

OVER HALF A MILLION COPIES SOLD!



The IVP Bible Background COMMENTARY

New Testament

An indispensable resource, now revised and expanded,
accessibly providing the cultural background
of every verse in the New Testament

SECOND EDITION

CRAIG S. KEENER

The IVP Bible Background Commentary

New Testament

Second Edition

CRAIG S. KEENER

 IVP Academic
www.IVPpress.com/academic

InterVarsity Press
P.O. Box 1400,
Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426
World Wide Web: www.ivpress.com
Email: email@ivpress.com

Second Edition: ©2014 by Craig S. Keener First Edition: ©1993 by Craig S. Keener

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from InterVarsity Press.

InterVarsity Press® is the book-publishing division of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA®, a movement of students and faculty active on campus at hundreds of universities, colleges and schools of nursing in the United States of America, and a member movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. For information about local and regional activities, write Public Relations Dept., InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA, 6400 Schroeder Rd., P.O. Box 7895, Madison, WI 53707-7895, or visit the IVCF website at www.intervarsity.org.

“Jerusalem in NT Times” map: Taken from Urchristliche Mission by Eckhard J. Schnabel. Copyright © 2002 R. Brockhaus Verlag, Wuppertal.

“Paul’s Missionary Journeys” maps: Taken from Rediscovering Paul © 2011 by Jordan Capes. Used by permission.

“Jewish Eschatology / Christian Eschatology” diagram: Taken from A Theology of the New Testament by George Eldon Ladd. Copyright © by George Eldon Ladd. Used by permission of Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids.

“A Chiasmus (Acts 2:22-36)” outline: Taken from Poet & Peasant by Kenneth E. Bailey. Copyright © 1976 by Kenneth E. Bailey. Used by permission of Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids.

“Major Figures in the Herodian Family” chart: Taken from Josephus and the New Testament, 2nd edition, by Steve Mason. Copyright © 2002 by Steve Mason. Used by permission of Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group.

Cover design: Cindy Kiple
Image: © hanoded/iStockphoto

ISBN 978-0-8308-7782-9 (digital)
ISBN 978-0-8308-2478-6 (print)

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.

Contents

[Preface and Acknowledgments](#)

[List of Abbreviations](#)

[How to Use This Commentary](#)

[The Need for a Cultural-Historical Commentary](#)

[Gospels](#)

[Matthew](#)

[Mark](#)

[Luke](#)

[John](#)

[Acts](#)

[New Testament Letters](#)

[Romans](#)

[1 Corinthians](#)

[2 Corinthians](#)

[Galatians](#)

[Ephesians](#)

[Philippians](#)

[Colossians](#)

[1 Thessalonians](#)

[2 Thessalonians](#)

[1 Timothy](#)

[2 Timothy](#)

[Titus](#)

[Philemon](#)

[Hebrews](#)

[James](#)

[1 Peter](#)

[2 Peter](#)

[1 John](#)

[2 John](#)

[3 John](#)

[Jude](#)

[Revelation](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Maps & Charts](#)

[Old Testament Scripture Index](#)

[Praise for the *First Edition* of *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*](#)

[About the Author](#)

[More Titles from InterVarsity Press](#)

Preface and Acknowledgments

When I began studying the Bible, I just wanted to learn the Bible itself in its original languages so I could spend the rest of my life living and preaching it. The more I studied it, however, the more I realized that I needed the *background*. Once I realized, more than three decades ago, that background helps us understand the Bible better, I desperately began looking for a book that would provide the necessary background for each passage, so I could use that in my sermon preparation. Unable to find such a book, I began scouring many books, and soon began working through countless volumes of ancient sources. Eventually I resolved to provide such a book, if no one else offered the service first, to save ordinary readers the years of study it had taken me. At the time of this foreword, the commentary has received almost unanimously positive reviews and, including translations and electronic editions, has sold more than six hundred thousand copies. Others have also developed different kinds of background commentaries for other purposes since that time.

I wrote the *Background Commentary* to serve readers like the young preacher I was when I began my study: many pastors and other readers who lack access to more detailed tools for reasons of time, training or economics. In addition to busy pastors, I envisioned students and others doing inductive Bible study, and readers in some parts of the world where few resources for research on the ancient world were available.

I did not write the book (in contrast to many of my other books) for scholars, who have access to many primary sources, or even for those pastors who had many commentaries providing more background detail. Many of my fellow biblical scholars have, however, expressed regret that this work does not provide scholarly documentation they could follow up. This lack is unfortunate, but given the book's size and its primary audience, the editorial decision was made not to bog it down with documentation, which would have been extensive. I have added some more references for this edition, but only very sparingly.

