" and exhorted therefore to live as if they were set apart (to be holy as God was holy; e.g., Lev 20:24-26).

4:8. The *Holy Spirit's main roles in Jewish texts included inspiring prophecy and purifying the righteous*; the latter was particularly prominent in \*Essene literature and based especially on Ezekiel 36:25-27. Even someone unfamiliar with this role of the Spirit, however, would catch Paul's point from the title (Holy Spirit); although Old Testament writers call the Spirit of God "the Holy Spirit" only twice, this had become a common title by Paul's day and could be



rendered literally "the Spirit of holiness." Paul has in mind the Spirit who purifies and sets apart God's people (1 Thess 4:7).

4:9-12

#### Behavior Toward One Another and Outsiders

4:9-10. Moralists often wrote on the topic "on love of family" and similar themes. For Paul, all Christians were one family and the ethics of familial love should apply. Thessalonica was a prominent city of Macedonia.

4:11. Quietism-minding one's own affairs-and clinging only to one's own philosophical community were central to \*Epicureanism but came to characterize many people in the first century who remained aloof from public or political life. Complete quietism of this sort drew criticism from the rest of society, just as Jewish allegiance to its own customs and people did.

In the broad sense of avoiding public controversies, however, "leading a quiet life" was wise guidance for a persecuted minority in the first-century Roman Empire. Some writers like \*Plutarch advocated the involvement of wise men in the affairs of the state, but even they advised certain people (e.g., those who had already enjoyed a full political career) to withdraw from active service. Paul asks his readers to be inconspicuous, not monastic.

4:12. Landowning aristocrats despised manual labor, but for most of the ancient world manual labor was the only means of livelihood. Although the Thessalonian \*church may have included a few well-to-do \*patrons (Acts 17:4, 9), Paul seems not to have encountered there the opposition to his views on manual labor that arose in Corinth. Treating outsiders appropriately ("behaving properly toward outsiders"-NASB, NRSV) presumably means one's witness in giving, or perhaps avoiding begging, if Paul thinks that some would beg favors from more well-to-do benefactors. Begging on the street normally characterized only the poorest, often propertyless persons; but some may have been attracted to the lifestyle of begging adopted by the Cynic philosophers (cf. comment on 2

Thess 3:11-12).

4:13-18

### Comfort for the Grieving

One common form of ancient nonbusiness letter was the "letter of consolation." Paul loads this consolatory section of his letter with Jewish \*apocalyptic motifs taken directly from Jesus' teaching. (Given the vast number of apocalyptic motifs Paul omits, and that most of those he includes coincide with the oral tradition of Jesus' teaching later recorded in the Gospels, there can be little doubt as to his source-see 4:15. Given the many prophets and hence prophecies in the early church, it is quite improbable that Paul and the Gospel writers simply drew on the same prophecy of someone other than Jesus; it is also unlikely that the Gospel writers would have known of 1 Thessalonians, or if they

had, that they would have modeled their reports of Jesus' teaching after it.) Appealing to Jewish future hopes was a natural approach in consolation, as Jewish tomb inscriptions attest.

In the light of the local persecution that this letter addresses (1:6; 2:14-16; 3:3-6), some scholars have suggested that those in the congregation who died since Paul's departure died as martyrs. Martyrdom must have been the exception rather than the rule around A.D. 50; it would not have taken many exceptions, however, to provoke questions among the Thessalonian Christians.

4:13. Philosophers often "consoled" the recipients of their letters by saying, "Do not grieve," or "Do not grieve too much," since "it will not do any good." This is not, however, Paul's point; rather, it is that Christians do not grieve for their fellow Christians as pagans grieve, because Christians have hope. Most pagans believed in a shadowy afterlife in the underworld and did not share the philosophers' optimism or neutrality toward death. Most pagans grieved, and Jewish and other Near Eastern peoples engaged in very cathartic grief rituals. "Sleep" was a common euphemism for death.

4:14. Like many Jewish people, Paul believed that the soul lived in heaven till the \*resurrection of the body, and that soul and body would be reunited at the resurrection (2 Cor 5:1-10). Many ancient writers distinguished the upper atmosphere ("aether") where pure souls would reside, from the lowest heaven, the realm of "air." Thus Paul can speak of the Lord descending from "heaven," meaning the highest heavens (4:16), and meeting his people in the "air," the lower atmosphere (4:17).

4:15. "Word of the Lord" in this case means a saying of Jesus (cf. Lk 22:61; Acts 20:35; 1 Cor 7:10). Jesus spoke of his "coming" (e.g., Mt 24:27), a term that could apply to the visit of a king or royal dignitary, which was celebrated with great pomp and majesty.

4:16-17. In the \*Old Testament, trumpets (shofars, rams' horns) were used especially to gather the assembly or give orders for battle; in this context, both connotations must be in view. Roman armies also used trumpets in war; Jewish views of the end time included Israel being gathered with a trumpet and trumpets used in the final war at the same time (daily Jewish prayers; the \*Qumran War Scroll). Michael, the chief archangel of Jewish literature, was considered Israel's guardian angel and thus figures in Jewish texts about the final battle; here Jesus seems to assume Michael's role on behalf of believers, God's people.

The "clouds," "trumpet" and possibly "archangel" allude to a saying of Jesus about the end time (Mt 24:30-31); the meeting in the air may be inferred from the gathering to join him (Mt 24:31). Judaism traditionally associated the \*resurrection of the dead with the end of this age and the inauguration of the \*kingdom, and readers would assume this connection in the absence of a direct statement to the contrary. When paired with a royal "coming" (see comment on 1 Thess 4:15), the word for "meeting" in the air normally referred to emissaries from a city going out to meet the dignitary and escort him on his way to their city. The contrast that this image provides with the honor thought to be particularly due to the "Lord" Caesar and his emissaries could well have

provoked hostility from local officials (cf. 2:12; 5:3; Acts 17:7).

The "shout" is undoubtedly the commander's shout of war (Amos 2:2), an image applied to God as warrior in the

\*Old Testament (Is 42:13; cf. the shout of triumph with a trumpet in Ps 47:5, 8-9), as is his descent (Is 31:4; cf. Zech 14:3-4). From the earliest *New Testament sources*, *Old Testament imagery about God's coming in the day of the Lord is applied directly to Jesus*; Judaism envisioned this role as G?d's, not the Messiah's. "Clouds" were used both as imagery for the coming day of God's judgment (e.g., Ezek 30:3; 32:7; Joel 2:2; often the clouds are the smoke of battle and pillaging) and the coming of the \*Son of Man (Dan 7:13).

4:18. Writers of letters of consolation sometimes urged their readers to "comfort" (KJV, NASB; or "exhort," "encourage") themselves and others with their words. In the same way, Jewish people recognized that committed servants of God could exhort one another to stand firm in the face of suffering and martyrdom (2 Macc 7:5). Even the majority of the Old Testament prophets who wrote most fiercely of judgment included words of comfort and hope for the righteous remnant, and hope is central to Paul's message about the future for his readers, who make up such a remnant.

5:1-11

Watchfulness

Paul continues his discussion of the Lord's coming (4:13-18), ending on the same exhortation to comfort or encourage one another (4:18; 5:11).

5:1. Here Paul cites another saying of Jesus (later recorded in Acts 1:7; writers normally paraphrased sayings when quoting them). The general thought-that the time of the end was unknown-was common enough in other Jewish circles; teachers debated whether the righteous could hasten the time of the end or whether it would simply come in the time that God had ordained, but most

agreed that people could not know the time of the end. Some, however, worked up elaborate schemes to predict that it was about to occur; Paul does not subscribe to such theories.

5:2. This verse is another saying of Jesus (Mt 24:43; also used in 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 3:3; 16:15). "The day of the Lord" in the \*Old Testament was the day of God, the judgment at the end of the age (sometimes prefigured in nearer judgments, but ultimately cataclysmic in its final form). Jewish \*apocalyptic commonly spoke of an unexpected end, yet one that was preceded by signs. Paul does not mean that no signs can precede the day of the Lord (2 Thess 2:2-4)-only that they will not pinpoint the time or provide sufficient warning to the wicked (1 Thess 5:3-4).

5:3. These "birth pangs" are not the age-long ones of Matthew 24:8, but the final pangs of destruction in the day of the Lord, as in Isaiah 13:8. Birth pangs were a common image of agony and destruction (Ps 48:6; Is 21:3; 26:17-18; 42:14; Jer 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 49:22-24; 50:43; Hos 13:13). Sudden destruction was also a common biblical idea (Is 47:11; Jer 6:26), and unexpected judgment on the wicked became a regular motif of Jewish apocalyptic; but Paul may here especially reflect Jesus' teaching (Mt 24:36-44).

The Jewish people knew well about false peace: false prophets prophesying peace had led to Judah's judgment in the Old Testament (e.g., Jer 6:14); the first-century B.C. Roman general Pompey had entered Jerusalem pretending peace; and roughly two decades after Paul wrote this letter, false prophets of victory led the Jerusalemites to slaughter at the hands of Titus's Roman army. Paul's readers in Thessalonica, however, would take his words as an attack on claims of earlier Roman emperors to have established peace and

security (*pax et securitas*) throughout the empire. Teachings like this one sounded subversive and may have aroused persecution against Christians (Acts 17:7).

5:4-5. The background to these verses is quite natural: Paul extends the image of the day of the Lord coming as a thief in the night (see comment on v. 2). Thieves normally broke in at night, but believers in Jesus were people of the day of the Lord. Paul parallels day with light and night with darkness, using common images for good and evil in his day. "Sons of" (NIV, NASB) or "children of" (KJV, NRSV) was a way of saying "people characterized by."

5:6-7. Night was the time for both sleeping and drunken parties. Paul may draw on the sayings of Jesus in Matthew 24:42, 49 and 26:45, besides the obvious Matthew 24:43. Other moralists also used "sobriety" metaphorically.

5:8. Roman guards and other kinds of night watchmen (such as shepherds) were the only people who stayed awake at night, apart from those engaging in drunken revelry. Paul's armor imagery may also reflect the standard Jewish idea of a final war preceding the end and the military imagery used by moralists concerning their struggle with the passions (see comment on Rom 13:12; cf. also comment on Eph 6:10-20).

5:9. Although "salvation" could mean "deliverance," in the context of the final salvation it would also be associated with the bodily \*resurrection of the righteous, as here. Judaism juxtaposed this resurrection with the wrath God would pour out on the \*Gentiles and disobedient Jews at his coming to judge the earth, which they expected would occur at the same time.

5:10. On the image of "sleep" see comment on 4:13 (it cannot allude to the image of 5:5-7, where it refers to the people of darkness).

5:11. See comment on 4:18.

5:12-22

How to Behave Among God's People

Verses 12-15 deal with how to treat one another; verses 16-22 address corporate

(and partly private) worship (cf. similar exhortations to corporate worship in Eph 5:18-21, followed by household codes).

5:12-13. The term for those who "have charge" (NASB, NRSV) or "are over" (KJV, NIV) the Thessalonian Christians was especially applied in the GrecoRoman world to \*patrons, sponsors of *clients and religious associations*. *If that sense is in view here, these would be the Christians who opened their homes for the churches to meet in them and sponsored them, providing what financial and political help they could (the Thessalonian patrons probably included Jason-Acts 17:5-9).*

That they would also "admonish" (not just "instruct"-NASB, TEV) is not unusual, since they would probably be the wealthier members of the congregation and hence better educated. (Most people in antiquity were functionally illiterate; exhorting was generally easier for those with the training and leisure to read the Scriptures, since the Scriptures were the source of exhortations in both synagogue and church.) If no one was particularly well-to-do, those who were relatively better off would have to perform the functions of patron as best they could, requiring either smaller or more crowded house churches; but the congregation probably included relatively well-to-do people (Acts 17:4).

5:14. The "unruly" (KJV, NASB) are

the undisciplined-"idlers" (NIV, NRSV) who can work but refuse to do so (cf. 4:11; 2 Thess 3:7-8). The word for "faint-hearted" (NASB, NRSV) or "timid" (NIV, TEV) referred especially to those who were self-denigrating, who had a low opinion of themselves. Cf. Isaiah 35:3-4.

5:15. Compare Jesus' teaching (Mt 5:39); some other Jewish teachers also advised nonretaliation (see comment on Rom 12:17).

5:16. Greek ethics often listed succinct statements one after another as Paul does

here. Many biblical psalms associate rejoicing with celebration and worship (e.g., Ps 9:14; 33:1; 47:1; 95:2; 149:1-5); here it is thus naturally linked with prayer and thanksgiving.

5:17. Even the strictest pietists of Judaism did not pray all day; but they prayed regularly, much and faithfully. "Pray without ceasing" could mean this type of prayer or to carry the attitude of prayer with oneself throughout the day, not just in corporate worship or personal quiet times.

5:18. Pagans who recognized that Fate or some god was sovereign over everything acknowledged that one should accept whatever comes or even give thanks for it. For Paul, those who trust God's sovereignty and love can give thanks in every situation.

5:19-20. Most of early Judaism associated the `Spirit especially with .prophecy; Paul does not want anyone quenching genuinely inspired speech. The term translated "quench" was often used with fire, which appropriately fits one \*Old Testament image of prophets unable to repress God's inspiration (Jer 20:9).

5:21-22. In the context, "test everything" (NIV) may mean test prophetic utterances (5:19-20), retaining the good but rejecting the bad. Perhaps because some Greek religious cults practiced ecstatic inspiration, Paul warns the Thessalonians not to confuse their inspiration with that of paganism; but judging prophecy was already an issue in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, many prophets were trained under senior prophets, guided in their sensitivity to the Spirit's inspiration (1 Sam 19:20); because such senior prophets were not available to most early Christian congregations, mutual testing by others moving in the prophetic gift was necessary (see comment on 1 Cor 14:29).

5:23-28

Concluding Words

5:23-25. On "wish-prayers" see comment on 3:11. Although Paul emphasizes the



whole person here by listing component parts in good Jewish fashion (cf., e.g., Deut 6:5; Lk 10:27), he uses the language of his culture to describe the parts (which he can divide differently elsewhere, e.g., 1 Cor 7:34; 14:14-15). He is quite unlike the philosophers who constructed detailed analyses, dividing the soul into two (\*Cicero), three (\*Plato, *Philo*) or eight (Stoics) components. Like most Jewish writers and the \*Old Testament, Paul saw people as a whole, with body and

soul separated at death, and distinguished various components only to make his point. (Valentinian \*Gnostics, mainly under Middle Platonic influence, later made much more of the differences between soul and spirit, and thus "soulish" and "spiritual" persons, than Paul intended here; their radical distinctions led them to deny the full incarnation, or enfleshment, of Jesus the Word. Posidonius, Marcus Aurelius and others advocated a form of trichotomy [three parts], and later \*Samaritans also held to a trichotomous division of the person, although they did not tend to use Paul's wording here. Much later Jewish mystics called cabalists divided the soul into ten parts, including a trinity of triads. Ancient Egyptian thought also seems to have recognized component parts, distinguishing body from ba, and ka and akh.) 5:26. Kisses were a common affectionate greeting for those with whom one had an intimate or respectful relationship; see comment on Romans 16:16.

5:27-28. Many people could not read, so reading his letter aloud was the only way everyone in the congregation could be acquainted with it.

# 2 T H E S S A L O N I A N S

## Introduction

Authorship. Some scholars have denied that Paul wrote this letter, because it differs in some respects from 1 Thessalonians; conversely, they attribute the similarities it has with 1 Thessalonians to imitation. But 2 Thessalonians is Pauline in style and moves in the same *apocalyptic world of thought that much of 1 Thessalonians 4-5 does; the differences are no greater than one would expect in two separate letters dealing with such a broad topic. It seems unlikely that 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 was written after the temple's destruction (A.D. 70); because pseudepigraphic letters were rarely written during or immediately after the lifetime of their alleged author, 2 Thessalonians was most likely written by Paul (who died c. A.D. 64). Most commentators today accept it as Pauline.*

Relationship to I Thessalonians. Although scholars have debated which letter was written first, most scholars think that 1 Thessalonians was written before 2 Thessalonians (the original letters were not titled, of course). The bearer of his first letter has probably returned with news about the situation in Thessalonica; some of the Christians have embraced Paul's message about future hope without the qualifications he had attached to it, and have decided that the day of the Lord has already come (2:2).

Commentaries. See those listed in the introduction to 1 Thessalonians. Most commentaries cover both letters.

1:1-12

Introduction, Thanksgiving and Prayer

Paul's letters usually open with the basic introduction ("Paul ... to ..."), a thanksgiving and either a prayer or a mention of his prayers for the recipients.

Each of these features was typical of letters in his day, but Paul adapts them in a Christian way. Paul also stocks his *apocalyptic language here with phrases from the Old Testament*.

1:1. The basic format of letter openings was: sender's name, to recipient's name; greetings.

1:2. The typical Greek greeting was *charein*, which Paul adapts to *charis*, "grace." Jewish letters usually added the typical Jewish greeting of "peace," which functioned as a wish-prayer: "May God's peace be with you," "May all be well with you." (On wish-prayers see comment on 1 Thess 3:11.) Paul makes this prayer more explicit by adding the source of grace and peace: both God the Father and the Lord Jesus. Both "God" and "Lord" are divine titles in the Old Testament.

1:3. Thanksgivings for the recipients were common in Greek letters and helped establish a friendly tone at the beginning of the letter.

1:4-5. A major theme in Jewish thought by this period was God's reward for the righteous who suffer. Developing this theme from the *Old Testament*, *Jewish writers emphasized that God would punish their persecutors in the end and deliver the righteous, no matter what they suffered now. This deliverance was intimately bound up with the hope of the resurrection of the righteous at the end of the age. Often the present or imminent tribulation was viewed as the final "messianic birth pangs" that would usher in the era of the \*kingdom. Some*

*philosophers also spoke of sufferings proving one worthy of God.*

1:6-7. As in Jewish literature, so here the righteous receive rest from their tribulation only at the same time that God vindicates them by his final judgment on the wicked (cf. also Deut 32:34-36, 41). Fire burning one's adversaries was a common image in the Old Testament (e.g., Num 11:1; Ps 97:3; Is 26:11; 66:15-16, 24; cf. Jer 4:4; 15:14; 17:4; 21:12; Ezek 21:31; 22:20; Nahum 1:6; Zeph

1:18; 3:8). This image was natural because of the use of fire in war and because "wrath" was often described in Hebrew and cognate languages in terms of "burning."

This also became customary end-time imagery in Jewish literature; in some Jewish texts the whole earth would be destroyed, in others the \*kingdom would be established without such cosmic transformation. But the wording here is particularly from Isaiah 66:15. The "mighty" angels are envisioned as the Lord's army.

1:8. On God's vengeance or repaying his people's enemies, see Deuteronomy 32:41, Isaiah 35:4 and 66:6; it was also an important theme in post-Old Testament Jewish literature.

1:9. This verse directly echoes the *Septuagint of Isaiah 2:10, 19 and 21*. *That Jewish literature often describes God turning his "face" (literally) or "presence" from the wicked may be theologically significant, but Paul directly takes over the Semitic idiom ("from the face of" means "from before," "from the presence of") as the Septuagint of Isaiah rendered it. "Eternal destruction" in the Dead Sea Scrolls and elsewhere usually meant that the wicked were completely destroyed, but in the contexts of many of these passages they also suffered eternally (both could be mentioned in the same passage, e.g., \*Jubilees 36:10; cf. Is 66:24, cited in Mk 9:48).*

1:10. Kings' "glory" was their splendor and royal bearing; the glorification of God's people was to be at the time of Israel's restoration (Is 46:13; 60:1-2; 62:2), when God (here Jesus) would come to vindicate them. (Paul normally associates the saints' "glorification" with their bodily \*resurrection-e.g., Rom 8:17-23; 1 Cor 15:43; Phil 3:21.) "When he comes" echoes the language of the Septuagint of Psalm 96:13, applying language about God to Jesus. "On that day" is the "day of the Lord" (see 2 Thess 2:2; cf. Is 2:11-12, 17, 20; 11:10-11; Joel 3:18-"in that day").

1:11. Ancient letters, including Paul's, often contained prayers or mentions of prayers on behalf of the recipients. On "worthy" see comment on 1:5.

1:12. The Lord could be glorified in his obedient people in the present (Jer 13:11), but the ultimate glorifying of God in his people would be on the day when he would bring all things to light (see comment on 1:10).

2:1-12

### The Final Rebellion

Some Thessalonian Christians thought that the imminent day of the Lord had already come. To correct their misunderstanding, Paul reminds them of Jesus' sayings he taught them while he was there (2:5, 15): a final period of rebellion constituted an essential prerequisite for \*Christ's return.

2:1. The "coming" (described further in 2:8; cf. 1 Thess 4:15) and "gathering" here are grammatically linked, and the use of both terms derives from the sayings of Jesus. "Coming" was a common word, but when applied to a king it took on special connotations of a glorious visitation. Some Jewish texts applied it to God's past theophanies and future revelation in glory; Matthew 24:3, 27, 37 and 39 use it for Jesus' re

turn to judge the world. Many texts, both in the \*Old Testament (e.g., Is 27:12-13) and later Jewish literature, speak of Israel's gathering as God's people; Paul probably takes the image of the gathering of the righteous from Jesus' saying later recorded in Matthew 24:31 (which uses a related term).

2:2. Those who heard Paul's first letter read only once in the congregation may have misunderstood its point. The Greek outlook included an afterlife in the underworld or an escape of the soul to the highest heavens, but not a future event when the dead would be *resurrected*. *Thessalonian Christians may have read Paul in the light of their own cultural predispositions: they may have assumed that the future reality was already fulfilled, not just initiated, in Christ.* Paul

replies that the future "day of the Lord" is imminent or unexpected in its timing (1 Thess 5:2) but still preceded by the final rebellion (2 Thess 2:3-12).

2:3-4. The first prerequisite is either the "rebellion" (NIV, NRSV, TEV) or the "apostasy" (NASB). If it is a "rebellion" against God, it is the world's final insult to him (2:4); if "apostasy," it refers back to Jesus' sayings later written in Matthew 24:10-13. Both sins are characteristic of Jewish lists of end-time sufferings, but because Paul omits most of the signs found in such lists and focuses only on those cited by Jesus, the term here might mean apostasy. In either case, Paul indicates that the term does not apply to his readers (2:10-15).

The figure of a general future antichrist (as he is commonly called) seems to occur mainly in later Jewish texts, but contemporary Jewish texts do describe some past or present rulers in similar terms (cf. also the evil rulers in Dan 9-11); the tradition of pagan kings who made themselves out to be gods is also quite ancient (Is 14:13-14; Ezek 28:2; Dan 6:7). The *Dead Sea Scrolls speak of a "man of lies" who opposed the founder of their community*; the Psalms of Solomon portray the Roman general Pompey in such terms; and Roman emperors lent themselves to such portrayals in general. Nearly a decade before this letter, Gaius Caligula had tried to set up his image in the Jerusalem temple, nearly sparking a revolt. (Caligula immediately preceded Claudius, the current emperor in A.D. 41-54.) Two decades after this letter, when Titus destroyed the temple, his soldiers desecrated the temple by paying divine honors to the insignia of Emperor Vespasian on the site of the temple.

The imagery used here derives especially from Jesus, however (cf. Mt 24:15), who took it from Daniel (Dan 7:25; 8:11; 9:26-27; 11:31, 36; cf. 2 Chron 33:7; Ezek 8:3). Some scholars who have examined the prophecies carefully have concluded that Daniel 11 describes the abomination caused by Antiochus Epiphanes; yet the "end" seems to come at that time (12:1), about two centuries before Jesus. Like the promise of the land to Abraham's descendants, deferred repeatedly during the period of the judges, between David and Josiah, and afterward due to Israel's disobedience, this text might be an example of deferred

\*eschatology. If one counts the period of Daniel 9:24-27, however, the anointed prince (whom some held to be the Messiah) was to be "cut off" around the year that Jesus died; the destruction of the city followed forty years later, again indicating a delay of at least forty years. Evangelical interpreters differ as to whether (1) a specific future tribulation remains (perhaps 2 Thess 2:8-9), (2) the Jewish war in A.D. 66-70 fulfilled it completely (cf. Mt 24:15-21),

(3) the whole course of history constitutes this period (cf. comments on Revelation, especially chap. 12). or (4) the language is reused in different ways, all of which are true.

2:5. The Thessalonians apparently misinterpreted Paul's talk about the future \*kingdom (Acts 17:7), much of which seems to derive from teachings of Jesus that Paul is transmitting to them (2 Thess 2:15).

2:6-7. The interpretations of this passage are more diverse than those of most passages in the \*New Testament. Even the translation is not certain (is the restrainer "taken out of the way" or does the lawless one "come forth from the midst" at the end of v. 7?). Views of the "restrainer" are plentiful. Some have thought that the "restrainer" is one prerequisite for the end stated by Jesus, the preaching to all the nations (Mt 24:14); this view makes some sense, but the completion of this preaching was technically to precede the end itself, not the rebellion that preceded the end.

The "restrainer" could be simply God's sovereign restraint (e.g., Ezek 5:11); it could be the archangel Michael, angelic protector of Israel in Jewish tradition (also Dan 12:1); it could be the presence of Christians in Jerusalem (Mt 24:16-21); or it could be, as many scholars have argued, the ruler preceding the self-deifying emperor or succession of emperors. (Those who hold the last view point out that the name of the emperor when Paul was writing this letter was Claudius, which was related to a Latin word for "restrain"; he immediately preceded the persecutor Nero, on whom see introduction to 1 Peter.) Many of the early church fathers took the view that the "restrainer" was the Roman Empire.

One popular modern view that has no specific contextual support is that the "restrainer" is the \*church, which had inadequate social power in Paul's day to perform that function. The church's removal from the earth by the resurrection described in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 does not fit this context, because the Thessalonian Christians were to receive rest from affliction only at the day of judgment (2 Thess 1:6-9), and be gathered (2:1) only in the day of the Lord (2:2), which was to be preceded by the rebellion (2:3-4), which in turn was to be preceded by the restrainer (2:6-7). Although no ancient Christian authors attest the view that the restrainer is the church (the idea of a rapture before the tribulation first explicitly appears in history around 1830, as a corollary of dispensationalism), the many adherents of this view today cite various other New Testament texts for its support.

In any case, the Thessalonians would apparently understand what Paul means (2:5), and his point is not in question: this event has not yet happened, so the rebellion and hence the day of the Lord and the church's gathering are still future.

2:8. Paul describes the end of the lawless one in terms borrowed from Isaiah 11:4 (cf. Hos 6:5) and similar to those in other Jewish texts. Paul contrasts Jesus' own coming (cf. 2 Thess 2:1) with the lawless one's (2:9); on such contrasts see comment on Revelation 13.

2:9. Deceptive signs already occurred in Paul's day. Sorcerers and shrines of healing gods were common; although healing was not the primary focus of the imperial cult, some people in the eastern Mediterranean also invoked the spirit of the emperor, who was worshiped as a god, to deliver or heal them. Propaganda circulated that the emperor Vespasian (to whose insignia homage was paid on the site of the

temple in A.D. 70) worked miracles, but emperors themselves were not usually known as miracle workers. Although miracle-working false prophets appear early in the Bible (Ex 7:11), Paul's source for their association with the end is



probably again Jesus' teachings (cf. Mt 24:24).

2:10-12. In the *Old Testament*, God often punished people by giving them the very blindness they had chosen for themselves (Is 19:14; 29:9-10); in Jewish tradition, all the nations chose to turn away from God's truth, and only Israel accepted his law. 'Satan's primary roles in Jewish thought were accuser and deceiver or tempter; for Antiochus Epiphanes' deceit, see Daniel 8:25; for that of idolatry in general, see Isaiah 44:20 and Jeremiah 10:3-5. Philosophers characterized themselves as lovers of truth, and this characterization was accepted as a morally high ideal among the leisured class of Paul's day and probably among others who stopped to listen to public lectures. But Paul, like most Jewish people, believed that God's perfect truth came by revelation, not by the finite reasonings of the philosophers.

2:13-3:5

Thanksgiving, Wish-Prayer and Prayer Request

As in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, here Paul offers a second thanksgiving and a wish-prayer before moving into the hortatory (exhortation) section of his letter.

2:13-14. In the *Old Testament*, God "*chose*" Israel; Gentile believers grafted into his people are often called "chosen" in the *New Testament* (see comment on Rom 9:14-29; cf. Mt 24:31). On the Spirit (often linked with spiritual purification in segments of Judaism) and sanctification, see comment on 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8. On "glory" see comment on 2 Thessalonians 1:10 and 12.

2:15. \*Pharisaic Judaism emphasized the careful passing on of traditions from earlier teachers. Paul passed on to the Thessalonian believers the teachings of Jesus, many of which he has alluded to in this chapter.

2:16-17. Here Paul offers a "wish-prayer," a prayer to God addressed as a wish for a person. Although not directly addressed to God, such statements were meant as prayers for God to answer.

3:1-4. The prayer request that God's word may "run" (literally) or "spread" swiftly probably borrows the image from Psalm 147:15. The Thessalonians would think of runners in an athletic competition.

3:5. Paul concludes with another wish-prayer (see comment on 2:16-17).

3:6-15

### Dealing with Idlers

3:6. Paul acts "in the name of Jesus"-as his representative. By this period "unruly" (NASB) usually meant "idle" (NIV, NRSV), the clear meaning in this context. The origin of this group of idlers in the church might be the Greco-Roman aristocratic disdain for manual labor, or a mistaken belief that the day of the Lord had come and canceled the need for such labor (2:2). More likely, they may have pursued a philosophic, specifically a \*Cynic, lifestyle (see comment on 3:11-12). Idlers were known to pass their days in the marketplaces of Greek cities (including Thessalonica-Acts 17:5); some may have been genuinely converted but not given up their previous lifestyle.

3:7-9. Teachers commonly exhorted their students to imitate them. On the labor of Paul and his companions, see comment on I Thessalonians 2:9. As some commentators point out, to "eat bread" seems to have been a Jewish fig

ure of speech for "making a living" (e.g., Gen 3:19).

3:10. Although Paul's saying here has no exact parallel, some Jewish and Greek sayings had similar meanings. Judaism had a strong work ethic and a heavy emphasis on charity; Proverbs emphasized both the need to help those who have nothing and for those who are able to work to do so. "Eat" refers either to food provided by other believers (cf. 3:12), as *synagogues cared for needy Jews, or food provided at the churches' communal meals* (cf. 3:14), a practice standard among religious associations in the Greco-Roman world.

3:11-12. For "eat their own bread" see comment on 3:7-9. "Busybodies" could refer to those engaged in superfluous activity, wasting their time on irrelevant details, or to troublesome "meddlers" (see TEV), or to both. Some Christians had apparently decided to take up the lifestyle of traveling philosophers, like Paul and his companions. But although Paul and his companions had distinguished themselves from the "bad" \*Cynic philosophers (see comment on 1 Thess 2:1-12), some Thessalonians may have continued fully in the Cynic vein: unlike Paul, Cynics begged rather than worked; and with their denunciations of passersby they were certainly "meddlers."

3:13. "Doing good" (NASB, TEV) includes charity, as in Judaism; Paul does not want his readers to misinterpret his limitation of charity.

3:14-15. The \*synagogue community enforced different levels of discipline, which the *churches largely adopted (except for corporal punishment)*. Even under later rabbinic rules, which allowed less diversity of practice than was common in Paul's day, full excommunication involved treating the person as an infidel, bringing him under a curse (cf. 1 Tim 1:20; 1 Cor 5:5; Mt 18:15-20), but lesser bans that still treated a person as part of the religious community were practiced as well. The \*Essenes also had different levels of discipline.

3:16-18

## Conclusion

3:16. This verse and 3:18 are final "wish-prayers"; see comment on 2:16-17.

3:17-18. In law courts, lawyers often

had to argue that documents were forgeries (so \*Quintilian), and some commentators have compared 3:17 with 2:2 to propose that Paul here reinforces the suggestion that the Thessalonians check to ascertain which letters were genuine. But most letter writers used scribes and signed their names at the end, and Paul often follows this practice elsewhere in his letters (e.g., 1 Cor 16:21).

That he fears the work of forgers is thus possible but not certain.

# 1 TIMOTHY

## Introduction

Authorship. Among all Paul's letters, it is the authorship of the \*Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus) that is the most disputed, although they were widely attested as Pauline in the early church. The style is noticeably different from the usual style of Paul's earlier letters: a heavier use of traditional materials (sayings from prior Christian tradition, e.g., the "trustworthy statements" marked by 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim 2:1; Tit 3:8), various literary forms he rarely employs in his earlier letters (e.g., lists of qualifications) and so on. Although these differences alone would not necessitate different authors, they have led many good scholars to suggest either that Paul is not their author or (more often favored by conservative scholars) that he allowed a scribe or amanuensis considerable freedom in drafting the letter. (It is common knowledge that Paul, like most people, depended on scribes for much of his letter writing-Rom 16:22.) Some have compared the style of the Pastoral Epistles with that of Luke-Acts and concluded either that Luke was the author or that he was the scribe of these letters (cf. 2 Tim 4:11). Especially in 2 Timothy, where the nature of Paul's detention may not have permitted him the materials to write his own letters, an amanuensis (scribe) spending time with Paul, remembering Paul's words and transcribing them in his own terms would make sense. Nearly all the details of vocabulary and style have parallels in Paul's earlier letters; it is their cumulative effect that is different. Different authors could legitimately explain this effect, but so could the passage of time and different circumstances in Paul's life (as more conservative scholars often suggest).

\*Pseudepigraphic letters (letters falsely ascribed to a great teacher of the past) were a common literary device but were rarely written close to the author's lifetime. The many personal allusions in 2 Timothy provide a strong argument against the thesis that the Pastoral Epistles are later pseudepigraphic epistles or

early forgeries. If 1 Timothy and Titus are "official letters" (cf. comment on 1 Tim 1:2) meant to bolster their respective recipients' authority among their congregations, then the fact that they are more formal than 2 Timothy is understandable. Apart from the special literary forms in 1 Timothy and Titus, these letters may exhibit fewer persuasive *rhetorical devices than Paul's earlier argumentation to churches* because he is writing to his friend Timothy.

**Situation.** Various features sometimes used to argue lateness, such as church offices and the heresy addressed (some scholars read it as second-century *Gnosticism*), *generally fit as well or better in the circumstances of Paul's time (see comments on specific passages; the heresy need not be Gnostic)*. False teachers advocating asceticism (4:3) based on the \*law (1:7) are undermining the work of Paul and his companions in Ephesus (1:3). (Although Ephesus was in Asia Minor, it was culturally more Greek than Anatolian by this period; its particularly Greek culture is presupposed in the following treatment of the background.) Central to Paul's solution to this problem is the appointment of church leaders especially qualified to address the heresies spreading in the church. Paul employs the sorts of stereotypical language normally used to address such situations in his day (e.g., by philosophers against sophists or pseudophilosophers).

**Date.** On the premise of Pauline authorship, the Pastorals were written toward the end of his life, about A.D. 62-64. This would mean that Paul was released from his detention described in Acts 28:30-31 and completed the journeys presupposed in the \*Pastoral Epistles, as suggested also by early Christian tradition. Those who date these letters later than Paul must date them late enough to allow for the reuse of Paul's name pseudonymously, and many date them to the mid-second century (although the Muratorian Canon assumes them to be Pauline not long after that date).

**Commentaries.** Especially valuable is Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, NIBC (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988); see also J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, HNTC (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book

House, 1981). On 1 Timothy 2, see also Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992), pp. 101-32; 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and chapter 5 are addressed in chapter 7 of Craig S. Keener, ... *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), pp. 83-103. On the social location of the Pastorals, see also David C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles*, SBLDS 71 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1983).

1:1-2

## Introduction

1:1. Letters customarily began with the name of the author. Many gods were described as "saviors" in antiquity, but the \*Old Testament and Jewish literature reserved this title for the God of Israel (cf. Phil 3:20).

1:2. The next elements of a letter were the name(s) of the addressee(s) and the greeting (cf., e.g., Rom 1:7). Educated persons in antiquity often addressed a letter to a specific person, but intended for that letter to be published or to be an open letter to a group. Paul publicly supports Timothy's authority through this letter; it functions as an open "letter of recommendation" for him. (\*Patrons often sent letters of recommendation on behalf of their *clients*, or *political dependents*. Such letters, if meant to be used only once, would be sealed; Timothy's letter, however, could be publicly read in the house-church gatherings, reinforcing Timothy's apostolic authorization.) "True child" (NASB) might echo legal terminology for a legitimate heir.

1:3-11

## Scripture Twisters

1:3. Timothy stayed in Ephesus while Paul traveled northward through Troas (2 Tim 4:13) and across into Macedonia. Paul here reminds the readers (1 Tim 1:2) that he authorized Timothy to act on his authority.

1:4. *Plato and most other philosophers rejected or reinterpreted the "myths" that they believed misrepresented the gods, although some believed that myths could be used to illustrate truths.* Philo, \*Josephus and other Jews argued that their Scriptures contained no myths; but extrabiblical elaborations of biblical accounts were common, and Paul probably has them in view here (cf. Tit 1:14). "Genealo

gies" might refer to expansions of biblical genealogies, as in some Jewish works from this period, or perhaps false postbiblical attributions of ancestry. The phrase "myths and genealogies" had been used pejoratively from Plato on.

1:5. Greek literature also praises a "good conscience"; the \*Old Testament extols a "pure heart" (Ps 24:4; 73:1, 13).

1:6. Both Judaism and the philosophers condemned empty, worthless talk, including arguments about words and the verbal skills of wordy \*rhetoricians unconcerned with truth. Some groups of philosophers from Protagoras on emphasized verbal quibbling more than seeking truth, regarding the latter as inaccessible; but most philosophers criticized these agnostics. Many professional speakers also valued important speeches above subtle disputes over trivialities, although training in public speaking included extemporaneous speeches on randomly assigned topics.

1:7. Although segments of Palestinian Judaism had standards for accredited teachers of the \*law, there was nothing legally to keep anyone from claiming to be a teacher of the Bible, any more than there is in many Christian circles today. A perusal of the Gospels indicates that Jesus had conflicts even with those who were publicly recognized as teachers of the law.

1:8-9. Philosophers believed that wise people did not need laws, because their wise behavior itself modeled the moral truth on which laws were based. For Paul, this ideal was true for Christians; laws were necessary only to restrain those who were inclined to sin. Like many ancient authors, he includes a "vice list" to catalog the sorts of sins he means (1:9-10). Most of these were obvious as



sins to ancient readers: for instance, killers of fathers and mothers were considered the most evil of sinners and executed in horrible ways under Roman law (sewn into a bag with animals, including a snake, and drowned).

1:10. On "homosexuals" (NASB; "perverts"-NIV) see comment on 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. "Kidnappers" (NASB, TEV) were "slave traders" (NIV, NRSV; this was the purpose for which people were kidnapped-cf. Ex 21:16; Deut 24:7); Paul's remark directly assaults the vicious slave trade of his day. Many kidnappers sought children to make them male and female slave prostitutes. Perjury was a special form of lying that involved the violation of a divine oath. \*Stoics and others described reasonable teaching as "sound" (healthy, wholesome).

1:11. Only the "faithful" (1:12) were to be entrusted with money, tasks as messengers and so forth.

1:12-17

### A Blasphemer's Conversion

Having condemned the false teachers (1:4-11), Paul nevertheless does not want to portray them as beyond hope; although blasphemers were to be excluded from \*church fellowship (1:20), Paul himself had been a blasphemer but was converted.

1:12. Paul's letters to churches usually open with a thanksgiving for his readers (so also 2 Tim 1:3); these were common in ancient letters. Paul similarly praises God here (concluding in 1:17). This is not, however, Paul's regular epistolary thanksgiving, which would have normally occurred after the introduction (1:1-2). Perhaps he sticks mainly to official business because this is an official letter meant to authorize Timothy.

1:13-15. Jewish texts condemn blasphemers to hell (\*Gehenna). Although ignorance never absolved one of guilt

in Judaism, it did decrease one's guilt; in Jewish texts, this was even true of the *Gentiles, who had some, but only very limited, knowledge about God. 1:16. Both Jewish and GrecoRoman teachers used examples to make their points. Sometimes they used themselves as examples, and occasionally (though rarely) described negative aspects of their past (e.g., Rabbi Akiba on his conversion to love of the \*law; many philosophers despised their past before their conversion to philosophy).*

1:17. In praising a deity, Greeks and sometimes Jews would list his or her titles and attributes. Jewish texts unanimously affirm everything Paul says about God in this verse; that God was the "only" God was the view of Judaism and a small portion of GrecoRoman society. Most people believed in all gods equally, so the Jewish and Christian view could sound intolerant to outsiders. "Amen" concluded prayers and praises in the \*synagogues, indicating the assent of the other hearers. In context (1:16), this description might refer to Jesus, but this is not clear.

1:18-20

### Removing a Blasphemer

1:18. Philosophers and moralists used battle imagery to describe their labor on behalf of truth. Claims of \*prophecies were a rare (and sometimes marginalized) phenomenon in Judaism but were apparently common in early Christianity; prophecies to Timothy at his ordination (4:14) would thus be very meaningful.

1:19. Philosophers also used the image of shipwrecks; Christians needed to be good spiritual sailors as well as good soldiers (1:18).

1:20. Official \*synagogue excommunication seems to have included a curse or execration against the person being banned from the community; it was meant to be equivalent to capital punishment under the *Old Testament law. By handing these blasphemers over to Satan*, Paul is simply acknowledging the sphere they had already chosen to enter (5:15). Paul's purpose here is restorative, however,

"so that they might be taught not to blaspheme" (NASB), as God had taught Paul (1:13). See comment on 1 Corinthians 5:5. On Hymenaeus's views (Hymenaeus is not a common name, so it is no doubt the same one), see comment on 2 Timothy 2:17-18.