Scholars will know where to find some of the information, but I am also writing more academic commentaries that provide much of the documentation as

well as the detail for what is only summarized here. Those looking for my information on the Gospels will find most of it in my academic commentaries on Matthew and John (in addition to my *Historical Jesus of the Gospels*); my multivolume commentary on Acts; and my shorter commentaries on Romans, 1–2 Corinthians and Revelation, which also supply the most relevant of my sources for these works. I could not include such documentation here without expanding this volume and its printing cost, but I am making it available in the appropriate venues, where those who desire it can access it. I trust that no one who has perused my scholarly work will doubt the level of research in ancient sources that stands behind my work. Nevertheless, a good scholar keeps learning, and after two decades in print, the time has come to provide a slightly revised version of the commentary.

I am deeply indebted to the many professors with whom I studied over the years. I am also deeply indebted to the students I served through campus ministry or teaching, and to the congregations I served, for the opportunity to test out the ideas in this commentary. They are the ones who helped me sift through which elements of potential background were more relevant for communicating the message of the biblical text and which elements were more peripheral.

I should especially acknowledge InterVarsity Press and my editors there (at the time Rodney Clapp, Ruth Goring and Dan Reid) for taking seriously the mission of this book. Just as we need to make the text of the Bible available to ordinary readers in all cultures, we need to make the background available that helps readers hear biblical passages the way their first audiences would have heard them. About two years after I decided that InterVarsity would be an ideal publisher for a commentary like this if I ever got the time to write it, Rodney asked if I would be interested in writing for InterVarsity, and I proposed this commentary. Before I received word back I began calculating the amount of income I would need to buy groceries and pay rent (in an apartment large enough for my research files) if I spent a year writing the commentary full time. At the time, the figure seemed overwhelming, given the only kind of employment I thought available to me that year, and I could only pray. Less than twenty-four hours later, Rodney called, surprising me with the unexpected offer of an advance. He could not have known that the offer came to the exact dollar amount that I had prayed for the night before. I am most grateful to the Lord for providing the opportunity to pursue and publish this research, and I pray that this book will serve the needs of his church.

List of Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
ASV	American Standard Version
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
CCSS	Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture
ESV	English Standard Version
GNC	Good News Commentary
GNS	Good News Studies
GNT	Good News Translation
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IVPNTC	InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement
KJV	King James Version
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
LXX	Septuagint

NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCB	New Century Bible
NCC	New Covenant Commentary
NIBC	New International Bible Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	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
SBL SBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
SHBC	Smyth and Hewlys Bible Commentary
SNTSMS	Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina Commentaries
TDGR	Translated Documents of Greece and Rome
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

WUNT Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

* Indicates names and terms found in the glossary

How to Use This Commentary

In its most basic form, “background” is what the biblical writers did not have to say because they could take for granted their original audiences knew it. Modern audiences, however, often do not know it, and some texts become even obscure to us without it. Cultural and historical background can shed light on virtually every text in the New Testament, yet much of this material is difficult for nontechnical readers to find. Although many helpful commentaries exist, no single one-volume 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 observed on the basis of 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 nearly three decades ago to undertake this project, unless someone else provided the service first. This book is written in the hope that more readers will now be able to hear the New Testament much closer to the way its first audience would have heard 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 stinky roots 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. Understanding Roman law helps us understand why Felix was playing unjust politics by not simply releasing Paul after his defense speech. 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 ancient culture is critical to understanding the Bible, especially the passages most foreign to us. 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 can determine the sorts of circumstances to which those passages most directly apply, we need to understand what circumstances they originally addressed.

This observation 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 most of us, 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 form of language that we speak today 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 more complete guides on how to study the Bible, the reader may consult (among less technical sources) works like Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), or J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

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 and see each passage in its larger context. For the most part, 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. Most New Testament authors wrote to biblically informed audiences and could take for granted this shared theological background. This commentary includes Old Testament background, but because that background is available to all readers of the Bible, this commentary especially emphasizes other Jewish and Greco-Roman 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. These traditions are often more relevant, especially for later works in the New Testament, than some other background I have offered, 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 is 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 better feel for the issues being addressed and is ready to move to the stage of 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 (among other matters) that Jews and Gentiles are saved on the same terms and urges reconciliation between them within the body of Christ. If Paul's gospel message challenged ethnic divisions that God himself had in some way established, how much more would it challenge the ethnic, tribal and racial divisions in the body of Christ today, both locally and globally? 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. (Most of those who disagree will find at least some use for the background here; few today take the injunction of silence so literally, for example, as to preclude even singing.) At least on most issues,

sincere believers, grappling with the same context and the same background, often 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 a range of specific connotations 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. I should pause to note that I have often followed common nomenclature even when it is imprecise or sometimes controversial where alternative terms were difficult to supply. Thus I use “Christian” and “Jewish” even though these categories strongly overlapped. Similarly, I am following usual scholarly convention concerning Roman antiquity, not making a political statement (as one critic complained), when mentioning “Palestine”; I am open to an alternative, but Judea-and-Samaria-and-Galilee is too cumbersome to be useful. I retain scholarly convention in mentioning “patrons” rather than the stricter Roman political usage; and so forth.

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. Many observations and analogies offered in my scholarly work are missing here, because it is difficult to determine the likelihood of their relevance (e.g., if a custom is attested only later and rarely).

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 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 a New Testament writer often 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 experiences and interpretations

sometimes attributed to “primitive” worldviews, such as possession by harmful spirits, appear in a wide range of cultures; they need not be explained away by modern Western reductionism.)

Finally, we should always be cautious in application; it is important that we apply biblical texts only to genuinely analogous situations. For an obvious example, 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. For much of the New Testament, I have already provided the most relevant of my sources in more detailed commentaries. But a concise and handy reference work in one volume can place much relevant information at the fingertips of busy pastors and other Bible readers who have fewer resources and less time available.

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. I follow this procedure in some of my other works, but this approach 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.

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 Greco-Roman 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 what were originally one hundred thousand index cards, especially from the primary literature of the ancient world but also recent scholarly research in ancient Judaism and Greco-Roman antiquity, as well as observations in earlier commentaries.

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 Bible teacher 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 cited it as background for Jesus' title "Son of Man," although it could be relevant.) I have also tried to avoid duplicating the kinds of information available in other commonly used reference works. Because word studies are elsewhere available (and the New Testament contains many Greek words), 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: Eerdmans, 1987). A helpful anthology of texts is C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989); some one-volume Bible dictionaries (for example, those by Eerdmans and InterVarsity Press) are helpful; see more fully larger reference works, such as Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols., rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979–88); David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992); and (esp. on background) Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000). Extremely helpful for understanding the New Testament are reference works on antiquity such as *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) and *Brill's New Pauly* (15 vols.), although, as with all such reference works, one must either read the entire way through or know where to look for information. Several years after my present one-volume background commentary was released (1993), some useful multivolume background commentaries (those edited by Clinton Arnold and Craig Evans) were also published; a different sort of useful background resource, including block quotations from ancient sources, is M. Eugene Boring, Klaus Berger and Carsten Colpe, eds., *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995). The most thorough work providing New Testament background today is a long-term project that will no doubt prove invaluable to scholars: Ugo Schnelle et al., eds., *Neuer Wettstein*:

Texte zum Neuen Testament aus Griechentum und Hellenismus (New York: De Gruyter, 1996–).

How to Understand the Bible in Its Context. On a basic level, see works such as Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981); J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001). Two of the recent New Testament introductions that emphasize cultural context are David A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004); Gary M. Burge, Lynn H. Cohick and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament Within Its Cultural Context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

For more advanced discussions of interpretive approaches, see, for example, Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006); and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); with a special focus on cultural issues in interpretation, see William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), with a foreword by Darrell L. Bock.

Judaism: General. E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 bce–66 ce* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1992).

Judaism: Rabbinic Judaism. Our most voluminous corpus of ancient Jewish sources comes from the rabbis; one popular survey of rabbinic literature is Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes, Hebrew University Press, 1979). Unfortunately, it does little with the comparative dates of the rabbinic traditions; New Testament students must depend on the earliest and most widely attested (preferably in other kinds of sources) traditions. Some detailed work on dating rabbinic traditions appears in the multivolume work of David Instone-Brewer, *Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004–).

Judaism: Surveys of the Documents. One useful work is Samuel Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978);

see most extensively Craig A. Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005). Some recent and progressive approaches may be sampled in volumes such as Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg, eds., *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters*, 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 (qualified in some respects by more recent studies); on the roles of women see Leonard Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen, NJ: 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 Sirach); then translations of the Dead Sea Scrolls (perhaps especially the Manual of Discipline [1QS], the Damascus Document [CD] and the War Scroll [1QM]); and the documents of most relevant date in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983–1985), especially *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, the *Sibylline Oracles* (not all from the same period), the *Letter of Aristeas* and other works like *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*. Josephus is in many respects one of our most valuable sources next to the Old Testament, though due to the sheer volume of his works, one may wish to focus on *Against Apion*, the *Life* and then the lengthier *Jewish War*. 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, MA: Hendrickson, 1993). Those who wish to examine rabbinic literature firsthand might start with *Avot* in the Mishnah; many early traditions are also preserved in the Tosefta, *Avot 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 and books; collections of inscriptions and papyri, such as *Select Papyri*, a three-volume work translated by A. S. Hunt, C. C. Edgar and D. L. Page (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932–1941) and discussions, such as Naphtali Lewis, *Life in Egypt Under Roman Rule* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), are also helpful.