2:1-7

### Public Prayers for All

2:1-4. The Romans permitted subject peoples to worship their own gods, but they had to show their loyalty to Rome by also worshiping the goddess Roma and the spirit of the emperor. Because Jewish people worshiped one God to the exclusion of all others, Rome allowed them to pray and sacrifice for the emperor's health without praying and sacrificing to him. Prayers were offered for him regularly in the *synagogues, showing the loyalty of these Jewish institutions to the Roman state. When the Zealots decided to throw off the Roman yoke "for God,"* however, they abolished the sacrifices in the temple. This act in A.D. 66 constituted a virtual declaration of war against Rome, several years after Paul wrote this letter. Christian public prayers for the emperor and provincial and local officials showed Christians as good citizens of the society in which they lived (Jer 29:7). Paul's motive is more than keeping peace (1 Tim 2:2); it is also to proclaim the \*gospel (2:3-4).

2:5-7. Both \*Christ's mission and Paul's mission testified to God's purpose, his wish to save all. In Judaism, wisdom, the \*law or, in a lesser sense, Moses was thought to have mediated

divine revelation, but it was ultimately effective only for Israel, not for the \*Gentiles. Most Gentiles believed in many mediators of revelation, just as they believed in many gods.

2:8-15

### Proper Demeanor for Public Worship

Paul addresses women (2:9-15) in considerably more detail than men here, apparently because women are erring more severely in this congregation. Their culturally inappropriate behavior can bring reproach against the \*gospel (something Christians could ill afford-5:14).

2:8. Apparently men were bringing their dissensions (1:6) into public worship; although "anger and disputing" (NIV) were bad in general, Paul addresses the men here because they were the ones engaged in these sins. Hands were normally lifted or outstretched for both praise and supplication in the \*Old Testament, Judaism, the ancient Near East and the GrecoRoman world. \*Diaspora Jews usually washed their hands before prayer, so "pure [or holy] hands" became a natural image for genuine worship (cf. also Ps 24:4).

2:9. Whereas many men in the Christian community were quarreling (2:8), many women appear to have been violating a different matter of propriety in public prayer: seeking to turn others' heads. Most Jewish teachers allowed wives to adorn themselves for their husbands, but both Jewish and GrecoRoman moralists ridiculed women who decked themselves out to turn other men's eyes. Jewish writings warn especially of the sexual temptation involved in such adornments; GrecoRoman writers also condemn wealthy women who show off their costly array. Hair was sometimes braided with gold, which Paul might have in view here; men were especially attracted by women's decorated hair. Like most other writers who condemned such gaudiness, Paul should be understood as attacking excess, not as ruling against all adornment.

2:10. GrecoRoman moralists often stressed that it was inward adornment rather than outward adornment that would please a good husband; Paul concurs. See also 1 Peter 3:3-4.

2:11. The proper way for any novice to learn was submissively and "quietly" (a closely related Greek term appears in 2:2 for all believers). Women were less likely to be literate than men, were trained in philosophy far less often than men, were trained in \*rhetoric almost never, and in Judaism were far less likely to be

educated in the law. *Given the bias against instructing women in the law, it is Paul's advocacy of their learning the law, not his recognition that they started as novices and so had to learn quietly, that was radical and countercultural. (In the second century, Beruriah, wife of Rabbi Meir, was instructed in the law, but she was a rare exception. Women could hear expositions at the synagogues and did sometimes attend rabbinic lectures, but the vast majority of rabbis would never accept them as disciples, and Hellenistically oriented Jews like Josephus and Philo were even more biased against them than the rabbis were. There is evidence for a few women filling higher roles in some Diaspora synagogues, in local cultures where women had higher social positions, but the same evidence shows that even there prominent women in synagogues were the rare exception rather than the rule.)*

2:12. Given women's lack of training in the Scriptures (see comment on 2:11), the heresy spreading in the

Ephesian \*churches through ignorant teachers (1:4-7), and the false teachers' exploitation of these women's lack of knowledge to spread their errors (5:13; 2 Tim 3:6), Paul's prohibition here makes good sense. His short-range solution is that these women should not teach; his long-range solution is "let them learn" (2:11). The situation might be different after the women had been instructed (2:11; cf. Rom 16:1-4, 7; Phil 4:2-3).

2:13. Paul argues for women's subordination in pastoral roles on the basis of the order of creation, the same way he argued for women wearing head coverings (1 Cor 11:7-12). Some writers take his argument here as universal, for all circumstances, even though that is not the most natural reading of the Genesis text to which he alludes (Gen 2:18 in Hebrew suggests a complementary partner). Other writers take Paul's statement here only as an ad hoc comparison (see comment on 2:14), as most writers take his same argument for head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11.

2:14. Paul refers to the account of Eve's fall as it is told in Genesis 3, although

some later Jewish stories increased Eve's guilt or deception considerably beyond that account. That he compares the unlearned women of the Ephesian \*church with Eve is clear; his earlier letters also compare the whole church of Corinth, both men and women, with Eve (2 Cor 11:3), the Corinthian church with Israel (1 Cor 10:1-22) and his opponents in Galatia with Ishmael (Gal 4:24-25). That he would actually apply this illustration to all women in all times, as some have thought, is less likely (if he did, he would be implying that all women are more easily deceived than men, and his illustration in 2 Cor 11:3 would lose its force; moreover, the local false teachers themselves were men 1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17).

2:15. Some scholars have argued that "saved" is meant theologically: Christian women will have *eternal life if they live godly lives, which includes following cultural propriety for the sake of the gospel's witness*. Paul probably means "saved" or "delivered" in a different sense, however-the sense it was usually given when related to childbearing. Women normally prayed to particular gods to "save" them, which meant bringing them safely through childbirth. (The curse on Eve came to be associated with death in childbirth in some parts of Judaism, so Paul might be qualifying his comparison in 2:13-14. In this case, he would be noting that Christian women are not daughters of Eve in every sense, thus implying that his illustration in 2:13-14 should not be pressed beyond the service for which he employed it.)

3:1-7

### Qualifications for Overseers

Lists of qualifications for offices appear in both Jewish and *Gentile sources*; *lists of virtues appropriate to such offices are even more common*. These lists were applied both to political or military offices and religious ones (e.g., judges in Jewish sources). Exceptions were not stated in general lists of qualifications but might be made in extenuating circumstances. The term translated "overseer" (NIV, NASB) or "bishop" (KJV, NRSV) was elsewhere in use in the ancient

*world for leaders, and Paul uses it synonymously with "elders" (Tit 1:5, 7), a leadership title used in synagogues.*

3:1. Many moralists urged any worthy men to become statesmen. Certain officials in the Greek world, in both cities and associations, were naturally called "overseers." The \*Dead

Sea Scrolls also use the Hebrew equivalent of the term for an office of leadership at \*Qumran; here it is probably equivalent to the synagogue leaders responsible for the synagogue service. This office is identified with that of elders in the \*Pastoral Epistles (Tit 1:5, 7), a situation that had changed by the early second century (Ignatius Letter to the Trallians 3) but that still obtained in Paul's day (Phil 1:1; cf. Acts 20:17, 28).

3:2-3. The office of overseer was open to all, but some qualifications needed to be observed, especially in view of the heresy in Ephesus. The qualification of being "above reproach" frames the other qualifications (3:2, 7); this was an ancient way of emphasizing that the qualifications focused on this issue. Political leaders were also expected to be "above reproach," but a persecuted minority sect needed to protect itself against public slander even more than politicians did.

Polygamy was not practiced in the Roman world outside Palestine, though illegal bigamy and certainly adultery were. "Husband of one wife" no doubt means a faithful husband and presupposes marriage; such a man would be helpful in standing against the false teachers who opposed marriage (4:3). (The injunction that married leaders be used would not apply to all situations; cf. comment on 1 Cor 7:8.) "Husband of one wife" refers to one's current marital status and behavior; validly divorced people who remarried were considered married to one spouse, the second one, not to two spouses.

"Hospitality" referred literally to taking in trustworthy travelers as guests. Such hospitality was a universal virtue, but because inns in antiquity usually

functioned also as brothels, Jewish people in the \*Diaspora were especially willing to take in fellow Jewish travelers, as long as the travelers bore letters of recommendation certifying their trustworthiness.

3:4-5. Politicians were often evaluated by how well their children obeyed them; it had long been accepted that the family was a microcosm of society and that a leader first needed to demonstrate his leadership skills in the home. Men in Paul's day exercised a great deal of authority over their wives and children. That children's behavior reflected on their parents was a commonplace of ancient wisdom (for society's view, see also the public shame reflected in Lev 21:9; Prov 19:13; 27:11; but contrast Ezek 18:9-20 for God's view when normal means of discipline failed). This factor may have been especially important for leaders of \*churches meeting in their own homes; but again, it is based on a premise of patriarchal ancient culture (where properly disciplined children usually obeyed) not directly, completely applicable to all societies.

3:6-7. Ancient leadership ideology required leaders to be tested in lower offices, to demonstrate their skills before being promoted; the church in Ephesus had existed for over a decade, hence the Ephesians could insist on more seasoned leaders than some other churches could (the requirement is missing in Titus). The ever-present danger of false accusation required leaders to do everything in their power to avoid scandal; a solid reputation was helpful for church leaders, as it was for public officials.

3:8-13

### Qualifications for Deacons

Lists of qualifications were common in antiquity; see the introduction to 3:1-7.

3:8. `New Testament texts use the term translated "deacon" in several ways. It usually means a servant-minister, generally a minister of the word,

like Paul. But sometimes it is an office distinguished from "overseers" (Phil 1:1)



and is probably parallel to the office of the chazan in the \*synagogue. This synagogue attendant was responsible for the synagogue building and would normally have been the owner of the home in which a house synagogue met. Unlike elders (3:2), this sort of "deacon" may have fulfilled an administrative function without much public teaching.

3:9. "Keeping hold of the deep truths of the faith" (NIV) is a critical qualification given the prevalence of heresy in the Ephesian \*church (1:3-7).

3:10. A common feature of ancient political life was that leaders (or new members of groups) were often tested in lower offices before being promoted to higher ones; see comment on 3:6-7. On being "beyond reproach" (NASB) see comment on 3:2.

3:11. Scholars debate whether "women" here refers to deaconesses or to male deacons' wives, although even the Roman government was aware of Christian deaconesses (female deacons) by A.D. 112. Thus Paul either requires upright behavior on the part of \*church officials' wives (in ancient society, men were often ridiculed for their wives' behavior) or explains some different requirements for women deacons. Gossip was especially associated with and probably more often practiced by women than by men in the ancient world (cf. 5:13).

3:12-13. On "husband of one wife" see comment on 3:2-3; on "managers of their children" (NASB) see comment on 3:4-5.

3:14-16

### Purpose of Church Administration

3:14-15. The \*church, which met in homes, was modeled on the household, just as pagan political theorists compared the household to society in general (3:4-5). Paul's prior admonitions to Timothy, especially in 3:1-13, thus serve a function analogous to the household codes of many ancient writers: providing a specific framework of wisdom for administering the family unit and society. "Pillars"

were used to uphold structures, and support for the truth was needed given its challenge by false teachers (1:3-7).

3:16. Here Paul gives the standard of faith his readers were to uphold in the form of a creed or hymn (which Timothy probably already knows). If "taken up in glory" refers to Jesus' return (cf. Dan 7:13-14) rather than to his ascension, then the lines are in chronological order; but not all scholars think this proposal likely. "Justified" or "vindicated" in the \*Spirit refers to the \*resurrection, God's acquittal after the human judicial condemnation of the cross.

4:1-5

#### Errors of the Heretics

4:1. Ancient Judaism associated the \*Spirit especially with *prophecy (speaking under divine inspiration)*, and Paul here either *prophecies or reports an earlier prophecy*. ("*The Spirit says*" is equivalent to the Old Testament formula "Thus says the Lord.") As a prophet himself, Paul refutes false or errant prophets (cf. 1 Cor 14:37).

Some Jewish groups (including the *Qumran community*) *predicted widespread apostasy in the end time, influenced by evil spirits*. "*Later times*" probably refers to the "*last days*," which by the Old Testament definition were normally understood as inaugurated by Israel's repentance and deliverance (e.g., Is 2:1; but cf. Dan 2:28; 10:14); in the *New Testament these days have begun because the Messiah has already come*.

4:2. The "branding iron" was especially used on livestock; the "searing" may thus mean that the consciences of these apostates have become the property of evil spirits.

4:3. *Asceticism was on the rise in GrecoRoman paganism, and although most teachers (both Jewish and Gentile) advocated marriage, the doctrine of celibacy was becoming more popular (especially among Gentiles, but some Essenes also*

seem to have practiced it). "Abstaining from foods" probably refers to Jewish food laws (see comment on Rom 14:1-4).

4:4-5. Jewish people always praised God before their meal; the normal blessing included praise for the God who "created" the fruit of the vine. Another blessing, possibly standardized in the early second century, was used after meals and included the statement "God is good and does good." This Jewish custom was an appropriate way to show gratitude to God for his provisions. The food was in a sense sanctified by the word of God (Gen 1:30-31) as well as by such prayer; there was thus no need to abstain from it.

4:6-16

### The Importance of Sound Teaching

4:6-11. Paul alludes to the sort of physical training undertaken especially by athletes and others in the Greek gymnasia, where men stripped naked for exercises (v. 7). This image would have been familiar to his Greek readers, because the gymnasium was the center of civic life in \*Hellenized towns. The image of physical training was extremely common in the illustrations of GrecoRoman moralists and philosophers. Like them, Paul speaks of moral, intellectual and spiritual discipline rather than physical exercise, although he is not opposed to the latter. "Nourished" (KJV, NASB, NRSV) or "brought up" (NIV) in verse 6 may anticipate this image in verses 7-8.

Philosophers commonly demeaned the tales of old women as fit only for children, and they mocked irrational views as those suited only to old women. This perspective also presupposes the illiteracy of most older women in antiquity (even those who had learned to read in youth would usually have had little subsequent practice at it). Paul takes up the current figure of speech (v. 7; but cf. 5:2).

Jewish teachers especially praised study of the \*law, which was profitable "both in this world and in the world to come." Paul emphasizes the same point

about spiritual discipline (v. 8).

4:12. "Elders" were highly respected in Greek gymnasia and exercised a ruling function in *synagogues* and churches, as they had in communities in the *Old Testament*. *Because Timothy joined Paul before A.D. 50 (Acts 16:1-3; men entered adulthood around puberty, so Timothy may have been in his midteens) and Paul is writing in the early sixties, Timothy is at least in his mid-twenties and could well be in his early or mid-thirties; this term for "youth" (KJV) could apply up to the age of forty, although it usually applied especially to someone under twenty-nine. But those who were not elders were often considered inappropriate for leadership positions (cf. 1 Sam 17:33), and many offices even in Judaism became available only at age forty. Most stories about the appointment of young men were made up later to extol prodigies (postbiblical stories about Daniel, Solomon or several rabbis); Timothy's appointment was thus a rare privilege in his culture.*

But even though Timothy is

younger than the elders he is advising, he is to take the role of the mature leader and act as an example for the community. Teachers normally asked \*disciples to imitate them, and in so doing took the role of father figures.

4:13. As in the \*synagogue service (both in Palestine and in the *Diaspora*), *public reading of Scripture was central to the service; the reading from the Law was probably generally accompanied by one from the Prophets. The reading was then expounded (exhortation and teaching) by means of a homily on the text that had been read. (This Jewish practice [cf. Neh 8:8] would be intelligible in a GrecoRoman context; in GrecoRoman schools, children translated texts from classical Greek into vernacular Greek, then expounded them in response to questions and answers.) By the mid-second century apostolic writings (later officially recognized as the New Testament) were being read alongside the Old Testament in church services. "Until I come" authorizes Timothy: his exposition of Scripture would function as the equivalent of Paul's apostolic presence.*

4:14. Oracular utterances had long been used to attest the divine rights of kings and other officials, and Paul's mentioning of \*prophecies about Timothy's gift (probably teaching-4:13) at his ordination could help quiet the opposition (see comment on 1:18). The approval of the "presbytery" (KJV, NASB) or "body of elders" (NIV) also could silence criticisms about his youth (4:12). Mature Jewish teachers ordained other Jewish teachers through laying hands on them; this practice served as official accreditation.

4:15-16. "Progress" (v. 15) was the standard philosophical way to describe a \*disciple's advancement in moral philosophy and was naturally applied to advancement in Jewish (Gal 1:14) and Christian (Phil 1:25) truth as well. It is clear that Timothy's attention to his teaching is critical: his teaching would affect the salvation of his hearers (v. 16; cf. 2 Tim 3:15).

5:1-2

### Honoring Elders

Given the preceding context (4:14), "older man" here may refer specifically to an "elder" (the same Greek word); the use of kinship terms for officers in the church accords with the description of God's household in terms of a family (3:4-5, 15). In this case, 5:3-16 refers to female elders, a special office of older widows devoted to prayer, just as 5:17-25 applies to male elders. Interestingly, prominent individuals in Diaspora *synagogues were often called "fathers" or "mothers" of synagogues. It is also possible that 5:1-2 is a more general statement, of which widows and elders as church leaders represent specialized examples. In either case, Timothy must address those older than he is (4:12).*

Respecting elders was a standard feature of ancient wisdom and social custom, just as respecting one's parents was; treating elders as if they were one's parents, and peers as one's brothers or sisters, was also considered praiseworthy behavior.

Developing the admonitions of Proverbs, Judaism heavily emphasized expressing concern for one's neighbor by offering and accepting correction (see

both *rabbis and Dead Sea Scrolls*). But it also emphasized the necessity of private as opposed to public rebuke unless all attempts at private settlement failed.

5:3-16

### Honoring True Widows

Here Paul may refer to widows in general, but he probably refers to an order of widows who served the \*church, as in second-century Christianity. (Commentators disagree on this point.)

We should keep in mind that Paul addresses the values of ancient society for the sake of the church's witness (5:7, 14; 6:1), not implying that all societies should share those values (which would, for example, look down on older women who had never married-5:10).

5:3. Honoring elders was important; "honor" here includes financial support (5:4, 16-18). By "widows indeed" (KJV, NASB) or "real widows" Paul means not simply those bereaved of husband but those both committed to the church's ministry of prayer (5:5) and experiencing the stereotypical Old Testament plight of widows: destitution (5:4).

5:4. Adult children or other close relatives were expected to care for destitute widows, who had no opportunity to earn wages in ancient society. It was believed that one owed this care to one's parents for their support during youth; Paul agrees. Judaism even understood this support as part of the commandment to honor one's parents (see comment on Mk 7:9-13). (Under Roman law, a father could discard a newborn child; the child was not regarded as a person and member of the household until the father agreed to raise and support the child. This way of thinking no doubt contributed to children's recognition of responsibility to parents. Early Jews and Christians, however, unanimously opposed abortion, infanticide and throwing out babies, seeing personhood as a

gift of God, not of parents.) Caring for aged parents was a matter not only of custom but of law, and was common even in Western society until recent times.

5:5. The Jewish ideal for older widows, who received support from family or distributors of charity but whose only contribution to society was prayer (no small contribution), was that they be women of prayer (cf. Lk 2:37). (This is probably unrelated to the Roman image of Vestal Virgins' prayers supporting Rome, although that image shows the ease with which the idea could have been grasped even in pagan culture.)

5:6. Here Paul probably refers to some sort of sexual immorality, perhaps becoming a mistress or indulging in lust (once remarried-5:11-a woman would not be considered a widow).

5:7. The GrecoRoman world as a whole was happy to find cause for scandals in minority and foreign religions, and libeled especially any sexual irregularities. Being "above reproach" (NASB, NRSV; also in 5:14; see comment on 3:2) is crucial for the spread of the \*gospel (6:1). Although conflicting ideals about widows' remarriage existed in antiquity (see comment on 5:9, 14), all would view negatively a Christian's committing immorality or violating a vow of celibacy (cf. comment on 5:11-12).

5:8. Even pagans believed in supporting destitute widows who were relatives; it was believed that one owed support to one's aged parents (cf. comment on 5:4).

5:9. The expression "put on the list" was often used of official registrations (e.g., for troops). "Sixty" was a Jewish figure for the beginning of old age (see comment on Lk 1:7). Some scholars think that the "wife of one man" may allude to the ancient ideal of remaining faithful to one's former husband after death by not remarrying; but the more popular ideal in this period was remarrying quickly (cf. 1 Tim 5:14). Another use of a related term is more likely: many husbands praised wives who had

been "one-man wives," meaning faithful and good wives. In view of 3:2, 12 (there was no ancient ideal that husbands not remarry), and 5:14, Paul must simply mean "faithful and good wives."

5:10. Ancient writers (especially Aristophanes; see comment on 4:7) sometimes ridiculed older women, though they sometimes respected them (see comment on 5:2). Paul's qualifications here are to ensure that those "on the roll" are above reproach; the popular ideal standards for women of any age included rearing or having reared children (see comment on 5:14). Providing water for washing of feet was a sign of hospitality in antiquity; the actual acts of washing someone's feet indicated the posture of a servant or a subordinate (cf. 1 Sam 25:41 and comment on Jn 13:3-8).

5:11-12. *Pharisees became upset with those who reneged on their Pharisaic vows, and the* Essenes were even more angered by those leaving their way of life; the importance that such sects attached to committed membership was reflected in the testing of candidates before their admission into full fellowship. Public departure from a commitment to the order of widows could bring about scandal; the "condemnation" (NASB, NRSV) is that of outsiders, as in 3:6-7.

5:13. Here Paul's language reflects a popular perception of uneducated women's behavior (cf. also 3:11); because of inadequate education (which Paul seeks to remedy in 2:11) and cultural expectations, idle gossip commonly characterized women's daily lives. Jewish and GrecoRoman texts alike condemn gossiping or babbling women, including widows. The \*Essenes were so sensitive about their reputation that an Essene who slandered their community would be excluded from fellowship for a year.

5:14. Since the time of Augustus over half a century before, the rapid remarriage of widows became a Roman social ideal; it was also the ideal maintained by Jewish teachers.

The popular standards for a young woman, stressed in writings of philosophers



and moralists, were chastity, modesty, quietness, submission and obedience to her husband, and devotion to domestic duties, including the rearing of young children. In contrast to the ideal wife of Proverbs 31, the ideal wife of Greek society was socially retiring and restricted herself mainly to the domestic sphere, the only place where she had authority. "Keep house" (NASB) is better translated "manage their homes" (NIV); although subordinate to her husband, the Greek wife otherwise "ruled" her home. Paul here upholds some societal values for the sake of the gospel's witness.

5:15. "Turning aside" (KJV, NASB) is used in the \*Dead Sea Scrolls for apostasy; see comment on 1:20.

5:16. Some women were well-to-do enough to become *patrons*; *they had social dependents, which could include blood relatives, slaves, freedpersons or others willing to be her clients. By requiring well-endowed Christians to fulfill their responsibilities to family members, Paul hopes to stretch the church budget to help those who really had no other means of support.*

5:17-25

Treating Church Elders Respectfully

5:17. "Honor" sometimes included payment, and this is the case here (5:18). "Double pay" (so TEV here) was sometimes given to worthy soldiers and is probably in view here. Because elders who did not have large property holdings would otherwise be at least partly dependent on working children,

Paul advocates supporting them well (this support does not imply making them wealthy, of course).

5:18. Paul argues his case both from the \*Old Testament (Deut 25:4) and from the sayings of Jesus (cf. Lk 10:7). Citations from authoritative or classical texts were used to prove one's point not only in Jewish but also in other GrecoRoman literature.

5:19. Greek culture also recognized the value of witnesses for legal decisions, but the testimony of two or three was one of the most crucial requirements of Jewish law (based on Deut 17:6; 19:15). For Paul, it is the other side of being "above reproach" (3:2): accusations must be properly examined and not uncritically accepted.

5:20. Judaism strongly emphasized reproof and correction; public reproof was to be a final resort only if private attempts had failed (see comment on 5:1-2).

5:21. Calling witnesses to a charge as Paul does here made it far more authoritative; Paul chooses the ultimate witnesses for such a charge. The angels are "*\*elect*" or "*chosen*" (NASB) as opposed to fallen angels. The ancient world-  
especially the Old Testament and Judaism (which did not automatically favor upper classes in disputes, as Roman law did)-stressed that judges must be fair.

5:22. Jewish teachers would "*lay their hands*" on their *disciples* to "*ordain*" them (see comment on 4:14), and that is what Paul has in view here: *ordaining an elder who had not first been tested (see comment on 3:10) made one responsible for his subsequent exposure if he turned out to be ungodly. Keeping oneself "pure" (literally) "from sin" was a Stoic virtue as well as a Jewish one.*

5:23. Most people drank wine with their meals (albeit about two parts water to one part wine, and not distilled to a higher than natural degree of fermentation). Timothy has been abstaining (apart from, we may assume, the Lord's Supper), perhaps to avoid the criticism of those influenced by the false teachers (4:3; some ascetics abstained from wine); Paul tells him to go back to using it. Wine was often helpful in settling stomachs and preventing dysentery (it disinfected water).

5:24-25. The sins that were secret or in the heart made evaluation (5:22) difficult, as many ancient writers acknowledged.

6:1-2

## Advice to Slaves

In keeping with exhortations dealing with households (3:15), Paul naturally includes advice to slaves. This advice was important because a religion that the Romans thought might incite slave discontent would immediately be labeled subversive and subjected to outright persecution; Paul wants the slaves who are Christian, as well as free Christians, to engage in a culturally relevant and intelligent witness. When Paul says that masters "benefit" from their slaves (v. 2), he employs a term especially used of wealthy benefactors who bestowed gifts on social inferiors. Thus Paul, like the philosopher \*Seneca, possibly portrays the slaves as persons free in God's sight who can choose to bestow a gift on their masters by serving them freely.

6:3-10

### The Heresy of Materialism

The heretics were using the \*gospel to get rich; Paul says that food and clothing should be enough for a Christian (6:8), who should seek no more than his or her basic needs (cf. Mt 6:25). This greed was one reason that Paul had to prohibit materialistic persons

from \*church office explicitly (3:3, 8). Some pagan philosophers also used their philosophy for personal gain, and this behavior drew the hostility and criticism of outsiders.

6:3. "Sound" means "healthy"; Greek and Roman writers often used medical imagery to describe the spiritual state of people's souls or beliefs. Perhaps Paul refers here to Jesus' teachings (cf. Mt 6:19-34).

6:4. Pseudointellectuals liked to quibble about detailed nuances of words rather than deal with crucial issues; see comment on 1:6.

6:5. Jewish people often recognized wealth as a sign of God's blessing, and

many teachers taught that those who served God would become more prosperous. This teaching was, however, meant as a general principle, as in Proverbs: one who works harder earns more. But these teachers also said that wealth could be used for good or evil, and many warned of the dangers of wealth, or even linked piety to poverty. A similar ambiguity is found among GrecoRoman philosophers: many said that wealth was acceptable if put to good use, but others (most obviously the \*Cynics) thought that it should be rejected altogether as burdensome. The philosophers did not, however, normally see wealth as a reward for doing good. It is not clear whether Paul's opponents preach that godliness is a means of gain or simply use religion as a means of gain.

6:6. Moralists sometimes used "gain" figuratively in a contrast to material wealth. Judaism often viewed present wealth as paltry compared with the true wealth of the world to come, which really mattered. One of the most common doctrines of philosophers and those influenced by them was contentment; people should be self-sufficient, recognizing that they need nothing other than what Nature has given them.

6:7. Here Paul cites a moral commonplace, phrased similarly by *Cicero*; *it is also attested in the Old Testament (Job 1:21)*, Diaspora Jewish literature and other GrecoRoman writers.

6:8. Ancient literature usually recognized "food and clothing" as the basic needs, which even \*Cynics and the poorest of peasants required (Cynics and most peasants had only one cloak each). On "contentment" see comment on 6:6 and Philippians 4:11.

6:9. Middle-class North Americans understand "rich" much differently from the way Paul's first readers would have; in the widespread poverty of the ancient Mediterranean, most people would have viewed the lifestyle of middle-class North Americans as "rich." Like many writers of his day, Paul addresses those seeking to accumulate wealth (cf. Prov 28:20) rather than those who had already

become wealthy through inheritance or industry (6:17).

6:10. Paul cites here a widely used ancient proverb about loving money being the source of various evils. The idea was even more common than the saying, but the saying itself circulated among philosophers and those who respected them.

6:11-16

### Fleeing the Evil Lifestyle

In contrast to the greedy preachers (6:3-10), Timothy is to seek righteousness.

6:11. Moralists often exhorted readers to "flee" from vices. Ancient Hittites used the expression "man of God" to describe religious figures, and the \*Old Testament used it for men commissioned by God to function as his spokespersons. Its rare occurrences in subsequent Jewish literature are prob

ably dependent on the Old Testament usage, as is Paul's use here.

6:12. GrecoRoman moralists often described moral struggles in terms of warfare, as did Jewish texts influenced by them (e.g., \*4 Maccabees, where it refers to martyrdom). The image in the Greek here is not that of a war, however, but of another image the moralists equally exploited in a figurative manner: the wrestling match or athletic contest.

6:13. A charge with gods as witnesses was considered especially binding.

6:14. "Without stain or reproach" (NASB) may allude to the requirements for pure sacrifices to God as unblemished (e.g., Lev 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6; 4:3, 23, 32) or to "undamaged" merchandise and so forth; it was a natural image for virtual perfection. On "without reproach" see comment on 3:2. "Appearing" was sometimes used in Greek religion for manifestations of gods, but it would be a natural Jewish description in Greek for the revelation of God at the end time.

6:15. Jewish literature repeatedly described God as king. Rulers who claimed to be supreme kings, such as the Babylonian or the Parthian king, called themselves "king of kings and lord of lords." Greek writers like Dio Chrysostom occasionally applied the title to Zeus; Judaism quite often applied it to God, and Christians applied it to Jesus (cf. Rev 19:16).

6:16. "The Immortal" was a common title for God in \*Hellenistic Judaism (borrowed from the Greek term for their own gods, which Jews and Christians recognized as an inappropriate epithet for them; thus Paul adds "who alone"). Jewish texts often mentioned the glory of light around God's throne; kings' great authority made them unapproachable for common people. The \*Old Testament declared that no one could see God's full glory and live (Ex 33:20), and later Judaism amplified this recognition (although some Jewish mystics, expanding the visions of the throne in Ezek 1 and Is 6, claimed to have penetrated the splendor around the throne and seen something of God).

6:17-19

#### Instructions for Those Who Are Rich

In 6:3-10 Paul condemned those who were seeking wealth, but in 6:17-19 he addresses those who are already wealthy. For Paul, wealth and property are not sinful in themselves, provided that one is not seeking them. Wealth can be used for good or for evil, for selfish or for beneficent causes; Paul says that Christians must use it for good.

6:17-18. The very wealthy usually derived their income from landowning; they rented out the land to tenant farmers or residents, or derived profits from crops grown on the land. A socially inferior but nonetheless wealthy class of merchants also arose, especially of ship owners. Wealth could be gotten by a variety of means, not all of them immoral.

The issue was not whether one had wealth but whether one used it for oneself or for others. This was the

usual view in Judaism, which stressed charity, and a view held by many philosophers. Paul does not reject the world, as the \*Cynics or (in the most extreme sense) later \*Gnostics did; with Judaism, he affirms that creation itself is good (4:4-5). But he also recognizes that material wealth is transitory. Still more important, people matter more than possessions, and in a world of unending human need, possessions were ultimately worthless compared with more important things one could do with one's resources.

6:119. Jewish texts sometimes spoke of storing up treasures in heaven; see comment on Matthew 6:20-21.

6:20-21

#### Final Exhortation

"Entrusted" is the language of keeping a deposit; those with whom money was deposited were under sacred obligation to keep it secure or increase it, and this principle applied also to teaching (to which the image was extended by other ancient writers as well). Some scholars have seen the "false knowledge" here as a reference to \*Gnosticism (which could indicate a date for the \*Pastoral Epistles later than Paul), but this interpretation is unnecessary; many philosophers made claims to "knowledge," which other philosophers considered false.

# 2 TIMOTHY

## Introduction

Authorship, Commentaries. See the introduction to 1 Timothy. Of the three *Pastoral Epistles* (whose authorship is often disputed), 2 Timothy is the most difficult to dispute, because of the abundance of personal notes. Pseudepigraphic letters could also contain personal notes (e.g., Diogenes' letter to Rhesus), but they rarely had many, whereas 2 Timothy is full of them. Pseudepigraphers had little reason to include these details.

Situation. For the general situation of persecution in Rome, see the introduction to 1 Peter. Assuming Pauline authorship, Paul writes 2 Timothy while imprisoned in Rome, awaiting probable execution; he wants Timothy to join him before it is too late (4:21). Paul was probably released after his imprisonment in Acts 28 (see comment on Acts 28:30) and undertook the missions presupposed in 2 Timothy; then he was rearrested, this time during Nero's massive repression of Christians. He was most likely beheaded under Nero in A.D. 64.

Paul's opponents have spread in the province of Asia, and the situation has become much worse since Paul wrote 1 Timothy (2 Tim 1:15). Paul could be discouraged; like Jeremiah in the \*Old Testament, his life is to end while God's people are turned away from him, and he will not live to see the fruit of his ministry. His consolation, however, is that he has been faithful to God (4:7-8), and he exhorts Timothy to follow in his paths no matter what the cost. (That the letter was preserved almost certainly indicates that Timothy did persevere.) The letter is dominated by the themes of persecution from outside the church and false teaching within, and Paul's final exhortation to a young minister is to focus on the Scriptures and the sound teaching to be found in them.

Genre. In many ways, Paul's final letter resembles the letters of moral



exhortation written by philosophers to their `disciples. But as a letter sent before his death, it also resembles Jewish tracts called "testaments," in which a dying leader imparted his final wisdom to his sons or followers, wisdom also of value to subsequent readers. Although most testaments were pseudepigraphic and Paul may have written this letter only for Timothy, the similar situation envisioned gives 2 Timothy the force of a testament: Paul's ultimate wisdom for young ministers.

1:1-7

### Introduction and Thanksgiving

1:1-2. Paul modifies the normal opening of letters (author, to addressees, greetings-a word related to "\*grace") in his characteristically Christian way. Both *rabbis and philosophers could call their* disciples "sons."

1:3. Ancient letters frequently included thanksgivings to God or gods on behalf of the addressee, who was often praised in the thanksgiving. "Unceasingly" or "constantly" probably means in Paul's regular times of prayer. Many Palestinian Jews prayed during the morning and afternoon offerings in the temple; they also said special blessings on rising in the morning and going to bed at night. Palestinian Jews reckoned days from sundown to sundown, so "night and day" is not an unnatural sequence. (One should not read too much into Paul's sequence, of course; the same sequence occurs not only in Jewish texts like *Judith* and *4 Ezra* but also in strictly Latin texts like *Horace*, *Quintilian* and *Cicero*. In contrast, *Josephus* and usually the *Septuagint*, as well as the Roman writer *Martial*, could say "day and night," and the New Testament references are not consistent. "Night and day" seems to have been the more common idiom.)

1:4. Expressions of longing were common in ancient letters of friendship, signifying the deepest intimacy. (This is not, as one commentator thought, a poor imitation of Rom 1:11 or other passages!) In the East, tears were an appropriate expression of sadness for troubled or long partings.

1:5. Even though fathers were responsible for their sons' education, Judaism and Greco-Roman aristocrats wanted mothers to be knowledgeable so they could impart knowledge to their young children. (This is true even

though Judaism did not provide women advanced education in the *law, and even though Greco-Roman society generally reserved* rhetorical and philosophical training for men.) Until the age of seven a Roman boy's mother was his main formative influence; many thought that children should not be taught reading until age seven, but others wished to begin it much earlier, even at the age of three. Jewish Scripture education began by the age of five or six, although this education always emphasized memorization and recitation more than reading skills.

The "faith" of Timothy's mother and grandmother was Jewish (Jewish Christian by the time Paul met them-Acts 16:1). Jewish fathers were primarily responsible for their son's instruction in the law, but Timothy's father was a \*Gentile (Acts 16:1, 3). Those without a living religious father also learned from grandmothers if they were still living (cf. Tobit 1:8).

Most education included corporal discipline, but some ancient education experts stressed instead encouraging the child, making him or her feel successful, provoking competition and making learning enjoyable (\*Quintilian). Ancient writers differed on whether public instructors or home schooling was better, provided the former held classes small enough to permit private instruction.

1:6. Laying on of hands was used for ordination (see comment on 1 Tim 4:14). The image of "rekindling" (NRSV) a fire is possible in this verse (cf. Jer 20:9), although the word for "kindle" (NASB) had been extended metaphorically so often by this period that it is not clear that its fire nuance would always be in hearers' minds.

1:7. Although \*Essene texts sometimes linked evil behaviors with pervasive evil

spirits, in Greek "spirit of" often meant simply "attitude of." The exhortation not to be afraid was one of the most prominent biblical assurances from God (e.g., Gen 26:24; Jer 1:8) and was a customary expression of assurance from others as well (Gen 43:23). Although Timothy may have been "timid," one should not therefore assume that this was his unique problem, as some interpreters have (Acts 18:9; 1 Cor 2:3).

1:8-14

### Carry on Paul's Mission

Timothy is to maintain his ground (1:3-7), joining Paul in suffering for the \*gospel entrusted to them.

1:8. \*Disciples were called to follow in their teachers' steps. Paul's suffering here entails especially his imprisonment and impending execution.

1:9-11. The language of "calling" is especially \*Old Testament and Jewish, that of "appearing" and "immortality" especially Greek (though long before already adopted by *Diaspora Jews*), and "Savior" was both. That Paul is equally conversant in both worlds is not surprising; most \*Diaspora and many Palestinian Jews generally saw no contradiction between fidelity to the Old Testament and speaking the language of their culture.

1:12-14. The "entrusted deposit" (1:12, 14) was originally a monetary image, although other writers had also applied it to teaching; one was responsible to safeguard or multiply any money given one for safekeeping. Jewish teachers felt that they were passing on a sacred deposit to their disciples, who were expected to pass it on to others in turn (cf. 2:2).

1:15-18

### Allies and Opponents in Asia

Paul briefly addresses the opposition that Timothy and he face in Asia, where

Timothy ministers.

1:15. "Asia" refers to the Roman province of western Asia Minor, of which Ephesus was the most prominent city (cf. 1 Tim 1:3). "All" excludes the household of 1:16-18; in accordance with the flexibility of common language in antiquity, it means "most." Although many Jewish teachers predicted widespread apostasy for the end time or even felt that it characterized their own generation, they lamented it. This is hardly the sort of detail a later \*pseudepigrapher writing in Paul's name would have made up about the end of his ministry. (Later *hagiographers sometimes described the rejection of their heroes, but the narrative was normally accompanied by a description of the awful judgment that befell the apostates who rejected them.*)

1:16. "Onesimus" (Philem 10) could be a contraction for Onesiphorus, but the person Paul describes here is hardly a recently freed slave. Because Paul speaks of a whole "household" of believers, the Onesiphorus to whom he refers probably had slaves and other dependents. "Refresh" is the language of hospitality, which included housing travelers; Onesiphorus must have had a large home and housed Paul whenever he came to Ephesus. He is a good example to Timothy of one not "ashamed" (1:8, 12; 2:15).

1:17. Very many people in the first century traveled to Rome; Onesiphorus, as a well-to-do \*patron in the prominent Asian city of Ephesus, would naturally be able to do so. "Finding" Paul would mainly be a matter of finding local Christians who could tell him where to find Paul, whether during his earlier detention (Act 28:30) or the more severe current one. If the latter is in view, Paul might have gotten his news about Asia (1:15) from Onesiphorus.

1:18. Because Paul greets Onesiphorus's "household" in 4:19, some writers have argued that Onesiphorus is dead and that Paul here prays for his posthumous salvation (although the context makes it clear that Onesiphorus was already a Christian). Judaism often spoke of departed heroes as "of blessed memory," and some later tomb inscriptions eulogized the righteous dead with "May he [or she]

be remembered for good." Posthumous acts of atonement were sometimes offered for the dead, but prayers for the "salvation" of the dead in the strict sense seem to be either minimal or altogether lacking in first-century Judaism. Further, it is not clear that Onesiphorus is dead; Paul looks ahead to the day of judgment for himself as well (1:12; 4:8). Paul could speak of someone's "household," including the individual, while the person was still alive (e.g., 1 Cor 16:15, 17).

2:1-13

Persevere

2:1-2. \*Pharisaism strongly emphasized the passing on of sacred traditions; second-century \*rabbis stressed the passing on of traditions from one generation to the next, noting that the process had begun long before them. This passing on of tradition was also the practice of Greek philosophical schools, although they usually emphasized the views of the founder more than those of immediate predecessors.

2:3-4. Philosophers emphasized the total commitment involved in being a true philosopher. They also compared their task to that of soldiers and athletes fighting a war or running a race. Soldiers were not even allowed to marry during their term of service (although some had unofficial concubines while they were stationed somewhere) and were to be strictly devoted to their

service for over twenty years; only about half survived to retire.

2:5. Philosophers often compared their task to that of athletes, whose intense discipline and preparation were proverbial. Athletes were pledged by oath to ten months of such preparation preceding their participation in the Olympic games. The winner's prize was a garland; see comment on 1 Corinthians 9:24-25.

2:6. As in 2:4 (pleasing the enlister) and 2:5 (receiving the prize), the emphasis here is on both hard work and future reward; one who labored for God would be rewarded in the day of God's judgment. (Some commentators have suggested

that in 2:4-6 Paul wants ministers to be supported only by their congregations, as some philosophers were supported by \*patrons, and never to work on the side; but this view would be surprising given Paul's explicitly contrary position in 1 Cor 9, where he allows both forms of support.)

2:7. Authors occasionally exhorted readers to "consider" (KJV, NASB) and hence understand (cf. Mt 24:15; Rev 13:18).

2:8. Appealing to examples was one of the main hortatory methods of ancient parenesis (moral exhortation); Paul here appeals to the example of Jesus, who endured much but received eternal glory (cf. 2:10-12).

2:9-10. Paul uses himself as an example, also a common form of moral exhortation among ancient philosophers and moral writers (cf. 2:8).

2:11-13. Although God's character is immutable, his dealings with people depend on their response to him (2 Chron 15:2; Ps 18:25-27). The faithfulness of God to his covenant is not suspended by the breach of that covenant by the unfaithful; but those individuals who break his covenant are not saved (see comment on Rom 3:3).

2:14-26

### Persevering Versus Heretical Vessels

The Ephesian Christians must observe "these things," which are what Paul mentions in 2:3-13 as summarized in 2:11-13. They must persevere, avoiding the false teachings rampant in Ephesus (2:14-23), and when possible correcting those involved in serious error (2:24-26).