Greco-Roman World: General. See Stambaugh and Balch, *New Testament in Its Social Environment*; James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New*

Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999); David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000); M. Cary and T. J. Haarhoff, *Life and Thought in the Greek and Roman World*, 4th ed. (London: Methuen, 1946).

Greco-Roman World: Secondary Sources. On the way texts were written and understood in the Greco-Roman world, see Aune, *New Testament in Its Literary Environment*; see also Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, LEC 5 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986). On moralists and moral issues, see primary sources and comment in Abraham J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Sourcebook*, LEC 4 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986). 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, NY: 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. On ancient rhetoric and argumentation, see, e.g., R. Dean Anderson Jr., *Glossary of Greek Rhetorical Terms Connected to Methods of Argumentation, Figures and Tropes from Anaximenes to Quintilian* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000); Stanley E. Porter, ed., *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 b.c.–a.d. 400* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). Too many valuable sources exist to name them all; one sample could include Edwin A. Judge, *The First Christians in the Roman World: Augustan and New Testament Essays*, ed. James R. Harrison, WUNT 229 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

Greco-Roman World: Primary Sources. A broad sampling of documents is available in Robert K. Sherck, ed., *The Roman Empire: Augustus to Hadrian*, TDGR 6 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988). For first-century Roman history, one should read especially Tacitus and Suetonius; for Judea, especially relevant material in Josephus. 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, MT: Scholars Press, 1977). For ancient and argumentation, helpful works include Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory*, the rhetorical essays of Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Cicero, and the like.

The Need for a Cultural-Historical Commentary

Many 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 INVITES US TO INTERPRET IT

Sometimes reading passages in light of their ancient context simply makes them more concrete for us, for example, knowing something about the character of Pilate or Herod Agrippa I. Sometimes, however, it prevents us from reading texts in impossible or absurd ways. For example, you probably do not set aside money for the Jerusalem church every Sunday, even though that is a direct command of Scripture (1 Cor 16:1-3). Perhaps you have also never traveled to Troas to try to find Paul’s cloak to bring it to him (2 Tim 4:13), even though this passage is also phrased as a command.

There are other passages that may not seem absurd to us but which also would sound different to us if we understood their original setting. The danger of “absurd” applications, however, points us to the importance of reading Scripture in its setting, where possible. It suggests a way of reading that, if followed consistently, can help us grasp all of the Bible more concretely.

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 work dealt, the better one could understand a work (see the first-century A.D. Roman rhetorician Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*, 10.1.22 on speeches; 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*, because this is a *part of the meaning he did not need to specify explicitly*. (This approach recognizes insights in what scholars call "relevance theory.") As Jesus pointed out in his conflicts with some Bible interpreters of his day, the original meaning and intention matters, not just the wording (e.g., Mk 10:5-6).

If we cannot relate to the situation the biblical writers and their readers are assuming, we will have more difficulty understanding the points they are making. 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 in some cultures 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 others to a religion that demands little in the way of sacrifice—even if such a religion alienates the homeless and hungry in poorer nations and in our own cities. Considering how to balance the interests of different factions in a church is similarly 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. This recognition invites us to deal with how Paul’s words would challenge us as well.

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 explicitly 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. We should listen in and learn from the wisdom God inspired Paul to give believers in Corinth; to do so we should do our best to hear it the way the Corinthians would have.

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 much of Western culture we are used to thinking abstractly. But in many cultures people think concretely and can read a story or a conversation and learn more lessons than Western readers learn from reading a series of abstractions. Those cultures are more attuned to the Bible that God chose to give the world than we in the West 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? 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 culturally prejudiced persons 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. 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. Some Western missionaries forced converts to adopt Western lifestyle, dress and even names to become Christians, rather than allowing that God works within a variety of cultural settings. Of course, some other missionaries, such as many early Jesuits or Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission, showed greater respect and cultural identification.

Most missionaries today recognize that Christians in different cultures can learn from one another. Sometimes even 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. (Some less informed non-Christian readers in North America might even popularly associate the phrase with a modern political agenda.)

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 sometimes explain away texts like "You can't serve both God and mammon," 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 Greco-Roman readers by the time 1 Timothy was written, whereas all of 1 Timothy’s themes and literary forms have parallels in Greco-Roman literature. To modern Western readers, most of the New Testament is much more inviting than Leviticus; but in many cultures, customs concerning what is clean and unclean appear 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 the popular idea that the “eye of a needle” through which a camel must pass was a gate in ancient Jerusalem. Unfortunately, no gate with this title existed in first-century Jerusalem; convenient as it would be for us, this is a case of invented background. (Happily, some other background is relevant: the use of hyperbole, or rhetorical overstatement, was common among ancient Jewish teachers.) Although this example is a good argument against *making up* cultural background, it is no reason not to use genuine cultural background. A good bit of invented cultural background circulates on the market today, but that is all the more reason for readers to seek background based on genuine, solid research.