2:14. Many professional speakers gave nitpicky attention to irrelevant twists and turns of phrase; some philosophers believed that one could do no better than examine the logic of words; many Jewish teachers, seeking to be faithful to the letter of the \*law, did the same (emphasizing even the slightest variations in

spelling or possible revocalizations). But others criticized this method (see comment on 1 Tim 1:6).

2:15. To the images of soldier, athlete and farmer (2:4-6), Paul now adds the general one of the worker, perhaps thinking of his own background as a skilled artisan. Jewish readers would have understood an exhortation to be diligent in representing "the word of truth" rightly as an exhortation to study God's law, where his word was found (cf. Ps 119:43). Although Paul presupposes such investigation of Scripture (3:14-17), his emphasis here is on accurate representation of the `gospel in contrast to the empty words of 2:14 and 16.

2:16. See comment on 2:14.

2:17. The image of spiritual or moral gangrene also occurred to some other authors; gangrene's basic characteristic is that it spreads and poisons the whole body, ultimately killing it if it is not removed. Hymenaeus and probably Philetus had been officially cut off

(1 Tim 1:20) but still retained a pervasive influence and probably a significant following. Then, as today, it was easy for almost any speaker to get a hearing, because only a few were skilled enough in the Scriptures to discern truth from error for themselves, rather than being dependent on others' teachings.

2:18. A future \*resurrection of the body did not appeal to Greek thought, although the proleptic spiritual resurrection that believers experienced in Christ was far more amenable to Greek tastes. Some false teachers like Hymenaeus and Philetus had apparently "demythologized" the \*gospel to make it more palatable to their culture (cf. 1 Cor 15:12; 2 Thess 2:2).

2:19. Although some stones might be removed, a foundation or cornerstone would remain secure. Seals were often used to attest the witnesses of a document or that merchandise had not been tampered with; here the seal is the inscription on a cornerstone, inscribed by the owner or builder.

2:20-21. Paul shifts to another image. When used figuratively in ancient literature, "vessels" (KJV, NASB) usually meant people (or their bodies as containers of their souls, which would be irrelevant here). Expensive vessels were reserved for special purposes like banquets; the cheapest vessels were expendable and in Jewish circles would be shattered if rendered impure.

One could interpret "purifies himself from these things" (NASB) in two ways. On the one hand, Paul may distinguish here the righteous from the wicked (as in Rom 9:22-23); but the righteous, like vessels reserved for honor, had to be separated from the vessels for dishonor in the same house (see comment on 2:17-18). On the other hand, one normally purified important vessels from dirt or, in the religious sense, from defilement (such as the heretics' talk-2:16). (Paul may intend both senses; under some conditions of Jewish law, a pure vessel brought into contact with something impure, including an impure vessel, had to be purified again.)

2:22. Moralists often exhorted readers to "flee" from vices. Certain passions were associated especially with "youth" (a category that could still include Timothy; see comment on 1 Tim 4:12).

2:23. On debates over trifling points see comment on 2:14.

2:24. Jewish teachers and philosophers like the \*Stoics also advised patience in instructing others; in contrast, some moralists, like the \*Cynics, verbally abused passersby with their "wisdom." Philosophers typically derided the unlearned (cf. 2:23; "ignorant"-NASB, TEV; "stupid"-NIV) in wisdom who were unwilling to seek knowledge.

2:25-26. Judaism emphasized correcting another person humbly and privately before giving public reproof, in the hope of restoring that person to the right way.

3:1-13



## The Wickedness of the Last Days

Judaism generally characterized the end time as one of turmoil, apostasy, and increased sin and oppression. This view was widespread despite the common expectation that all Israel would return to greater standards of holiness, ushering in the end and the restoration of Israel; others (see the \*Dead Sea Scrolls) believed that only the righteous Israelites would remain after these judgments. Like most Jewish writers, Paul does not anticipate a complete renewal of righteousness in the world until the day of God.

3:1. In "last days" Paul includes the time in which he is living (cf. 1 Tim 4:1); he no doubt alludes here to the Jewish idea that came to be called the \*messianic woes, a period of great suffering preceding the end of the age. (The length of this period varied as widely as those Jewish texts that speculated on it; it was not fixed in Jewish tradition.)

3:2. Other ancient moralists also used "vice lists" (cf. Rom 1:28-32). "Lovers of self" (i.e., self-seeking people) were condemned by philosophers such as Musonius Rufus (a Stoic), \*Epictetus and *Philo*; *the moralist* Plutarch warned readers to avoid even the appearance of self-love. Love and obedience toward parents was one of the most central virtues of antiquity (see comment on Eph 6:1-3).

3:3-4. Philo and other philosophers, especially *Stoics*, *repeatedly condemned "love of pleasure"*; *among philosophers, only the Epicureans* sought pleasure (which they defined as the absence of pain or disturbance), and they were not very influential. Philo even subsumed a long list of vices under the title "lovers of pleasure" and opposed pleasure to virtue.

3:5. Both Jewish religion and Greek philosophy condemned those who pretended devotion but whose hearts or lives did not match their professed devotion. For Paul, religion without God's power transforming the heart was useless.

3:6. Because women were usually uneducated, they were more susceptible than men to false teaching (see comment on 1 Tim 2:11-12). Women's penchant for switching religions was ridiculed by satirists like \*Juvenal and offended conservative Romans. Women reportedly converted to Christianity, Judaism, and the cults of Isis, Serapis and other deities far more readily than men; and in the second century A.D. women were attracted to many heretical movements. Because they were less educated in traditional religion and had less social standing to lose, they more quickly changed religiously, sometimes for good and sometimes for bad.

The false teachers had to get into the homes because they had less access to the women in public (due to married women's partial segregation in Greek society). After they had gained access to a household, their male or female convert within the household could supply financial and other help to them. Greek and Roman men often thought of women as easily swayed by passion and emotion; many may have been, because of their lack of education and cultural reinforcement. But Paul here addresses particular, not all, women.

3:7. Philosophers stressed that change came through knowing the truth, and that this knowledge came through learning from them. These women were learning, but they were learning falsehood designed to play on their passions; Paul says that 'repentance, not mere learning, frees those thus taken captive (2:25-26).

3:8. Paul here employs Jewish tradition not found in the \*Old Testament. In a widespread Jewish tradition (various elements appear in *Pseudo-Philo*, the Dead Sea Scrolls, *rabbis*, etc.), *Jannes and his brother Jambres were Pharaoh's magicians who opposed Moses in Exodus 7:11*. Even pagan accounts (*Pliny the Elder* and *Apuleius*) record them as magicians of Moses' time. Because Paul's opponents appeal to Jewish myths (1 Tim 1:4; 2 Tim 4:4; Tit 1:14), Paul cites such stories to fill in the names for these characters.

3:9. "Progress" (NASB, NRSV) could be a technical term for advancement in

learning a particular school of teaching, but here it probably refers simply to advancement of the opponents' movement. Jannes and Jambres ultimately could not match all Moses' signs (in Exodus and in most later Jewish accounts); God would also confound this heretical movement in time (1 Tim 5:24).

3:10. \*Disciples of philosophers were to follow and emulate their teachers' words and lives. Some other ancient moralists also naturally used "but you" for moral contrasts (cf. also 3:14; 4:5; 1 Tim 6:11). Timothy's knowledge of Paul's sufferings in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra (Acts 13:50-14:19) apparently dates to his family's initial exposure to the Christian message, before he began traveling with Paul (16:1-3).

3:11. See comment on Acts 13-14. Timothy was from this area of Asia Minor (Acts 16:1).

3:12. Many Jewish people expected repression from the pagans, especially in the end time, but Paul virtually promises persecution to every Christian truly living in a holy way (cf. Jn 15:20, etc.).

3:13. Paul clearly shares the view of much of early Judaism that the end time would be characterized by evil, with sinners proceeding from sin to sin unchecked (cf. Jer 9:3). They would ultimately be stopped only by God's final wrath (cf. Gen 6:11-13). The Greek term here rendered "impostors" or "seducers" (KJV) was often used as a pejorative title for harmful or fake magicians (cf. 3:8).

3:14-17

Equipped by the Scriptures

3:14-15. "Sacred writings" (NASB, NRSV) was also used for pagan religious writings (e.g., in the cult of Isis) but is attested in Greek-speaking Jewish sources as a name for the Bible that then existed, what we call the \*Old Testament. Although there were different ways of counting the books, it is clear from the

listing in *Josephus (Apion 1.8, 39-40)* and subsequent listings that these Scriptures correspond to our Old Testament canon. The most common recensions of the *Septuagint* also appear to have included what we usually call the Apocrypha, although neither the \*rabbis nor Josephus seems to have accepted this material as part of the Bible per se.

At least in pious Palestinian Jewish homes, boys were normally taught the "sacred writings" from around the age of five; teaching Scriptures to the children was commanded in the Old Testament (Deut 6:7; cf., e.g., Ps 71:17; 78:5-7). Other peoples were often amazed at how well instructed Jewish children were in their ancestral traditions.

3:16-17. The belief in the inspiration of \*prophecy and (usually in a somewhat different sense) poetry and music was widespread in Mediterranean antiquity. This belief was naturally applied to books of prophecy, and most of the Old Testament was attributed to prophets. Paul's claim for Scripture's inspiration matches Old Testament designations for the law and divine prophecies as "God's word." Like Paul, Judaism virtually universally accepted the Old Testament as God's word.

Listing examples of "every good work" (3:17), Paul employs standard terms from ancient education (3:16); "training" especially characterized Greek education (the \*LXX often used the term for discipline). Reproof was especially important in Judaism, where it had to be done privately and gently first. The proper authority, source and content for any of these works was Scripture. On "man of God" (in Timothy's case; more generally, "person of

God"), see comment on 1 Timothy 6:11.

4:1-8

Preach the Word

After reminding Timothy of the source of his authority, the Scriptures (in his

day, the \*Old Testament; see 3:14-17; cf. 1 Tim 4:13), Paul tells him to engage in the ministry for which the Scriptures are profitable (3:16-4:2).

4:1. An oath sworn by a deity or deities was considered especially binding and dangerous to break; in the same way, a charge witnessed by a deity or deities was sacred and inviolable. A broken oath would be avenged by the god whose name was violated; for Jewish people and Christians, the ultimate judgment was in the coming day of the Lord.

4:2. As virtually always in Paul, "the word" here stands for the message of Jesus, which was the divine message, like the Law and the Prophets were (3:16). Greco-Roman moralists often discussed the "appropriate" time for speech, especially frank speech; Paul says that Timothy should announce his message whether or not people are willing to listen (4:3). Although Paul adapts Greco-Roman philosophical language, the idea is also a pervasive Old Testament one; prophets had to continue speaking regardless of opposition (Ex 6:9-13; Jer 6:11; 20:8-9).

4:3. Demagogues who told people what they wanted to hear were common among politicians, public speakers and philosophers in Greco-Roman society, and false prophets in the \*Old Testament (prophets who told people what they wanted to hear were usually false; cf. Jer 6:14; 8:11; Ezek 13:10, 16; Mic 3:5; see also comment on Lk 6:26). "Desiring to have one's ears tickled" means desiring to hear only what one enjoys; Lucian describes in these terms people who like to listen to slander.

4:4-5. The term translated "myths" was usually used derogatorily for false stories; see comment on 1 Timothy 1:4.

4:6. On one's life being poured out as a libation, or drink-offering, see comment on Philippians 2:17. (Some Jewish texts, especially \*4 Maccabees, assign atoning-hence in some sense sacrificial-value to the deaths of martyrs; in much contemporary Jewish teaching, suffering could expiate guilt, and martyrs could

turn away some of God's wrath against the people as a whole. But it is not clear that this idea is present here.)

4:7. Paul's first image is the athletic contest, probably wrestling in the arena; moralists commonly borrowed this image to describe struggles on behalf of virtue (see comment on 1 Tim 6:12). "Completed the course" refers to a race, again popular athletic imagery. "Keeping faith" was a Greek expression for loyalty, similar to a Hebrew expression meaning remaining faithful to the covenant, or in some cases, guarding the true faith (thus "the faith" here).

4:8. The image of the "crown" refers to the wreath given to victors in Greek races (4:7).

4:9-18

#### Old Acquaintances

Some friends had proved faithless, others Paul had needed to send away; but God had proved faithful all along (4:17-18).

4:9. See comment on 4:21. It was important for close friends to come by and visit a dying person a final time, and this principle applied above all else to a son, even an adopted or surrogate son (1:2). (Sons normally also buried their fathers, but the officials might be reticent to hand Paul's body over to

Timothy.) It was especially important to Paul that Timothy be with him before he died; compare, for example, those friends who spent Socrates' final moments with him.

4:10. Most of Judaism contrasted this present evil age (Gal 1:4) with the age to come, often insisting that those who valued this age too much would have no part in the next one. The persecutions Paul had faced earlier in Thessalonica had probably diminished, and Demas (probably an abbreviation for Demetrius, but the name Paul always uses for him) expected to find less suffering there than he

would have faced had he remained with Paul.

The motives of Crescens (a Latin name) and Titus are not criticized. "Galatia" probably means the Galatia in Asia Minor to which Paul addressed his letter "to the Galatians." (It is also possible, though less likely, that it refers to the land of the Gauls to the north, in what is now France, which was the original "Galatia." If so, this would be the only explicit reference to non-Mediterranean Europe in the \*New Testament.) Titus had gone to Dalmatia, which was near Nicopolis, where he had met or tried to meet Paul earlier (Tit 3:12). If Timothy came overland to see Paul (2 Tim 4:13), he would probably pass through at least Thessalonica and Dalmatia (the latter on the Adriatic coast), and Paul gives him advance notice that he would find some of his former companions in this area.

4:11. Although "Mark" was a common name, among the limited number of close associates of Paul it almost certainly refers to John Mark of Acts, as in Colossians 4:10. Others besides Luke were with him in Rome (2 Tim 4:21), but Luke was the only traveling companion he and Timothy had shared; he was probably also the only one in Rome specifically to be with Paul.

4:12. Tychicus is bearer of the letter (cf. 1 Tim 1:3), a mutual traveling companion of Paul and Timothy (Acts 20:4; Col 4:7). Because the only Roman mail service was by imperial envoys for government use, personal mail had to be carried by travelers.

4:13. The sort of cloak mentioned was like a blanket with a hole for one's head; the ease with which it could be donned probably made it popular with travelers. It was useful only in cold or rainy weather; Paul had apparently left it at Troas when it was becoming warm and had not been able to return for it. Now, imprisoned, Paul is cold and anticipates the approach of winter soon after Timothy's arrival (cf. 4:21). (Some commentators have suggested that the term refers here not to a coat but to a wrapping for books; although this meaning is possible, most of the purported evidence for it derives from comments on this verse!)

Some commentators have suggested that the "parchments" refer to certificates (e.g., to prove Paul's citizenship), but such documents are not widely attested in this period. The term was, however, already in use for codices (collections of papyrus sheets with a cover, as opposed to scrolls), a form of book already in existence but popularized by Christians. They were originally used for notebooks, account ledgers and other nonliterary purposes; Christians quickly began using them for the Scriptures. Paul may have notebooks for Scripture study in view; the other "books" would then be papyrus scrolls, the most common form of writing in this period.

Paul apparently expects Timothy to journey northward to Troas, from which he would cross over to Macedonia and take the main Roman road

through Thessalonica and to Dalmatia, sailing thence to Italy (though cf. 4:21).

4:14. Many coppersmiths lived in the eastern Mediterranean, but working with copper produced so much noise that Alexander, unlike Paul the leatherworker, could not have engaged in much discussion at work. He thus could not have gained much of a following until his workday was ended (unless he was a former coppersmith now living off his false teaching).

Alexander may be the false teacher of 1 Timothy 1:19-20, although this name was common. The term Paul uses for "did me harm" was sometimes used of delatores, "accusers"; it is not clear whether Paul also refers to Alexander as the one who betrayed him to the Roman authorities. Paul was probably not arrested in Ephesus, because he had spent the preceding winter in Nicopolis; he may have been on his way to Rome and simply arrived in time for Nero's persecution (Tit 3:12; cf. 2 Tim 4:10).

The psalmist often prayed for God to vindicate him and repay his enemies (e.g., Ps 17:13-14; 35:1-8, 26; 55:15; 69:22-28). Paul here makes a prediction (future tense) rather than a prayer for vengeance (cf. Ps 52:5; 55:23; 63:9-10; 73:17-20; etc.); nevertheless, his point is that God will put things right on behalf



of his servants in the end.

4:16. Here Paul probably refers not to the detention of Acts 28:30-31, which presumably ended favorably, but to a more recent hearing after his rearrest. This would have been a preliminary hearing, a *prima actio*, before a Roman magistrate (in practice, probably not the emperor himself).

4:17-18. Paul may allude to David's or Daniel's exploits of faith in the Old Testament (1 Sam 17:37; Dan 6:27; cf. 1 Macc 2:60); Daniel was sent to the lions by the decree of a king, albeit a reluctant one. The image of a lion in ancient literature is one of supreme strength, appropriately applied here to Nero's court. Under Nero's persecution in which Paul died, some Christians were literally fed to beasts in the arena, but Paul uses "lion" metaphorically, as often in the Old Testament (e.g., Ps 22:13, 21). The term translated "delivered" meant earthly rescue and safety (v. 17) but was also applied to ultimate salvation (v. 18). Prayers seemed natural in ancient letters, because ancient life was permeated by religious belief and practice.

4:19-22

## Conclusion

4:19. Letters often closed with greetings. Aquila and Priscilla, who had left Ephesus (Acts 18:24-26) for Rome (Rom 16:3), had returned to the work in Ephesus-probably recently, because Paul did not comment on their help in 1:16-18 (contrast also 1 Tim 2:11-12 with Priscilla's ministry in Acts 18:26); only Paul's traveling companions, probably mainly single men, are mentioned in 4:10-12 and 20. On the household of Onesiphorus see comment on 1:16-18.

4:20. Letters customarily mentioned news about friends, who included these former traveling companions of Timothy (Acts 19:22; 20:4). For how Trophimus's illness might have been viewed, see comment on Philippians 2:25-30.

4:21. The seas were closed down to

traffic in winter; shipping was completely closed down from around November 10 to as late as March 10, but the periods from about September 15 to November 10 and March 11 to May 26 were risky periods as well. Timothy thus could not sail from Ephesus in winter, but even if he took the overland route north of Greece, as Paul seems to expect (4:13), he would still need to sail across the Adriatic, which was also closed. If Timothy delayed, he would not be able to come until spring-and Paul might not still be alive then. Paul may have sent this letter by Tychicus in summer, leaving Timothy little time to set matters in order and come to him.

"Pudens," "Linus" and "Claudia" are Latin names. Jewish people could have Latin names ("Claudia" would fit a slave woman freed during Claudius's reign), but most Roman Jews had Greek names. Thus three out of four names' being Latin might suggest that Christianity was making inroads into new sectors of Roman society. If they are \*church leaders (although only these are named, Paul appends "all the brethren" as a distinct group), the woman's name is significant. Secondcentury tradition declares that Linus succeeded Peter as the second bishop of Rome.

4:22. The final "you" is plural in Greek; Paul's final greeting includes Timothy's fellow servants in Ephesus (4:19).

# TITUS

## Introduction

Authorship, Purpose, Commentaries. See introduction to 1 Timothy. Like 1 Timothy, Paul's letter to Titus seems to function more as a letter authorizing Titus than as a personal letter only.

Situation. Paul left Titus behind in Crete to establish \*church leadership in each city there (1:5). The description of the opposition (1:10-11, 14) sounds much like what Paul addressed at Ephesus in 1 Timothy, suggesting that the error addressed there is spreading rapidly among Christian congregations. Paul's old opponents, those of the circumcision group he encountered in Galatia, apparently continue to follow on his heels to "correct" his converts (1:10, 14). Although they won over many of his converts, their views eventually lost ground; but Paul did not live to see his views prevail (2 Tim 1:15).

1:1-4

### Introduction

As in 1 Timothy, here Paul omits many features customary to his letters (such as thanksgiving and, less often, mention of prayer) and goes right to the point with his instructions.

1:1. Letters customarily opened with the name of the sender. It could be prestigious to be the slave in a high-status household, and the \*Old Testament prophets were often called "servants of God." Judaism believed that Jewish people were chosen for salvation by virtue of their corporate participation in Israel; perhaps especially to counter false teachers in Crete (1:10), Paul applies the term to all believers in Jesus (though he usually does so anyway).

1:2-3. *"Eternal life" was literally the "life of the world to come," which (according to Jewish teaching) was to be inaugurated by the future resurrection of the dead. That God could not lie, that he had spoken through the prophets from the beginning and that the future resurrection could be proved from the earliest parts of the Bible fit common Jewish teaching and could not be disputed by his opponents (1:10). (The \*Stoics taught the immutability of divine decrees, but the Stoic form of the doctrine allowed God less freedom to interact with human will than Judaism did. By contrast, in Greek myths, deities readily deceived mortals, but such a view of divinity was rejected by the philosophers and ridiculed by Judaism.)*

1:4. After naming the sender, letters named the recipient(s) and conveyed an expression of greeting. Philosophers and \*rabbis spoke of their disciples as their children; cf. 1 Timothy 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:2.

1:5-9

### Appointing Sound Elders

1:5. In the \*Old Testament, cities

were ruled and judged by their "elders," those with the greatest wisdom and experience in the community. By the \*New Testament period, prominent older men in the *synagogues were called "elders."* Paul followed the convenient, conventional forms of synagogue leadership in his culture rather than instituting entirely foreign leadership structures. *"In every city" meant that the different house churches in each city would each have their own leaders.* Like much of old Greece, Crete had long been known for intercity rivalry.

1:6. The requirement for being "above reproach" (NASB) was vital for leaders in antiquity (see comment on 1 Tim 3:2). "Husband of one wife" probably meant "a faithful husband"; like the requirement about the children, this one suggests that he be a family man and a leader in his household. These were necessary aspects of being respectable in antiquity and were qualities often examined with regard

to suitability for public office. (The \*Old Testament also emphasized filial obedience under normal conditions; cf. Deut 21:20.) Because they are "elders," and "dissipation" (NASB; the term means wasting money, often on selfish pleasures like drunkenness) was a vice stereotypically attributed to young men, not children, these elders are apparently held responsible for the behavior of their adult children. In the Roman world, sons were to respect their fathers, who had legal authority to rule their sons as long as they lived.

1:7. "Stewards" were household managers, often slaves or \*freedmen, accountable to the master for how they handled his property; this term fits particularly well the image of leaders of household churches. The drunken worship of Dionysus was known on Crete, and the Christian leaders' behavior must not be confused with it in any way (some people ignorantly confused Judaism with the cult of Dionysus, and Christians were generally viewed as part of Judaism). Those "given to wine" (KJV, NASB) were also often recognized as abusive and given to fighting as well.

1:8. "Hospitality" meant housing, feeding and treating graciously travelers needing a place to stay. (Christian travelers, like Jewish ones, normally carried letters of recommendation attesting that they could be trusted.)

1:9. Elders had to be trained to refute current false teachings before they were appointed; for the false teachings in view here, see comment on 1:10-16. The "word" in Judaism would be the \*law, but Paul means the apostolic message (see comment on 2 Tim 4:2).

1:10-16

Evil Legalists

Although the opponents here are probably related to opponents Paul had faced elsewhere, they may have derived some of their appeal from local knowledge of Judaism and possibly a strong Jewish element within the \*church. Crete was racially mixed, and a large Jewish colony was there.

1:10. "Empty talk" (NASB) characterized many pseudointellectuals in antiquity; see comment on 1 Timothy 1:6 and 2 Timothy 2:14.

1:11. "Upsetting whole families" (NASB) could mean that, by gaining entrance to families, these false teachers were disrupting whole households (cf. 2 Tim 3:6-7), but more likely Paul means that they are "subverting" (KJV) households. Perhaps they are undermining the authority structures current in the culture (Tit 2:4-5, 9-10); less likely, they may oppose marriage or sex within marriage on \*ascetic grounds (see comment on 1 Tim 4:1-3;

1 Cor 7:1-7). Neither error was characteristic of Palestinian or \*Diaspora Judaism, although many \*Essenes advocated celibacy.

On those who taught for "gain," see comment on 1 Timothy 6:3-10; this accusation was commonly leveled against traveling teachers of morality, probably including Paul (1 Thess 2:5). A writer long before Paul charged that the Cretans were known to be more fond of gain, dishonest as well as honest, than any other people.

1:12. The saying Paul quotes here has been attributed to several sources, the earliest being the sixth-century B.C. teacher Epimenides of Knossos in Crete. (The real source may more likely be Hesiod by way of the third-century B.C. Callimachus's Hymn to Zeus; Crete claimed to possess both the birthplace and grave of Zeus. But that the words were often attributed to a Cretan in Paul's day is sufficient for him to make the point for Titus. Paul is clearly not citing his own view, because he would not consider a liar to be a true prophet. Greek logicians played with the claim by a Cretan that all Cretans were liars: if he had told the truth, he was lying; but if he was lying, then they reasoned that all Cretans told the truth-reasonable, except that this Cretan had not!)

By Paul's time Epimenides was reputed to have been a traveling wonderworker, teacher and prophet; as usual in Greek thought, the line between

poetic and prophetic inspiration could be thin. Although the saying seems to have become proverbial (one commentator declares that "to cretize" became slang for "to lie"), it is possible that Paul knew either the works of Epimenides or, perhaps more likely, an anthology containing sayings attributed to him (see comment on Acts 17:27-29).

Crete also had a bad reputation for arrogance, treachery and greed. "Gluttony" was associated with love of pleasure as opposed to love of knowledge; see comment on Philippians 3:19.

1:13. Ancient ethnographers attributed certain characteristics (both good and bad) to various peoples whose cultures emphasized those traits. (That Paul could cite these negative characteristics of Cretans in a letter that Cretan believers would hear suggests that he must have been on very good terms with them and that Cretans recognized these characteristics of their own culture; he is not offering here a model for crosscultural sensitivity in normal situations.)

1:14. Jewish "myths" would especially be haggadot, stories amplifying or explaining biblical \*narratives. *Pharisees and others who tried to expound and apply biblical law for their own times were forced to surround it with case law, detailing how the Old Testament rules addressed specific situations*; Paul apparently dismisses such legal traditions here.

1:15. The Old Testament \*law considered some foods pure and other foods impure (cf. 1:14), but Paul applies the common figurative extension of purity language to moral and spiritual purity (see 1 Tim 4:3-5; cf. Rom 14:14).

1:16. In the Old Testament, "knowing God" was being in covenant relationship with him; on a personal level, this meant an intimate relationship of faithfulness to him. But the claim was worthless if not accompanied by just treatment of others and obedience to the Scriptures (Hos 8:2-3; Jer 22:16).

2:1-14

## Sound Doctrine: Right Relationships

Because the Romans suspected minority religions, especially religions from

the East with ecstatic elements to their worship, of subverting traditional family values, minority religions often followed the philosophers in exhorting adherents to follow "household codes." These codes instructed patriarchs of households how to treat each member of the household, especially wives, children and slaves. Under the broad topic of "household management," such codes also extended to treatment of parents, duties to the state (3:1) and duties to the gods. Because the \*church met in homes and was viewed as a sort of extended family around the household of the \*patron in whose home the believers met, the instructions naturally extended to categories of relationships in the church.

Early Christian adaptation of Roman social relations was important for the church's witness to society and for diminishing preventable opposition to the \*gospel (2:5, 8, 10). Modern readers often recognize only the traditional values of their own culture (e.g., traditional family values of the nineteenth-to mid-twentieth-century U.S. middle class), but one should recognize that Paul addresses instead the traditional Roman values of his day (including the household slavery of his day, which differed from many other societies' models of slavery).

2:1. Because the false teachers were subverting the structure of households, the "sound" teaching (cf. 2:15) Paul supplies in this case applies especially to household relationships (2:2-14). Households were defined in terms of hierarchy and dependence (e.g., slaves to masters or \*clients to patrons) rather than strictly in terms of blood relationship.

2:2. This description matches the expectation for venerable older men in Roman culture: dignified, serious, sober.

2:3. Older women were often objects of ridicule in comedies and were especially mocked for gossip and foolish talk (see comment on 1 Tim 4:7).



2:4. It had long been customary for older women, especially mothers, to instruct their daughters in the ways of life (even in ancient Israel, e.g., Jer 9:20); some philosophers wanting to advise women even wrote \*pseudepigraphic letters purportedly from women, telling women how to behave. The Roman mother's chief duty to her daughter seems to have been to help her acquire the appropriate education (especially to be a good mother) and a good husband. "Young women" were almost always wives, because Jewish and Greco-Roman society generally frowned upon women's singleness and men seem to have outnumbered women. Both Judaism and ancient moralists stressed that wives should love their husbands and nurture their children; many tomb inscriptions report these characteristics as a woman's crowning virtue.

2:5. The term translated "sensible" (NASB) means "self-controlled" (NIV, NRSV, TEV) or disciplined, one of the central Greek virtues; when applied to women, it meant "modesty" and hence indicated virtuously avoiding any connotations of sexual infidelity. In the Greek ideal, women were also to be secluded in the privacy of their home, because they were supposed to be the visual property of their husbands alone. They ruled the domestic sphere to which they were limited but had to obey their husbands in everything. Paul only says they are to be "submissive" (NRSV, TEV) rather than "obedient" (contrast KJV); women were also expected to be quiet, docile and socially retiring. To violate such social customs was to lend credence to the charge that Christianity was socially

subversive, a charge that would provoke more persecution for the small but growing faith than most of them, both women and men, would have felt it worth.

2:6-8. The men also are to be self-disciplined, and Timothy was to provide a model for them, as a good teacher should. Paul uses the expression "good deeds" in a variety of ways (see 1:16; 2:14; 3:1, 8, 14; 1 Tim 2:10; 5:10; 6:18; 2 Tim 2:21; 3:17).

2:9-10. Although masters legally held absolute authority over household slaves, in most cases household slaves held freedoms that field or mine slaves did not, and they had more adequate provision than most peasants. In the popular stereotype entertained by their owners, slaves were lazy, apt to argue with their masters and liable to steal when they could. The stereotype was sometimes true, especially where the work incentive was least, but Paul urges Christian slaves not to reinforce the stereotype. Minority religions were already viewed as subversive, and to counter this prejudice Christians had to work especially hard to avoid the normal causes of slander. For more on slavery in general, see the introduction to Philemon.

2:11. The believers were to live in a respectable way to counter false accusations (2:8-10) so that all would have access to the \*gospel according to which they lived. On prejudice against minority religions, see the introduction to 2:1-14. That God's grace had provided (though not automatically effected-cf., e.g., 1:10) salvation for all people ran counter to Jewish exclusivism and prevailing sentiments of cultural distinctions held by many people in antiquity (though Judaism allowed that some righteous Gentiles would be saved, and philosophers and some mystery religions challenged conventional cultural boundaries).

2:12. The ethical terms Paul employs here were cardinal virtues of ancient Greek philosophers and moralists. An almost identical list occurs in \*Philo, a Jewish philosopher who wished to present Judaism favorably to the Greek society of Alexandria, to which he also felt he belonged.

Judaism contrasted the present age, dominated by evil and suffering, with the age to come, when God would rule unchallenged and reward his people. Although some oppressors through history have used such a doctrine to keep the oppressed subdued, it more appropriately found its first hearing among the oppressed themselves. Palestinian Jews felt discouraged by Roman repression and the lack of independence to practice their *law as they believed it*; Diaspora Jews and Christians found themselves a moral minority in a morass of paganism, subject to slanders and sporadic violence. Their hope for the future was rooted in

their faith in God's justice.

2:13. In Judaism, the ultimate revelation or "appearing" of God would signal the end of the present age and the beginning of the new one (cf. 2:12). *Diaspora Judaism commonly called God "the great God" and saw him as a "savior"* (in Greek religion, the latter term often meant deliverer or benefactor). According to the most likely reading of the grammar here, Paul applies this divine title to Jesus.

2:14. In the *Old Testament* God "*redeemed*" the people of Israel (i.e., freed them from slavery in Egypt) to make them "*a special people*" (Ex 19:5; Deut 4:20; 7:6; 14:2; cf. 1 Sam 12:22; 2 Sam 7:24; Ps 135:4); here Paul applies this language to the church.

Judaism strongly praised "zeal" for God. Although zeal was associated particularly with the \*Zealots in this peri

od, it is doubtful that Paul would intend an allusion to that group, which was very probably unknown to the Cretans. He probably uses it in its more general sense of uncompromising zeal for the law or for God. (Although unlikely, it is possible that the Jewish colony in Crete was affected by the same tensions building in Cyrene, which was on the North African coast far to the south but under the same Roman administration. These tensions erupted into violence in Cyrene a little over a decade after Paul wrote this letter, and into a full revolt around four decades later. These revolutionary sentiments had been stirred by surviving Zealots from Palestine.)

2:15-3:8

The Purpose of a Lifestyle Witness

Paul here provides his reasoning for their lifestyle witness (2:5, 8, 10): God wants everyone to be saved, and he paid a great price to accomplish this salvation. Now the only way to counter the world's negative conception of

Christianity is to live irreproachably. 2:15. Paul encourages Titus to pass on the sound doctrine of 2:1-14.

3:1. Allegiance to the state and submission to its authorities were often part of the same sorts of exhortations as the household duties (see the introduction to 2:1-14). They were as important as, or possibly more important than, household duties in undermining slander about subversiveness, because the Romans hated nothing worse than cults they deemed seditious.

3:2. The epitome of right relationships was being kind toward everyone, including one's enemies; this injunction is a fitting climax to Paul's rules on relationships.

3:3-4. Philosophers sometimes exhorted people to imitate God's character; Paul here uses God's kindness toward sinners in saving them to argue why Christians should be kind to all people, even their enemies. Philosophers described the majority of people as "enslaved by passions and pleasure," until they were freed from this bondage by the truth of philosophy; Paul agrees with their evaluation of the human plight but sees a different solution for it (3:5).

Paul's term for God's "love for humanity" here was used by pagan moralists especially for the sort of sympathy humans as humans necessarily have for one another; for Paul, God in \*Christ has sympathy for humanity. (Sometimes the term was also applied to the supreme God, but more often it was applied to the benevolence of the emperor.) Paul shows how the most valued genuine virtues of his culture reflected God's own character.

3:5. The *Essenes and some other Jewish people associated the Spirit with purification, especially based on Ezekiel 36:25-27, where God cleanses his people from their idolatry. Because \*baptism was the decisive act of conversion in Palestinian Judaism, it figures as the natural image for conversion here (see comment on Jn 3:5).*

3:6. For the Spirit being "poured out," see Joel 2:28 (cited in Acts 2:17).

3:7-8. "Justified" meant "judged righteous" or "acquitted" before God's court; according to the \*Old Testament and Jewish teaching, one must condemn the guilty and acquit only the innocent. But in the Old Testament, God by his covenant love had also promised to vindicate his people and declare them in the right for their faithfulness to him; see comment on Romans 1:17. "Heirs" reflects the Old Testament image of inheriting the Promised Land, a picture naturally developed in early Judaism for entering the future \*kingdom.

On "\*eternal life" see comment on 1:2-3; on "hope" see also comment on 2:13. For Paul, as for Judaism, eternal life would be fulfilled at the *resurrection of the dead at the end of this age and beginning of the next*. But for Paul the hope was *already inaugurated* by Christ's resurrection.

3:9-11

### Avoid Divisiveness and Divisive People

Part of maintaining a gentle, nonresistant life among members of the Christian community (3:1-2; cf. Gen 26:18-22) involved dissociating oneself from those who would violate one's witness by their disobedience.

3:9. Genealogies and details about the *law (including arguments of Jewish legal scholars over spellings or vocalizations of Hebrew words)* were *minutiae that missed the genuinely critical issues in the spirit of the Old Testament* (see comment on 1:10; 1 Tim 1:6; 2 Tim 2:14).

3:10-11. The term translated "factious" (NASB) or "divisive" (NIV) had not always been used negatively; the related noun came to designate different sects of philosophers, and *Josephus used it to designate different schools of thought within Judaism*. But Paul uses it negatively here (also Gal 5:20; cf. 1 Cor 11:19) for *sectarian or divisive tendencies*. He presumably refers either to the *false teachers or to their disciples* in the congregation (cf. Tit 3:9 with 1:10).

Jewish law required several private rebukes before bringing a person before the religious assembly for discipline; this procedure gave the offender ample opportunity to repent. One severe form of punishment against an unrepentant offender was exclusion from the religious community for a set time or until \*repentance ensued. Because Paul uses this penalty only in the most extreme circumstances, the divisiveness in view here must be serious; the person has already excluded himself from the life of the community.

3:12-15

### Concluding Business

3:12. Nicopolis was on the Greek side of the Adriatic coast, about two hundred miles east of Italy. Located near the coast and only about a century old, it was not a major city that would be likely to occur to a \*pseudepigrapher. It was in this city that the *Stoic philosopher* Epictetus, banished from Rome, settled three decades later, so it might have also invited philosophical debates (and hence opportunities for Christian witness) in Paul's day. Apparently wishing to go on to Rome, Paul is going to leave Asia, cross Macedonia and wait in Nicopolis for Titus, who is to come up from Crete after receiving Paul's message. Sea travel was not possible during winter, so Paul would wait there (see comment on 2 Tim 4:21). Titus later walked northward to minister in Dalmatia (2 Tim 4:10), where some work had probably been initiated before (Rom 15:19, referring to the same region). Because Paul later sent Tychicus from Rome to Timothy (2 Tim 4:12), it was probably Artemas he sent to Titus. (Although the name "Artemas" was compounded on the name of the Greek goddess Artemis, one cannot draw any conclusions about whether he was

Jewish or \*Gentile. By this period Jewish names in Egypt and possibly elsewhere were compounded with "Artem-" roots; cf. the analogously Jewish Christian "Apollon," taken from the name of the Greek god Apollo.)

3:13. "Lawyer" could refer to a Jewish legal expert, but in the \*Diaspora it more

likely refers to a jurist of Roman law. Such jurists were trained 'rhetoricians (like Apollos; see comment on Acts 18:24) and were prominent men. (In contrast to some other ancient professionals like physicians, who were sometimes slaves, lawyers were generally of higher social status.) Like most names, "Zenas" is attested as a name in Jewish funerary inscriptions, so his occupation need not rule out his Jewishness; perhaps both he and Apollos were from the educated Jewish elite in Alexandria.

This verse constitutes a miniature "letter of recommendation" to provide hospitality to Zenas and Apollos (see comment on 1:8), who must be the bearers of this letter to Titus. "Help" means to supply their needs, providing for them to continue their voyage to their destination, perhaps to the south in Cyrene or Alexandria.

3:14. Here Paul enjoins charity (see comment on 2 Cor 9:6-8; Gal 6:6-10).

3:15. Such greetings were customary at the end of a letter, at times including expressions like "those who love us" (to designate to whom general greetings most suitably applied).

# PHILEMON

## Introduction

Authorship. Almost all scholars accept this letter as Pauline; the style and substance are characteristic of Paul.

Slavery and the Setting of Philemon. Like all other slave law, Roman law had to address the dual status of slaves: by nature they were persons, but from an economic standpoint they were disposed of as property. The head of a household could legally execute his slaves, and they would all be executed if the head of the household was murdered. Slaves composed a large part of the agricultural work force in parts of the Empire (e.g., Italy); they competed with free peasants for the same work. The mine slaves had the worst life, dying quickly under the harsh conditions of the mines.

But slaves were found in all professions and generally had more opportunity for social advancement than free peasants; unlike the vast majority of slaves in the United States and the Caribbean, they were able to work for and achieve freedom, and some freed slaves became independently wealthy. This social mobility applied especially to the household slaves-the only kind of slave addressed in Paul's writings. Economically, socially, and with regard to freedom to determine their future, these slaves were better off than most free persons in the Roman Empire; most free persons were rural peasants working as tenant farmers on the vast estates of wealthy landowners.

A few philosophers said that slaves were equals as people, but they never suggested that masters should free their slaves. Nearly everyone took the institution of slavery for granted, except a few people who purportedly said that it was "against nature"; their views were so unpopular that they survived only in the critique of their enemies. Paul's message to Philemon goes beyond other



documents of his time in not only pleading for clemency for an escaped slave but asking that he be released because he is now a Christian. So powerful was this precedent that many early U.S. slaveholders did not want their slaves to be exposed to Christianity, for fear that they would be compelled to free them; only in time was a distorted enough form of the Christian message available for use in sustaining slavery (see Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1978]).

Slaves, especially skilled or educated males, were often sent on errands and trusted as agents with their masters' property. Such slaves could sometimes earn enough money on the side to buy their freedom (although their earnings legally belonged to their master, they were normally permitted to control the money themselves); still, some took the opportunity of an errand to escape. Because a safe escape required them to get far away from where their master lived (in the case Paul addresses here, from Phrygia to Rome), they might take some of their master's money with them. (Such theft is probably the point of v. 18, but Paul might there account for the possibility that Philemon wants repayment for Onesimus himself. From the standpoint of ancient slave owners, the lost time of an escaped slave was lost money and was legally viewed as stolen property, to which one harboring him was liable. But more important, slaves themselves were not cheap, and Philemon might have already bought another slave to replace him.) Recapture normally meant severe punishment.

Old Testament law required harboring escaped slaves (Deut 23:15-16), but Roman law required Paul to return Onesimus to his master, with serious penalties if he failed to do so. Paul uses his relationship with Philemon to seek Onesimus's release: in a standard "letter of recommendation," one would plead with someone of equal (or sometimes lower) status on behalf of someone of lower status. Paul was not Philemon's equal socially or economically, but as his spiritual father he had grounds to claim the equality that characterized ancient friendship.

Structure and Form. This letter is a "letter of recommendation," the sort that a

*patron wrote to social peers or inferiors on behalf of a dependent client* to ask a favor for him. It is also "deliberative \*rhetoric," the type of speech or writing educated persons in antiquity used to persuade others to change their behavior or attitudes. Paul's exordium, or opening appeal (vv. 4-7), is followed by the main argument, consisting of proofs (vv. 8-16), which is followed by the peroratio, or summary of his case (vv. 17-22). Paul uses methods of argumentation common in his day to persuade well-to-do and well-educated Philemon, who would find such arguments persuasive. The preservation of the letter suggests that Paul succeeded in persuading Philemon, who would not have kept it and later allowed it to be circulated had he not freed Onesimus. The shortest of Paul's extant letters, this letter to Philemon would have occupied only a single sheet of papyrus.

Commentaries. See under Colossians. For Paul's views on slavery, see S. Scott Bartchy, *First-Century Slavery and the Interpretation of I Corinthians 7:21*, SBLDS 11 (Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973); compare also Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992), pp. 184-224, for some general considerations of Paul's words to household slaves.

1-3. On house \*churches see comment on Acts 12:12 and Romans 16:5. Well-to-do owners of homes in which ancient religious groups met were normally granted positions of honor in those groups, as their \*patrons. Ancient writers defined households not by blood relations but by hierarchical relationships: the free man and his wife, children and slaves (though only those with sizable incomes could afford slaves). The addressees are located in Phrygia (cf. Col 4:17). (This location is based on more helpful evidence than the character of the names. Although a much more common Phrygian name than "Philemon," "Apphia" is also attested elsewhere, including Palestine.)

4. Paul kept times of regular prayer, a normal pious Jewish practice (probably at least two hours a day); see comment on Romans 1:10. Thanksgivings were common in letters, and Paul here (vv. 4-7) follows his usual custom of using his

thanksgiving as a complimentary exordium. Such exordia were commonly used in speeches to praise the hearers, thus securing their favor.

5-6. The term translated "fellowship" (NASB, TEV) or "sharing" (NIV, NRSV) was often used for business partnerships or for sharing possessions (see v. 7). Philemon acts as a \*patron for the \*church (v. 2).

7. Hospitality was considered a paramount virtue in Greco-Roman antiquity, especially in Judaism. Well-to-do hosts often gathered those one rung below them on the economic ladder, sometimes members of their own religious group, to their home and provided a meal; Philemon and other well-to-do Christians sponsored the meals in their house churches. Mention of a shared friendship between the writer and recipient was a common feature of ancient letters; it was especially important in letters of friendship or when

the writer was about to request a favor from the letter's recipient.

8. Although Philemon has high social status-something particularly valued in his culture-he recognizes Paul's higher spiritual rank in the faith. Philosophers were often sponsored by such well-to-do persons as lecturers at banquets or teachers, but Paul claims a higher role than a mere philosopher would fill. Philosophers could be \*clients of wealthy \*patrons, but Paul implies that he is Philemon's spiritual patron here. Philosophers used the expression "what is proper" (NASB; "what you ought to do"-NIV) as a criterion for ethical judgments.

9. \*Rhetoricians (those who specialized in public speaking) liked to argue this way: "I could remind you of this, but I won't"-thus reminding while pretending not to do so. Respect for age was important in his culture, so Paul appeals to his age. (According to one ancient definition, the term Paul uses here ["aged"-KJV, NASB; "old man"-NIV, NRSV] applied to ages forty-nine to fifty-six; but \*New Testament writers usually use it loosely for anyone no longer "young." On the basis of other New Testament evidence, Paul is probably around fiftyseven, give or take five years.) Shared friendship was also used as the basis for a request;

friends were socially obligated to grant and return favors.

10. Teachers often called \*disciples "sons." The point of Paul's plea is that one could not enslave the son of one's own spiritual \*patron. Appeals to emotion were a necessary part of ancient argumentation.

11. Here Paul makes a wordplay on Onesimus's name, which means "useful." It was a common slave name, for obvious reasons. The well-to-do had a stereotype that slaves-explicitly including Phrygian slaves-were lazy and ill-disciplined.

12-14. Slaves were sometimes freed by their masters to become slaves of the temple of some god; here Paul asks that Philemon free Onesimus for the service of the \*gospel. He appeals not to his own authority but to Philemon's honor as a friend. Runaway slaves were known to be fearful of being captured and taken back to their masters, and Paul's concern for Onesimus is here evident.

15-16. Roman law saw slaves as both people and property; but a full brother would naturally not be viewed as property. The phrase "receive him back" or "have him back" resembles that found in business receipts, but here it is not a property transaction in which Philemon receives Onesimus back as a slave, but like welcoming back a family member. "Parted from you" (NASB) implies the sovereignty of God, a doctrine accepted by Judaism and no doubt assumed by Philemon.

17. "Partner" was often a formal business term (see comment on v. 6). In status-conscious Roman society, Paul is telling a social superior who respects his ministry: we are equals, and if you accept Onesimus as my agent (authorized representative), you must accept him as an equal (see, e.g., comment on Mt 10:40). Ancient letters of recommendation commonly appealed to friends to consider the bearer of the letter "as if he were me."

18-19. Here Paul employs language normally used for formally assuming debts; letters acknowledging debt normally included the promise "I will repay" and

were signed by the debtor in his own handwriting. Because it is in writing, this offer would be legally binding in the unlikely event that Philemon would take Paul up on it. But Philemon also owes a debt to Paul; again Paul uses the \*rhetorical technique of "not to mention" something he then mentions (vv. 8-9). By ancient social custom, friends were bound by the reciprocal obligation of repaying favors; Philemon owes Paul the greatest favor-his "self," his new life in conversion.

20. Compare the "refreshing" of verse 7; Paul asks for the same hospitable character that Philemon shows the \*church.

21. "Do even more than what I say" (NASB) means that Philemon will free Onesimus (cf. vv. 12-14). Professional speakers often sought favors in such terms: "Knowing your goodness, you will gladly hear me" or "grant me such-and-such a request."

22-25. Well-to-do \*patrons offered hospitality, which Paul can expect as Philemon's spiritual peer. Indeed, providing lodging for prominent guests was regarded as an honor.

# J A M E S

## Introduction

Authorship. That "James" need not further specify which James he is in 1:1 suggests that he is the most prominent and well-known James of the early church, James the Lord's brother (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:17-26; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 2:9, 12), as in church tradition. (James was a common name, and when one spoke of a less commonly recognized individual with a common name, one usually added a qualifying title, e.g., "Plato the comic poet," "James the lesser" in the apostolic list and many people in ancient business documents.)

The main objection to this proposal is the polished style of the Greek language of the letter, but this objection does not take account of several factors: (1) the widespread use of *rhetoric and more than sufficient time for James, the main spokesperson for the Jerusalem church, to have acquired facility in it*; (2) *that as the son of a carpenter he had probably had a better education than Galilean peasants*; (3) *the spread of Greek language and culture in Palestine (e.g., Josephus, Justin)*; (4) excavations showing that most of Galilee was not as backward as was once thought; (5) the widespread use of amanuenses (scribes) who might, like Josephus's editorial scribes, help a writer's Greek.

The situation depicted in the letter best fits a period before A.D. 66 (the Jewish war with Rome), and James was killed about A.D. 62. The letter probably should be viewed as genuinely from James; \*pseudepigraphic letters usually circulated long after the death of the person the author claimed to be, and a date between A.D. 62 and 66 would allow insufficient time for this letter to be a pseudepigraphic composition.

James the Just. \*Josephus and some later Jewish-Christian writers reported the great esteem that fellow Jerusalemites, especially the poor, had for James. Non-

Christian as well as Christian Jerusalemites admired his piety, but his denunciations of the aristocracy (as in 5:1-6) undoubtedly played a large role in the aristocratic priesthood's opposition to him. About the year A.D. 62, when the procurator Festus died, the high priest Ananus II executed James and some other people. The public outcry was so great, however, that when the new procurator Albinus arrived, Ananus was deposed from the high priesthood over the matter.

\*Genre. Greek writers, including Jewish writers enamored with Greek thought, often listed loosely related exhortations in a style called parenesis. Some modern writers have argued that James is this sort of work (some even view the letter as a New Testament collection of proverbs), but they fail to observe the close literary connections running throughout the book. It may be that James or one of his followers has adapted his sermonic material into a letter, but the connectedness of the material demonstrates that the letter in its present form is a polished, unified work.

James reads more like an essay than a letter, but one kind of ancient letter in which moralists and skilled \*rhetoricians engaged was a "letter-essay," a general letter intended more to make an argument than to communicate greetings. Writers like *Seneca and Pliny used literary epistles of this sort, which were published and meant to be appreciated by a large body of readers (1:1). The messenger who delivered it would presumably provide appropriate words of explanation; like letters from Jerusalem high priests to Diaspora synagogues, a letter from a respected leader in the Jerusalem church would carry much weight.* James draws on Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions, Jewish wisdom and Jesus' teachings (especially as now found in Mt 5-7).

Situation. Over a century before this time, the Roman general Pompey had cut Judean territory and made many Jewish peasants landless; the exorbitant taxes of Herod the Great must have driven more small farmers out of business. In the first century, many peasants worked as tenants on larger, feudal estates (as elsewhere in the empire); others became landless day laborers in the marketplaces, finding work only sporadically (more was available in harvest

season). Resentment against aristocratic landlords ran high in many parts of the empire, but nonpayment of promised goods to them was hardly an option; a few landowners even had their own hit squads of hired assassins to deal with uncooperative tenants. The situation was less extreme in the cities, but even there the divisions were obvious (e.g., the aristocracy in Jerusalem's Upper City versus the poor living downwind of that city's sewers). When the aristocratic priests began to withhold tithe income from the poorer priests, their only means of support, economic tensions began to climax.

In Rome, grain shortages often led to rioting. Social and economic tensions in Palestine were contained longer but eventually yielded to violence. Pursuing peace with Rome through practical politics, the Jerusalem aristocracy became an object of hatred to *Zealots and other elements of resistance, who felt that God alone should rule the land*. (Josephus, who wished to minimize the antiRoman sentiment that prevailed in Judea just before the war, tried to marginalize the Zealots as a fringe group; but other evidence in his \*narrative shows clearly that revolutionary sympathies were widespread.) Various outbreaks of violence eventually culminated in a revolt in A.D. 66, followed by a massacre of priests and the Roman garrison on the Temple Mount. Aristocratic and proletarian patriots clashed inside the city as Roman armies surrounded it, and in A.D. 70 Jerusalem fell and its temple was destroyed. The final resistance stronghold at Masada fell in A.D. 73.

Audience. James addresses especially Jewish Christians (and probably any other Jews who would listen) caught up in the sort of social tensions that eventually produced the war of A.D. 66-70 (see comment on Acts 21:20-22). Although the situation most explicitly fits James's own in Palestine, it also addresses the kinds of social tensions that were spreading throughout the Roman world (1:1). During the Judean war of 66-70, Rome violently discarded three emperors in a single year (A.D. 69), and immediately after the Judean war resistance fighters continued to spread their views to Jews in North Africa and Cyprus. But as in the case of most general epistles, this letter reflects especially the situation of the



writer more than that of any potential readership elsewhere.

Argument. James addresses the pride of the rich (1:9-11; 2:1-9; 4:13-17), persecution by the rich (2:6-7; 5:6) and pay withheld by the rich (5:4-6). He also addresses those tempted to retaliate with violent acts (2:11; 4:2) or words (1:19-20, 26; 3:1-12; 4:11-12; 5:9). He responds with a call to wisdom (1:5; 3:14-18), faith (1:6-8; 2:14-26) and patient endurance (1:9-11; 5:7-11). Once understood in the context of the situation, his supposedly "disjointed" exhortations all fit together as essential to his argument.

Commentaries. Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982); and Ralph P. Martin, *James*, WBC 48 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1988), are the best; the essay by Ralph P. Martin, "The Life-Setting of the Epistle of James in the Light of Jewish History," in *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies: Essays in Honor of William Sanford LaSor*, ed. Gary A. Tuttle (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 97-103, is also helpful on background. For those who do not work well with Greek, much of the same material in Davids's earlier work is found in his NIBC commentary on James (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1989). James is more favored with helpful commentaries than most other books, from Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James*, 3rd ed. (1913; reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1977), to James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1916), and Sophie Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, HNTC (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), and, somewhat less helpful, H. Greeven's reissue of Martin Dibelius, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, Hermeneia, trans. M. A. Williams (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), all of which give detailed parallels to specific verses.

1:1-11

How to Face Trials

In this opening section James introduces the major themes of his letter, by which

he responds to the trials of poverty and oppression faced by Jewish Palestinian peasants in his day.

1:1. The three basic elements of a letter's introduction were (1) the author's name; (2) the name of the recipient(s); (3) a greeting (usually the same greeting as here). Because this is a "general letter" (cf. comment on "letter-essays" in the introduction to James under "genre"), it proceeds immediately to the argument, without other epistolary features.

Because "James" is an English substitution for the original "Jacob" (as always in the \*New Testament), some writers have surmised here a symbolic "Jacob" addressing the twelve tribes of Israel, as Jacob addressed his descendants in the testament in Genesis 49. This suggestion would work better on the assumption of \*pseudonymity, but it is also possible that James would play on his own name. Plays on names were common (e.g., Mt 16:18). On the author and audience, see the introduction.

Most Jewish people believed that ten of the twelve tribes had been lost for centuries, and they would be restored only at the end of the age. They were thought to exist somewhere, however, so James's address may just mean, "To all my Jewish brothers and sisters scattered throughout the world." The "dispersion" or \*Diaspora included Jews in the Parthian as well as the Roman Empire, and James would meet Jews from many nations at the pilgrimage festivals to Jerusalem. Some commentators believe that he means the term symbolically for all Christians as spiritual Israelites, on the analogy of 1 Peter 1:1, but given the letter's contents, James

probably particularly addresses Jewish Christians.

1:2. The specific trials he addresses in this letter are the poverty and oppression experienced by the poor (1:9-11; 5:1-6; cf. 2:5-6).

1:3-4. Jewish tradition repeatedly stressed the virtue of enduring testings and

occasionally stressed joy in them due to faith in God's sovereignty. (\*Stoic philosophers also stressed contentment in them, because they affirmed that one could control one's response to them, but one could not control Fate.) Addresses like "friends," "beloved" and "brothers" were common in ancient moral exhortation; "brothers" was used both for "fellow countrymen" and for "fellow religionists." One point leading to another, yielding a list of several items (as here; 1:14-15; Rom 5:3-5; 2 Pet 1:5-7), was a rhetorical form known as concatenation. Lists of vices and virtues were also a conventional literary form.

1:5. Jewish wisdom traditions often stressed endurance and gave practical advice concerning how to deal with trials. The prime *Old Testament example of asking God* (cf. 4:2-3) *for wisdom is 1 Kings 3:5 and 9* (cf. also in the Apocrypha, Wisdom of Solomon 8:21; 9:5; Eccles 51:13-14), and God was always recognized as its source (e.g., Prov 2:6). In Jewish wisdom, upbraiding or reproaching was considered harsh and rude under normal circumstances, although reproof was honorable.

1:6. The image of being driven on the sea was common in Greek literature and occurs in Jewish wisdom texts; cf. especially Isaiah 57:20 and the saying about the insincere in Ecclesiasticus 33:2. In the context of James, asking for wisdom in faith means committing oneself to obey what God reveals (Jas 2:14-26).

1:7-8. Jewish wisdom texts condemn the double-minded or double-tongued person (cf. also 1 Chron 12:33; Ps 12:2); like philosophers, Jewish sages abhorred the hypocrisy of saying one thing and living another, and speaking or living inconsistently. (See comment on Jas 4:8 for the function of this warning in James.)

1:9-11. Wealthy landowners exploited the poor throughout the Empire, and Palestine was no exception; such economic tensions eventually provoked a war against Rome, in the course of which less well-to-do Jewish patriots slaughtered Jewish aristocrats.

The Old Testament and Jewish wisdom literature stress that riches fade, that God vindicates the oppressed and the poor in the end, and that he judges those who keep their wealth and do not share with the poor. James's final statement here resembles Isaiah 40:6-7 and Psalm 102:4, 11 and 16, although the idea was by this time common. The "scorching wind" (NASB) might refer to the sirocco, an especially devastating hot wind blowing into Palestine from the southern desert. But the summer sun by itself was also quite effective in wilting Palestinian flowers, which were then useless except as fuel.

1:12-18

### The Source of Testings

1:12. James uses the beatitude form common in ancient literature, especially Jewish literature: "How happy is the person who..." Distresses were viewed as temptations, providing opportunities to sin. The term translated "trials" (NASB, TEV; cf. NIV) or "testing" did not necessarily mean "temptation" (KJV, NRSV) in the modern sense, however; the tester could be interested in the distressed person's perseverance, rather than his or her defeat. Famines, poverty and oppression

were among events viewed as testings.

1:13-16. God clearly "tested" people in the Bible and later Jewish literature (Gen 22:1; Deut 8:2; 13:3; Judg 2:22), but he never tested them in the sense that is implied here: seeking for them to fail instead of persevere. Jewish texts distinguished between God's motives in testing people (in love, seeking their good) and *Satan's motives in testing them (to make them fall)*. In most Jewish texts, Satan (also called Belial and Mastema) fills the role of tempter. Although James does not deny Satan's indirect role (4:7), he emphasizes here the human element in succumbing to temptation. He personifies "desire" (NIV, NRSV, TEV) or "lust" (KJV, NASB) as enticing a person, then illegitimately conceiving the child "sin," which in turn brings forth "death"; Jewish teachers occasionally

*applied the rhetorical technique of personification to the "evil impulse" all people had.*

That people "tested" God in the \*Old Testament is also clear (Num 14:22; Ps 78:18, 41, 56; 95:9; Mal 3:15), but again these examples mean that they tried to put him to the test, not that they led him to succumb to temptation. James could adapt the term in the light of the Greek philosophical idea that God could not be affected or changed by human actions, nor could he cause evils in the world. But more likely James is simply working with a different nuance of the term for "test"; in the Old Testament God is clearly the direct cause of judgment (e.g., Amos 4:6-11), and he listened to human pleas (Gen 18:23-32; Ex 32:10-13). The meaning is thus as in Ecclesiasticus 15:11-12 and 20: people choose to sin, and they dare not say that God is responsible for their response to testing (by contrast, Greek literature was full of people protesting that their temptation was too great to resist).

1:17. Rather than sending testing to break people (1:12-16), God sends good gifts, including creation or rebirth (v. 18). That God is author of everything good was a commonplace of Jewish and Greek wisdom. That what is in the heavens is perfect was a common belief in antiquity, and Jewish writers sometimes used "from above" to mean "from God."

"Father of lights" could mean "Creator of the stars"; the pagans viewed the stars as gods, but Jewish people viewed the stars as angels. (Canaanites at Ugarit had long before called El the "Father of lights," and the \*Dead Sea Scrolls call God's supreme angel "Ruler of lights." Various ancient Jewish texts call stars "the lights"-cf. Gen 1:14-19; Jer 31:35.) Ancient astronomers used words like "moving shadows" to describe the irregularities of heavenly bodies; but philosophers viewed what was perfect, what was in the heavens, as changeless and without direct contact with earth. Most of the ancient world believed in astrology and feared the powers of the stars. James is not supporting astrology; rather, like other Jewish writers, he is declaring God lord over the stars while denying God's inconsistency. To ancient readers his words would thus proclaim:

testings are not the result of arbitrary fate, but the faithful workings of a loving Father.

1:18. Whether he refers to believers' rebirth through the \*gospel (cf. 1:21; 1 Pet 1:23; see comment on Jn 3:3, 5) or to humanity's initial creation by God's word (Gen 1:26) is disputed; "first fruits" may favor the former meaning (the beginning of the new creation). The point is clear either way: God's giving birth is contrasted with desire's giving birth (1:15), and it illustrates God's grace toward people (1:17).

1:19-27

### True Religion

James now turns to appropriate ways to deal with testing (1:2-18). The 'Zealot-like model, which was gaining popularity in Jewish Palestine and would ultimately lead to Jerusalem's destruction, was not the appropriate response. James condemns not only violent acts but also the violent \*rhetoric that incites them.

1:19. These are by far some of the most common admonitions in Jewish wisdom, from Proverbs on (e.g., 14:29; 15:18; 16:32; 19:11); Greek parallels are no less easy to adduce. James contrasts this biblical and traditional wisdom with the spirit of revolution sweeping his land.

1:20. The militant Jewish resistance emphasized striking out at the Romans and their aristocratic vassals, supposing that they would be acting as agents of God's righteous indignation. But James associates righteousness with peace (3:18) and nonresistance (5:7).

1:21. "Wickedness" (NASB) in this context must refer to unrighteous anger (1:20); "meekness" (KJV) is the virtue of the nonresistant.

1:22. Receiving the word (1:21) meant more than hearing it; they had to live

accordingly (1:19-20). (The proposal that "the ingrafted word" refers to the *Stoic concept of "innate reason," using similar language, fails on this point: "innate" reason need not be "received."*) Although most Jewish teachers (some disagreed) valued learning the law above practicing it because they held that practice depended on knowledge—they all agreed that both were necessary to fulfill the law. That one must not only know but must also obey truth was common moral wisdom, which the readers would not dispute. Hearing without obeying indicated self-delusion (cf. Ezek 33:30-32).

1:23-24. The best mirrors were of Corinthian bronze, but no mirrors of that period produced the accurate images available today (cf. 1 Cor 13:12). Those with enough resources to own mirrors used them when fixing their hair; if James alludes to such people, he portrays the forgetful hearer as stupid. More likely, he refers to many people who had no mirrors and saw themselves rarely, who might more naturally forget their own appearance. In this case the reference is to the ease with which one loses the memory of the word, if one does not work hard to put it into practice. (Some moralists recommended use of a mirror to emphasize moral reflection. Perhaps one who heard in the word how a new creation should live—1:18-20—but failed to practice it was forgetting what he or she had become. But the mirror analogy probably means only the quick forgetting of the word, as above.)

1:25. The mirror is an analogy for the law (as at least once in \*Philo), which was thought to bring liberty. Philosophers believed that true wisdom or knowledge freed them from worldly care; the liberty here, however, as in many Jewish sources, seems to be from sin (1:19-20). (On conceptions of freedom, see comment on Jn 8:33.)

1:26. James again condemns uncontrolled speech, such as the impassioned denunciations of Roman rule likely to lead to violence.

1:27. In contrast to the violent and unruly religion of the Jewish revolutionaries, true religion involves defending the socially powerless (Ex 22:20-24; Ps 146:9;

Is 1:17) and avoiding worldliness (i.e., the values and behavior of the world; see comment on 4:4). Orphans and widows had neither direct means of support nor automatic legal defenders in that society. In Juda

ism, charity distributors made sure that widows and orphans were cared for if they had no relatives to help them; such charity is also part of the visiting envisioned here. Greek society did look out for freeborn orphans, but not other ones. Jewish people visited the bereaved especially during the first week of their bereavement but also afterward, and they likewise visited the sick. Many Greco-Roman writers also valued visiting the sick and bereaved.

2:1-13

### No Favoritism Toward the Wealthy

In Palestine, as in most of the empire, the rich were oppressing the poor (2:67). But the temptation to make rich converts or inquirers feel welcome at the expense of the poor was immoral (2:4). The language of impartiality was normally applied especially to legal settings, but because \*synagogues served both as houses of prayer and as community courts, this predominantly legal image naturally applies to any gatherings there.

2:1. Jewish wisdom stressed that those who respected God should not show "favoritism" toward (literally "accept the face of") people. The title "Lord of glory" (KJV, NASB; it means "glorious Lord"-NIV, NRSV, TEV) was normally applied to God (e.g., in \*1 Enoch; cf. Ps 24:7-8).

2:2. Moralists and satirists mocked the special respect given to the wealthy, which usually amounted to a self-demeaning way to seek funds. Illustrations like this one could be hypothetical, which fit the writer's \*diatribe style of argument. In Rome the senatorial class wore gold rings; some members of this class sought popular support for favors shown to various groups. But rings were hardly limited to them; in the eastern Mediterranean gold rings also marked great wealth and status. Clothing likewise distinguished the wealthy, who could be



ostentatious, from others; peasants commonly had only one cloak, which would thus often be dirty.

"Assembly" (KJV, NASB, NRSV) or "meeting" (NIV, TEV) is literally *"synagogue," either because James wants the whole Jewish community to embrace his example, or because the Jewish-Christian congregations (cf. 5:14) also considered themselves messianic synagogues.*

2:3. Jewish legal texts condemn judges who make one litigant stand while another is permitted to sit; these hearings normally took place in synagogues (2:2). To avoid partiality on the basis of clothing, some second-century \*rabbis required both litigants to dress in the same kind of clothes.

2:4. Roman laws explicitly favored the rich. Persons of lower class, who were thought to act from economic self-interest, could not bring accusations against persons of higher class, and the laws prescribed harsher penalties for lower-class persons convicted of offenses than for offenders from the higher class. Biblical law, most Jewish law and traditional Greek philosophers had always rejected such distinctions as immoral. In normal times, the public respected the rich as public benefactors, although the \*Zealots recognized in the Jerusalem aristocracy pro-Roman enemies. The \*Old Testament forbade partiality on the basis of economic status (Lev 19:15) and called judges among God's people to judge impartially, as God did.

2:5. For God hearing the cries of the poor, who were also the most easily judicially oppressed, cf. texts like Deuteronomy 15:9. One line of Jewish tradition stresses the special piety of the poor, who had to depend on God alone.

2:6. Roman courts always favored the rich, who could initiate lawsuits against social inferiors, although social inferiors could not initiate lawsuits against them. In theory, Jewish courts sought to avoid this discrimination, but as in most cultures people of means naturally had legal advantages: they were able to argue their cases more articulately or to hire others to do so for them.

2:7. Judaism often spoke of "the sacred name" or used other expressions rather than using the name of God; James may apply this divine title to Jesus here (cf. 2:1). In the Old Testament, being "called by someone's name" meant that one belonged to that person in some sense; it was especially applied to belonging to God. Some of the Galilean aristocracy (such as those settled in Tiberias) were considered impious by general Jewish standards. But this accusation may apply specifically to anti-Christian opposition: the opposition Christians faced in Jerusalem came especially from the Sadducean aristocracy (Acts 4:1; 23:6-10).

2:8. A "royal" law, i.e., an imperial edict, was higher than the justice of the aristocracy, and because Judaism universally acknowledged God to be the supreme King, his \*law could be described in these terms. Christians could naturally apply it especially to Jesus' teaching; like some other Jewish teachers, Jesus used this passage in Leviticus 19:18 to epitomize the law (cf. Mk 12:29-34).

2:9-10. Jewish teachers distinguished "heavier" from "lighter" sins, but felt that God required obedience to even the "smallest" commandments, rewarding the obedient with \*eternal life and punishing transgressors with damnation. That willful violation of even a minor transgression was tantamount to rejecting the whole law was one of their most commonly repeated views. (Ancient writers often stated principles in sharp, graphic ways but in practice showed more mercy to actual transgressors in the community.)

"Stoics (against the \*Epicureans) went even farther in declaring that all sins were equal. The point here is that rejecting the law of economic impartiality in Leviticus 19:15, or the general principle of love behind it (Lev 19:18), was rejecting the whole authority of God (Jas 2:8). Jewish teachers often used "stumbling" as a metaphor for sin.

2:11. Jewish tradition sometimes compared oppression of the poor with murder (cf. also 5:6). But James might here allude to those 'Zealot-like protesters, too religious to commit adultery, who would nevertheless not scruple at shedding the

blood of Jewish aristocrats. At the time this letter was written, these "assassins" were regularly stabbing aristocrats to death in the temple (see comment on Acts 21:20-22).

2:12. Ancients could summarize a person's behavior in terms of words and deeds; see comment on 1 John 3:18. Some scholars have pointed out that many philosophers believed themselves alone wise, free and kings, and they connect "law of liberty" here with "royal law" in 2:8. Jewish teachers believed that the law of the heavenly king freed one from the yoke of this world's affairs. "Law of freedom," as in 1:25, probably implies deliverance from sin. 2:13. James's point here is that if his readers are not impartial judges, they will answer to the God who is an impartial judge; his impartiality in judgment is rehearsed throughout the \*Old Testament and Jewish tradition. Jewish teachers defined God's character especially by two attributes, mercy and justice, and suggested that mercy normal

ly won out over justice. They would have agreed with James that the merciless forfeited a right to mercy, and they had their own sayings similar to this one.

2:14-26

### Faith Must Be Lived Out

James could be reacting against a misinterpretation of Paul's teaching, as some commentators have suggested, but more likely he is reacting against a strain of Jewish piety that was fueling the revolutionary fervor that was leading toward war (cf. 1:26-27; 2:19). James uses words like "faith" differently from the way Paul does, but neither writer would be opposed to the other's meaning: genuine faith is a reality on which one stakes one's life, not merely passive assent to a doctrine. For James, expressions of faith like nondiscrimination (2:8-9) and nonviolence (2:10-12) must be lived, not merely acknowledged.

2:14-16. God commanded his people to supply the needs of the poor (Deut 15:78); to fail to do so was disobedience to his \*law. "Go in peace" was a Jewish

farewell blessing, but Jewish people were expected to show hospitality to other Jewish people in need. "Be warmed" (NASB) alludes to how cold the homeless could become, especially in a place of high elevation like Jerusalem in winter. Moralists often used such straw examples ("if someone should claim") as part of their argument; the reader is forced to admit the logical absurdity of the conclusion of a particular line of reasoning and to agree with the author's argument. Jewish people held Abraham to be the ultimate example of such hospitality (cf. 2:21-23 and comment on Heb 13:2).

2:17. Writers like \*Epictetus could use "dead" the same way as here; this is a graphic way of saying "useless" (see comment on 2:26).

2:18. "Someone will say" was a common way to introduce the speech of an imaginary opponent, the answer to whose objection merely furthered the writer's argument. The force of the objection is "One may have faith, and another works"; the answer is "Faith can be demonstrated only by works." "Show me" was a natural demand for evidence and appears in other moralists, especially \*Epictetus.

2:19-20. The oneness of God was the basic confession of Judaism, recited daily in the Shema (Deut 6:4 and associated texts). Thus by "faith" James means monotheism, as much of Judaism used the term ('emunah). He thus says, "You hold to correct basic doctrine-so what? That is meaningless by itself." That demons recognized the truth about God and trembled before his name was widely acknowledged, even in the magical papyri (which specialized in what from a biblical perspective was illicit demonology; cf. also .1 Enoch). Jewish teachers would have agreed with James that the oneness of God must be declared with a genuine heart; his oneness implied that he was to be the supreme object of human affection (Deut 6:4-5).

2:21-24. James connects Genesis 15:6 with the offering of Isaac (Gen 22), as in Jewish tradition. This event was the climax of his faith in God, not only in Jewish tradition but in the *Genesis narrative itself*. (*God entered into covenant*

*with Abraham's descendants because he loved him and made a promise to him-Deut 7:7-9-which Abraham embraced in faith and thus obeyed; God accepted this obedient faith-Gen 26:4-5. This view was not quite the same as the second-century rabbinic view that God parted the Red Sea on account of the merits of the patriarchs, but neither is it the same as a*

common modern conception that faith is a once-for-all prayer involving no commitment of life or purpose and is efficacious even if quickly forgotten.)

Abraham was "declared righteous" at the Aqedah, the offering of Isaac, in the sense that God again acknowledged (Gen 22:12) Abraham's prior faith, which had been tested ultimately at this point. The \*Old Testament called Abraham God's friend (2 Chron 20:7; Is 41:8), and later Jewish writers delighted in this title for him.

2:25. Like the example of Abraham, the example of Rahab would not be controversial among James's Jewish readers. Like Abraham (see comment on 2:14-16), Rahab was known for hospitality; but her act of saving the spies saved her as well (Josh 2:1-21; 6:22-25).

2:26. Most ancient people, including most Jewish people, accepted the necessary cooperation of body and spirit or soul; all who believed in the spirit or soul agreed that when it departed, the person died.

3:1-12

The Violent Tongue

James now returns to his warnings against inflammatory speech (1:19, 26): one ought not to curse people made in God's image (3:9-12).

3:1. Jewish sages also warned against teaching error and recognized that teachers would be judged strictly for leading others astray. Some who wanted to be teachers of wisdom were teaching the sort of "wisdom" espoused by the Jewish

revolutionaries, which led to violence (3:13-18).

3:2. That everyone sinned was standard Jewish doctrine; that one of the most common instruments of sin and harm was the human mouth was also a Jewish commonplace (as early as Proverbs, e.g., 11:9; 12:18; 18:21).

3:3-4. Controlling horses with bits and ships with rudders were common illustrations in the ancient Mediterranean, because everyone except the most illiterate peasants (who would also miss many of the other allusions if they heard James read) understood them. Jewish texts often cast wisdom, reason and God in the role of ideal pilots, but James's point here is not what should control or have power. His point is simply the power of a small instrument (v. 5).

3:5-6. Others also compared the spread of rumors to the igniting of what would rapidly become a forest fire. Here the image is that of a tongue that incites the whole body to violence. The boastful tongue plotting harm (Ps 52:1-4) and the tongue as a hurtful fire (Ps 39:1-3; 120:2-4; Prov 16:27; 26:21; Ecclus 28:21-23) are old images. That the fire is sparked by "hell" suggests where it leads; Jewish pictures of 'Gehenna, like Jesus' images for the fate of the damned, typically included flame.

3:7-8. Made in God's image (v. 9), people were appointed over all creatures (Gen 1:26). But although other creatures could be subdued as God commanded (Gen 1:28; 9:2), the tongue was like the deadliest snake, full of toxic venom (Ps 140:3; cf. 58:16, the \*Dead Sea Scrolls and other Jewish texts). \*Stoic philosophers also occasionally reflected on humanity's rule over animals.

3:9-10. Some other Jewish teachers also noted the incongruity of blessing God while cursing other people, who were made in his image; even more often, they recognized that whatever one did to other humans, it was as if one did it to God himself, because they were made in his image. James's readers could not easily miss his point. This text makes clear the sort of perverse speech that 3:1-12 addresses: antago

nistic speech, which fits the situation the letter as a whole addresses. Whether by incendiary \*rhetoric or a battle cry, cursing mortal enemies was incompatible with worshiping God, no matter how embedded it had become in Jewish patriotic tradition (since the \*Maccabean era).

3:11-12. James produces two other common examples of impossible incongruity. Figs, olives and grapes were the three most common agricultural products of the Judean hills, and alongside wheat they would have constituted the most common crops of the Mediterranean region as a whole. That everything brought forth after its kind was a matter of common observation and became proverbial in Greco-Roman circles (cf. also Gen 1:11-12, 21, 24-25).

3:13-18

#### Peaceable Versus Demonic Wisdom

The \*Zealot paradigm of violent retaliation claimed to be religious and wise; James urges the poor to respond by waiting on God instead (5:7-11). That James was wiser than advocates of revolution was proved in the aftermath of the Judean revolt of A.D. 66-70, when Judea was devastated, Jerusalem destroyed and Jerusalem's survivors enslaved.

3:13. Those who wished to teach others as wise sages (3:1) needed to show their wisdom by gentleness: this is the antithesis of the advocates of revolution, who were gaining popularity in the tensions stirred by poverty and oppression in the land.

3:14. The term translated "jealousy" (NASB) or "envy" (NIV, NRSV) here is the term for "zeal" used by the Zealots, who fancied themselves successors of Phinehas (Num 25:11; Ps 106:30-31) and the \*Maccabees and sought to liberate Jewish Palestine from Rome by force of arms. "Strife" (KJV; "selfish ambition"-NASB, NIV, NRSV) also was related to disharmony and had been known to provoke wars.

3:15-16. "Above" was sometimes synonymous with "God" in Jewish tradition; as opposed to heavenly wisdom, the wisdom of violence (3:14) was thoroughly earthly, human and demonic (cf. similarly Mt 16:22-23). The \*Dead Sea Scrolls spoke of sins as inspired by the spirit of error, and folk Judaism believed that people were continually surrounded by hordes of demons. James's words suggest a more indirect working of demons through stirring up their own ungodly values in the world system.

3:17. Wisdom "from above," i.e., from God (1:17; 3:15), is "pure," not mixed with anything else (in this case, not mixed with demonic wisdom-3:14-16); it is thus also "unhypocritical." Many Jewish wisdom texts spoke of divine wisdom coming from above. God's genuine wisdom is nonviolent rather than given to lashing out: "peaceable," "gentle," "open to reason," "full of mercy" (cf. 2:13); it was also "unwavering" (NASB), better rendered "impartial" (NIV), or "without prejudice or favoritism" (cf. 2:1-9). This wisdom is neither that of the \*Zealots nor of those wishing to accommodate the aristocracy.

3:18. The image of virtues as seeds and fruits has many parallels (e.g., Prov 11:18; Is 32:17), but James's point in the context is this: true wisdom is the wisdom of peace, not of violence. Although many \*Pharisaic teachers extolled peace, many populists were advocating violence, and James's message was in many regards countercultural.

4:1-12

Choose Between God and the World's Values

God's wisdom was not the populist

wisdom of the revolutionaries (3:13-18); thus those whose faith was genuine (2:14-26) could not waver between the two options. James addresses here many of the poor, the oppressed, who are tempted to try to overthrow their oppressors and seize their goods.



4:1. Most Greco-Roman philosophers and many *Diaspora Jews repeatedly condemned people who were ruled by their passions, and described these desires for pleasure as "waging war."* Many writers like Plato, Plutarch and Philo attributed all literal wars to bodily desires. In a somewhat similar vein, Jewish people spoke of an evil impulse, which according to later \*rabbis dominated all 248 members of the body.

4:2. \*Diatribes often included hyperbole, or graphic, \*rhetorical exaggeration for effect. Most of James's readers have presumably not literally killed anyone, but they are exposed to violent teachers (3:13-18) who regard murder as a satisfactory means of attaining justice and redistribution of wealth. James counsels prayer instead. (Later he has much harsher words for the oppressors, however; cf. 5:1-6.)

4:3. Jewish prayers typically asked God to supply genuine needs; see comment on Matthew 6:11. James believes that such prayers will be answered (cf. Prov 10:24), even though the oppressed will always be worse off than they should be (cf. Prov 13:23). But requests based on envy of others' wealth or status were meant to satisfy only their passions (see comment on 4:1).

4:4. In the \*Old Testament, Israel was often called an adulteress for claiming to serve God while pursuing idols (e.g., Hos 1-3). Those who claimed to be God's friends (Jas 2:23) but were really moral \*clients of the world (friendship often applied to patron-client relationships)-that is, they shared the world's values (3:13-18)- were really unfaithful to God.

4:5. Here James may refer to the evil impulse that, according to Jewish tradition, God made to dwell in people; on this reading, he is saying, "This human spirit jealously longs," as in 4:1-3. Less likely, he could mean that one's spirit or soul longs and ought to long-but for God (Ps 42:1-2; 63:1; 84:2).

A third possibility is that he may be citing a proverbial maxim based on such texts as Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 32:21 and Joel 2:18, summarizing the sense

of Scripture thus: "God is jealous over the spirit he gave us" and will tolerate no competition for its affection (4:4). (Like Jewish writers, \*New Testament authors sometimes \*midrashically meshed various texts together.) This view seems to fit the context somewhat better than other views, given that Scripture did not speak this "in vain" (4:5); but the "greater grace" of 4:6 could support the first view above.

4:6. James cites Proverbs 3:34 almost exactly as it appeared in the common form of the `Septuagint. This idea became common in Jewish wisdom texts. Humility included appropriate submission, in this case to God's sovereign plan for a person's life (4:7, 10).

4:7. Ancient magical texts spoke of demons' fleeing before incantations, but the idea here is moral, not magical. One must choose between the values of God and those of the world (4:4), between God's wisdom and that which is demonic (3:15, 17). The point is that a person who lives by God's values (in this case, his way of peace) is no part of \*Satan's kingdom (in contrast to the religious-sounding revolutionaries).

4:8. \*Old Testament texts exhorted priests and people in general to "draw near to God." Purification was also necessary for priests (Ex 30:19), but the

image here is not specifically priestly; those responsible for bloodshed, even if only as representatives of a corporately guilty group, were to wash their hands (Deut 21:6; cf. Jas 4:2). "Purification" often came to be used in an inward, moral sense (e.g., Jer 4:14).

Using ideas like "sinners," James employs not only the harsh diatribe rhetoric that Greco-Roman writers used against imaginary opponents when demolishing their positions; he also uses the rhetoric of Old Testament prophets. "Double-minded" again alludes to the general ancient contempt for hypocrisy: one must act from either God's peaceful wisdom or the devil's hateful wisdom (3:13-18; 4:4).

4:9-10. Old Testament texts often connected mourning and self-humiliation with \*repentance (Lev 23:29; 26:41), especially when confronted by divine judgment (2 Kings 22:11; Joel 1:13-14; 2:12-13). The exaltation of the humble was also a teaching of the prophets; see comment on Matthew 23:12.

4:11. James returns to the specific worldly behavior his readers are following: violent speech (3:1-12). (He either addresses social stratification within the Christian community or, more likely, uses "brothers" in its more common Jewish sense of "fellow Jews." Jewish revolutionaries had already begun killing aristocrats, and inflammatory *rhetoric was certainly even more common.*) *His general principle was standard Old Testament and Jewish wisdom opposing slander, which many of his readers may not have been considering in this context. The law declared God's love for Israel and commanded his people to love one another (2:8); to slander a fellow Jew was thus to disrespect the law.*

4:12. That God alone was the true judge was a common Jewish and \*New Testament teaching. In Jewish teaching, earthly courts proceeded only on his authority, and those who ruled in them had to judge by the law. Investigations had to be conducted thoroughly, with a minimum of two witnesses; acting as a false witness, slandering someone to a court without genuine firsthand information, was punishable according to the judgment the falsely accused person would have received if convicted.

4:13-17

### The Pride of the Rich

Having counseled the oppressed, James quickly turns to the oppressors, denouncing their self-satisfied forgetfulness of God. Most of the wealth in the Roman Empire was accumulated by one of two means: the landed gentry, of high social class, made their wealth from land-based revenues such as tenant farmers and crops; the merchant class gathered great wealth without the corresponding social status. James addresses both merchants (4:13-17) and the

landed aristocracy (5:1-6).

4:13. Many philosophers (especially \*Stoics) and Jewish sages liked to warn their hearers that they had no control over the future. "Go now" (5:1) was a fairly common way of proceeding with an argument (e.g., Athenaeus), addressing an imaginary opponent (e.g., *Cicero*, Epictetus) or prefacing harsh words in satire (Horace, \*Juvenal).