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 as a young Christian, 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.” Reading the Bible forced me to come to grips with the way it is written, however, 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." Of course, as people in Luther's day realized, having a translation does not resolve all the problems of determining what the text *means*; that work is not completed simply by offering 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 many of our modern 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 (as he often does)? 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. Most 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; unfortunately, it was not *always* the most *appropriate* background. Many scholars 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 early 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 ancient Judaism forms the *primary* context of the New Testament. Its basic, broad context is Greco-Roman society, but Jewish people had lived in and adapted to Greco-Roman 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 Greco-Roman 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. (Hopefully this will change as study Bibles more frequently incorporate the most relevant features of background, so long as they depend on genuine research and not popular misconceptions.) Many helpful commentaries do exist (including some more recent ones focused on background), 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, wired and often postmodern society, we have moved 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. In fact, today’s appreciation for diversity of cultures means that many people will be ready to hear the inspired biblical writers in those writers’ own contexts.

Much of the church today seems asleep to our 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 seven times as high as it did two centuries ago, when the church was stirring to its

mission in another great move of the Spirit.

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, understand, obey and teach it more fully. 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 more fully 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.

While not all scholars devote their research to serving the church, many have done so throughout history, from Justin, Jerome, Augustine and Bede, to the monks who led the medieval universities on which modern universities are based, and later Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards and others. Likewise, many scholars today have pursued scholarship because this was God's call for them.

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 learn more 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.

Gospels

INTRODUCTION

Note: asterisked (*) terms appear in the glossary.

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. Some classifications of the Gospels have not stood the test of time. Some earlier scholars focused on elite classical Greek literature 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. Even our Gospels range from Mark's rough style to Luke's sometimes fairly sophisticated style.

By contrast, more recent studies have compared the Gospels with the sources they would have most resembled for ancient readers. Thus the majority of recent scholars have come to classify the Gospels as ancient biography, which resembles the way that the church has historically treated them. Ancient biographies did not necessarily emphasize the same features that modern biographies do, but they were still a form of historical writing.

How historically reliable were ancient biographies? There was a range of reliability, but a major factor in this range was the chronological distance between the writer and the writer's subject. Some biographers, like *Plutarch* and *Livy*, certainly spiced up their *narratives*, but especially when writing about characters who lived centuries earlier. Writers sometimes openly admitted the difficulty of distinguishing legend from fact when they wrote about reported events centuries earlier. Other authors, like *Tacitus* (in the *Agricola*) and **Suetonius*, writing about events of the past century and a half, kept very close

to their sources.

When writing about subjects in the past generation, as (for example) the Gospel of Mark does, biographers were able to depend on large amounts of information. Thus, for example, Tacitus, Suetonius and Plutarch in the early second century write about the short-lived emperor Otho half a century earlier. When we compare them, we find that their material overlaps in very considerable detail. Because they follow their sources so closely where we can test them, we may assume that they generally follow them no less closely where other sources are no longer available to us. The Gospels supply much historical information about Jesus.

Biography was a largely Greek and Roman category, but it influenced other writers. Jewish writers could model their biographies after *Old Testament biographical narratives, which everyone in their day took to be reliable. Only Jewish writers composing in Greek created conventional biographies, however, and these often followed Greek forms. *Josephus spiced up his autobiography in good Greek rhetorical style but still expected his readers to take his account seriously, and the substance of his account is mostly reliable. 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. Jewish novels about biblical characters also flourished, but not about characters of recent history and not with detailed dependence on sources. Luke wrote like a popular Greco-Roman historian, and none of the Gospels fits the haggadic *midrash pattern.

Ancient Historiography. Both Jewish and Gentile writers could take some liberties in how they recounted their narratives, but biographies about recent characters were supposed to be grounded in facts. Many scholars view ancient biography as a specialized form of ancient historiography. Whenever possible, historians consulted eyewitnesses or those who knew them. While historians and novelists both used some similar storytelling (or in elite circles, rhetorical) techniques, ancient writers (from *Aristotle to Pliny and Lucian*) insisted that history must deal in facts and distinguished it from novels.