The primary markets for manufactured goods were towns and cities; projecting commitments and profits was also a normal business practice. Traders were not always wealthy, but here they are at least seeking wealth. The sin here is arrogant presumption-feeling secure enough to leave God out of one's calculations (4:16; cf., e.g., Jer 12:1; Amos 6:1).

4:14. Here James offers common

Jewish and Stoic wisdom to which few readers would theoretically object, although many were undoubtedly not heeding it.

4:15-17. "If God wills" was a conventional Greek expression but fit Jewish piety well; it appears elsewhere in the \*New Testament (e.g., Acts 18:21; 1 Cor 16:7).

5:1-6

Judgment on Wealthy Oppressors

Throughout most of the rural areas of the Roman Empire, including much of rural Galilee, rich landowners profited from the toil of the serfs (often alongside slaves) who worked their massive estates. That feudalism arose only in medieval times is a misconception; it is simply less prominent in literature of Roman times because Roman literature concentrated on the cities, although only about 10 percent of the Empire is estimated to have been urban.

Most of James's denunciation takes the form of an *Old Testament prophetic judgment oracle*, paralleled also in some Jewish wisdom and apocalyptic texts.

The difference between his denunciation of the rich and the violent speech he himself condemns (1:19, 26; 3:1-12; 4:11) is that he appeals to God's judgment rather than to human retribution (4:12; cf. Deut 32:35; Prov 20:22). His \*prophecy was timely; several years later the Jewish aristocracy was virtually obliterated in the revolt against Rome.

5:1. Exhortations to weep and howl were a graphic prophetic way of saying: You will have reason to weep and howl (Joel 1:8; Mic 1:8; cf. Jas 4:9). On "come" see comment on 4:13.

5:2. Clothing was one of the primary signs of wealth in antiquity; many peasants had only one garment.

5:3. Some other ancient writers ridiculed the rust of unused, hoarded wealth. For "rust" and "moth" (v. 2) together, compare Matthew 6:19. As Jewish sources often noted, wealth would be worthless in the impending day of God's judgment.

5:4. The law of Moses forbade withholding wages, even overnight; if the injured worker cried out to God, God would avenge him (Deut 24:14-15; cf., e.g., Lev 19:13; Prov 11:24; Jer 22:13; Mal 3:5). That the wrong done the oppressed would itself cry out to God against the oppressor was also an \*Old Testament image (Gen 4:10). In firstcentury Palestine, many day laborers depended on their daily wages to purchase food for themselves and their families; withholding money could mean that they would go hungry.

The income absentee landlords received from agriculture was such that the wages they paid workers could not even begin to reflect the profits they accumulated. Although the rich supported public building projects (in return for attached inscriptions honoring them), they were far less inclined to pay sufficient wages to their workers. At least as early as the second century, Jewish teachers suggested that even failing to leave gleanings for the poor was robbing them (based on Lev 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut 24:19).

Most crops were harvested in or near summer, and extra laborers were often hired for the harvest. Some Diaspora Jewish texts (literary texts, amulets, etc.) called God "Lord of Sabaoth," transliterating the Hebrew word for "hosts": the God with vast armies (an epithet especially prominent in the \*LXX of Isaiah). If it was a bad idea to offend a powerful official, it was thus a much worse idea to secure the enmity of God.

#### 5:5. The rich consumed much meat

in a day of slaughter, i.e., at a feast (often at sheep-shearing or harvest; cf. 1 Sam 25:4, 36); once an animal was slaughtered, as much as possible was eaten at once, because the rest could be preserved only by drying and salting. Meat was generally unavailable to the poor except during public festivals.

The picture here is of the rich being fattened like cattle for the day of their own slaughter (cf., e.g., Jer 12:3; Amos 4:1-3); similar imagery appears in parts of the early \*apocalyptic work 1 Enoch (94:7-11; 96:8; 99:6). As often in the \*Old Testament (e.g., Amos 6:4-7), the sin in verse 5 is not exploitation per se (as in v. 4) but a lavish lifestyle while others go hungry or in need.

5:6. Jewish tradition recognized that the wicked plotted against the righteous (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 2:19-20), as the sufferings of many Old Testament heroes (like David and Jeremiah) showed. Judicial oppression of the poor, repeatedly condemned in the Old Testament, was viewed as murder in later Jewish texts; to take a person's garment or to withhold a person's wages was to risk that person's life. James "the Just" himself was later martyred by the high priest for his denunciations of the behavior of the rich.

#### 5:7-12

#### Endure Until God Vindicates

The oppressors would be punished (5:1-6), but the oppressed have to wait on God (cf. 1:4) rather than take matters violently into their own hands. This

exhortation did not mean that they could not speak out against injustice (5:1-6); it only forbade violence and personally hostile speech (5:9) as an appropriate solution to injustice.

5:7-8. Harvest here (cf. v. 4) becomes an image of the day of judgment, as elsewhere in Jewish literature (especially \*4 Ezra; Mt 13). Palestine's autumn rains came in October and November, and winter rains (roughly three-quarters of the year's rainfall) in December and January. But residents of Syria-Palestine eagerly anticipated the late rains of March and April, which were necessary to ready their late spring and early summer crops. The main wheat harvest there ran from mid-April through the end of May; the barley harvest was in March. The main grain harvest came in June in Greece, July in Italy. Farmers' families were entirely dependent on good harvests; thus James speaks of the "precious" (or "valuable"-NIV) fruit of the earth.

5:9. On this kind of speech, see comment on 4:11-12.

5:10. *Most Old Testament prophets faced great opposition for their preaching; some faced death. Jewish tradition had amplified accounts of their martyrdom even further, hence no one would dispute James's claim. Virtuous examples were an important part of ancient argumentation* (Stoic philosophers often used like-minded sages as models of endurance).

5:11. The whole structure of the book of Job was probably meant to encourage Israel after the exile; although God's justice seemed far away and they were mocked by the nations, God would ultimately vindicate them and end their captivity. 'Hellenistic Jewish tradition further celebrated Job's endurance (e.g., the `Testament of Job, and Aristeas the Exegete). (Various later \*rabbis evaluated him differently, some positively, some negatively. The Testament of Job includes Stoic language for the virtue of endurance and transfers some earlier depictions of Abraham to Job; this transferral may have been the source of one later rabbi's rare conclusion that Job was greater than Abraham.)

5:12. Oaths were verbal confirmations guaranteed by appeal to a divine witness; violation of an oath in God's name broke the third commandment (Ex 20:7; Deut 5:11). Like some groups of Greek philosophers, some kinds of \*Essenes would not swear any further oaths after they had completed their initiatory oaths (according to *Josephus, in contrast to the Essenes who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls*); the \*Pharisees, however, allowed oaths. On swearing by various items as lesser surrogates for God, see comment on Matthew 5:33-37. Oaths generally called on the gods to witness the veracity of one's intention and had to be kept, or invited a curse on the one who had spoken the untruth. Vows were a more specific category of oaths to undertake some duty or abstain from something for a particular period of time.

The difficulty is ascertaining what sort of swearing is in view in the context. Some scholars have suggested a warning against taking a 'Zealot-type oath (cf. Acts 23:12); while this would fit the context of James very well, his readers may not have recognized something so specific as the obvious application of his words. The idea is probably that one should not impatiently (5:7-11) swear; rather one should pray (5:13). One should pray rather than swear because the fullest form of an oath included a self-curse, which was like saying "May God kill me if I fail to do this" or (in English preadolescent idiom) "Cross my heart and hope to die."

5:13-20

Depending on God

5:13. Nonresistance did not mean pretending that things did not matter (as the \*Stoics did; see comment on Eph 5:20) or simply waiting unconsolated until the end time (as some Jewish \*apocalyptic writers may have done); it meant prayer.

5:14. Wounds were anointed with oil to cleanse them (cf. Lk 10:34), and those with headaches and those wishing to avoid some diseases were anointed with olive oil for "medicinal" purposes (from the ancient perspective). Oil was also



used to anoint priests or rulers, pouring oil over the head as a consecration to God. Christians may have combined a symbolic medicinal use with a symbol of handing one over to the power of God's \*Spirit (Mk 6:13).

A general prayer for healing was one of the blessings regularly recited in *synagogues*; on "*elders*" see comment on Acts 14:23; on "*church*" in a Jewish context see the glossary. Visiting the sick was an act of piety in early Judaism that Christians probably continued (cf. Mt 25:36, 43, for ailing missionaries).

5:15-16. The \*Old Testament prophets often used healing from sickness as an image for healing from sin, and Jewish literature often associated sin and sickness; for instance, the eighth blessing of a Jewish daily prayer, for healing (although the emphasis is not physical healing), followed petitions for forgiveness and redemption. James does not imply a direct causal relationship between all sickness and sin, any more than Paul or the Old Testament does (see comment on Phil 2:25-30).

Jewish wisdom also recognized that God would hear the sick (Ecclus 38:9) and connected this hearing with renouncing sin (38:10). But although only a very few pious Jewish teachers were normally thought able to produce such assured results in practice (cf. Jas 5:17-18), James applies this standard of faith to all believers.

5:17-18. Although all Palestinian Jews prayed for rain, few miracle workers

were thought able to secure such answers to prayer (especially Josephus's Onias, called Honi the CircleDrawer in the many \*rabbinic traditions about him; Hanina ben Dosa, in rabbinic texts; in later traditions about earlier pietists, occasional pious men like Honi's grandson Abba Hilkiyah or Hanan ha-Nehba, Johanan ben Zakkai, Nakdimon ben Gorion, Rabbi Jonah and occasionally an anonymous person). The miracle of securing rain eventually came to be viewed as equivalent to raising the dead. The piety of these miraculous rainmakers always set them apart from others in Jewish tradition, but here James affirms that

Elijah, the greatest model for such miracle workers, was a person like his readers and is a model for all believers (1 Kings 17:1; 18:41-46; cf. 1 Sam 12:17-18; for Elijah's weakness cf. 1 Kings 19:4).

The "three and a half years," not mentioned in 1 Kings 17, reflects later tradition (cf. Lk 4:25 and a rabbinic tradition of three years), perhaps through associations with ideas about famines in the end time, which were sometimes held to last for this period of time.

5:19-20. In Jewish belief, the former righteousness of one who turned away was no longer counted in his or her favor (Ezek 18:24-25), but (in most Jewish formulations) the *repentance of the wicked canceled out his or her former wickedness* (Ezek 18:21-23), if conjoined with proper atonement. Some Jews (\*Dead Sea Scrolls, some rabbis) regarded some forms of apostasy as unforgivable, but James welcomes the sinner back. In this context, he is especially inviting revolutionaries to return to the fold.

"Covering a multitude of sins" comes from Proverbs 10:12. In that text, it probably refers to not spreading a bad report (cf. 11:13; 20:19), but Judaism often used similar phrases for securing forgiveness. One may compare the Jewish idea that one who con

verted another to the practice of Judaism was as if he or she had created that person.

# 1 P E T E R

## Introduction

Authorship. Although some commentators question Petrine authorship, others have argued forcefully for it; the situation presupposed in the letter fits Peter's lifetime. The tradition of Peter's martyrdom in Rome is virtually unanimous. By the late first century 1 Clement accepted the letter's authenticity, and excavations indicate a second-century memorial in Rome to Peter's martyrdom. Other early Christian traditions also support this tradition as well as the view that Peter was the author of the letter, which is cited by authors from the beginning of the second century.

Given this tradition of his martyrdom in Rome, the likelihood that letters he wrote would be preserved, and the fact that most letters were either authentic or written long after the purported author's death, the burden of proof is on those who wish to deny that Peter wrote the letter. One commentator (Selwyn) thought he could detect parallels to Silas's (5:12) style in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. This argument alone is not conclusive, but arguments against Petrine authorship are even weaker (for those based on Greek style, see introduction to James).

Date. Three basic periods of persecution have been suggested as the background: the time of Trajan (early second century), the time of Domitian (see introduction to Revelation) and the time of Nero, which would be the time of Peter's martyrdom. First Peter implies an atmosphere of severe repression, but not the official court prosecutions of Trajan's time. \*Church leadership in the epistle (5:1-2) also fits the first-century model better than a later date. A pseudonymous letter attributed to Peter as early as the Flavian period (after Nero but still first century) is unlikely.

Unity. The first section of 1 Peter (1:1-4:6) does not explicitly indicate that fatal

persecution has begun; the second part (4:75:14) is more explicit. Some writers have therefore divided the letter into two parts, usually arguing that the former was a baptismal homily (due to abundant parallels with other parts of the \*New Testament). But the difference of situation presupposed between the two sections is not significant enough to warrant such a division, and there appear no other compelling reasons to divide them.

**Provenance and Audience.** It is widely agreed that "Babylon" (5:13) is a cryptic name for Rome, as in some Jewish works and undoubtedly in the book of Revelation. The situation of persecution described here fits Rome, and it would be appropriate for Peter to send advance warning of that situation to believers in Asia Minor, the stronghold of emperor worship. An audience in Asia Minor might consist mainly of Jewish Christians, but Peter's audience probably includes \*Gentile Christians (cf. 1:18; 4:3-4).

**Situation.** A fire devastated Rome in A.D. 64 but suspiciously left unscathed the estates of Nero and his friend Tigellinus. Like any good politician, Nero needed a scapegoat for his ills, and what appeared to be a new religion, understood as a fanatical form of Judaism begun by a crucified teacher three and a half decades before, filled the need perfectly.

Romans viewed Christians, like Jews, as antisocial. Certain charges became so common that they were stereotypical by the second century: Romans viewed Christians as "atheists" (like some philosophers, for rejecting the gods), "cannibals" (for claiming to eat Jesus' "body" and drink his "blood"), and incestuous (for statements like "I love you, brother," or "I love you, sister"). Judaism was a poor target for outright persecution, because its adherents were numerous and it was popular in some circles; further, Nero's mistress, Poppaea Sabina, was a \*patron of Jewish causes. By contrast, Christianity was viewed as a form of Judaism whose support was tenuous even in Jewish circles, and therefore it was an appropriate political scapegoat.

According to the early-second-century historian \*Tacitus, who disliked

Christians himself, Nero burned Christians alive as torches to light his gardens at night. He killed other Christians in equally severe ways (e.g., feeding them to wild animals for public entertainment). In all, he must have murdered thousands of Rome's Christians, although most Christians there escaped his grasp. Thus, even though the Greek part of the Empire loved Nero and the Jewish community generally favored him, Christians saw him as a prototype of the antichrist. Nero died in disgrace several years later, pursued by fellow Romans who hated him.

\*Genre. First Peter is a general letter, influenced more by the situation in Rome than by the current situation in Asia Minor (what is now western Turkey); thus Peter can address it as a circular letter to many regions of Asia Minor (1:1). Peter does, however, seem to expect that the sufferings of Rome will eventually materialize in other parts of the empire. On events in Asia Minor three decades later, see the discussion of background in the introduction to Revelation. Leaders of the Jerusalem priesthood sent out encyclicals, letters to \*Diaspora Jewish communities, by means of messengers; Peter's letter is similar to these but on a smaller scale of readership.

Commentaries. The most helpful for those who do not work with the Greek text is J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1981). J. R. Michaels, *I Peter*, WBC 49 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1988), Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), and E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1947), are also helpful. Two of the best specialized works are David L. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in I Peter*, SBLMS 26 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1981), and William J. Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits: A Study of 1 Peter 3:18-4:6*, *Analecta Biblica* 23 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965).

1:1-12

Present Testing, Future Hope

Verses 3-12 are one long sentence in Greek; such long sentences could be viewed as skillful in antiquity, when hearers of speeches were accustomed to following the train of thought for a longer time than North American and some other television-trained readers are today.

1:1. Jewish people spoke of Jews who lived outside Palestine as the "*\*Diaspora*," or those who were "scattered"; Peter transfers this term to his readers (cf. 1:17; 2:11). On "resident aliens" see comment on 1:17; cf. 2:11. The five Roman provinces he mentions were geographically connected; he omits the southern coastal regions of Asia Minor, which could be grouped with Syria in this period instead of as part of Asia Minor. The sequence in which Peter lists the provinces of his intended readers reflects the route a messenger delivering the letter could take if he started from Amastris in Pontus. (Although messengers from Rome were more likely to start at the province of Asia, Peter may start in his mind with the province farthest from him and work his way around.) On encyclical or circular letters, see the discussion of *\*genre* in the introduction.

1:2. In the *\*Old Testament* and Judaism, God's people were corporately "chosen," or "predestined," because God "foreknew" them; Peter applies the same language to believers in Jesus. Obedience and the sprinkling of blood also established the first covenant (Ex 24:7-8).

1:3. Peter adopts the form of a *berakah*, the Jewish form of blessing that regularly began "Blessed be God who..." The rebirth may allude to language Jewish people normally used for the conversion of *\*Gentiles* to Judaism (see comment on Jn 3:3, 5), with

the meaning: you received a new nature when you converted. Believers were reborn to a living hope by Jesus' *\*resurrection*, an inheritance (v. 4) and future salvation (v. 5), three ideas connected in Jewish views of the end of the age.

1:4. *New Testament writers followed Jewish teachers in speaking of "inheriting" the future world; the original source of the idiom is probably Israel's*

*"inheritance" of the Promised Land subsequent to their redemption from Egypt. Some Jewish texts (like 4 Ezra, late first century) also spoke of a treasure stored up in heaven for the righteous, but whereas the emphasis for receiving that treasure is normally on one's obedience, the emphasis here is on God's work.*

1:5. The \*Dead Sea Scrolls and other Jewish texts speak of everything being "revealed" in the "last time"; the deeds of the wicked would be made known, but the righteous would be "saved," delivered, from all that opposed them.

1:6-7. God was sovereign over testings, but his purpose both in the \*Old Testament and in Judaism was to strengthen the commitment of those who were tested (it was only *Satan whose object in the testing was to bring apostasy-5:8*). *See comment on James 1:12-16. (The Old Testament and Judaism also taught that sufferings could be discipline to bring persons to repentance or punishments to fulfill justice and invite repentance; contemporary Judaism developed this concept into the idea of \*atonement by sufferings. Although this view does not reflect Peter's emphasis, he does allow that the persecution believers face is also God's discipline to wake his people up-4:17.)*

Many Jewish traditions also presented the end as preceded by times of great testing. The image of the righteous being tested like precious metals purified in the furnace comes from the Old Testament (Job 23:10; Ps 12:6; Prov 17:3; cf. Is 43:2; Jer 11:4) and continued in subsequent Jewish literature (e.g., Ecclus 2:5). Ores of precious metals (the most precious of which was gold) would be melted in a furnace to separate out the impurities and produce purer metal.

1:8-9. Testing could be joyous rather than grievous because these readers knew in advance the goal of the testing: when they had persevered to the end, the final deliverance would come, as in traditional Jewish teaching. Unlike the testing in James, the primary test in 1 Peter is persecution (see introduction).

1:10-12. Many Jewish interpreters (especially attested in the \*Dead Sea Scrolls) believed that the Old Testament prophets had told especially about the

interpreters' own time, and that their meaning for this time had thus remained cryptic until sages of their own generation were given special insight by the *Spirit*. *Peter here seems to assert that the prophets recognized that their prophecies applied to the \*Messiah who would suffer and be exalted, and that they knew that many details would make sense to the readers only once they had happened.* It sounds as if Peter would, however, have agreed with the interpreters in the Dead Sea Scrolls that the Old Testament prophets did not know the "time or kind of time."

That Old Testament servants of God could have the Spirit of God in them is clear (Gen 41:38; Num 27:18), although the Old Testament usually preferred the Hebrew idiom for the Spirit resting "upon" God's servants, empowering them (as in 1 Pet 4:14). According to some Jewish traditions, some secrets were so important that

God kept them even from angels until the end time; in other traditions, angels respected \*rabbis' esoteric teachings and came to their lectures to listen; in still other traditions, angels envied Israel, who received God's \*law.

1:13-2:3

Live the New Life

1:13. Men wore long robes and would tuck them into their belt, "gird up their loins," so they could move more freely and quickly. Although the image also occurs elsewhere in the \*Old Testament, here Peter may specifically allude to the Passover (Ex 12:11): once God's people had been redeemed by the blood of the lamb (1 Pet 1:19), they were to be ready to follow God forth until he had brought them safely into their inheritance (cf. 1:4), the Promised Land. Thus they were to be dressed and ready to flee. "Sobriety" in ancient usage meant not only literal abstinence from drink but also behaving as a nonintoxicated person should, hence with dignified self-control.

1:14. "Obedient children" picks up the image of 1:3: born anew, they were no



longer what they had been before, and they should obey God (cf. 1:2, 22) as children obeyed their fathers. The obedience of minors to their parents was highly valued, and Roman and Jewish law required it.

1:15-16. Israel was called to be holy as God was holy and thus to live in a manner distinct from the ways of the nations (Lev 11:44; 19:2; 20:7, 26). The daily *synagogue prayers also stressed holiness to God, hence the idea would have been one of the most familiar to Jewish readers and to Gentiles* who had learned Scripture from them. If Peter continues the image of father and children between 1:14 and 1:17, he may allude here to another feature of a child's relationship with a father that was stressed in antiquity: imitation. 1:17. The image of God as an impartial judge was standard in Judaism, which also addressed him as "heavenly Father" in most of its prayers. "Resident aliens" ("strangers"-NIV; "the time of your stay"-NASB) were distinguished from local citizens, but as legal residents of an area they were viewed more highly than newcomers. Jewish communities throughout the empire generally enjoyed a resident alien status, and although some Jews could achieve citizen status, in other places like Alexandria the Greeks met their attempt to do so with hostility.

1:18. Jewish people often spoke of idolatry as "futile" or "empty." To them idolatry was the most basic characteristic of pagans' lifestyle, thus the former way of life of Peter's readers ("passing down" of the ancestors' way of life by itself could refer either to paganism or to Judaism). Jewish sages contrasted the imperishability of true wealth (cf. 1:4, 7, 23) with the eternal wealth of righteousness or wisdom; here it refers to the price of the readers' redemption, for which money was insufficient (1:19). (That gold was devalued in this period due to inflation under Nero may have occurred to some of Peter's original readers but is probably peripheral to Peter's point about perishable gold; cf. 1:7.)

1:19-21. Redemption by the blood of a lamb recalls the annual Passover celebration, by which Jewish people commemorated their redemption (freedom from slavery) in Egypt, through the blood of the Passover lamb (cf. 1:13).

1:22. In \*Old Testament purity laws, people purified themselves from defilement by ceremonial bathing; although Judaism continued to practice literal ceremonial washings, it often used the image of washing figuratively for spiritual or moral purification (as occasionally in Old Testament prophets, e.g., Is 1:16; Jer 2:22; 4:14).

1:23. The new life of obedient love (1:22) is natural for the person with a new nature; it was axiomatic in antiquity that children inherited the nature of their parents. (Many writers even remarked that adulterers gave themselves away because children bore their image.) The father's seed was especially important; followers of Jesus had been reborn through the living word, the \*gospel (1:3; 2:2), and it was imperishable (1:24-25). (A variety of parallels could be adduced, including *Philo's perspective on the divine word as not only imperishable but as "seminal," or a seed; but most of these examples are individual and distinct cases rather than based on general tradition. The parallels may thus all be remote, drawn from the same sort of natural imagery as Peter's [except that Philo, unlike Peter, might draw on Stoicism's seminal Logos]*. Compare Lk 8:11; 1 Jn 3:9. That the Word of God was imperishable, however, was agreed throughout all of Judaism; cf. Is 40:6-8.)

1:24-25. Here Peter quotes Isaiah 40:6-8 (following the \*LXX, which is more concise than the Hebrew text here), where the word is the future message of salvation in the time when God would redeem his people (e.g., 52:7-8).

2:1. Ancient writers sometimes employed "vice lists," indicating what people should avoid; Peter employs a miniature vice list. "Putting aside" (NASB) the old ways also follows rebirth in James, Ephesians and Colossians; together with other parallels to those letters, this similarity has suggested to some scholars a common \*baptismal tradition in the early \*church. It might also follow some teaching by Jesus no longer available to us; on possible background to "putting aside," see comment on Romans 13:12 and Ephesians 4:20-24.

2:2. This verse continues the image of rebirth (1:23). Babies were dependent on

their mothers or nurses for nourishment by their milk; use of cows' milk was rare. It was believed that children were very impressionable at this nursing stage, and those who allowed them to be tended by nursemaids were advised to select the nurses with care. "Pure" milk meant that it had not been mixed with anything else; the term is used in business documents for sales of unadulterated foods. Pure "spiritual" (NIV, NRSV, TEV) milk is a possible translation, but the adjective here more often means "rational" and could well be rendered "milk of the word" (logikon; cf. NASB, KJV), i.e., the "word" of 1:25.

2:3. Here Peter alludes to Psalm 34:8. The term translated "kindness" (NASB) or "good" (NIV, NRSV) was sometimes used to mean "delicious" when applied to foods (as here, milkv. 2).

2:4-12

### Being Built Up as God's People

The \*Qumran community (the Jewish monastic sect who wrote the *Dead Sea Scrolls*) also portrayed themselves as a new temple. Whereas many of Peter's exhortations to this point are the sort of moral instructions philosophers could give for individual behavior, this section concerns the church's corporate identity and hence corporate witness.

2:4. Peter derives this image from Isaiah 28:16 ("choice," "precious"), which he cites in 2:6.

2:5. The \*Dead Sea Scrolls portray the Qumran community as a living temple, and one text speaks of the temple's components (pillar, foundations, etc.) as animate beings. "House" could

refer to a building, like the temple, or to a household (4:17), even to a large family like the "house of Israel"; both senses are played on here, as sometimes in the \*Old Testament (2 Sam 7:5-7, 12-16). The image of God's people as a "holy priesthood" is from Exodus 19:5-6 (cf. Is 61:6) and appears more explicitly in

Hebrews 2:9 (Israel as a priesthood also appears in some contemporary Jewish texts based on Ex 19:6, including an insertion into the \*LXX of Ex 23:22). As priests (as well as stones) in this new temple, they would offer sacrifices; others in Judaism also used the image of a spiritual sacrifice (see comment on Rom 12:1; Heb 13:15).

2:6. The \*Qumran community applied Isaiah 28:16 to their own leadership; early Christians applied it to Jesus (Rom 9:33).

2:7-8. The Jewish interpretive principle *gezerah shavah*, which linked texts that had a common key word, makes it natural for Peter to cite Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14. Although this interpretive technique suggests that he is not dependent on Paul, both Peter and Paul may have depended on Jesus for the cornerstone image (Mk 12:10-11). Psalm 118 was sung during the Passover season (cf. 1 Pet 1:19), normally, at least among some Jews in this period, after thanking God for delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt into freedom, "from darkness to great light" (cf. 2:9).

2:9. Roughly half this verse is a direct quotation of Exodus 19:6, implying that all Christians, including \*Gentile Christians, share in God's covenant with Israel. Jewish people on the Passover described their deliverance from Egypt as a call "from darkness into great light." `Old Testament prophets taught that God had redeemed his people for his praise (e.g., Is 60:21; 61:3; Jer 13:11).

2:10. Peter cites Hosea 1:10 and 2:23, which reverse God's earlier verdict against Israel (Hos 1:6, 8-9), promising the restoration of God's people in the end time. Like Paul, Peter believes that Gentiles converted to Israel's true faith, the message of Jesus, are part of this end-time people of God (Rom 9:24-26). Had he wished, he could have cited Old Testament passages to support his conclusion (e.g., Is 19:24-25; 56:3-8).

2:11. On "resident aliens" (the normal sense of the terms usually translated "aliens and strangers"), see comment on 1:17. \*Philo spoke of souls as being

"strangers" (using a term technically more foreign than "resident aliens") in their bodies, belonging instead to heaven. The image here is of God's people (2:4-10) dispersed among the nations; God's people in the Old Testament were sometimes portrayed in such terms (Lev 25:23), because of their mortality (1 Chron 29:15; Ps 39:12), because of zeal for God (Ps 69:8; cf. 119:19) or because of their wanderings (Gen 23:4; 47:9). Greek philosophers often viewed fleshly passions as "waging war" against the soul. Peter uses the same image, although not for the same reason that philosophers did (freeing the soul from earthly distractions); he demands proper living (2:12).

2:12. Jewish people living in the Diaspora (1:1) always had to be concerned about \*Gentiles' anti-Jewish slanders, for their safety and for their witness to the one true God. Just as Gentiles were more than happy to slander Jews living among them, they were happy to slander Gentile converts to what they viewed as a Jewish sect, Christianity (2:4-10). The behavior advocated in the following household codes (2:13-3:12) would undermine some of the most traditional slanders

against such faiths, slanders that they subverted the public order and traditional family values. "Day of visitation" (KJV, NASB) was good \*Old Testament language for God's coming day of judgment (e.g., Is 10:3); many texts reported that the Gentiles would recognize God's glory in the end time (e.g., Is 60:3).

2:13-17

### Responsibilities Toward the State

Many ancient household codes were set in the context of discussions of city management and included instructions on how to behave toward the state (as well as toward parents, elders, friends, members of one's household, etc.). According to contemporary aristocratic ideals, the household mirrored the government of a city-state, so public obligations and obligations within the household (2:18-3:7) were commonly treated together.

\*Stoic and other philosophers commonly used these ethical codes to delineate proper relationships with others. Jewish people and members of other slandered religious groups sometimes adopted these codes to demonstrate that their groups actually supported the values of Roman society; this demonstration was important in combating persecution. See comment on Romans 13:1-7.

2:13. Vassal kings in the East ruled their people with Rome's permission but were required to act in Rome's interests. Because most of Peter's readers (1:1) would instead be directly under governors (2:14), by "king" Peter may refer specifically to the Roman emperor. Although the emperor's title was technically princeps, i.e., "the leading citizen" or the first among equals (to preserve the myth of the republic in the early years of the Empire), every one knew that he was the supreme earthly king in the Mediterranean world.

2:14. The term translated "governors" covers both legates (who governed imperial provinces as representatives of the emperor-2:13) and proconsuls (who governed senatorial provinces). Such representatives of Rome ruled most of the empire. Governors of imperial provinces were "sent by" the emperor and were expected to administer justice. "Praise" may refer to legal acquittal or may apply to inscriptions of praise dedicated to benefactors who provided wealth or services for municipalities.

2:15. "Ignorance" includes the false understanding of Christianity spread among outsiders (more than in 1:14); Roman aristocrats were much quicker to malign minority religions, whose worship did not assimilate to Roman values, than to seek to understand them. The \*Old Testament taught God's sovereignty over rulers (Prov 16:10; 21:1).

2:16. Here Peter modifies a common exhortation of ancient philosophers: for them, freedom from the world's values meant not only authority to do as one pleased but also freedom to pursue virtue, freedom from desire and freedom to do without. Most philosophers (such as contemporary `Stoics) regarded the wise man as the ideal ruler but still advocated obedience to the state. For Christians,

freedom meant freedom to be God's slaves rather than slaves of sin; it meant freedom from the tyranny of the state but also freedom to uphold the laws of the state as God's servants (v. 15).

2:17. Such brief lists of these kinds of duties appear in other ancient moralists (e.g., Isocrates, Marcus Aurelius, Syriac Menander). The Old Testament also associated honoring God with

honoring those in authority (Ex 22:28; 1 Kings 21:10; Prov 24:21).

2:18-25

### Duties of Servants

This passage addresses household slaves, who often had more economic and social mobility than free peasants did, although most of them still did not have much. Field slaves on massive estates were more oppressed; given the regions addressed (1:1) and the nature of household codes (see comment on 2:13-17), they are probably not addressed here and at most are peripherally envisioned. The most oppressed slaves, who worked in the mines, were segregated from the rest of society and would not have access to Peter's letter; they are not addressed here at all.

It should also be kept in mind that Peter does not address the institution of slavery per se, although his sympathy is clearly with the slave (2:21): no ancient slave war was successful, and abolition was virtually impossible in his day except through a probably doomed bloody revolution. In this situation, it was far more practical for a pastor to encourage those in the situation to deal with it constructively until they could gain freedom. On slaves and household codes, questions of subsequent application and so forth, see comment on Ephesians 6:4-9 and the introduction to Philemon.

2:18-20. Except those slaves who were able to save enough money on the side to buy their freedom (which many household slaves could do), slaves were not in a

position to achieve freedom. Although slaves and masters cooperated in many households as members of a common family, laws viewed slaves as property as well as people, and some owners abused them as property; nearly all owners treated them as socially inferior. Philosophers (especially the popular *Stoics*) *generally counseled that slaves do their best in the situation in which they found themselves; this was also the view of Epictetus*, who had been a slave earlier in life.

2:21. Moralists commonly cited models for imitation. Philosophers also often prided themselves in their ability not to be bothered by insults or deprivation (e.g., one said that Socrates, when advised that he suffered unjustly, protested, "What-would you rather I suffer justly?"). Although ancient society was very status-conscious and associated power with greatness, Peter identifies \*Christ with unjustly treated slaves.

2:22. Here Peter quotes Isaiah 53:9, the first of several allusions to Isaiah 53 in this passage. The passage describes "the suffering servant," a role fulfilled by Jesus.

2:23. This verse may reflect the idea of Isaiah 53:7: though oppressed, he did not open his mouth. In a society based on respect and honor, this was a painful experience; subordinates like slaves were accustomed to it, but it could not have failed to hurt many of them. Many philosophers also advocated enduring reviling without responding in kind.

2:24. Here Peter reflects the language of Isaiah 53:4-5. In this context (1 Pet 2:24, 25), Peter takes the "wounds" as the wounds of sin, as it often was intended in the prophets (e.g., Is 6:10; Jer 6:14; 8:11) and sometimes in later Jewish literature (as probably in the eighth benediction of the Amidah, a regularly recited Jewish prayer).

2:25. This verse echoes Isaiah 53:6. The image of Israel as sheep was common in the \*Old Testament (e.g., Is 40:11), and the image of Israel as scattered sheep



wandering from the shep

herd also appears elsewhere (Jer 50:6; Ezek 34:6; cf. Ps 119:176). An "overseer" (NIV; "guardian"-NASB, NRSV) was one who watched over, protected and had authority; \*Diaspora Judaism sometimes applied the term to God. In the Old Testament, God is the chief shepherd of his people (see comment on Jn 10:1-18).

3:1-7

### Wives and Husbands

Although Peter upholds societal norms for the purpose of the \*church's witness in society (see the introduction to the household codes in 2:13-17), his sympathy here is clearly with the woman, as it was with the slaves in 2:18-25. He continues to advocate submission to authority for the sake of witness and silencing charges that Christianity is subversive; husbands were always in the position of authority in that culture.

3:1. "In the same way" refers back to the passage on slaves (2:18-25). Like Judaism and other non-Roman religions, Christianity spread faster among wives than husbands; husbands had more to lose socially from conversion to an unpopular minority religion. But wives were expected to obey their husbands in Greco-Roman antiquity, and this obedience included allegiance to their husbands' religions. Cults that forbade their participation in Roman religious rites, including prohibiting worship of a family's household gods, were viewed with disdain, and Jewish or Christian women who refused to worship these gods could be charged with atheism. Thus by his advice Peter seeks to reduce marital tensions and causes of hostility toward Christianity and Christians. Silence was considered a great virtue for women in antiquity. 3:2. "Chaste and respectful" (NASB) is the behavior that was most approved for women throughout antiquity.

3:3. Hair was braided in elaborate manners, and well-to-do women strove to keep up with the latest expensive fashions. The gaudy adornments of women of wealth, meant to draw attention to themselves, were repeatedly condemned in

ancient literature and speeches, and Peter's readers would assume that his point was meant in the same way. See comment on 1 Timothy 2:9-10.

3:4. Ancients considered a meek and quiet spirit a prime virtue for women, and many moralists advised this attitude instead of dressing in the latest fashions to attract men's attention, a vice commonly attributed to aristocratic women but imitated by those who could afford to do so.

3:5. Moralists normally added examples of such quietness to their exhortations; they especially liked to appeal to matrons of the distant past, who were universally respected for their chaste behavior in contrast to many of the current models in Roman high society. Jewish readers would think especially of the great matriarchs, extolled for their piety in Jewish tradition: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, Sarah being most prominent. The readers may think in terms of head coverings that were prominent in much of the East, meant to render the married woman inconspicuous (see comment on 1 Cor 11:2-16).

3:6. Although Peter explicitly advocates only "submission" (v. 1), he cites Sarah as an example even of "obedience," which was what Roman male society demanded of their wives. That Abraham also "obeyed" Sarah is clear in Genesis (the term usually translated "listen to" in 16:2 and 21:12 also means "obey," and in both passages Abraham submits to Sarah), but this point is not relevant to Peter's example for wives

with husbands disobedient to the word (3:1; see the introduction to this section). (One should not read too much into Sarah's calling her husband "lord" here. The direct address "lord" may have been used in Hebrew to address husbands respectfully as "sir," e.g., Hos 2:16, but it is mainly in later Jewish traditions such as the Testament of Abraham that Sarah addresses Abraham in this manner. Even in the Testament of Abraham, Isaac also addresses his mother with a similarly respectful title and Abraham so addresses a visitor, unaware that he is an angel. In another Jewish tale, Asenath calls her father "lord" yet answers him boastfully and angrily, although Peter certainly does not suggest such behavior

here. In the patriarchal period, it was a polite way to address someone of higher authority or one to whose status one wished to defer, e.g., Jacob to Esau in Gen 33:13-14.) Jewish people were considered "children" of Abraham and Sarah; on Christians' fulfilling such a role, cf. 2:9-10.

Peter's advice is practical, not harsh as it might sound in Qpr culture. Although philosophers' household codes often stressed that the wife should "fear" her husband as well as submit to him, Peter disagrees (v. 6; cf. 3:13-14). Husbands could legally "throw out" babies, resort to prostitutes and make life miserable for their wives, although sleeping with other women of the aristocratic class or beating their wives was prohibited. (In a mid-second-century account, a Christian divorced her husband for his repeated infidelity, so he betrayed her to the authorities as a Christian.) Christian wives were limited in their options, but Peter wants them to pursue peace without being intimidated.

3:7. Although his point is to address the many converted wives with unconverted husbands (3:1-6), he includes a brief word for converted husbands as well. Many philosophers, moralists and Jewish teachers complained about the moral and intellectual weakness of women; some referred to the weakness of their bodies. Women's delicacy was considered an object of desire, but also of distrust; even the traditional Roman legal system simply assumed their weakness and inability to make sound decisions on their own. Much of this was due to the influence of 'Aristotle, who argued that women were by nature inferior to men in every way except sexually.

Yet this weakness (Peter may apply it only to social position) was often cited as a reason to show them more consideration, and Peter attaches no significance to this common term except that requirement; the rest of the verse declares women to be equal before God, which ruined any arguments of their inferiority "by nature." A husband who failed to recognize his wife's spiritual equality jeopardized his own prayers, for the reason Peter gives in 3:12.

3:8-12

## Be Kind to One Another

Peter concludes his argument of 2:13-3:7 in the verses following 3:8, although this conclusion flows directly into his next argument. It reinforces the sense of mutual consideration Peter wishes to engender in household relationships, within limitations imposed by the culture he addresses.

3:8. Moralists often listed virtues. They also often lectured on the topic of "harmony" between husband and wife. Advocating peace in all relationships in the home would not have offended any Roman moralists (3:13). "Sympathy" recalls the exhortation to husbands in 3:7, which probably means to "understand" their wives.

3:9. Parallels with Jesus indicate that his teaching may be the source of part of this verse; see comment on Romans 12:17.

3:10-12. Having cited Psalm 34:8 in 2:3, Peter now cites Psalm 34:12-16, which instructs the righteous to pursue peace with others and to speak no evil, thus supporting what he has argued in 2:13-3:7. (Jewish teachers also emphasized that one should pursue peace actively, not just passively.) It also indicates that although God hears the righteous, he opposes the wicked and hence does not hear the prayers of those who mistreat others (3:7).

3:13-22

## Be Prepared to Suffer for Doing Good

This section flows naturally from 3:8-12.

3:13-14. Peter alludes to the language of Isaiah 8:12, where God assures the prophet that he need not fear what the rest of his people feared, but should trust in God alone (8:13).

3:15. The *Septuagint* (standard Greek version) of Isaiah 8:13 begins "Sanctify the Lord [i.e., God] himself"; here Christ is the Lord. The "defense" (NASB,

NRSV; the common translation "answer" is too weak) implies especially (though probably not only) the image of a legal defense before a court, given "judgment" and execution in the context (4:5-6).

3:16. Judaism also tried this tactic to undermine false accusations.

3:17. Ancient writers sometimes communicated points through special literary forms; one of these is called chiasmus, an inverted parallel structure, which seems to occur here:

A Your slanderers will be ashamed (3:16)

B Suffer though innocent, in God's will (3:17) C For Christ suffered for the unjust (3:18)

D He triumphed over hostile spirits (3:19) E Noah was saved through water (3:20) E' You are saved through water (3:21)

D' Christ triumphed over hostile spirits (3:22) C' For Christ suffered (4:1a)

B' Suffer in God's will (4:1b-2)

A' Your slanderers will be ashamed (4:3-5)

3:18-19. On "flesh" and "*Spirit*," see comment on Romans 8:1-11; the idea here is that Jesus was resurrected by the Spirit of God, by whom also he went (presumably after the resurrection) to proclaim triumph over the fallen spirits. Of the many views on this text, the three main ones are (1) that between his death and resurrection, Jesus preached to the dead in Hades, the realm of the dead (the view of many church fathers); (2) that Christ preached through Noah to people in Noah's day (the view of many Reformers); (3) that before or (more likely) after his resurrection, Jesus proclaimed triumph over the fallen angels (the view of most scholars today). (In early Christian literature, "spirits" nearly always refers to angelic spirits rather than human spirits, except when explicit statements are made to the contrary. The grammar here most naturally reads as

if, in the Spirit who raised him, he preached to them after his resurrection; further, v. 22 mentions these fallen angels explicitly. The view that these were instead spirits of the dead often rests on 4:6, but the point of 4:6, which caps the section, is that martyrs put to death in the flesh will be raised by the Spirit as Christ was in 3:18.)

Except for most later \*rabbis, nearly all ancient Jews read Genesis 6:1-3 as a reference to the fall of angels in Noah's day (1 Pet 3:20); after the flood, they were said to be imprisoned (so also 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6), either below the earth or in the atmosphere (cf. 1 Pet 3:22). Then, according to a commonly known Jewish tradition, Enoch was sent to proclaim God's judgment to them; here Christ is the proclaimer of triumph over them.

3:20. Ancient Judaism sometimes used the flood as a prototype of future judgment, as in 2 Peter 3:6-7. The emphasis on the salvation of "few" would encourage Christian readers, who were a persecuted minority. God's "patience" reflects Genesis 6:3 and is mentioned in connection with the final judgment in 2 Peter 3:9.

3:21. The act of faith indicated in \*baptism, rather than the physical cleansing, was what was significant; baptism was an act of conversion in ancient Judaism, but Judaism insisted on the sincerity of \*repentance for it to be efficacious.

3:22. "Authorities and powers" were angelic rulers over the nations, of which Jewish texts often speak (see comment on Eph 1:21-23). Thus even the evil powers behind the rulers who persecuted Christians had been subdued, and the final outcome was not in question.

4:1-11

Persevere in the New Life

4:1-2. "Arm yourselves" borrows the imagery of soldiers arming, training or otherwise preparing themselves for battle and possible death. The sense seems to

be that those who died with \*Christ through faith (cf. 2:24) are genuinely prepared to suffer with him in any other way, including martyrdom.

4:3. Unlike certain maligned religions, social clubs demanded orderly behavior at parties. Nevertheless, dinners at the homes of *patrons and probably those of social clubs lasted far into the night, with heavy drinking and men often pursuing slave women or boys; religious festivals were similar occasions for immorality. Social clubs, household cults and virtually all aspects of Greco-Roman life were permeated with the veneration of false gods and spirits. Although this behavior was not immoral from the general Greco-Roman perspective, Jews and Christians condemned it as immoral. Jewish people rightly regarded this behavior as typical of Gentile men in their day-especially, though not exclusively, on pagan festivals.*

4:4. Although Jewish people did not participate in the lifestyle characterized in 4:3, their pagan neighbors often portrayed them as lawless and subversive because of their alleged antisocial behavior. The earliest pagan reports of Christians testify that the same prejudices were applied to them, although the authorities never found evidence substantiating these rumors from those they interrogated under torture. Nero's accusation against the Christians he butchered was that they were "haters of humanity," i.e., antisocial. But rumors of Nero's own base immorality offended even the Roman aristocracy.

4:5. These pagans, not the Christians (3:15), would have to give "account" at the final trial. Since the \*Old Testament period, the final day of judgment had often been portrayed in courtroom terms.

4:6. Although some commentators regard "those who are dead" as souls of the dead, they seem to be Christians "judged" by earthly courts and executed, who would nevertheless be raised by the \*Spirit, as in 3:18. Compare Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-6.

4:7. In many Jewish traditions (including Dan 12:1-2), the end of the age would

be preceded by a period of great suffering; the impending end, therefore, calls for exhortations to perseverance in seriousness and prayer.

4:8. Proverbs 10:12 seems to prohibit gossiping about one another's sins or slandering one another (cf. Jas 5:20). The implication here may be that love overlooks one another's faults, although some scholars have suggested that it means that those who love will themselves find grace in the day of judgment (1 Pet 4:5-6).

4:9. Hospitality was receiving others, especially taking in travelers of the same faith who needed a place to stay. As generally in the ethical ideals of antiquity, lodging and provisions were to be provided generously, not grudgingly.

4:10-11. Like Paul (Rom 12:4-8), Peter emphasized the diversity of gifts in the church and the need for all of them until the end. *Speaking as if one uttered divine "oracles" would no doubt refer to the gift of prophecy*, or at least prophetic inspiration in some form of speaking for God. On prophecy and serving, see comment on Romans 12:6-8 and 16:1.

4:12-19

### Christians Judged First

In the \*Old Testament (Dan 12:1-2) and much Jewish tradition, God's people would suffer greatly just before the time of the end; then the wicked would be judged. Jewish tradition often emphasized that the righteous experienced their sufferings in this age but that the wicked would experience theirs throughout the age to come. Such persecutions as are mentioned here continued for two more centuries in the Roman Empire and have continued periodically in various times and places throughout history; believers in each generation have had the occasion to feel close to the end of the age.

4:12. It is possible that Peter alludes to the fate that befell many Christians captured in Rome in A.D. 64: they were burned alive as torches to light Nero's



gardens at night. But he more likely alludes again to the image of gold being tried by fire (1:7), and perhaps to the fire of judgment day being experienced in advance; the language of fiery trials was often used figuratively.

4:13. Some Jewish people described the time of tribulation before the end as the "*\*Messiah's travail*"; Peter may therefore be saying that those who share the Messiah's sufferings also hasten the coming of the end (although the regular *New Testament idea of sharing* Christ's sufferings may be adequate to explain the passage).

4:14. The Old Testament and Jewish tradition often speak of the *\*Spirit* resting "on" God's servants, empowering them for their task. In the light of "glory" in verse 13, Peter presumably means, "the Spirit who will raise you [4:6] is already on you."

4:15. As second-century apologists, or defenders of Christianity, pointed out, the only charge on which true Christians were ever convicted was the charge of being a Christian. The Greek term for "meddler" (NIV, NASB) could refer to sorcerers but probably refers to "busybodies" (KJV), those giving unwanted and ill-timed advice. Meddling tactlessly in others' affairs was a vice often attributed to unpopular *\*Cynic* philosophers (to whom some Christian preachers had already been compared).

4:16. The nickname "Christian" was originally used only by those hostile to Christianity; see comment on Acts 11:26. Here it is parallel to legal charges like "murderer" and "thief." Early Roman descriptions of Nero's persecution use this title for Jesus' followers. Many wise men in Greek tradition pointed out that it was truly noble to suffer scorn for doing good; in Greco-Roman society, obsessed as it

was with shame and honor, this was a countercultural insight.

4:17. The image of judgment beginning at God's household is an *Old Testament*

one (Ezek 9:6; cf. Jer 25:18-29; Amos 3:2), as is the ominous expression, "the time has come" (Ezek 7:7, 12). Believers experience the judgment of earthly courts (1 Pet 4:6), but Peter probably sees that suffering also as God's discipline, as Jewish teachers did. Throughout history, persecution has refined and strengthened the church. 4:18. Peter proves his case in 4:17 by citing the \*Septuagint of Proverbs 11:31, which may reflect what had become the prevailing Jewish conception by Peter's day, that the righteous suffered in this life, but the wicked suffered in the world to come.

4:19. Peter again echoes the familiar language of Jewish prayer: the final benediction of one regularly uttered Jewish prayer included the lines "Our lives are committed to your hand, and our souls are in your care," and some others also uttered similar prayers in the face of possible death (cf. 2 Macc 13:14); the prototype for all of them was probably Psalm 31:5 (cited in Lk 23:46).

5:1-5

### Faithful Caretakers of the Flock

The behavior of \*church leaders in the time of crisis could encourage or discourage the flock. The leaders, once known, would be the first targets of search, capture, torture and execution. 5:1. Elders, older and wiser men skilled in judging cases, ruled in most Israelite towns in the *Old Testament*. In the New Testament period, "elders" held a respected place in the \*synagogues, from which the churches took over this form of leadership. Peter ranks himself among them as a fellow elder. 5:2. The image of a "shepherd" is that of a concerned guide, not of a severe ruler (although the image of shepherds had been applied to rulers in parts of the ancient Near East). Charges of illegitimate gain were often made against moral teachers in the ancient world, and it was necessary for Christians to avoid even the appearance of impropriety. (Like certain officials in the Jewish community, these Christian leaders distributed the funds for the poor.)

5:3. Heads of Greek philosophical schools and Jewish schools of law presented their lives as models to their students, but some also exercised strict control. A closer parallel to this text would be elders in \*Diaspora synagogues, who were

responsible for the services and led the Jewish community but normally had no official power outside settling internal legal disputes.

5:4. In ancient texts a "chief shepherd" appears to have been an overseer of a group of other shepherds, although they were usually not well-to-do themselves. "Crowns" were garlands given to victors of athletic contests, benefactors or other heroes, and they were perishable; those faithful to Christ would receive an imperishable crown. The image was also used in Judaism.

5:5. Respect for parents, elders and, in Judaism, those more knowledgeable in the law was socially obligatory in antiquity; some Jewish traditions regarded it as an expression of one's respect for God. Such respect included deferring to the wisdom of older men and allowing them to speak first. Peter advocates submission to the ruling elders (5:1), but he also urges-against Greco-Roman society's ideals-mutual humility, based on the teaching of the Old Testament (Prov 3:34).

5:6-11

Persevere by Grace

Although 1 Peter 5:5-9 has sufficient

similarities with James 4:6-10 to suggest a common source for the imagery, the application is different. In James, the test is poverty and oppression tempting people to retaliate. In 1 Peter, it is persecution tempting believers to fall away.

5:6. Following on Proverbs 3:34, cited in 1 Peter 5:5, Peter urges believers to "humble" themselves before God. In the *Old Testament*, this idea often meant repenting, sometimes when facing impending judgment (4:17), or learning one's complete dependence on God. Here the sense includes embracing and accepting the suffering until God provides the way out (cf. Jer 27:11). On present humbling and future exalting, see comment on Luke 1:52-53 and 14:11; the cries of God's people during unjust sufferings had always moved him to act on their

behalf (Ex 2:23-25; 3:7-9; Judg 2:18; 10:16).

5:7. Although the promise of complete relief from persecution is future (5:6), Peter encourages believers to pray and trust God's love for them in the present. Judaism learned to see God's love in Israel's sufferings (as disciplines of love), but most pagans, who bartered sacrifices and vows to get benefactions from the gods, had difficulty with this concept.

5:8-11. In the Old Testament, "Satan" (in the Hebrew of Job, a title, "the Satan") was the accuser, the prosecuting attorney before God-the "adversary," as Peter says. In Jewish tradition, Satan accused God's people before God's throne day and night (except, it later accounts, on the Day of 'Atonement). The "devil" is literally the "slanderer," carrying the same connotation as the adversarial accuser. Jewish teachers recognized that, as in the book of Job (where he "went about" over the face of the earth-2:12), Satan sought in this present age to turn people to apostasy from the truth, although his power was limited because he ultimately had to answer to God. The \*Dead Sea Scrolls called the present evil age the "dominion of Satan."

Lions were viewed as the most ferocious and mighty beasts, and from Psalm 22:13 (probably the background here) they came to be used as figures for enemies of God's people. In the time of Nero, Christians were fed to some literal lions as well. The small, isolated Christian communities could take heart that their other spiritual siblings-starting with the \*churches Peter knew in Rome-were experiencing the same trials (1 Pet 5:9), until the end (v. 10).

5:12-14

Conclusion

5:12. Silvanus (the full Roman name for which the similar name Silas served as a short equivalent) appears to have

been the amanuensis, or scribe. Most letters were written through the agency of

scribes. As a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37), Silas presumably came from a fairly well-to-do Jewish family that provided him a good literary and 'rhetorical education; Peter may have given him some degree of freedom in wording the letter. On assertions of brevity, see comment on Hebrews 13:22; it was a polite closing formula in many ancient speeches and letters.

5:13. Some elements of contemporary Judaism had readily transferred *prophecies of Babylon's demise in the Old Testament* to the new empire of Rome. "Babylon" had thus become a fairly common cryptogram for Rome (although "Edom" was more popular with later \*rabbis).

5:14. Kisses were a common affectionate greeting for close friends and relatives.

# 2 P E T E R

## Introduction

Authorship and Date. Regarding authorship, 2 Peter is one of the most disputed letters in the *New Testament*. *The style differs so much from 1 Peter that the same person could not have written both unless he were purposely trying to alter his style. But Peter could have given literary freedoms to his amanuenses, using a different scribe (1 Pet 5:13) for each, with the second being more accustomed to bombastic Asiatic rhetorical style.* (Although many second-rate rhetoricians preferred flowery Asianism, Atticist style became predominant and ultimately flourished by the early second century. This style might provide a clue to the destination or, more likely, the date [before the second century], although it might reveal only the rhetorical training of the author or scribe. \*Quintilian noted that a third style, the Rhodian, less redundant than the Asiatic school but less concise than the Atticist, was sometimes also used.)

The most important argument against Petrine authorship is the letter's clear dependence on Jude, yet this point is not absolutely decisive; Peter could have incorporated much of Jude's letter, instructed a scribe to do so or (much less likely) even used Jude as his scribe. (That Jude used 2 Peter is improbable, based on simplifications of imagery, expansions of allusions, etc.)

The attestation for 2 Peter is weaker than that for most other New Testament books but stronger than that of early Christian books that did not become part of the New Testament, especially those claiming to be Petrine. The early `church did debate its genuineness, although its existence is attested early. But \*pseudepigraphic documents were generally written in the name of a hero of the distant past; although a second-century date for the letter is possible, no internal evidence necessarily precludes a first-century date. Second-century `Gnosticism is probably not in view, and the end's delay was an issue perhaps as early as the

first New Testament document (1 Thessalonians).

Opponents. One suggestion of the heresy combated in this letter is second-century Gnosticism or a first-century proto-Gnosticism; "knowledge" (a favorite emphasis of the Gnostics, though hardly limited to them) is mentioned seven times in the letter. Gnostics denied the future coming of \*Christ, and many of them believed that bodily sins did not matter. Gnosticism did not, however, create these ideas out of nothing; they developed earlier Greek (plus Jewish and Christian) ideas that were already evident in the first century.

Given the reports of charlatans so prominent in antiquity and parallels to all the ideas in existing Greek and Jewish conceptions in the first century, it is likely that the opponents are simply "Diaspora Jews almost completely overtaken by Greek thought (perhaps even more than `Philo was).

\*Genre. Second Peter is clearly one of those ancient letters intended for a wide circulation (1:1), although the style indicates that it was not directed toward the highest literary circles who normally read such letters. Besides being a "general letter," some scholars have found in it elements of the "testamentary" genre: testaments were final instructions left by a dying father or leader (cf. 1:14).

Commentaries. The best is Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC 50 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983). J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1981), is also very helpful.

1:1-2

## Introduction

The Greek text here reads "Simeon" (NRSV) rather than "Simon" Peter; this form of the name is less common but closer to the original Semitic form of the name than "Simon" is (also in Acts 15:14). Although "*Savior*" was a divine title in Judaism and antiquity as a whole, it could be applied more generally; but

*applying the title "God and Savior" (the most natural translation) to Jesus was a clear statement of his divinity and would have offended most Jewish readers who were not Christians. Writers often established the intimate relationship between themselves and their readers at the beginning of a letter (thus, "faith like ours"). "Grace and peace" adopts a standard ancient greeting form but with Christ at the center; see comment on Romans 1:7.*

1:3-11

### How to Persevere to Salvation

This section is sometimes said to adapt the literary form of a civic decree known from inscriptions honoring benefactors, but the evidence for this thesis is hardly compelling. Although the parallels demonstrate ideas in common between this passage and some decrees, such ideas were relatively widespread and can be identified in other literary forms as well.

1:3-4. "Divine power" and "divine nature" had been important phrases in Greek thought for centuries; they had also become standard in many 'Diaspora Jewish writers. Many Greeks in this period wanted to escape the material world of decay around them, believing that their soul was divine and immortal and belonged in the pure and perfect heavens above; some Greek thinkers and cults provided this idea as a hope for the masses.

Many Greek writers, some Jewish writers like *Philo* and generally later Gnostics argued that one could become "divinized," a god, either in life or at death; in some systems this divinization involved absorption into the divine. But most of ancient Judaism rejected the idea of divinization; there was only one God (cf. Gen 3:5; and even Philo meant divinization in a very qualified sense). Many Diaspora Jewish texts used language like Peter's but nearly always only to indicate reception of immortality, not divinization. (Peter applies this language to the Christian view that a believer in Jesus receives a new nature; see comment on I Pet 1:23.) In the context of monotheistic early Christianity, embattled by



polytheistic culture, Peter's subdued language could serve to refute claims of those who expected full divinization.

That Peter's immediate cultural context is Diaspora Judaism rather than Greek paganism may be indicated by how he defines physical "corruption" or "decay": its source is lust (v. 4; cf. 2:14; 3:3). Immortality was available, as the Greeks wished, but it was made available only through purification from sin (1:9); and the Greek concept of immortality is qualified by the biblical hope in the \*kingdom and hence future resurrection (cf. 1:11).

1:5-7. Lists of vices and virtues appear elsewhere in ancient literature. Adding one virtue, vice or some other next step to a former one, as here, was also a standard literary form that appears in Jewish, Greek and Roman texts (such progressions were called *sorites*). "Moral excellence" (NASB) or "goodness" (NIV, NRSV, TEV) was the catchall Greek "virtue" (KJV) representing nobility of character.

1:8. Greek philosophers saw philosophical knowledge as the key to changing people's behavior; Peter may, however, intend "knowledge" to include the sense of a personal relationship, as often in the \*Old Testament.

1:9. Jewish texts also speak of moral corruption and defilement from which one must be "purified" (cf. 2:20).

1:10-11. Judaism often spoke of Israel's "calling" and "chosenness." Peter applies these terms to all who would persevere to *eternal life*. *The future transformation of the world and an eternal kingdom* established in the future were Jewish and Christian ideas foreign to pagan Greek thought.

1:12-21

Peter's Eyewitness Traditions

1:12. "Reminding" was a common part of ancient moral exhortation, especially

when softened by the qualification "though you already know this."

1:13. A number of ancient texts compared the body to a tent, as here; Peter chooses an image that his readers would readily grasp.

1:14. Jewish writers generally believed that the righteous often were warned of their impending death in advance. In ancient Jewish stories, heroes often gave final exhortations to their heirs in "testaments" as their death approached. By announcing his imminent death (undoubtedly his execution in Rome), Peter informs his readers: These are my final instructions to you, so pay close attention. Cf. John 21:18-19.

1:15. Reminders were common in testaments (1:14), although they were also common in moral exhortations in general (1:12). "Departure" here is literally "exodus," a term occasionally used in Jewish and Christian texts for death (e.g., Lk 9:31).

1:16. The term translated "myths" (NRSV) was usually used negatively for untrue stories, such as slanderously false accounts about the gods;

"myths" were contrasted with reliable accounts. Eyewitness testimony was important in establishing a case historically or legally, although Greek and Roman rhetoricians did not always give it as much weight as it bears today. (Some scholars have drawn attention to the point that the same term Peter uses for "eyewitnesses" here was used for initiates in the final stage of initiation in some pagan *mystery cults, such as the Eleusinian and Samothracian mysteries; but a related term was also applied to the higher philosophy by Plato and Aristotle, and it was a standard term for eyewitnesses, applied even to God himself in Diaspora Judaism*. Because Peter describes not his initiation into the faith but an eyewitness experience distinct from that initiation, the eyewitness element is the central point. Like Peter here, the Gospels are at pains to point out that the glory which Jesus' companions would see before death was the transfiguration, not the Second Coming; but the transfiguration prefigured the

Second Coming; cf. 1:19.)

1:17. Some "testaments" (1:14) cited special revelations (often heavenly journeys) of the hero; Peter provides a more down-to-earth revelation: what he experienced at the transfiguration (Mk 9:2-13). Early Judaism often referred to God speaking from heaven (see comment on Mk 1:11 for the texts excerpted here). "The Glory" was sometimes a Jewish circumlocution for God; Peter probably intends an allusion to Sinai, where God revealed his glory to Moses.

1:18. Israel also experienced a revelation of God at a "holy" mountain, and Peter probably parallels his own witness of Jesus' glory with Moses' witness of God's glory on Mount Sinai. (*The Old Testament usually applies this title to Zion, but Zion was to be the site of the new Sinai, or law giving, in the end time; cf. Is 2:2-4.*) *Both revelations led to divine Scriptures (cf. 2 Pet 1:20 with 3:16), although Jewish teachers generally agreed that the law had more authority than any mere voice from heaven.*

1:19. The apostolic revelation in *Christ confirmed the revelations of the Old Testament prophets*. Some Dead Sea Scrolls texts present the "star" of Numbers 24:17 as \*messianic, and an Old Testament text describes the coming day of the Lord in terms of a sunrise (Mal 4:2) because God would come like the sun (cf. Ps 84:11). The point here seems to be that the morning star (Venus) heralds the advent of dawn; a new age was about to dawn (cf. 2 Pet 1:11), but the Old Testament plus what was revealed by Jesus' first coming was the greatest revelation the world would experience until his return in the day of the Lord. "You do well" was a common way of suggesting that a person do something (i.e., "You ought to do this").

1:20-21. Ancient Judaism and Greek thinkers generally viewed prophetic inspiration as a divine possession or frenzy, in which the prophet's rational mind was replaced by the divine word. (The remark on the Jewish perspective is especially true of \*Diaspora Jewish ecstasies, like *Philo and authors of the Sibylline Oracles*.) The various literary styles of different Old Testament

prophets indicates that this was not quite the case; inspiration still used human faculties and vocabulary (cf. 1 Pet 1:10-12; 1 Cor 7:40; 14:1-2, 14-19), although there may have been different levels and kinds of ecstasy (cf. 1 Cor 14:2; 2 Cor 5:13; 12:4). On either model, however, inspiration could protect the inspired agents from error; contrast 2 Peter 2:1.

2:1-22

### Damnation of Immoral Teachers

2:1. In contrast to the inspired prophets of 1:20-21, false prophets were those who spoke visions from their own mind instead of from God's heart; in many \*Old Testament texts that define them as such, they falsely promise peace for sinners destined instead for judgment (e.g., Jer 23:16-32; Ezek 13:3-10).

2:2. Sincere philosophers complained that philosophy was ridiculed on account of pseudophilosophers; Jewish people and representatives of other minority religions also suffered from the negative publicity following wayward, profiteering members of their groups (cf. Rom 2:23-24). The same was true of early Christianity.

2:3. Traveling diviners, false prophets and moral teachers typically charged fees or begged funds and were thus frequently accused of having monetary motives unworthy of their professed callings (see comment on 1 Thess 2:5). False teachers in the .church were likewise exploiting Christians.

2:4. One of the most prominent themes of ancient Jewish tradition, though usually suppressed by the later \*rabbis, was the idea that the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:1-3 were angels who lusted after women and so fell. The term for "cast into hell" here is from the Greek name Tartarus, a place not only of holding for the wicked dead (and especially the Titans, the preOlympian supernatural beings), but of the severest conceivable tortures; it occurs elsewhere in Jewish literature as the place where the fallen angels were imprisoned. Jewish writers also generally affirmed a current hell as a holding place for the wicked until the

final judgment.

2:5. Noah stories, like fallen angel stories, were also popular in nonrabbinic Judaism. Judgment on the fallen angels was usually linked with judgment on Noah's generation because Genesis 6 recounted both. Jewish traditions also portrayed Noah as a preacher of \*repentance (e.g., 'sibylline Oracles and Jubilees). Jewish teachers liked to use the flood generation as an example of impending judgment to warn their own generation to repent, and they believed that the flood generation was particularly wicked and would not have a share in the world to come.

2:6. Jewish teachers often coupled Sodom with the flood generation as epitomes of wickedness ("an example"-3 Maccabees 2:5; the \*rabbis frequently; etc.); the Old Testament prophets also used Sodom repeatedly as an image of ultimate sin, often imitated by their own generations (cf. Deut 32:32; Is 1:9-10; 3:9; 13:19; Jer 23:14; 50:40; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46; Zeph 2:9).

2:7-8. Jewish tradition was quite divided on whether Lot was righteous (most of the rabbis and some others said that he was not). Genesis portrays him as personally righteous (Gen 18:25; 19:1-16); though not as wise as Abraham (13:10-11; 19:29, 32-35), he was too righteous for Sodom (19:9, 15).

2:9. In most Jewish traditions, the wicked were tortured in \*Gehenna until the day of judgment (or until their annihilation, depending on which tradition one follows). In the Wisdom of Solomon 10:6, Wisdom "rescued the righteous one," Lot, when the ungodly perished in the fire of Sodom; 2 Peter probably alludes to this tradition.

2:10-11. A wide variety of Jewish texts mention those who reviled the stars of heaven or cursed \*Satan or

demons. Peter's opponents have presumably adopted this practice, perhaps as a form of "spiritual warfare." (By contrast, the Sodomites [2:6] tried to molest

angels but were unaware that they were angels.) Although Christians had to be concerned for their public witness-charges of subversion in the Roman Empire led to severe persecution and repression-these false teachers reviled earthly authorities and the angelic authorities behind them (see comment on Eph 1:19-23).

2:12. Ancient writers regarded some animals as existing only to be killed for food; here the animals are objects of the hunt. Philosophers (e.g., \*Epictetus and the second-century Stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius) characterized animals as creatures ruled by instinct as opposed to humans, who were ruled by reason, and considered unreasoning humans "wild beasts."

2:13. Reveling was part of all-night parties; accusing these people of partying in the daytime was portraying them as worse than the pagans. (The common suggestion that Peter's wording here depends on the early Jewish work called the Assumption of Moses is possible, but it is also possible that the Assumption of Moses depends on 2 Peter; the direction of dependence depends on the respective dates assigned to the two documents. It is also possible that both depend on some other source, or that the verbal parallel is coincidental.)

2:14. Some Jewish writers also spoke of adultery of the eyes; see comment on Matthew 5:27-28. Whereas philosophers spoke of moral "training" and avoidance of greed, these false teachers were "trained in greed" (NASB, NRSV). "Accursed children" (NASB, NRSV) could either represent the Semitic figure of speech for accursed ones or refer to disinherited children who received curse instead of blessing from parents.

2:15. According to Jewish tradition and the most likely interpretation of the \*Old Testament, Balaam was a dishonorable character. For the sake of money, Balaam had led the Israelites into cultic prostitution with the Midianites, bringing God's judgment on them and leading to his own death (Num 31:8; Josh 13:22). Jewish literature considered him the ultimate prophet (and sometimes philosopher) of the pagans but did not reduce his role in Israel's sexual offense.

His attempt to make Israel sin was considered worse than any other nation's military attack on them because it brought God's judgment against them. The contrast between "the way of Balaam" and the "right way" reflects the common ancient image of two paths, one leading the righteous or wise to life, the other leading the foolish to destruction.

2:16. Ecstatic prophets were often called "mad" or "possessed" (in the ancient Near East and ancient Israel as well as in Greco-Roman antiquity; cf. 2 Kings 9:11; Jer 29:26). But Balaam's insanity is even more evident: despite a miraculous warning through an animal that proved to be smarter than he was (cf. the implications in 2 Pet 2:12), he proceeded with his folly (Num 22:20-35). *Philo used Balaam as an allegory for foolish people; the rabbis said that people who followed in Balaam's paths would inherit hell.* Jewish tradition added to the donkey's speech, in which it reproved Balaam's folly in greater detail.

2:17. Barren wells were worse than useless; they promised water in the arid East yet did not deliver on their promise. Hell was sometimes described as outer darkness.

2:18-19. Greek philosophers often

warned against being enslaved by one's passions; the image could extend to those who exploited those passions (such as prostitutes). Those defeated in battle and taken captive were enslaved. Most philosophers spoke of freedom from passion rather than freedom to indulge it; the \*gospel spoke of freedom from sin, not freedom to engage in it.

2:20-21. Jewish texts often spoke of the "way of righteousness"; see comment on 2:15.

2:22. One of the proverbs Peter cites here is from the Bible (Prov 26:11, referring to a fool returning to his folly); the other proverb was extrabiblical (from the ancient story of Ahiqar) but would have been a familiar image. Both

dogs and pigs were considered unclean (cf. Mt 7:6) and would have been regarded contemptuously by Jewish readers; they were also associated in other analogies like this one.

3:1-7

### The Certainty of Coming Judgment

Like many \*Hellenized Jews and like later \*Gnostics, the false teachers here played down future judgment, thus leading people to sin like the false prophets of old (chap. 2; see comment on 2:1). Now Peter turns to address the root of their immoral error directly; like many Jewish teachers, he recognizes that lack of expectation of future judgment usually led to immoral behavior or even moral relativism (see also comment on Jude 3-4). Some commentators regard chapter 3 as a letter distinct from the one in chapters 1-2, but this is unnecessary: the transition is natural, especially in view of Peter dropping his dependence on Jude at this point.

3:1-2. Some philosophers spoke of a "pure mind" as one untainted by the physical senses; Peter means one untainted by the false teachers' views (2:20). On "reminder" see comment on 1:12. For Jesus' commandment here, cf. Matthew 24:42-44 (especially for 2 Pet 3:9).

3:3. In much Jewish literature, those who deny the age to come have no basis for morality (cf., e.g., \*Pharisaic accusations against the *Sadducees*). *Ridiculing the righteous was also understood to be characteristically wicked behavior*; 1 Enoch speaks of sinners who mock God, denying his revelation; the \*Dead Sea Scrolls complain about those who mocked their community's righteous teacher.

3:4. Ancient writers vested "the ancestors" (NRSV) or "the ancients" with great prestige.

\*Aristotle and his adherents (the Peripatetics) believed that the universe was eternal. His view caught on even outside Peripatetic circles, and *Philo had to*



address the idea. (Like Plato, Philo believed that God created the world from preexistent matter, but unlike Plato, he believed that God had created that preexistent matter too.) *Epicureans denied that God acted in the world; they also believed that matter was indestructible (on the atomic level) and that the universe was infinite. The Stoics believed that fire was eternal, that the universe would periodically be resolved into the primeval fire (see comment on 3:7) and that eternity was a cycle of ages. Whether matter was created out of preexisting substance in chaos (as in most ancient thought) or from nothing (as is most likely in Gen 1) was debated in Diaspora Judaism.*

3:5. In Genesis 1, God created the world through his word (also Ps 33:69). (Some later Jewish traditions counted ten commands in Gen 1 and suggested that they represented the Ten

Commandments, the word of the \*law on which God founded the world.)

3:6-7. God had promised after Noah's flood (Gen 6-9) never to destroy the earth by water again (Gen 9:15; Is 54:9), but the prophets did speak of a future fiery destruction and renewal of the present world (cf. Is 65:17; 66:15, 22); they were followed on this point by later Jewish writers (e.g., \*Dead Sea Scrolls, *Sibylline Oracles*). *Jewish tradition thus declared that the present world would be destroyed not by water but by fire (e.g., Josephus; Rabbi Meir, second century; Life of Adam). Jewish literature sometimes used the flood as a symbol for the future judgment by fire. Unlike the Stoics, who believed that the universe (including even the gods) would be periodically resolved into fire and formed again, Jewish people hoped for a future day of judgment and then a new creation that would stand forever (2 Pet 3:10, 12-13). Though their source was the Old Testament, on this point their view was closer to that of Plato, who thought that the world would end once by flood and once by conflagration.*

3:8-13

The Timing of the Final Judgment

Delay should never be taken to indicate that Jesus is not coming back after all (3:4; cf. Ezek 12:27-28; Hab 2:3). Although many modern scholars think that 2 Peter addresses a second-century disillusionment with the earliest Christian *apocalyptic hope*, *questions over the delay of Christ's coming* arguably surfaced as early as Pentecost, and the book of Revelation, at the end of the first century, still cherished apocalyptic fervor. The *Dead Sea Scrolls* also attest *unexpected, continued deferment of hope for the day of God among the Essenes*, producing similar exhortations to endurance.

3:8. Peter appeals to Psalm 90:4 to make his point, as did many other Jewish writers of his day (who often took "the day as a thousand years" literally and applied it to the days of creation). Some apocalyptic writers lamented that God did not reckon time as mortals do and consequently urged perseverance.

3:9. The *Old Testament emphasized that God delayed judgment to allow opportunity for the wicked to repent* (cf. 2 Kings 14:25-27; Ezek 18:23, 32; 33:11). His patience with regard to the world's end was further emphasized in later Jewish texts like \*4 Ezra; in Jewish texts, one could no longer repent once the day of judgment had come. Some Greco-Roman writers also praised the mercy of God or that of the gods in delaying divine vengeance.

3:10. The day of the Lord is a familiar Old Testament image for the ultimate day of God's judgment, his final day in court when he settles the injustices of the world (e.g., Is 2:12; Joel 1:15; Amos 5:18-20). That day's "coming as a thief" refers to a saying of Jesus (extant in Mt 24:43). Different ancient thinkers had different lists of elements (the \*Stoics, who believed the world would be resolved into fire, had four, like most writers: earth, water, air and fire), but Peter's point is that everything will be destroyed. The destruction or purifying renewal of heaven and earth was also common in \*apocalyptic tradition.

3:11. As usually in the \*New Testament, Peter's discussion of the future is practical and suggests how to live in the present. This focus corresponds with the motives of some \*apocalyptic writers but contrasts with what appear to be those

of many others: impatient curiosity about the future. Those who suffered in the present order especially embraced apocalyptic hope, which gave

them strength to persevere in the midst of seemingly insurmountable tests in this age.

3:12. \*Rabbis disagreed among themselves as to whether the end of the age was at a time fixed by God or whether it could be hastened by Israel's \*repentance and obedience. In this context, Christians hasten the coming of the end by missions and evangelism (cf. Mt 24:14), thereby enabling the conversion of those for whose sake God has delayed the end (2 Pet 3:9, 15).

3:13. This hope is from Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22, and was frequently reiterated in later Jewish literature. The Old Testament and Judaism agreed that righteousness would characterize the world to come (e.g., Is 9:7; 32:16-17; 62:1-2; Jer 32:40).

3:14-18

#### Preparing for the Final Judgment

3:14. Here Peter urges his readers not to be like the false teachers (2:13). See comment on 3:11.

3:15-16. God's patience allows salvation for those on whose behalf he delays; cf. 1 Peter 3:20 on Genesis 6:3, returning to the judgment image of the flood (2 Pet 3:5-7). Calling a writer's work "hard to understand" in antiquity was not an insult (as it often is today); it could mean that it was complex and brilliant. Jewish teachers said that the message of the Scriptures could be "distorted" by misinterpreting them. Second-century \*Gnostics and many first-century Jewish and probably Christian groups were already distorting the Scriptures, some even to play down a future judgment (perhaps by allegorizing it).

By the late first century, another early Christian writer (1 Clement) asserted the inspiration of Paul's letters; although Paul's early writings had undoubtedly not

been collected before Peter's death, Peter may have known of some of them from his travels among the churches. Even though *Josephus and other writers asserted that Judaism had a closed canon*, some Jewish groups (such as the *Qumran community and Diaspora communities* that used various recensions of the \*LXX) seem to have had a fluid idea as to where Scripture ended and other edifying literature began. Although some scholars have reasonably used this statement identifying Paul as Scripture to argue for a post-Petrine date for

2 Peter, it would not have been impossible for the real Peter to view Paul's writings as Scripture if he accepted Paul's apostolic status and hence the possibility that some of his writings were \*prophetically inspired. Much that was prophetically inspired, however, never became Scripture (see "canon" in the glossary). If Peter wrote these words, they reflect a remarkable insight for his day.

3:17-18. Peter's readers are to resist the false teachers by growing in \*Christ.

# 1 JOHN

## Introduction

Authorship. The style of 1 John is so close to that of the author of the Gospel of John that no one questioned that they were written by the same person until the twentieth century. Some writers have pointed to minor stylistic differences and have proposed that 1 John was written by a different member of the "Johannine school." Sometimes disciples of famous teachers would seek to imitate their teachers' works (often even their style), so this proposal cannot be ruled out on a priori literary grounds.

One can account for the minor stylistic differences, however, simply by recognizing the difference between an epistle and a gospel; the latter \*genre is literarily related to ancient biography, which went through several stages in the writing process before it was complete. Conversely, this epistle does not represent a major literary production (although literary epistles did exist).

One can explain the purported differences in theology and outlook by the different situation each addressed; by the standards used to suggest that the same person did not write both, different sermons of the average preacher today would often have to be attributed to different authors as well! Most important, the author claims to be an eyewitness (1:1) but does not claim to write in another's name (he provides no \*pseudepigraphic preface).

Genre. The form is more like a homily than a letter (except 2:12-14). That the epistolary prescript (opening) and conclusion are missing need not surprise us; they were sometimes removed when letters were incorporated into collections (although 2 and 3 John retain standard elements of letters). But the whole document flows more like a sermon, albeit one not structured by the rhetorical conventions of the day. It thus resembles the form of letter known as a "letter-

essay," although it nevertheless addresses the specific situation of the readers.

Situation. If the setting of 1 John is the same as that of the Fourth Gospel, it is meant to encourage Christians expelled from the *synagogues*, *some of whose colleagues have returned to the synagogue by denying Jesus' messiahship* (2:19, 22; 4:2-3). The letter can be read in this way and makes sense on these terms.

But John was concerned about situations in cities other than those addressed in his Gospel. While Christians were expelled from synagogues and betrayed by the Jewish community in Smyrna (Rev 2:9-10) and Philadelphia (Rev 3:7-9), they were tempted with the heresy of compromise elsewhere, including compromise with idolatry advocated by false prophets (Rev 2:14-15, 20-23; cf. 1 Jn 4:1; 5:21). The form of idolatry may have especially been the imperial cult, to which people in the East needed to show their loyalty or pay serious consequences (cf. Rev 13:14-15), possibly including death (1 Jn 3:16). First John could address a community like Ephesus, where the \*church had expelled the false teachers but needed love for one another (Rev 2:2-4).

On the one hand, the issue in view might be simply some false prophets (1 Jn 4:1-6) advocating compromises with the imperial cult to save one's life. On the other hand, the issue might be one of the heresies that was developing toward full-blown \*Gnosticism. Docetists believed that Christ was divine but only seemed to become human (cf. 4:2); Cerinthians (followers of Cerinthus) believed that the \*Christ-`Spirit merely came on Jesus, but denied that he was actually the one and only Christ (cf. 2:22). Gnostics also tended to define sin in various ways, hence some Gnostics believed that they were incapable of committing real sins, although their bodies could engage in behavior non-Gnostic Christians considered sinful. Any of the above backgrounds fits the letter itself; thus the commentary mentions all of them at relevant points below. But one point is beyond dispute: the primary troublemakers are clearly "secessionists," people who had been part of the Christian community John addresses but who had withdrawn from that community. John advocates testing the spirits by two main tests: a moral-ethical test (keeping the commandments,

especially love of the Christian community) and a faith test (the right view of Jesus).

Commentaries. Among the best are I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978); Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, WBC 51 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1984); D. Moody Smith, *First, Second and Third John*, Interpretation (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1991); and Kenneth Grayston, *The Johannine Epistles*, NCB (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984). The most detailed commentary is Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, AB 30 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982).

1:1-4

### The Basis for True Fellowship

The basis for fellowship as Christians (1:3) is precisely what divided John's readers from those who had withdrawn from the community. If (as many scholars think) 1:1 alludes back to the opening of the Fourth Gospel, John speaks of God's Word that had always been (see comment on Jn 1:118). Although philosophers and Jewish teachers alike spoke of the divine Word, none of them spoke of the Word's becoming human. By saying that Jesus' witnesses had touched and felt him, John indicates that Jesus had been fully human; he was not simply a divine apparition like the current "manifestations" of the gods in which the Greeks believed (though merely "testifying" what one saw "with one's eyes" could be used more broadly, e.g., 2 Maccabees 3:36).

1:5-10

### The Reality of Sin

It is possible that the secessionists believe, like some later \*Gnostics, that they have achieved a state of sinlessness. Given the emphasis on God's holiness in this passage and later statements about the secessionists, however (3:6, 9), it is perhaps more likely that they believe, like some later Gnostics, that they are

sinless in a different sense-they do not regard the sins they commit as sinful. (On the sins they are especially committing, see comment on 3:6, 9.)

1:5. Other Jewish texts (especially the *Dead Sea Scrolls*) also used the light-darkness image to contrast the followers of righteousness with those of sin, regarding God as wholly righteous. The Old Testament also affirmed that God was wholly righteous (e.g., Ps 92:15).

1:6. The Old Testament often de

scribed "obeying" God's commands as "walking" in them-so often that Jewish teachers called their view of the way Jewish people should behave halakah, "walking." The image of walking about in darkness connoted the danger of stumbling (2:10-11). The Old Testament condemned mixing up light and darkness, right and wrong (Is 5:20; cf. 2:5).

1:7. Although water, not blood, cleansed in a physical sense, blood also purified in an Old Testament ritual sense (see comment on Heb 9:21-22). Sacrificial blood set apart what was sacred for God, purifying from sin by making \*atonement (Lev 16:30).

1:8-10. The Old Testament prophets had often condemned false protestations of innocence as self-deception (e.g., Jer 2:35; Hos 8:2; cf. Prov 30:12); God required instead both admission of the sin and \*repentance (cf. Lev 5:5; 16:21; Ps 32:1-5; Prov 28:13; Jer 3:13). (Some *synagogue prayers for forgiveness were also preceded by confessions of sin, indicating that Jewish people in the first few centuries A.D. generally recognized the idea; cf. also Psalms of Solomon 9:6, etc.*) On cleansing see 1 John 1:7. On the sins of the secessionists, see comment on 3:6 and 9.

2:1-11

The Moral Test



Christians were new people, and while they might not be living absolutely sinless lives yet (1:8-10), the newness of their life in \*Christ would affect their lifestyles; because sin was real (1:5-10), moral behavior was a valid way of testing real commitment to Christ. This moral examination especially emphasizes the test of love (2:5, 9-11). Judaism also stressed that true participants in God's covenant obeyed his commandments.

2:1. Philosophers and Jewish teachers sometimes addressed their \*disciples as "children." "Advocate" meant "intercessor" or "defending attorney." In the *Old Testament*, *God could plead his people's case before the nations (Jer 50:34; 51:36); in ancient Judaism, such advocates as God's mercy or Israel's merit pleaded Israel's case before God. Jesus is naturally the advocate, as elsewhere in the New Testament, because of his position, his righteousness and his work (v. 2).*

2:2. A "propitiation" (KJV, NASB) was an \*atonement, a way to appease or satisfy the wrath of a God whose standard had been violated; it alludes to the sacrifices offered for atonement in the Old Testament. In Judaism, the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement was for Israel alone; but Jesus' sacrifice was offered not only for Christians but even for those who chose to remain God's enemies, leaving them without excuse.