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. Far more often than novelists, historians (and still more clearly biographers) wrote with clear moral, political or theological agendas and expected readers to draw lessons from their

works. Most historians and biographers 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 biographers, the writers of the Gospels are among the most careful. When we test 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 a higher degree of reliability than found in biographies of much earlier persons; 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. Extraordinary feats of ancient memory indicate the extent to which memory could be accurate in ancient Mediterranean society, where memorization pervaded education from the elementary level. At a more advanced level, *disciples ordinarily learned their teachers' sayings well, often extensively. Sometimes they even collaborated with other former students to collect the teachings. Ancient schools often preserved the teachings of schools' founders, making them "canonical" for what the school would teach new adherents. (In one graphic but perhaps fictitious ancient example, Pythagorean students had to repeat back their teacher's lectures from the previous day before getting out of bed in the morning. But disciples of other teachers were also rigorous in preserving their masters' teachings.)*

We should expect no less for Jesus' disciples than for these other ancient students; to expect less of Jesus' disciples is simply to assume skepticism against our best evidence about how disciples learned. In their own instruction during years and decades that followed, the disciples would repeat the teachings of Jesus that they remembered, hence would know these selected teachings far better than disciples of other teachers who did not become teachers themselves.

None of this means that anyone expected the sayings to appear in sequence. 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. Taking matters further, some critics warn that sayings of one teacher were also sometimes modified or transferred to another teacher after much time had elapsed. This observation is less relevant for the Gospels, however, since they focus on only a single founder and chief teacher for the movement. Moreover, they were written in the first two generations, when Jesus' teachings were still in the memories of the writers' sources, making radical changes unlikely.

Just as we do not expect the sayings to appear in sequence, we do not expect them to be verbatim (impossible for Jesus' *Aramaic sayings anyway, since the Gospels are written in Greek). 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 (e.g., “*Son of Man”) come through Jesus' sayings, indicating that the Gospel writers did not always paraphrase him, even in translation from Aramaic to Greek. (Jesus probably sometimes spoke Greek as well as Aramaic, but most scholars believe that he would have addressed Galilean crowds especially in Aramaic. Most Galileans would have been bilingual; some Jewish schools conducted advanced discussions even in Hebrew.)

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 (such as biographies like the Gospels) and novels alike. Writers of topical biography had complete freedom to rearrange their sources, so it should not surprise us that Matthew and Mark often have 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 (like the majority of ancient biographies) were not in chronological order, as the early Christian teacher Papias plainly remarked about Mark.

Other Gospels? By the time that Luke wrote his Gospel, other works about Jesus were in circulation (Luke 1:1) this undoubtedly includes Mark. Luke, Matthew and possibly Mark also used material they shared in common, and the common sequence at points suggests at least one written source, which many scholars call “Q.” Based on Papias, some scholars believe this source reflects early notes by Matthew (to which Mark’s narrative was added in forming our current Matthew’s Gospel). These studies are valuable. The only first-century Gospels that survived, however, are the four that the church ultimately preserved as Scripture (and any material from other sources preserved in them). Later writers composed apocryphal Gospels, but instead of reflecting significant information about the Jesus who lived in first-century Galilee they fit the form of novels and derive from their heyday in the late second and third centuries. Later *Gnostics composed collections of sayings attributed to Jesus, but these are not really “Gospels” in the traditional sense of narratives about Jesus like the first-century Gospels. The earliest of these might date to 120 years after Jesus’ public ministry; most belong to the late second century or later.

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? What does it teach

me about the character of the Lord I serve?

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.

Although we speak of “reading” the Gospels, most people in antiquity would have “heard” them. Many people could not read, and few people had economic resources to obtain their own copies of books. Instead, a person who could read would read the Gospels to gathered assemblies of believers, and most believers would “hear” the Gospels. In that sense we should speak of them as “audiences” rather than “readers.” Each Gospel writer may have had a special target audience in mind, but probably most hoped for a wider audience as well. In antiquity, books that succeeded well in public readings came to circulate more widely as more people had copies made.

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 hearers and listen to 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 their hearers 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, perhaps 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); Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, SNTSMS 70 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; 2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown and Nicholas Perrin, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013); for a collection of background sources, see Darrell L. Bock and Gregory J. Herrick, eds., *Jesus in Context: Background Readings for Gospel Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

For historical Jesus research, see (among others) Craig S. Keener's works: *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); "Otho: A Targeted Comparison of Suetonius' Biography and Tacitus' History, with implications for the Gospels' Historical Reliability," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 21, no. 3 (2011): 331-55; "Assumptions in Historical Jesus Research: Using Ancient Biographies and Disciples' Traditioning as a Control," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 9, no. 1 (2011): 26-58; and *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011). For others' works, see, for example, Dale C. Allison Jr., *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (New York: Doubleday, 1988); James D. G. Dunn, *A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (New York: Penguin, 1993); Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); especially extensively, Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 4 vols. (New Haven: Yale, 1994-); Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, 4 vols. (Boston: Brill, 2010).

On Jesus' teachings, see, e.g., Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990); T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); Harvey K. McArthur and Robert M.