2:3-4. In the \*Old Testament, Israel "knew" God-were in covenant relationship with him-when they obeyed his commandments (e.g., Jer 22:16; 31:33-34).

2:5. One was to demonstrate love for God by obeying his commandments (Deut 6:5-6); this idea was understood throughout ancient Judaism.

2:6. Moralists commonly appealed to imitation of God or of a famous teacher in ancient moral exhortation. John here alludes to Jesus' example of sacrificial love to the point of death (Jn 13:34-35).

2:7-8. In antiquity, paradox was one graphic way of forcing an audience to think

through the meaning of one's words; John uses it here ("old, not new," "but new"). The love commandment was old, always part of God's word (Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18, cited by Jesus-Mk 12:30-31), but also new, based on a new and ultimate example

(Jn 13:34). Many Jewish traditions that used the light-darkness imagery for good and evil portrayed the present age as ruled mainly by darkness but the age to come in terms of the triumph of light.

2:9-11. The secessionists who have withdrawn from the Christian community John addresses have broken fellowship with true Christians, thus showing that they "hate" rather than "love" them. The \*Old Testament and Judaism forbade "hatred of brothers and sisters" (Lev 19:17); in a Jewish context, this term referred to fellow Jews (though cf. also 19:34); in a Christian context, it refers to fellow Christians.

2:12-14

#### Exhortations to Different Groups

"I am writing" is probably not intended to convey a sense different from "I wrote"; it was common to vary style to make one's writing more interesting. One could write "I have written" in a letter one was presently writing; grammarians call this convention an "epistolary aorist."

On the one hand, "fathers," "young men" and "children" (John does not exclude women from consideration here but employs the language categories of his day, which used masculine forms for mixed groups) could refer to different stages of progress in the Christian faith; see comment on 2:1. On the other hand, some writers addressed different kinds of moral instruction to different age groups to which particular points were most relevant (e.g., the fourth-century Greek \*rhetorician Isocrates; a letter of the Greek philosopher Epicurus; cf. Prov 20:29; 2 Tim 2:22).

Fathers held positions of honor and authority; children were in positions of learning and lacked status and authority. Young men were generally associated with strength and vigor; here they had overcome the evil one by participating in \*Christ's victory (4:4; 5:4) over sin (3:10-12). Although some ancient writers often considered young men more vulnerable to particular temptations (especially sexual immorality), John expresses his confidence in them.

2:15-17

### Do Not Love the World

2:15. "The world" could refer to everything but God; here it means the system in competition with God. Just as Israel in the \*Old Testament repeatedly had to decide between allegiance to God and allegiance to the pagan nations around them, the Christians scattered among the nations had to choose \*Christ above whatever in their cultures conflicted with his demands. In the case of John's readers, refusal to compromise might be a costly proposition (3:16).

2:16. The Old Testament often related the eyes to desire, especially sexual desire, and pride. Both Judaism and philosophers (e.g., \*Aristotle, \*Epictetus) condemned arrogant boastfulness. By listing the three vices together, John might allude, as some commentators have suggested, to Genesis 3:6, although the language here is more general.

2:17. Judaism spoke of the world passing away but of God's word remaining forever (cf. also Is 40:6-8). John's words here could encourage those who preferred death for the sake of \*Christ over the survival that the world offered (cf. 1 Jn 3:16).

2:18-27

### Discerning the Spirits: The Theological Test

John needs to assure his readers that

they, not the secessionists, are true followers of God. To the ethical test (2:111) John now adds a theological test: they must hold the proper view of \*Christ. John carries on the thought of the end time (v. 18) from 2:17.

2:18. It was a common Jewish belief that evil would multiply in the end time; the duration of this period immediately preceding the end of the age was often left indeterminate (as here), although some Jewish writers assigned a specific duration to it (e.g., forty years, four hundred years). Some Jewish people also appear to have envisioned a particularly evil figure as a high priest or ruler oppressing God's people, an idea that became much more prevalent in Christian circles (e.g., 2 Thess 2:3-4). John argues that by definition there are many "antichrists" already. (John is the only \*New Testament writer to use this term. "Anti-" could mean "instead of," but he would probably call a substitute Christ a "false Christ," like "false prophets" in 4:1, if that were what he meant; the meaning "against" is more likely: hence, opposer of Christ. Cf. Paul's argument that the "mystery of lawlessness is already at work"-2 Thess 2:7.)

2:19. *The Old Testament was clear that the righteous could become wicked (e.g., Ezek 18:24-26) but also that one's deeds could reveal the sincerity or falsehood of one's heart (e.g., 2 Chron 12:14). Both Greek and Jewish teachers condemned disciples who proved unfaithful or unable to endure the tests of discipleship, generally assuming that their initial commitment had been inadequate. Judaism recognized that many converts were false, although they regarded even more severely Jewish apostates who had once embraced but now rejected the law.*

Some New Testament texts (e.g., Jn 6:70-71; 1 Jn 2:19) may view the issue from the standpoint of God's foreknowledge, and other texts from the standpoint of the believer's experience (e.g., Gal 5:4; 1 Tim 4:1-2). But unlike most modern interpreters, ancient Jewish interpreters would not see a contradiction between these two perspectives.

2:20-21. In the Old Testament people were anointed with literal oil to perform a specific task, especially for the priesthood or kingship; the term translated

"anointed" is used figuratively for those ordained by God to particular tasks. Christians had been appointed to discernment (see 2:27).

2:22-23. Of themselves, these verses would counter equally well a nonChristian Jewish opposition and a Cerinthian opposition to Christian faith. Compromising the absolute uniqueness of Jesus as the *Christ and the only way to the Father would probably permit Jewish believers to remain in the synagogues*-thus delivering them from the direct challenge of the imperial cult and threat of persecution. That false prophets would advocate such compromise (cf. 4:1-6) is by no means difficult to conceive (see the introduction to Revelation). Cerinthus, who taught around A.D. 100, believed that the Christ-\*Spirit came on Jesus but was not identical to him; the late-second-century Christian writer Irenaeus also attributed this view to many later \*Gnostics.

2:24-27. Many commentators hold that the "anointing" (v. 27) is the Spirit (cf. Jn 14:17, 26; Acts 10:38); others suggest that it refers in context to the word, the message of the \*gospel; in either case it alludes to the \*Old Testament practice of God setting particular people apart for his calling, which here applies to all believers. The Old Testament used anointing oil symbolically to consecrate or separate people

(such as kings) or objects (such as the tabernacle) for sacred use. The ultimate consecration for such use arose when the Spirit came on people (Is 61:1; cf. 1 Sam 10:1, 9; 16:13).

2:28-3:3

### Readiness for His Coming

As the readers have been abiding in Jesus (v. 27), so they are to continue to do (v. 28); on abiding (dwelling, remaining), see comment on John 15:1-8.

2:28. In Jewish tradition, the coming of God to judge the world would be a fearful day for those who were disobedient to his will (cf. Amos 5:18-20).

2:29. It was an ancient commonplace that children inherited the natures of their fathers. So thoroughly was this belief held that many writers even warned that adulterers would give themselves away, because their image would be stamped on the children of the union.

3:1. No one who agreed with John that Christians were God's children would have disputed his point here. A roughly contemporary Jewish teacher, Rabbi Akiba, celebrated, "Beloved is humanity, since they were created in God's image; greater still is the love, that God made it known to humanity that they were created in the image." Rabbi Meir, later in the second century, proclaimed, "Beloved is Israel, for ... they are God's children."

3:2-3. In some Greek thought, one's nature was transformed toward that of the divine by contemplating the divine; philosophers like \*Plato believed that they accomplished this transformation through the vision of the mind rather than through knowledge derived through the senses. *Philo agreed that one attained the vision of God mystically, because he affirmed that God was transcendent; he believed that God endowed Israel and especially the prophets with this vision, that this vision was preceded by virtue and purity of soul, and that the vision would be made complete when one was perfected. The idea also occurs in some Palestinian Jewish texts, especially in Jewish mysticism. Perhaps more to the point, this vision of God was often associated with the end time, and some Jewish apocalyptic thought seems to have envisioned transformation through beholding God's glory.*

John may derive most of the image of transformation by beholding glory from the Old Testament (Ex 34:29-35; see comment on Jn 1:14-18). For him, one who knows God's character purifies himself or herself accordingly, and the final and ultimate purifying will take place when one knows God perfectly at the end.

3:4-24

Which Side Are You On?

In traditional Jewish fashion, John contrasts sin and righteousness, along with those aligned with either side (3:4-9). He then explains why the unrighteous oppose the righteous, appealing to a stock Jewish illustration for this principle: the righteous love one another, but the wicked, like Cain, hate the righteous (3:10-18). This was the test that would make clear who would ultimately triumph in the day of judgment (3:19-24).

3:4. Greeks saw sin as imperfection; the *Old Testament and Judaism* saw it as *transgression of God's law*. John wants everyone to understand that he means sin in the biblical sense.

3:5. Here John probably uses sacrificial language; cf. John 1:29. The point is that those who are in Jesus have their sins taken away, so they no longer live in them.

3:6-7. This verse again alludes to the transformative power of beholding

God (cf. 3:2-3). Some commentators think that the claim to sinlessness here is ideal, "to the extent that" one abides in Christ. (In this way \*Plato argued that to the extent one was a craftsman, one's craftsmanship would be perfect; but where one's craftsmanship failed, it was because one was not acting as a true craftsman at that point.) Others think it is potential: one is capable of living sinlessly (cf. Jn 8:31-36). But verse 9 is worded too strongly for either of these options.

More likely, John is turning the claims of the false teachers and their followers (1:8-10) against them: unlike those errorists who merely claim to be sinless, true believers do not live in sin. (Many commentators suggest that the present continuous tense of "sin" suggests "living in" sin, sinning as a natural way of life. This is different from living righteously but sometimes succumbing to temptation or deception and genuinely repenting.) The particular sins that dominate John's portrayal of these secessionists are violations of the two basic precepts John stresses in this letter: the right attitude toward members of the Christian community and the right view about Jesus (3:24). Thus John may mean that they commit the sin that leads to death, i.e., leading out of \*eternal life

(cf. 5:16-17).

3:8. In the \*Dead Sea Scrolls, all sins were influenced by the spirit of error. Given the traditional Jewish view that the devil had introduced sin into the world, all sins were ultimately the devil's works and reflected his character.

3:9-10. On the claim to sinlessness, see comment on 3:6-7. Some scholars have suggested that John borrows the image of "seed" here from his opponents, since the idea is later attested among the \*Gnostics; but the image was already widespread in Christian tradition (Jas 1:18, 21; 1 Pet 1:23; see comment on 1 Pet 1:23). A child was believed to inherit his or her father's nature through the seed, hence John is able to use this image to make his point: those who are born from God through conversion reflect his character now in them, and those who are not reveal this by their nature as well. In the \*Old Testament one could overcome sin by the word written or dwelling in one's heart (e.g., Ps 119:11; Jer 31:32-33).

3:11-13. Cain's murder of Abel is often rehearsed with little adornment in Jewish tradition; at other times, Jewish tradition expounds on Cain's wickedness in great detail. He became a stereotypical prototype for wickedness (e.g., \*Jubilees and *1 Enoch*; Pharisees sometimes associated Cain with the *Sadducees and their denial of the life to come*); one pre-Christian Jewish text calls him "*the unrighteous one*" (*Wisdom of Solomon 10:3*). Philo used Cain repeatedly as a symbol of self-love and made him an illustration that "the worse attacks the better," as here (cf. Gal 4:29). Some later antinomian Gnostics took Cain as a hero.

Murder of a brother was considered one of the most hideous crimes possible in antiquity (so, e.g., *Cicero, Horace*); John applies "brother" or "sibling" to any member of the Christian community. A murderer was a child of the devil (3:10), for one of the devil's first works had been to bring death to Adam (see comment on John 8:44); some later rabbinic texts claim that Cain's father was a bad angel, even the devil himself. Sibling rivalry (Gen 37:8; 1 Sam 17:28) was normally outgrown, but Cain's act did not allow that to happen.



3:14-15. Murder was a capital offense under *Old Testament law and thus merited* Gehenna in post-Old Testament Jewish thought. Jesus included as murder the attitude that generated the literal act (cf. Mt 5:21-22).

3:16-17. John's readers anticipated persecution and the possibility of death, although few had actually been martyred so far (Rev 2:13). Refusal to participate in the worship of the emperor would brand them as subversives, and their enemies would be more than happy to betray them to the government as such. Since noncitizen prisoners were routinely tortured for information, especially if they were slaves, Christians might have to pay a tremendous price to avoid betraying their fellow Christians to death.

But John also demands of them a practical commitment to love in the present. Their opponents, who had withdrawn from the community, perhaps to avoid persecution, are responsible for others' deaths as Cain was; but the true Christians are to live sacrificially on behalf of others daily. As in some Jewish thought, withholding goods from someone in need was equivalent to starving him or her (cf. Jas 2:15).

3:18. Ancient literature often coupled "word" and "deed" (e.g., in Isocrates, Demosthenes, *Quintilian*, Seneca, \**Lucian*, *Wisdom of Solomon*); one who did both was praised, but one who only spoke and did not act accordingly was viewed as a hypocrite.

3:19. The \**Dead Sea Scrolls* sometimes called the righteous "children of truth" or "the lot of God's truth."

3:20-21. Judaism repeatedly stressed that God knew the hearts of all people (cf. Jer 29:23); some texts even call him "Searcher of Hearts." As one Jewish wisdom writer expressed it, "Happy is the one whose soul does not accuse him" (Ecclus 14:2).

3:22-24. These commandments are precisely those which the secessionists are

violating: by leaving the Christian community they have demonstrated their lack of love for their supposed brothers and sisters, and by not believing Jesus as the only true \*Christ (2:22) they have failed the faith test as well. On the promise of answered prayer, see John 14:12-14.

4:1-6

### Testing the Spirits

4:1. Judaism especially associated the \*Spirit of God with \*prophecy but acknowledged the existence of false prophets, who John says are moved by other spirits. His readers would understand his point; Jewish people were familiar with the idea of other spirits besides the Spirit of God (see especially comment on 4:6). There were many pagan ecstasies in Asia Minor, as well as Jewish mystics claiming special revelations; the need for discernment would be acute.

4:2-3. The issue may be the secessionists' denial that Jesus has come as the \*Christ (if the opposition is Jewish); more likely it is a Docetic denial that Jesus was actually human and actually died (see introduction), a heresy an eyewitness would be well positioned to refute. It may simply be a relativizing of Jesus' role to the position of a prophet like John the Baptist, which allows enough compromise to avoid persecution. Whatever the error, the secessionists are claiming the authority of inspiration for it, as do some similar cults today. John does not deny the reality of the inspiration; he merely denies that the spirit working in them is God's Spirit.

4:4-6. The \*Dead Sea Scrolls similarly distinguish between God's children and the rest of the world, though they go far beyond John in asserting that every act is determined by either the spirit of truth or the spirit of error. (The language of "two spirits" proba

bly extended beyond the Dead Sea Scrolls, although the best attestation outside the Scrolls is in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. These testaments contain a number of references to spirits of falsehood, but the closest to 1 John

4:6 is Testament of Judah 20, which, with the Testament of Levi, is one of the testaments most often suspected of harboring Christian interpolations. Thus the issue is not settled, although the Testament of Judah reference is probably pre-Christian, reflecting an idea similar to the general Jewish doctrine of the two impulses, which the \*rabbis especially developed and expounded; on this doctrine see comment on Rom 7:15-22.) The promise that the one with them was greater than the one with the world (1 Jn 4:4) recalls an Old Testament principle (2 Kings 6:16; 2 Chron 32:7-8).

4:7-21

### The Test of Love

4:7-10. Again (3:9-10) John argues that one's nature shows one's spiritual lineage; those who are like God are his children, and God's supreme characteristic is his love, revealed in the cross of \*Christ. The secessionists proved their lack of love by withdrawing from Christian fellowship. On propitiation see comment on 2:2.

4:11-12. Even true Christians' love had to be perfected, but unlike the secessionists, they had remained within the Christian community, thus maintaining a commitment to love one another. The false teachers may have been claiming to have had mystical visions of God (see comment on 3:2-3; 4:1), but John includes a corrective: God was unseen (Ex 33:20), and the sense in which believers could envision him is in his character of love fleshed out in the cross (4:9) and in Christians' sacrificial love (4:12).

4:13-16. Although the \*Qumran community as a group claimed to possess the \*Spirit, most of ancient Judaism relegated the Spirit's most dramatic works to the distant past and future, or to very rare individuals. For John, all true believers in Jesus have the Spirit, who moves them to love (see comment on 4:11-12) and prophetically endows them to testify the truth about Christ (see comment on 4:1).

4:17. In the \*Old Testament (e.g., Amos 5:18-20) and Judaism, "the day of judgment" was something to be feared by the disobedient (2:28). But those who continued in love could be confident of acquittal before God's tribunal in that day, for they are agents of his unselfish love.

4:18. It was understood that sin often leads to fear (e.g., Gen 3:8; *Epistle of Aristee* 243). *Although* Stoic philosophers emphasized not fearing anything, because circumstances cannot ultimately destroy one's reason, John's assurance that true believers need not fear here is not explicitly directed toward all circumstances. His assurance applies specifically to punishment in the day of judgment (4:17).

4:19. The Old Testament also recognized that God's people learned how to treat others from God's gracious treatment of them (Ex 13:8; 22:21; Lev 19:34; Deut 10:19), although the ultimate expression of the principle is the example of \*Christ (1 Jn 4:10; cf. Jn 13:34).

4:20-21. Principles like arguing on the basis of what was near at hand rather than from something related to the gods (e.g., \*Plutarch) and that a new friend would treat you as he had treated others (e.g., the fourth-century B.C. rhetorician Isocrates) were also recognized by others in antiquity. In the \*Old Testament, God accounted

behavior toward those who could not repay it as if it were done to him (Prov 19:17; cf. Deut 15:9).

5:1-13

### Triumph and Life Through Faith in Jesus

5:1. Families were often viewed as a unit, hence one could not love one member of a family while despising other members. This verse may also reflect the idea that children bear their parents' nature.

5:2. On love being demonstrated actively, compare 3:18.

5:3. God's commandments had never been too heavy for those in whose hearts they had been written (Deut 30:11-14). Many Jewish teachers regarded some parts of the \*law as "heavier" or "weightier" than others (as in Mt 23:23), but they meant that some were more crucial for daily life, not that any of them were too hard to keep.

5:4-5. The image of achieving "victory" was used in military, athletic, debate and courtroom situations but always involved a conflict or test. John calls his readers to "overcome" or "triumph" in the face of opposition, persecution and possible martyrdom (probably including suffering for refusal to compromise with the imperial cult).

5:6-13. Many scholars have suggested that the secessionists, like Cerinthus and some later *Gnostics*, said that the Christ-\*Spirit came on Jesus at his \*baptism but departed before his death; or that, like the Docetists and some later Gnostics, the secessionists believed that Jesus was actually baptized but could not actually die, being eternal. It is also possible that some Docetists saw in the "water and blood" of John 19:34 the picture of a demigod: Olympian deities in Greek mythology had ichor, a watery substance, instead of blood. Thus they may have stressed his divinity at the expense of his humanity.

Ancient sale documents sometimes included the signatures of several witnesses attesting a sale, and the \*Old Testament and later Jewish courts always required a minimum of two dependable witnesses (Deut 17:6; 19:15). John cites three witnesses whose reliability could not be in dispute. (The trinitarian formula found in the KJV of 1 Jn 5:7 is orthodox but not part of the text. It appears in only three manuscripts-of the twelfth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries-out of the thousands available, placed there by scribes who knew it from the Latin Vulgate, which took it from an early marginal note based on a popular early interpretation of the text. The KJV includes it only because that translation was based on a recension dependent on the third edition of Erasmus's Greek text; Erasmus

included the verse to fulfill a wager, protested it in a note and withdrew it in subsequent editions of the text.)

5:14-21

### Avoiding Sin

5:14-15. For background applying to the general principle in these verses, see comment on John 14:12-14. But the specific issue emphasized here is prayer for an erring brother or sister, one attracted to the false prophets' ideas (4:1-6); see 5:16-17 (cf. Mt 18:15-20).

5:16-17. Given the use of "life" for \*eternal life and "death" for its opposite in this epistle, a "sin unto death" (KJV) would seem to be a sin leading one away from eternal life (cf. Gen 2:17; 3:24). The two sins John would likely have in mind would be hating the brothers and sisters (the secessionists' rejection of the Christian community)

and failing to believe in Jesus rightly (their false doctrine about his identity as the divine Lord and \*Christ in the flesh); see comment on 3:23.

*The Old Testament and Judaism distinguished between willful rebellion against God, which could not be forgiven by normal means, and a lighter transgression. More relevant here, some ancient Jewish texts (e.g., the Dead Sea Scrolls, Jubilees) also spoke of a capital offense as "a matter of death," which was normally enforced by excommunication from the community rather than literal execution. Those who were sinned against could secure forgiveness for their opponents by prayer (Gen 20:7, 17; Job 42:8), but a sin of willful apostasy from God's truth nullified the efficacy of secondhand prayers for forgiveness (1 Sam 2:25; Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). John is presumably saying: God will forgive erring believers at your request, but those who have gone completely after the heresy are outside the sphere of your prayers or (on another interpretation) simply must directly repent to receive forgiveness.*

5:18. \*Satan could not touch job without God's permission (Job 1:11-12; 2:3-6). Judaism recognized that Satan needed God's permission to test God's people, and that God rejected Satan's accusations against God's own people.

5:19-20. Judaism acknowledged that all the nations except themselves were under the dominion of Satan and his angels. The source of this idea is not hard to fathom; nearly all \*Gentiles worshiped idols, and most also practiced sexual immorality and other sins. 5:21. "Idols" could refer to anything that led astray from proper worship of the true Lord (thus "idols of one's heart" meant falsehoods or sins in the \*Dead Sea Scrolls), but a literal meaning (physical images of false gods) makes good sense to a congregation in Asia Minor. It may refer to worshiping the image of the emperor, to which Christians were eventually required to offer incense to show their loyalty to the state. It could also refer to compromise with idolatry in a broader sense. Asia Minor afforded plenty of temptation for former pagans. Ancient Jewish

texts often condemned idolatry as the worst sin—surely a capital offense or a "sin unto death" (5:16-17); if the false prophets of compromise in 4:1-6 are like other false prophets affecting Asian 'churches in this period (Rev 2:20), the idolatry may well be literal; see comment on Revelation 2:14, 9:20, 13:12 and 15.

# 2 JOHN

## Introduction

Authorship, Date. See the introduction to 1 John and to the Gospel of John; there is little stylistic difference between 1 and 2 John. Although John himself might send a shorter personal letter resembling a longer one he had previously written, it is unlikely that a forger would try to produce such a short document that added so little to the case found in 1 John. Further, a later forgery of 2 John (or 3 John) would have drained it of its authority for the readers, since the contents of 2 and 3 John indicate that they knew the writer personally.

Nature of the Letter. Second John may function as an official letter, the sort that high priests could send to Jewish leaders outside Palestine. The length is the same as that of 3 John; both were probably limited to this length by the single sheet of papyrus on which they were written; in contrast to most \*New Testament letters, most other ancient letters were of this length.

Situation. Second John addresses the problem of the same secessionists that 1 John addressed. The secessionists' inadequate view of \*Christ was either a compromise with \*synagogue pressure (see the introduction to Gospel of John) or a relativization of Jesus to allow more compromise with paganism (see the introduction to Revelation)-probably the latter. For the secessionists, Jesus was a great prophet like John the Baptist and their own leaders, but he was not the supreme Lord in the flesh (cf. 1 Jn 4:1-6; Rev 2:14, 20). They may have been affiliated with or forerunners of Cerinthus (who distinguished the divine Christ and the human Jesus, like some modern theologians) or the Docetists (who claimed that Jesus only seemed to be human). All these compromises helped the heretics better adapt to their culture's values what remained of Christianity after their adjustments, but led them away from the truth proclaimed by the eyewitnesses who had known Jesus firsthand.



Commentaries. See the introduction to 1 John.

1-3. "Elders" were given authority in local Jewish communities by virtue of their age, prominence and respectability; age was respected. John assumes this simple title (cf. 1 Pet 5:1) rather than emphasizing his apostleship here. The "chosen lady" (NASB, NIV) or spiritual mother could refer to a prophetess/elder (cf. 3 Jn 4; contrast Rev 2:23). But it more likely refers to a local congregation here (see v. 13); both Israel and the \*church were portrayed as women.

4-6. The commandment John mentions here was an old one because it was in the law (Lev 19:18), although Jesus' example gave it new import (Jn 13:34-35). In the context of 1-2 John, "loving one another" means cleaving to the Christian community (rather than leaving it, as the secessionists were doing).

7-9. See the introduction.

10. Travelers were to be accorded hospitality and put up in hosts' homes (cf. 3 Jn 5-6; it is possible, though not certain, that the houses in question here may also be house \*churches); early Christian missionaries had depended on this hospitality from the beginning (Mt 10:9-14). Traveling philosophers called sophists charged fees for their teaching, as some of Paul's opponents in Corinth probably did.

But just as Jewish people would not receive \*Samaritans or those they considered impious, so Christians were to exercise selectivity concerning whom they would admit. Early Christian writings (particularly a text of mainly authoritative traditions known as the Didache) show that some prophets and \*apostles traveled around, and that not all of them were true prophets and apostles. Greetings were an essential part of social protocol at that time, and the greeting ("Peace be with you") was intended as a blessing or prayer to impart peace.

11. In the \*Dead Sea Scrolls, one who provided for an apostate from the

community was regarded as an apostate sympathizer and was expelled from the community, as the apostate was. Housing or blessing a false teacher was thus seen as collaborating with him.

12-13. "Paper" is papyrus, made from reeds and rolled up like a scroll. The pen was a reed pointed at the end, and the ink was a compound of charcoal, vegetable gum and water. Written letters were considered an inferior substitute for personal presence or for a speech, and writers sometimes concluded their letters with the promise to discuss matters further face-to-face.

# 3 JOHN

## Introduction

This is a "letter of recommendation" for Demetrius, a traveling missionary (vv. 7-8) who needs to be put up by a local \*church while he is evangelizing in their area (cf. comment on Mt 10:11-13, 40-42). For authorship and date, see the introduction to 2 John. For the first three centuries of the church's existence, congregations met in homes; for further details on this practice, see Romans 16:5. In this letter to Gaius, a house-church leader, John is apparently attempting to counter the opposing influences of Diotrephes, a different house-church leader who is asserting his own authority and rejecting emissaries backed by John's apostolic authority.

Commentaries: See the introduction to 1 John.

1-2. This is a standard greeting in many ancient letters, which quite often began with a prayer for the reader's health, frequently including the prayer that all would go well with the person (not just material prosperity, as some translations could be read as implying). This greeting might be similar to saying "I hope you are well" today, but it represents an actual prayer that all is well with Gaius (see comment on 1 Thess 3:11).

3-4. \*Rabbis and philosophers sometimes spoke of their *disciples as their "children"*; here John probably intends those he led to Christ (cf. Gal 4:19 and the later Jewish tradition that when someone made a convert to Judaism, it was as if the converter had created the convert).

5-6. Hospitality was a critical issue in the GrecoRoman world, and Jewish people were especially concerned to take care of their own. Most inns also served as brothels, making a stay there unappealing, but Jewish people could

expect to find hospitality from their fellow Jews; to prevent abuse of this system, they normally carried letters of recommendation from someone the hosts might know to substantiate their claim to be good Jews. Christians had adopted the same practice.

7-8. Philosophers and sophists (traveling professional speakers, which is how many observers in the GrecoRoman world interpreted traveling Christian preachers) often made their livings from the crowds to whom they spoke, although others took fees or were supported by wealthy \*patrons. Like Jewish people, Christians showed

hospitality to travelers of their own faith, and these traveling preachers were dependent on this charity. Judaism spoke of the sacred "Name" of God; John is apparently applying this title to Jesus.

9-11. Diotrophes is apparently leader of another house \*church; he refuses to show hospitality to the missionaries who have letters of recommendation from the elder. Scholars have speculated whether the issue was doctrinal disagreement, disagreement over church leadership structure or that Diotrophes was simply outright disagreeable; at any rate, he refuses to accept the authority of John that stands behind the missionaries he backs. To reject a person's representatives or those recommended by a person was to disrespect the person who had written on their behalf.

12. This is the recommendation for Demetrius, who has not only John's attestation but that of the rest of his home church(es). No one in Diotrophes' house church will receive him, so Gaius's house church must help him.

13-14. Sometimes ancient letters closed as John does here. Most letter writers employed scribes, and if John is writing by hand, he may well wish to close quickly. See comment on 2 John 12. If "friends" is here a title for a group, it probably refers to fellow Christians in the place from which the elder is writing; these Christians may have borrowed the idea from the \*Epicureans, whose

philosophical communities consisted especially of "friends."

# J U D E

## Introduction

Authorship. Although a \*pseudepigrapher would want to clarify which Jude he was (i.e., Jesus' brother) or to write in the name of someone more prominent, this author does not specify which Jude he is, making it probable that the letter was genuinely written by Jude. At the same time, his lack of clarification as to which Jude he is and the fact that he seems to be already known to his readers (vv. 3, 5) suggest that he is the most prominent Jude, brother of the most prominent James—the younger brother of Jesus (Mk 6:3). Early church tradition varied on which Jude wrote the letter, but this is the only Jude known to us whose brother was called James. His Greek is sophisticated, but the thought world he shares with his readers is that of popular Judaism; for a Palestinian Jew's knowledge of Greek, see the introduction to James.

Situation. The letter clearly opposes false teachers whose sexual lifestyles are immoral and who are teaching arrogantly. The thought world of Jude and his readers is popular Judaism; his opponents may be rooted in the same Jewish-Christian tradition that Jude is, but they have also sought to assimilate many values of immoral pagan culture. Given Jude's heavy use of \*1 Enoch, that book may represent a tradition cited by his opponents, who apparently appeal to their own mystical visions as divine revelations like Enoch's (v. 8).

\*Genre. This is a letter-essay, a letter used as a sermon. Letters were meant as substitute speeches or surrogates for the presence of the writer.

Commentaries. The best are R. J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC 50 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983), and (easier for those without Greek) J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1981).

1-2

## Introduction

1-2. Jude's lack of elaboration on his office suggests that he is the wellknown Jude, brother not only of James but of Jesus as well. Although a son of Joseph and Mary, he now describes his half-brother Jesus as "Lord" rather than as brother.

3-6

## Falling from Grace

3-4. The heresy Jude addresses resembles that proclaimed by false prophets in the \*Old Testament: judgment would not come on God's people because of his special favor for them-a doctrine that led to sin (Jer 6:14; 8:11; 23:17; Ezek 13:10, 16; Mic 3:5). Biblical \*grace means forgiveness and power to overcome sin, not permission to act immorally. Ancient writers often applied the language of battle or athletic contests ("contend") to spiritual or moral battles.

5. All Jewish readers and even most recent \*Gentile converts to Christianity knew the exodus story. That people had experienced God's redemption did not guarantee that they could not fall away and be destroyed.

6. In Jewish tradition (except most of the *rabbis*), the "*sons of God*" in *Genesis 6:1-4* were *fallen angels who left their assigned place to have intercourse with women. In the earliest of these traditions, 1 Enoch*, the fallen angels were imprisoned and bound; Azazel was thrown into "darkness" (which was applied to the realm of the dead in much ancient tradition). First Enoch uses "great day" for the day of judgment.

7-16

## Sin and judgment

7. Already in the \*Old Testament and even more so in later Jewish tradition,

Sodom came to be viewed as the epitome of wickedness. "Strange flesh" (KJV, NASB) here could mean angelic bodies, but because Jewish tradition would not call angels "flesh" and the Sodomites did not realize that they were angels (Gen 19:5), Jude may have their attempted homosexual acts in view. ("Strange" flesh is literally "other" flesh, but this may mean "other than what is natural," rather than "other than their own kind." Then again, "in the same way" as those of v. 6 might imply angels and people having intercourse with each other. Apart from \*Philo, few ancient Jewish writers stressed the Sodomites' homosexual behavior; most instead stressed their lack of hospitality, arrogant sin or sexual immorality in general, which in the Jewish perspective included but was not limited to homosexual acts.)

8. "Dreaming" probably refers to the dreams of false prophets, who produce falsehood while claiming to speak truth (Jer 23:25); angelic "majesties" (literally "glories"; cf. NRSV, TEV) refers to the various ranks of angelic hosts, to which God has assigned authority over nations, nature and so on in Jewish tradition. Disrespect for earthly authorities and the spiritual powers behind them appointed by God would cause Christians to be labeled as subversive and produce widespread persecution of them in the Roman Empire. (Some scholars have also suggested that they reviled these angels as the angels through whom God gave the \*law, because of their antilaw stance, but it is not clear that they argued for their immorality primarily on the basis of their rejection of the law.)

9. Michael (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1) and Gabriel (Dan 8:16; 9:21) are the only two angels named in the \*Old Testament, and they naturally became the two most popular angels in contemporary Jewish lore, with Michael as Israel's guardian and generally the most prominent archangel.

Jewish traditions about Moses' death (or lack of it, despite Deut 34) varied widely, and this report seems to have been one of these versions. In the Old Testament and Jewish literature, the devil acted as an accuser; here the great



archangel Michael did not challenge his accusations; he deferred the issue to God the supreme judge. God's angelic messenger also cries, "The Lord rebuke you" in defending the high priest in Zechariah 3:2.

10. The false teachers, however, were ridiculing angelic powers, probably including *Satan*. *The Dead Sea Scrolls* show that some people cursed Satan, but Jude does not approve of that. Instead, he seems to agree with the moral embodied in a later \*rabbinic story: a man named Pelimo went around making fun of the devil until one day the devil showed up and chased him into a bathhouse, whereupon he learned his lesson; cf. also Ecclesiasticus 21:27. Christians also should not speak authoritatively on secret or esoteric matters God has not chosen to reveal (cf. Deut 29:29).

11. More than in the Old Testament, in Jewish tradition Cain (see comment on 1 in 3:12) and Balaam (see comment on 2 Pet 2:15) had become symbolic for leaders of wickedness; Balaam was regarded as one of the most powerful prophets, as prophet of the \*Gentiles, but he used his powers for evil. Korah revolted against the leadership of Moses (Num 16) and became a standard figure for rebelling against the law in Jewish tradition.

12. The Last Supper was a full Passover meal, and the early \*church had continued the tradition of celebrating a meal ("the Lord's Supper") of which bread and wine were only a part. Com

munion as a full meal was also called a "love feast."

"Concealed rocks" (or "hidden reefs"-NASB) were deceptive and killed sailors who failed to navigate their vessels away from them; empty clouds promised rain to needy farmers but delivered nothing (Prov 25:14). The image of trees may be because harvesting would be complete by late autumn, when many trees shed their leaves before the advent of winter; or it may mean that they did not bear summer fruit and showed no signs of fruitfulness by early autumn; either way, these trees were plainly dead (on the future second death, see comment on

Rev 2:11).

13. In Greek tradition, Aphrodite, goddess of desire, was produced from sea foam at the castration of the Titan Uranos (alluding to the teachers' immorality); waves appear in the \*Dead Sea Scrolls as an image of casting up the filth of sin. "Wandering stars" referred to the erratic orbits of planets, sometimes attributed to disobedient angels, who were to be imprisoned under God's judgment and are called "stars" in \*1 Enoch. Judgment as eternal darkness appears in 1 Enoch and elsewhere. The wicked as raging waves appear in Isaiah 57:20 and in subsequent Jewish tradition (Dead Sea Scrolls).

14-15. Jude quotes from 1 Enoch 1:9, citing a popular story that is still extant to make his point. This passage in 1 Enoch represents some themes that run throughout that section of 1 Enoch.

16. "Grumblers" may allude to Israel's murmuring in the wilderness, but especially to the wrong speech ("harsh words"-NIV) of verse 15, expounding the citation from 1 Enoch. Ancient moralists repeatedly condemned flattery and advocated forth right speech; politicians commonly used flattery to win people over with speeches, and flattery was a necessity for subordinates of many emperors to survive. Jude had already addressed both their lusts (vv. 6-8b) and arrogant speech (vv. 8c-10).

17-25

Call to Persevere

17-19. Later \*Gnostics claimed to be spiritual, thinking that others were at best "worldly" (NASB, NRSV) or "natural" (NIV); under the influence of certain kinds of Greek philosophy, some false teachers were probably already moving in this direction. Because the false teachers claimed to be prophetically inspired (v. 8), they no doubt laid claim to the \*Spirit (cf. comment on v. 20), but Jude says that they are also lacking in the Spirit.

20-21. Because the \*Holy Spirit was usually viewed as the Spirit of .prophecy, "praying in [or by] the Holy Spirit" probably means inspired prayer (1 Chron 25:3; Psalms), very likely including tongues (cf. comment on Acts 2:4; 1 Cor 14).

22-23. Some of the language here is from Zechariah 3:2 and 4, but the reference is to those being led astray and others who are already astray or false teachers themselves, who are dangerous.

24-25. Jude closes with praise, as would be common in a \*synagogue service; the emphasis is that, for all the danger of falling away (vv. 3-23), God is able to keep believers secure and persevering.

# G L O S S A R Y

The most important terms and names are highlighted with an asterisk (\*).

Achilles Tatius. A secondcentury A.D. \*rhetorician who wrote *Cleitophon* and *Leucippe*, a Greek romance novel.

Akiba. A late-first- to early-secondcentury \*rabbi whose opinions became very influential in rabbinic Judaism. After wrongly supposing Bar Kochba to be the \*Messiah, he was flayed to death by the Romans and died reciting Judaism's basic creed: "The LORD is one."

\*Apocalypses, apocalyptic literature. The broadest use of the term today (usually followed in this commentary) refers to the thought world of literature dealing with the end time, often replete with symbols. The most precise sense of the term refers to a category of ancient Jewish literature growing out of *Old Testament* prophecy (especially Daniel and parts of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, etc.) in which visions or travels through the heavens reveal divine secrets, usually including many about the future. Nonfuturistic Jewish mysticism was probably a truncated apocalyptic with future expectations played down.

Apocrypha. A group of books accepted as part of the Catholic *canon between the Old and New Testaments*, but not part of the Protestant and Jewish canons. Most of these books circulated in the most common form of the Septuagint, but ancient Jewish writers (e.g., *Philo*, Josephus and the rabbis) did not treat them as *Scripture*. The New Testament never ex

pressly cites these books with Scripture formulas but alludes to them fairly often. The books are 1-2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (also known as Sirach or Ben Sira), Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Prayer of Manasseh, and 1-2 Maccabees.

*Apostle.* The term applies literally to a sent or commissioned messenger; in Judaism such messengers acted on the full authority of their sender, to the extent that they accurately represented the sender's message. The closest Old Testament equivalent to God's "apostles" in this sense was the prophets, although the apostles seem to have added an overseeing and evangelistic function that prophets (both Old Testament and \*New Testament) did not always incorporate. Those prophets commissioned with special authority to oversee prophetic awakening (e.g., perhaps Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah) or to judge Israel (e.g., Deborah, Samuel) may provide the best Old Testament models.

*Apuleius.* A second-century A.D. \*rhetorician who probably dabbled in magic and was initiated into the cult of Isis. He is most famous for his book *Metamorphoses*, now often called *The Golden Ass*.

*\*Aramaic.* A language related to Hebrew that was the standard international language of the ancient Near East before Alexander the Great's conquests made Greek the standard; it was still widely spoken in different forms in Syria-Palestine and farther east in Jesus' day. Most Jewish people in first-century Palestine probably spoke both Greek and Aramaic.

*Aristeas, Epistle of.* The \*pseudepigraphic story of seventy wise translators of the *Septuagint* (LXX) and how they impressed the ruler of Egypt. An Alexandrian document probably from the second century B.C., it seeks to portray Judaism in a positive light to Greeks.

*Aristotle.* A fourth-century B.C. student of *Plato* who wrote treatises on logic, rhetoric, nature and ethics. Many of his views became influential; his teachings were preserved especially by the school of philosophy known as the Peripatetics.

*Ascetic.* Austere and self-denying; some ancient religious and philosophical groups required this discipline as a matter of policy (often to show one's lack of attachment to mortal, bodily pleasures and pains). Asceticism grew in popularity in late antiquity, influencing the shape of later Christian monasticism.

Atone, atonement. The satisfaction of God's anger by venting it on a substitute instead of on the guilty person. Laying down one's life for another was highly regarded in Greek culture; some elements in Judaism came to emphasize that martyrs paid the price for others. But the concept especially derives from one kind of \*Old Testament sacrifice, in which the death of a sacrifice appeases God's anger so the sinner can be forgiven.

\*Baptism. The \*Old Testament and the ancient world emphasized ceremonial washings to remove various kinds of impurity; Judaism had developed these washings more fully by the time

of Jesus, and some sects (particularly the community that authored the \*Dead Sea Scrolls) were especially scrupulous. One once-for-all ritual designed to purify *Gentiles of pagan impurity when they converted to Judaism (attested in the rabbis, in \*Epictetus, and elsewhere)* provided the most significant model for Christian baptism: it indicated an act of conversion, of turning from the old life to the new.

2 Baruch. A Jewish apocalypse from the late first or early second century A.D.

\*Canon. The minimum of books agreed to constitute the absolutely authoritative, divinely inspired body of literature, by which other claims to revelation may be evaluated. Most of ancient Judaism accepted the present *Old Testament as canonical; early Christians came to accept the books of the present New Testament* in addition to the Jewish canon.

*Christ. The Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term for "Messiah."* Some \*Gentile readers, unfamiliar with the Jewish sense of the term, may have taken it merely as Jesus' surname, a usage that became more common over time.

\*Church. The Greek term used in the *New Testament reflects the terms often used in the Septuagint* to translate the Hebrew word for the "congregation" (qahal) of Israel: "church" (assembly) and "synagogue" (gathering). Although

some scholars have suggested that Jesus could not have spoken about the church during his earthly ministry, the \*Dead Sea Scrolls used the Hebrew term for God's community; hence Jesus could use this word in talking about his future community (Mt 16:18; 18:17). The term was in common use in Greek culture for "assemblies," especially citizen assemblies in cities. (The popular modern surmise that the Greek word for "church," *ekklesia*, means "called-out ones" is thus mistaken; that sense is actually more appropriate for "saints," i.e., "those separated [for God].")