Johnston, *They Also Taught in Parables* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978). On Jesus's miracles in an ancient framework, one recent helpful work (focused especially on Mark) is Wendy J. Cotter, *The Christ of the Miracle Stories: Portrait Through Encounter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010); on the passion narratives, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah—from Gethsemane to Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1994); on the resurrection narratives, see Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010); N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

Matthew

INTRODUCTION

Authorship. In contrast to, say, Paul's letters, attributions of authorship in the Gospels are generally based on church tradition rather than evidence in the biblical text itself. Although these traditions surface in various parts of the second-century empire, there appears to be unanimity regarding the authorship of the four Gospels, suggesting the traditions are early. Rarely were works the size of the Gospels published anonymously, so the first generation would have probably remembered and transmitted accurately traditions about their authorship.

Some question the specific tradition about Matthew, in part because the earliest tradition also claims that the original Gospel of Matthew was written in Hebrew, which is not true of our First Gospel. Some suggest that Matthew authored an earlier Hebrew work, perhaps especially involving Jesus' sayings; translated into Greek, this material was used by other Gospel writers but especially developed in our Gospel of Matthew. Most scholars also believe that our current Gospel of Matthew uses Mark. Although this observation might count against direct authorship by Matthew, one could argue against it being decisive by itself. Xenophon, for example, depends on an earlier written source even while reporting events of which he was an eyewitness, presumably because that source had become standard. Whatever one's conclusions, it seems best to speak of "Matthew" for lack of any better designation. There was also likely a reason for the church's tradition. Some scholars note that tax collectors (Mt 9:9) would be among the Galileans most apt to be able to take notes.

Date. The date of Matthew is debated (from before 70 to around 90). Even fairly conservative scholars differ in their views of Matthew's date and authorship. Most scholars, however, do not date Mark before 64, and do believe that our current Gospel of Matthew depends on Mark at a time when the latter was circulating widely. Because Matthew shows more concern for the emerging power of the Pharisaic rabbinic movement than Mark, and these *rabbis began to achieve some political power in Syria-Palestine mainly after 70, some argue that Matthew wrote in the seventies. Scholars lack unanimity; suggestions range

earlier and later.

Where Matthew Was Written. The most likely proposed locale is in the area of Syria-Palestine. Some do so because that is where the rabbis may have exercised their greatest influence in the seventies and eighties of the first century. Whether or not that is the case, much of Matthew's language fits that of Jewish sages from the eastern Mediterranean, suggesting such a milieu. But again certainty is not possible.

Setting, Purpose. Matthew addresses the needs of his Jewish-Christian hearers, whom many scholars believe were in conflict with a Pharisaic religious establishment (cf. Mt 3:7 with Lk 3:7; Mt 5:20; 23:2-39). Members of the early rabbinic movement, mainly successors of the earlier *Pharisees, never achieved the power that later rabbis claimed, but they began to consolidate as much juridical and theological influence as possible, especially in Syria-Palestine, in the years and decades following A.D. 70.

Matthew presents the traumatic destruction of the temple (on many views this event had occurred recently; see the previous discussion on date) as judgment on the earlier Judean establishment (though it was mainly Sadducean) in chapters 23–24. He wants to encourage his community to evangelize *Gentiles as well as their own people (cf. 1:5; 2:1-12; 3:9; 8:5-13; 15:21-28; 24:14; 28:19). Many scholars believe that Matthew's collection of Jesus' teachings (especially chaps. 5–7, 10, 13, 18, 23–25) is to be used to make other disciples for Jesus, just as other Jewish disciples passed on their rabbis' teachings to their own disciples (28:19).

Genre and Sources. Most scholars think that when Matthew wrote his Gospel, Mark was already in circulation. (Not all scholars accept this position, but it is widely viewed as the consensus.) In line with a common literary practice of the day, Matthew followed an important source—Mark—and then wove in material from other sources around it. Given the character of ancient biography (see introduction to the Gospels), Matthew would have used only sources that he believed to be reliable; given the range of dates proposed, most of Matthew's primary sources would have come from the generation immediately following Jesus' ministry. Due to space limitations in this commentary, much of the material found in both Matthew and Mark receives more detailed treatment only under Mark.

Matthew and Luke also follow other material they share in common. Given Luke's birth *narratives and other material, the majority of scholars think it unlikely that Luke was depending on our current Gospel of Matthew. Instead,

both share a common source or sources, sometimes in the same sequence (as one might expect particularly for a written source). Like most sources from antiquity, this one has not survived, except insofar as we might infer it from Matthew and Luke.