Cicero. A famous Roman orator and statesman who wrote on a variety of subjects and flourished in the first century B.C.

\*Client. A person socially dependent on a \*patron in Roman society.

Colony. A city either literally founded by the Romans or given honorary privileges as if it had been; its citizens were thus treated as citizens of Rome itself.

Cynic. One type of antiworldly philosopher who expressed independence from social needs by begging. Cynics owned only the barest necessities (e.g., cloak, staff, begging purse) and often greeted passersby with harsh, antisocial words.

\*Dead Sea Scrolls. Writings from a strict Jewish sect (usually agreed to be *Essenes*) that lived in the Judean desert, near modern Khirbet Qumran. The writings include the War Scroll, the Community Rule, the Damascus Document, the Thanksgiving Hymns, the Genesis Apocryphon, the Temple Scroll and commentaries on and expansions of various biblical books.

\*Diaspora. The Jewish dispersion outside Palestine. The technical term "Diaspora Judaism" is thus used interchangeably with "non-Palestinian Judaism" in this commentary.

Diatribes. A style of teaching used in ancient philosophical schools, generally characterized by rhetorical questions and imaginary interlocutors.

Digression. A change of subject (usually brief) before returning to the previous point; this was a standard technique in ancient speeches and literature.

\*Disciples. Students of \*rabbis or

philosophers, normally committed to memorizing and living according to their master's teachings.

Elect. Predestined, chosen. One of the most important tenets of Judaism was that the Jewish people were chosen in Abraham; the \*New Testament applies the term to Christians, who are a chosen people in \*Christ.

1 Enoch. An \*apocalypse whose five sections may derive from different authors, 1 Enoch is mainly (excepting the *Similitudes*) *from the second century B.C. Probably written in Aramaic*, it circulated especially in *Essene circles and survives in part in the Dead Sea Scrolls* and in full in later Ethiopic manuscripts.

3 Enoch. An *apocalypse from the perspective of rabbinic mysticism* that is no later than the fifth century A.D. (probably the third century).

Epictetus. A firstcentury \*Stoic philosopher, originally a slave.

Epicureans. A philosophical school that valued pleasure (the absence of pain and disturbance) and disbelieved in the gods of ancient myths; see comment on Acts 17:18.

Eschatological. Dealing with the end time.

\*Essenes. A strict group of pietists, some of whom withdrew into the wilderness as monastics. The \*Dead Sea Scrolls are probably from one group of Essenes.

\*Eternal life. In Jewish texts, the term literally means "the life of the world to come," bestowed after the *resurrection from the dead*; taken from *Daniel 12:2*, it became a standard concept in most of early Judaism and was sometimes abbreviated "life." Some New Testament passages speak of it as a present as well



as future gift, because Jesus' resurrection has inaugurated salvation for the present.

4 Ezra. The bulk of this work (chaps. 3-14) is a Jewish \*apocalypse from the late first century A.D.

Freedperson. A former slave who had been manumitted, legally freed.

Gehenna. A Greek transliteration of the Hebrew Gehinnom, which in Judaism had come to describe the abode of the wicked dead in torment. Various Jewish sources differ on the duration of punishment in Gehenna and whether the wicked would eventually be annihilated, continue to be detained or be released; the Gospels, Acts and Revelation are much more united in their picture of a \*resurrection to eternal judgment.

Genre. The kind of writing a work is: for example, letter, historical \*narrative, biography, poem or bomb threat.

\*Gentile. Anyone who is not Jewish. In ancient Jewish parlance, this was often the equivalent of "pagan."

*Gnosticism. A fusion of Greek, Jewish and Christian ideas that began by the early second century and presented a major challenge to early Christianity. Some scholars have seen tendencies toward developed Gnosticism in the opponents of Paul (especially in Colossians and the Pastoral Epistles) and John. The same Greek ideas that later produced Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism were probably already at work in the first century, but we can reconstruct these from other sources without recourse to Gnosticism per se.*

Gospel. The term so translated means literally "good news"; it was the sort of good news heralds would bring, and in Isaiah it refers to the specific message of God's restoration and salvation for his people. ("Gospel" as a literary *genre*, a type of book in the New Testament, is different; on this sense of the term see the introduction to the Gospels.)

Grace. In the *New Testament*, the term generally represents the Old

Testament concept of God's covenant love, which was expressed in passages like Deuteronomy 4:37, 7:7-9 and 10:15.

Hagiography. A highly elaborated account of a holy person, meant to praise him or her.

\*Hellenistic. Although the commentary usually uses the term "Greek," "Hellenistic" is the more accurate technical term for the cultural fusion of classical Greek culture with Near Eastern cultures carried out in the eastern Mediterranean by Alexander the Great and his successors. "Hellenistic" Judaism is thus Judaism heavily influenced by Greek culture, i.e., "Hellenized."

Hillel. A famous Jewish teacher contemporary with \*Shammai and with Jesus' early childhood; usually more lenient than Shammai, his school's opinions generally prevailed after A.D. 70.

*Holy Spirit. Although used only twice in the Old Testament (Ps 51, Is 63), this term became a standard title for the Spirit of God in New Testament times. Many people believed that the Spirit had been quenched since the completion of the Old Testament and that prophecy continued only in muted form; but the Old Testament had promised an outpouring of the Spirit in the end, when the Messiah would come. Jewish people especially associated the Spirit with prophecy and divine illumination or insight, and many also (especially the Essenes) associated it with God purifying his people in the end time. The New Testament includes both uses, although it also speaks of the Spirit as a person like the Father and Son (especially in John), which Judaism did not do.*

Hyperbole. A \*rhetorical exaggeration, a figure of speech often used by Jewish wisdom teachers to underline their point. The point of Jesus' hyperbolic illustrations is generally to grab the hearer's attention and force that hearer to take his point seriously.

Joseph and Asenath. An Alexandrian, \*Hellenistic Jewish romance novel, describing the winning of Joseph's bride; probably non-Christian, it may derive from the first century A.D.

\*Josephus. A first-century Jewish historian who lived through the war of A.D. 66-70; his works (The Jewish War, Antiquities of the Jews and Against Apion, and his autobiography, the Life) are useful sources of information concerning first-century Palestine. Intended for a Diaspora audience, his writings are quite Hellenized.

Jubilees. A theologically shaped midrashic reworking of Genesis and part of Exodus. It circulated in (and probably derived from) \*Essene circles in the second century B.C.

Justin Martyr. A philosopher both before and after his conversion to Christianity. Writer of two Apologies and the Dialogue with Trypho, he was a prominent Christian apologist (defender of the faith) in the second century A.D., until his martyrdom.

Juvenal. A Roman satirist of the late first through early second century A.D. He is especially known for his invective against women, foreigners and freedmen who were encroaching on rights and privileges once reserved for aristocratic Roman males.

*Kingdom. This term means "rule," "reign" or "authority" (not a king's people or land, as connotations of the English term could imply). Jewish people recognized that God rules the universe now, but they prayed for the day when he would rule the world unchallenged by idolatry and disobedience. The coming of this future aspect of God's reign was generally associated with the Messiah and the \*resurrection of the dead. Because Jesus came and will come again, Christians believe*

that the kingdom has been inaugurated but awaits consummation or completion.

"Kingdom of heaven" is another way (Matthew's usual way) of saying "kingdom of God." "Heaven" was a standard Jewish way of saying "God" (as in Lk 15:21).

\*Law. "Torah" (the Hebrew word behind the Greek word translated "law") means literally "instruction" and "teaching," not just regulations. It was also used as a title for the first five books of the \*Old Testament (the Pentateuch, the books of Moses) and sometimes for the whole Old Testament. This commentary uses the translation "law" because it is familiar to readers of most translations, even though the English term's semantic range is much narrower than the Jewish concept.

Livy. A firstcentury B.C. Roman historian.

Lucian. A secondcentury A.D. Greek satirist and \*rhetorician.

LXX. The common abbreviation for the \*Septuagint.

Maccabees. A priestly family who led the Jewish revolt against the \*Hellenistic-Syrian empire in the second century B.C., they became the Hasmonean dynasty, an aristocracy that ruled Palestine until the time of Herod the Great.

3 Maccabees. A historical novel of Alexandrian Judaism; it may have been written in the first century B.C.

4 Maccabees. A Jewish treatise full of Greek (especially \*Stoic) philosophy; probably written by an Alexandrian Jew in the early first century A.D.

\*Messiah. The rendering of a Hebrew term meaning "anointed one," equivalent to the original sense of the Greek term translated "*Christ*." *In the Old Testament, different kinds of people were anointed, and some of the Dead Sea Scrolls mention two main anointed ones in the end time, a king and a priest. But the common expectation reflected in the biblical Psalms and Prophets was that one of David's royal descendants would take the throne again when God reestablished his kingdom for Israel. Most people believed that God would*

somehow have to intervene to put down Roman rule so the Messiah's kingdom could be secure; many seem to have thought this intervention would be accomplished through force of arms. Various messianic figures arose in first-century Palestine, expecting a miraculous intervention from God; all were crushed by the Romans. (Jesus was the only one claimed to have been resurrected; he was also one of the only messiahs claiming Davidic descent, proof of which became difficult for any claimants arising after A.D. 70.)

Midrash. Jewish commentary or exposition on Scripture. The forms varied considerably but often included reading a text in the light of other texts, with careful attention to all nuances of details supposedly filled with divine significance. Because such methods of reading Scripture were common, early Christians could employ them in relating their message to other ancient Jewish Bible readers.

\*Mystery cults. A diverse group of Greek cults entered only by special initiation. The details of the initiation were to be kept entirely secret, although one could join a number of these societies. Apart from secrets and initiations, they varied widely in popularity, antiquity and appeal to different social classes.

Narrative. Story form (applied to both true and fictitious stories), as opposed to other literary forms, like explanatory discourse.

\*New Testament. The common modern term for the early Christian liter

ature finally declared *canonical* by the church and accepted by nearly all Christians today.

*Old Testament.* The common modern term for the Hebrew Bible (including Aramaic portions) as defined by the Jewish and Protestant Christian \*canons; Jewish readers generally call this the Tenach.

Papyri. Documents contemporary to the New Testament, especially business documents and correspondence, written on papyrus scrolls (writing material

from the papyrus reed) and preserved especially in the dry climate of Egypt.

*\*Parable.* Jewish teachers regularly illustrated their teachings with brief stories, similar to the use of sermon illustrations today (though often with less verisimilitude). Jesus' parables, like those of other teachers, were meant to illustrate his points graphically, hence many details in these parables appear there only to advance the story line. Modern interpreters who read too much into such secondary details run the risk of overlooking the parable's real point or points. The Greek word for "parable" normally means a comparison; the Jewish practice behind Jesus' usage included a wide range of meanings (riddles, proverbs, fables, etc.).

*Pastoral Epistles.* Three Pauline letters-1 and 2 Timothy and Titus-that give Paul's advice to young ministers carrying on his work.

*Patron.* The social superior in the Roman patron-client relationship, who granted favors to and acted as political sponsor for his clients, or social dependents. The obligations in the relationship were viewed as reciprocal; clients were to grant the patrons honor as their benefactors.

*Petronius.* A firstcentury A.D. satirist who indulged in pleasure. After incurring the jealousy of Nero's guide and reputed sexual partner Tigellinus, Petronius killed himself when it became obvious what his fate would be.

*Pharisees.* A movement of several thousand pious Jewish men who sought to interpret the law carefully and according to the traditions of previous generations of the pious. They had no political power in Jesus' day but were highly respected and thus influential among the larger population. They emphasized their own version of purity rules and looked forward to the \*resurrection of the dead.

*\*Philo.* A firstcentury Jewish philosopher committed to both Judaism and Greek thought; he lived in Alexandria, Egypt, and held a position of great influence and

prestige in the Jewish community there.

Plato. A student of Socrates whose idealism and dualistic worldview became influential in subsequent Greek thought. He flourished in the fourth century B.C.

Plutarch. A Greek biographer and moralist whose writings illustrate many of the views prevalent in the first and second centuries A.D.

Prophecy. Speaking forth God's message by his inspiration. It can, but need not, involve prediction. Although "prophet" technically refers to anyone who prophesies, Judaism generally reserved this title for God's spokespeople of the distant past.

\*Proselyte. A convert (as used in this commentary, a convert to Judaism).

Psalms of Solomon. Jewish psalms from the mid-first century B.C., somewhat like the Qumran hymns. Probably all from one author, they may reflect early Pharisaic piety.

Pseudepigrapha. A broadly defined, modern collection of very diverse ancient Jewish texts outside the Jewish and Christian \*canons and other collec

tions such as the *Apocrypha*, Dead Sea Scrolls and *rabbinic literature*. So named because most of them are pseudepigraphic. These works include 2 Baruch; 1, 2 and 3 Enoch; Epistle of Aristeas; 4 Ezra; Jubilees; Life of Adam; 3 and 4 Maccabees; Martyrdom of Isaiah; Psalms of Solomon; Sibylline Oracles; Testament of Job; Testament of Solomon; and Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.

\*Pseudepigraphic. Purporting to be written by someone other than the real author, something like writing under a pen name today.

Pseudo-Philo. Pseudo-Philo's Biblical Antiquities retraces biblical history from Adam to the death of Saul. Possibly from Palestine, the work probably derives

from the late first or early second century A.D., but betrays no specific Christian influence.

Pseudo-Phocylides. A probably Jewish work of moral wisdom, influenced by \*Stoic ethics. It may date to the late first century B.C. or early first century A.D.

Publican. A mistranslation of a Greek term simply meaning -tax gatherer." The Romans did not use literal publicanoi, a special kind of tax farmers, in the Palestine of Jesus' day.

Pythagoreanism. A mystical philosophy developed by Pythagoras, a Greek thinker of the sixth century B.C. Like other Greek philosophical schools, it had its own unique traits; one of its most basic tenets was the mystical significance of numbers.

Quintilian. An influential first-century Roman \*rhetorician.

Qumran. The place where the \*Dead Sea Scrolls were found (Khirbet Qumran); hence "Qumran community" is used to describe the people who lived there and wrote the Scrolls.

*Rabbi. Jewish teacher. Sometime after A.D. 70 the term became a technical one for those ordained in the rabbinic movement, which probably consisted primarily of Pharisaic scribes. (To accommodate customary usage this commentary sometimes applies the term to Jewish teachers of the law in general, although such common usage may have technically been later; it also applies the term to the teachings of Jewish legal experts collected in rabbinic literature.)*

Rabbinic literature. The massive body of literature containing opinions attributed to various Jewish teachers considered part of the rabbinic movement; the bulk of the material used in this commentary is from the first few centuries A.D. Although all the written sources and most of the \*rabbis they cite are later than the New Testament, this literature is useful to illustrate one stream of Jewish



tradition. Rabbinic works include the Mishnah, Tosefta, Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds, Mekilta on Exodus, Sifra on Leviticus, and Sifre on Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Repentance. In the \*New Testament, this term does not merely mean "change of mind" (as some have gathered from the Greek term); it reflects the *Old Testament and Jewish concept of "turning around" or "turning away" from sin. Jewish people were to repent whenever they sinned; the New Testament uses the term especially for the once-for-all turning a Gentile would undergo when converting to Judaism or any sinner would undergo when becoming a follower of Jesus.*

*Resurrection. Although some scholars earlier in the twentieth century derived the idea of Jesus' resurrection from Greek mystery cults, it is now widely understood that early Christian belief shared little in common with the Mysteries' myths, which simply reenacted a seasonal revivification of fer*

*tility. Rather, Jesus' resurrection was rooted in a Jewish hope, which in turn was rooted in notions of God's covenant, promise and justice from early in Israel's history. Most Palestinian Jews believed that God would resurrect the bodies of the dead (at least the righteous, and many believed also the wicked), at the end of the age (Dan 12:2). There was, however, never any thought that one person would rise ahead of everyone else; thus Jesus' resurrection, as an inauguration of the future kingdom within history, caught even the disciples by surprise.*

\*Rhetoric. The art or study of proper forms and methods of public speaking, highly emphasized in antiquity. Although only the well-to-do had much training in it, the rhetorical forms and ideas they used filtered down to the rest of urban society through public speeches, in a manner similar to that in which television permeates modern Western society.

\*Sadducees. Most belonged to the priestly aristocracy that had prospered due to its good relationship with the Romans; they pacified the people for the Romans

and the Romans for the people. They controlled the prosperous temple cult, were skeptical of *Pharisaic traditions and supernaturalistic emphasis on angels and other spirits, and most of all were disturbed by talk of the resurrection of the dead* and other end-time beliefs. \*Messianic beliefs about the end time could-and ultimately did-challenge the stability of their own position in Palestine.

Samaritans. A people of mixed Jewish and \*Gentile ancestry who claimed descent from Jacob and worshiped the God of Israel, but felt that Mount Gerizim rather than Jerusalem was the holy site for worship. They engaged the Jews in bitter rivalry, often leading to political hostilities in Jesus' day, sometimes requiring Roman intervention.

Satan. Originally "the satan," "the adversary" (as in the Hebrew text of Job), but used as the devil's name by the end of Israel's exile (2 Chronicles, Zechariah) and standard by the \*New Testament period, although many Jewish people also called him by other names. In contrast to some modern theologians, the first readers of the New Testament would have viewed him as a literal, personal evil spiritual being.

Savior. A title often used for gods and divine rulers in Greek culture but also used in the \*Septuagint for Israel's God as the deliverer of his people. *Scribes. Throughout the Roman Empire, local executors of legal documents. In Jewish Palestine these would be the people who also taught children how to read the Scriptures; many of them were experts in the legal issues contained in the law of Moses (i.e., they were predecessors of the rabbis); some of them were Pharisees.* Seneca. A Roman \*Stoic philosopher, an adviser to Nero in that emperor's early days.

\*Septuagint. The Greek version of the *Old Testament widely circulated in the New Testament period*. (It is commonly abbreviated LXX because of the tradition that seventy scholars were responsible for it.) Although various recensions, or versions, of the Septuagint existed, this commentary refers to the most widely accepted standardized form (for the sake of avoiding technical questions beyond its scope).

Shammai. A famous Jewish teacher contemporary with \*Hillel and with Jesus' early childhood; usually stricter than Hillel's, his school's opinions generally prevailed in the time of Jesus. Shroud of Turin. The purported bur

ial cloth of Jesus. Against its authenticity are the results of its radiocarbon dating; in its favor are its many Palestinian features (including traces of Palestinian plant fibers) and indications of firstcentury Jewish burial customs. The origin and character of the image have still not been resolved by investigators.

Sibylline Oracles. \*Pseudepigraphic Jewish oracles modeled after pagan oracles of the same name, attributed to the ancient prophetess Sibyl and probably collected from Jewish circles in Alexandria, Egypt, and Asia Minor. Their composition spans a wide range of time, but they are mainly preChristian.

Similitudes of Enoch. The parables of 1 Enoch (1 Enoch 37-71), they may be from the first century B.C. or as late as the first century A.D. Because this section of Enoch alone is not represented in fragments from \*Qumran, it remains disputed whether it is preChristian.

\*Son of God. The term was applied generically to all Israel (Ex 4:22) but specifically to the Davidic king (2 Sam 7:14), especially (following 2 Samuel) the ultimate restorer (Ps 2:7; 89:27). Although most Jewish texts from the time of Jesus do not use it to designate the *Messiah*, *some do* (Essene interpreters of 2 Sam 7:14).

*Son of Man.* Hebrew and Aramaic used the expression to mean "a human being," but Jesus used it as a designation for himself, based on the particular use in Daniel 7:13-14. There "one like a son of man," a representative for the saints who suffer before receiving the *kingdom* (7:25-27), *receives the right to rule eternally.* This passage was not usually applied to the Messiah in Jesus' day, and not until he clearly cited Daniel 7 at his trial did his opponents fully understand the claim he was making.

Spirit. When capitalized in this commentary, it refers to the Spirit of God, the \*Holy Spirit.

Stoicism. The most popular form of Greek philosophy in Paul's day. Although most people were not Stoics, many Stoic ideas were widely disseminated. For more detail, see comment on Acts 17:18.

Suetonius. A Roman historian whose early-second-century A.D. biographies of first-century A.D. emperors contain much useful information.

\*Synagogues. Assembly places used by Jewish people for public prayer, Scripture readings and community meetings.

Synoptic Gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke; so called because they overlap so much, sharing common sources

(probably especially Mark and "Q"). Tacitus. A Roman historian whose early-second-century history of first-century Rome is among our most dependable sources for that era (albeit often tainted with Tacitus's cynicism).

Targum. A paraphrase of the Hebrew Bible into the \*Aramaic vernacular. Although it is impossible to date the extant written targums, the activity of translation is as old as Nehemiah 8:8 and could have developed into expanded paraphrases at an early date.

\*Tax gatherers. A despised group of Jewish people who collected taxes for the government at a profit. Rome allowed wealthy men to contract with their own cities or districts to see to it that taxes were paid; because they had to cover any shortfall themselves, they were not inclined to have mercy on their clients. Herod the Great had used local taxes to finance not only the Jerusalem temple and his palaces but also pagan temples in \*Gentile enclaves in Palestine, an action that had undoubtedly further alienated the masses. Tax collectors thus appeared as collaborators with the occupying pagan power.

Testament of Job. A \*Hellenistic Jewish account of job's suffering and triumph, maybe from Egypt and probably from the first century B.C. or the first century A.D.

Testament of Moses. Some think this document derives from the \*Maccabean era; it could also be dated after A.D. 70 (cf. 6:9), but probably it dates to around the mid-first century A.D. (it describes only part of the temple being burned).

Testament of Solomon. Probably a non-Christian Jewish work from about the third century A.D., possibly from Asia Minor; its exorcist rites reflect thorough familiarity with magical texts.

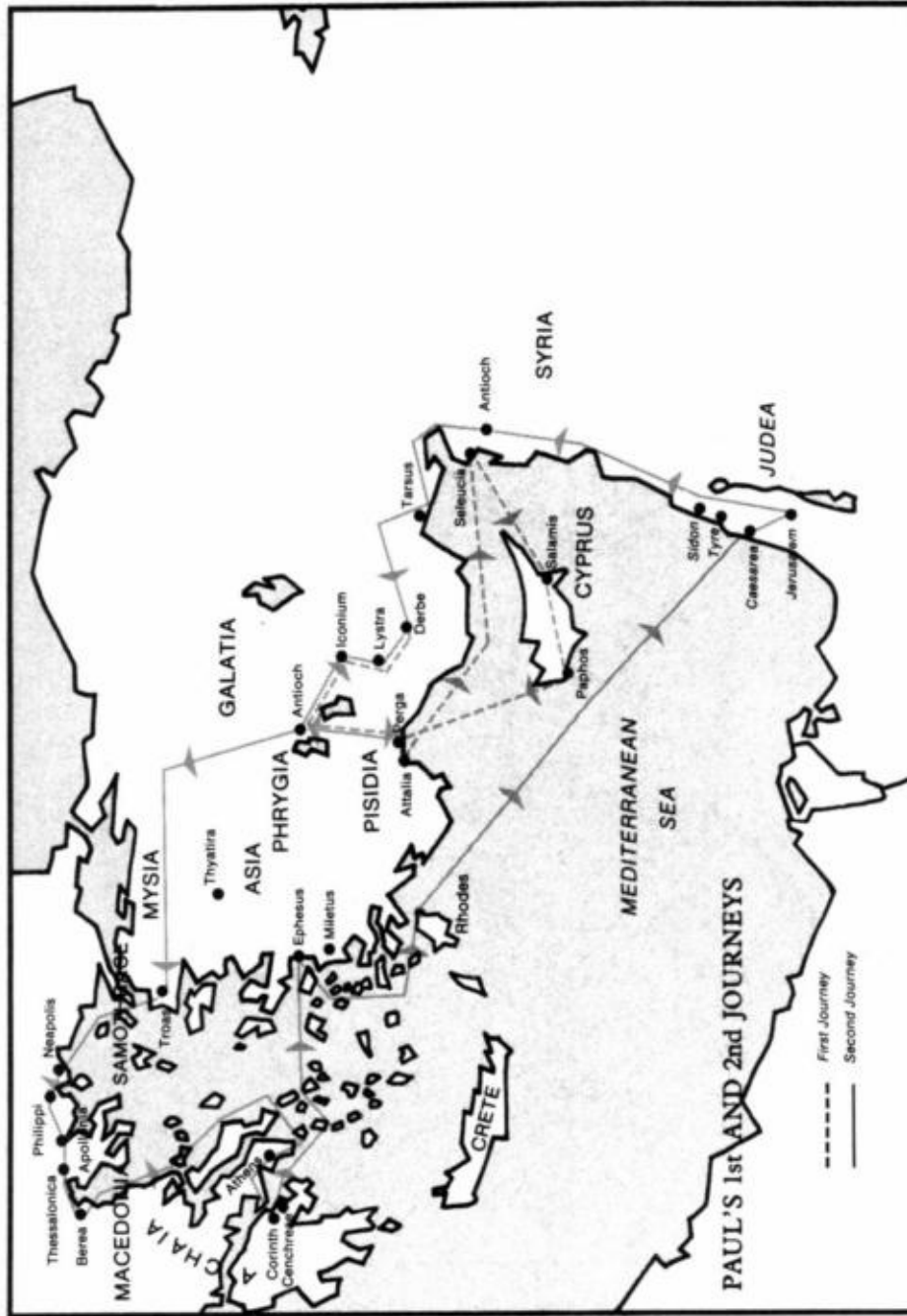
Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. Probably a mainly preChristian Jewish work with some Christian interpolations. Its date is uncertain. \*Pseudepigraphic "testaments," or final instructions, are left by each of Jacob's twelve sons for their children.

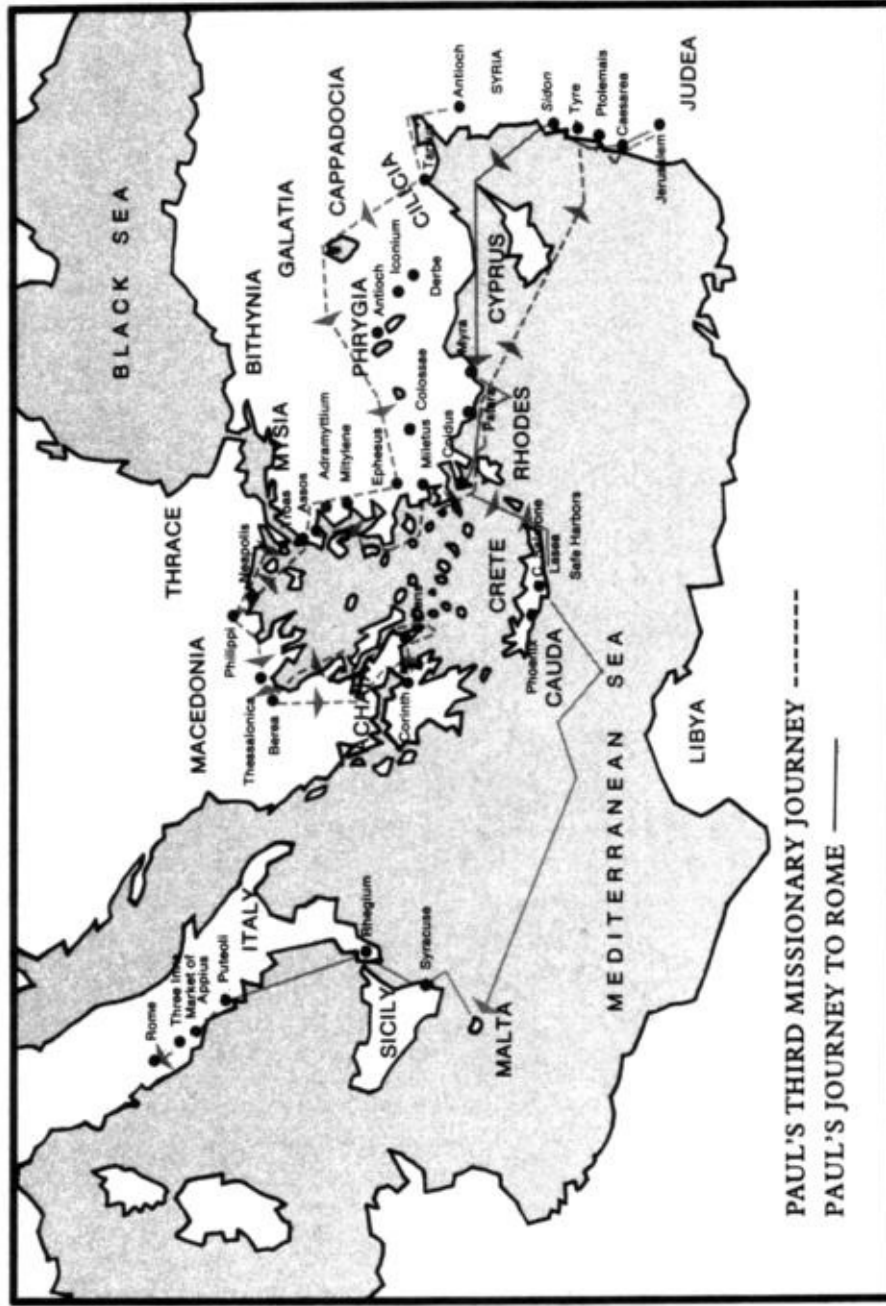
Theon. A Greek *rhetorician whose manual of rhetoric is helpful in reconstructing ancient speaking and writing styles (along with handbooks by Quintilian and others).*

*Zealots. Jewish revolutionaries who became prominent by this name especially shortly before the first Jewish war (A.D. 66-70). Seeking to exonerate his people before the Romans, Josephus marginalized them as robbers and troublemakers, but Zealot sympathizers were almost certainly widespread, apparently even among many \*Pharisees. Although Zealots technically refers to only one of the resistance groups, modern writers have often used the term as a convenient title for the whole resistance movement.*

# MAPS & CHARTS







PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY -----  
 PAUL'S JOURNEY TO ROME ———



# **The New Testament World: A Chronology**

## ROME (rulers)

- Augustus (27 B.C - A.D. 14)
  - ◇ hailed as "Savior"
  - ◇ Pax Romana

- Tiberius (A.D. 14-37)
  - ◇ \*patron of Sejanus
  - ◇ expels Jews from Rome

- Gaius Caligula (37-41)
  - ◇ tries to set up his image in the temple

- Claudius ("Restrainer"?) (41-54)
  - ◇ expels Jews from Rome over "Chrestus"

- Nero (54-68)
  - ◇ murders, orgies, bestiality, matricide
  - ◇ \*patron of Pallas

## PALESTINE (government)

- Herod the Great (c. 37-4 B.C.)

- Archelaus, ethnarch (4 B.C. - A.D. 6)

- Judas's revolt and Sepphoris burned (A.D. 6)

- Roman procurators over Judea (A.D. 6-37)

- Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee (4 B.C. - A.D. 39)

- Pontius Pilate (A.D. 26 or 27 to 36 or 37); \*client of Sejanus

- Herod Agrippa I, popular king (37-44)
  - ◇ dies in Acts 12:23; Josephus (44)

- Procurators (44-66) and Herod Agrippa II (c. 50-92, over various territories)

- Felix: corrupt \*client of Pallas (52-60)

## JUDAISM

- Dead Sea Scrolls (2nd century B.C. through mid-first century A.D.)

Jewish teachers:

- Shemaya, Abtalion

- Hillel and Shammai

- Annas, high priest (A.D. 6-15)

- Caiaphas, high priest (A.D. 18-36)

- School of Shammai predominates

- Gamaliel I a prominent Pharisaic teacher (School of Hillel)

- Theudas's revolt (c. 45)

- Simeon b. Gamaliel

- Rich (Sadducean) priests and Galilean landlords oppressing the poor

- Socioeconomic tensions building; \*Zealots arise

## CHRISTIAN BEGINNINGS

- Birth of Jesus (c. 7 B.C.?)

- Return from Egypt to Galilee

- Work for carpenters in Nazareth (4 miles from Sepphoris)

- John the Baptist, Jesus begin public ministry (c. A.D. 27) (Lk 3:1; Jn 2:20)

- Jesus crucified (c. A.D. 30)

- Church begins in Jerusalem

- Hellenist movement (Acts 6)

- Stephen's stoning

- Paul converted (c. 32)

- Church in Antioch, Gentile expansion

- Apocalyptic ideas flourish probably due to Gaius (cf. 2 Thess 2:3-4)

- Paul's first missionary journey (45-48)

- Jerusalem Council (Acts 15; c. 49)

- Second journey (50-53): Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth;

- 1-2 Thessalonians
- Mid-fifties: 1 Corinthians, Romans

- Paul caught in temple, taken to Caesarea (c. 58-60)

- James written?



## ROME (rulers)

- Fire of Rome (64)
- Nero burns Christians alive (64)

- Nero dies; replaced by Galba, Otho, Vitellius (68-69)
- Vespasian (69-79)

- Titus (79-81)

- Domitian (81-96)
  - ◇ later in his reign, demands worship
  - ◇ Christians and others persecuted
- Nerva (96-98)
- Trajan (98-117)

- Hadrian (117-138)

## PALESTINE (government)

- Festus: fair procurator (60-62)

- Festus dies (62); replaced by corrupt governors

- Massacres in Caesarea, Decapolis

- Jerusalem paganized (Aelia Capitolina, 135)

## JUDAISM

- War with Rome (66-70)

- Jerusalem falls; temple destroyed (70)
- Sadducees, other groups disbanded
- Johanan ben Zakkai reorganizes Pharisaism
- Gamaliel II, Samuel ha-Katon; troubles with "schismatics" (many possibly Jewish Christians; c. 85)

- Akiba, Ishmael

- Bar Kochba revolt (132-135)

- R. Judah ha-Nasi I (c. 200) codifies the Mishnah (later Amoraic rabbis' opinions and rulings codified in the Gemara)

## CHRISTIAN BEGINNINGS

- Paul sent to Rome (c. 60)
- Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philip-pians, Colossians, Philemon; c. 60-62)
- Paul must address philosophy, Hellenistic and Jewish mysticism, and household codes
- Paul probably released after 2 years (62)
- James brother of Jesus martyred (62)
- 1 Timothy, Titus
- Paul's reimprisonment
- 1-2 Peter; 2 Timothy; Mark? (c. 64)
- Peter and Paul executed (c. 64)
- Jerusalem church flees
- Hebrews written (c. 68)?

- False prophets say the End has come (c. 70)

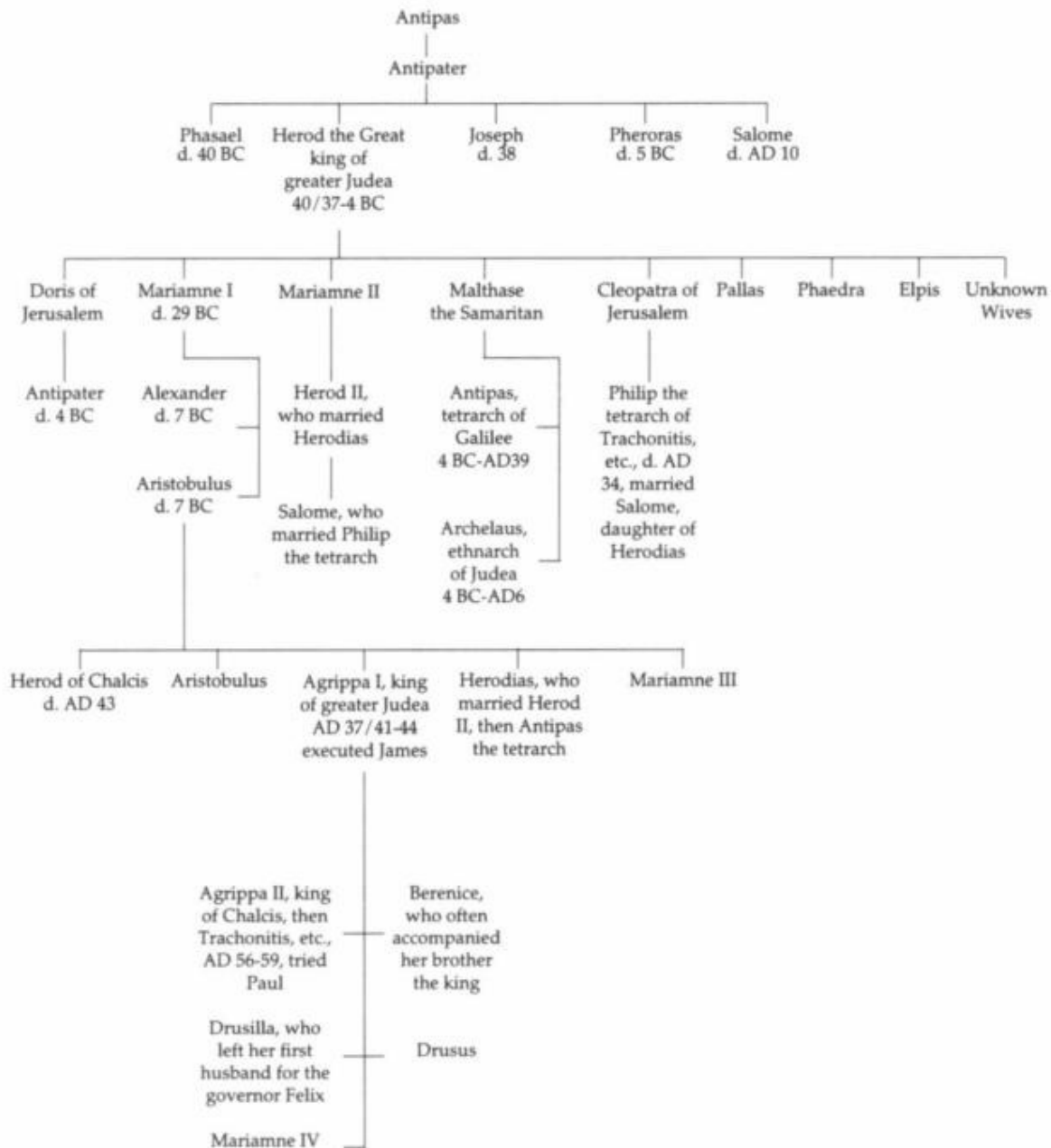
- Luke-Acts? (Greco-Roman)
- Matthew? (Syrian-Jewish)

- John (90s)
- 1, 2, 3 John
- Revelation

- Gentile Christianity overshadowing Jewish Christianity in many areas, understanding its roots less
- Justin Martyr
- Irenaeus, Athenagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian



# Major Figures in the Herodian Family

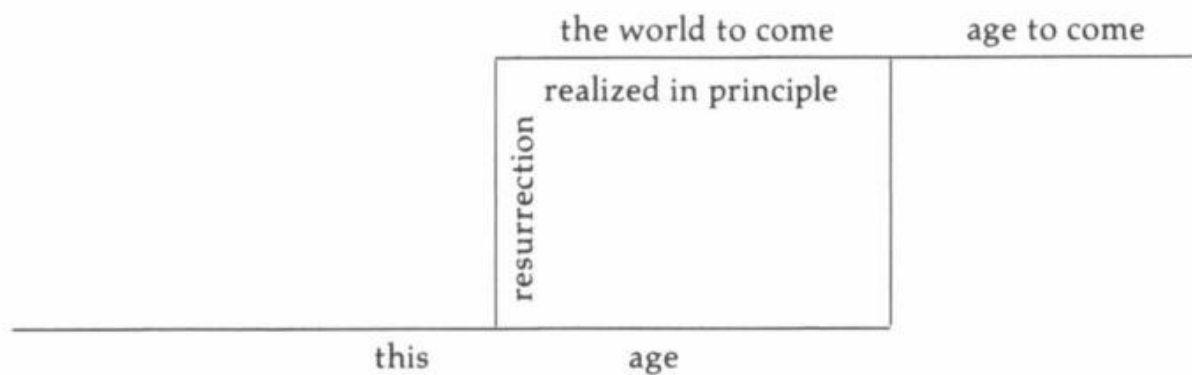


From Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992). Used with permission.

## Jewish Eschatology



## Christian Eschatology



George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 68. Used with permission.

## A Chiasmus (Acts 2:22-36)

- A This one [Jesus] . . . you crucified and killed  
B But God raised Him up, having loosed the pangs of death  
C David says . . .  
MEN, BROTHERS, IT IS NECESSARY TO SPEAK TO YOU BOLDLY  
D That the patriarch David died and was buried  
(and his tomb is with us to this day)  
E Being therefore a prophet, and knowing  
F That God had sworn with an oath to him  
G That He would set one of his descendants on his throne  
H He foresaw and spoke  
I Of the resurrection of Christ  
J That He was not abandoned to Hades  
J' Nor did His flesh see corruption  
I' This Jesus God raised up  
H' Of that we are all witnesses  
G' Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God  
F' Having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit  
E' He has poured out this which you see and hear  
D' For David did not ascend into the heavens  
C' David says . . .  
ASSUREDLY, THEREFORE, LET ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL KNOW  
B' That God has made Him Lord and Christ  
A' This Jesus whom you crucified

From Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant: A Literary Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 65-66. Used with permission.



**Jesus (in Matthew 6:7-8) told us not to pray like the pagans.  
But how did the pagans pray?**

"Greek prayers piled up as many titles of the deity addressed as possible, hoping to secure his or her attention. Pagan prayers typically reminded the deity of favors done or sacrifices offered, attempting to get a response from the god on contractual grounds. . . . Jesus predicates effective prayer on a relationship of intimacy."

---

**Why was James (in James 2:6) so sure the rich would exploit the poor and drag them into court?**

"Roman courts always favored the rich, who could initiate lawsuits against social inferiors, although social inferiors could not initiate lawsuits against them."

---

**What was unusual about Jesus' exorcising demons "with authority"?**

"There were many exorcists in Jesus' day. They had two main methods of expelling demons: (1) revolting or scaring the demon out (e.g., by putting a smelly root up the possessed person's nose in the hope that the demon would not be able to stand it); (2) invoking the name of a higher spirit to get rid of the lower one. The people are thus amazed that Jesus can be effective by simply ordering the demons to leave."

---

**T**o understand and apply the Bible well, you need two crucial sources of information. One is simply the Bible itself. The other is an understanding of the cultural background to the passage you're reading.

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