Biographies were written differently in Matthew's day than they are today. Biographers could write either in chronological order (e.g., Luke usually follows the order of his sources as carefully as possible) or, more frequently, in topical order. Matthew arranges the sayings of Jesus according to topic, not chronology: the ethics of the *kingdom in chapters 5–7, the mission of the kingdom in chapter 10, the presence of the kingdom in chapter 13, church discipline and forgiveness in chapter 18 and the future of the kingdom in chapters 23–25. Some commentators have argued that Matthew grouped Jesus' sayings into five sections to parallel the five books of Moses. (Other works were also divided into five to correspond with the books of Moses, e.g., Psalms, Proverbs, the rabbinic tractate *Pirke Avot*, 2 Maccabees and perhaps *1 *Enoch*.) This could be the case, although one cannot parallel specific speeches with specific books of the Pentateuch.

Matthew's Message. Some scholars believe that this Gospel or one of its sources was used as a training manual for new Christians (Mt 28:19); rabbis taught oral traditions, but Jewish Christians needed a body of Jesus' teachings in writing for Gentile converts. Matthew repeatedly emphasizes that Jesus fulfills the Jewish Scriptures, and argues from those Scriptures the way a trained *scribe would*. *He portrays Jesus as the epitome of Israel's hopes for his Jewish audience, but also emphasizes missions to the Gentiles: outreach to the Gentiles is rooted both in the Old Testament and in Jesus' teaching.* Matthew is quick to counterattack the religious leaders of his day who have attacked the followers of Jesus, but he also warns of the growing dangers of unfaithful religious leadership within the Christian community.

Commentaries. For background material, very useful commentaries include Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); W. D. Davies and Dale Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988–); and R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). On a more popular level, see, for example, R. T. France, *Matthew*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008); Joe Kapolyo, "Matthew," in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), pp. 1105-70; Craig S. Keener,

Matthew, IVPNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997); and Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

Those most familiar with Matthew's milieu, however, will recognize my debt to primary sources and to various scholars on Jesus and his Jewish setting, both earlier voices such as I. Abrahams, Joachim Jeremias, T. W. Manson and Gustaf Dalman; and more recent scholars such as E. P. Sanders, Geza Vermes and Martin Goodman. For examples of useful specialized studies, see, for example, Marshall D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*, SNTSMS 8, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), whose treatment includes Matthew 1:2-16; and on John the Baptist, works such as Carl H. Kraeling, *John the Baptist* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951); and Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist Within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

1:1-17

The Background of Jesus

Ancient biographies typically began by rehearsing the noble lineage of their subject. Here Jesus is connected with the history of his people from the beginning.

1:1. Greek readers often called the book of Genesis "the book of generations," and the title is also used for genealogies and other accounts contained in it (Gen 2:4; 5:1 LXX). In Genesis genealogies are named for the first person cited, but Matthew's genealogy is named for the person in whom it climaxes, Jesus Christ. For Matthew, Jesus' ancestors depend on him for their historical significance no less than others expected descendants to depend on their ancestors.

The *Messiah was to be a "son [descendant] of David"; "son of Abraham" was applied to Jewish people in general, so Matthew begins by reminding us that Jesus is Jewish. Genealogies could provide unity to a survey of history between major figures (as with Adam, Noah and Abraham in Gen 5, 11).

1:2-16. As in *Old Testament genealogies, but in contrast to Luke and Greco-Roman genealogies, Matthew records the names beginning with the oldest and moving to the most recent.

Genealogies reminded Jewish people of God's sovereignty in arranging marriages and providing offspring. Sometimes they also used genealogies to

explain why a person behaved a particular way (e.g., perhaps Moses' descent from lawbreakers like Reuben, Simeon and [directly] Levi in Ex 6:12-30); Greek biographers could use illustrious ancestry to honor a person about whom they wrote. Most important, Jewish genealogies were essential to document a person's proper lineage as a pure Israelite (i.e., not descended from converted *Gentiles), a member of the priesthood, or royalty. Genealogies could also be used as unifying links between major figures in history; Genesis links Adam, Noah and Abraham in this way (Gen 5, 11). Matthew connects Jesus with the Old Testament narratives about the patriarchs, the Davidic kingly line and the exile.

Tradition records that at least partial genealogical records of important (especially priestly) families were kept in the temple. Though the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, the claim for Jesus' Davidic descent was made before 70, when it still could have been checked (Rom 1:3). Even after 70, tradition reports that the evidence for his Davidic descent was still sufficient to provoke trouble for some of Jesus' relatives with the Roman government.

Ancient genealogies usually omitted women, but Matthew includes four women (1:3, 5-6). Three of these women were Gentiles (Gen 38:6; Josh 2:1; Ruth 1:4) and the other was at least associated with a Gentile (2 Sam 11:3)—though Matthew omits the four matriarchs prominent in Jewish tradition, Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and (less relevantly here) Rachel. Thus he hints from the Old Testament that God has always planned a mission to all peoples (Mt 28:19). Yet Jews emphasized their pure ancestry!

Scholars have suggested that some ancient genealogies incorporated symbolic material based on the interpretation of biblical texts. Jewish interpreters of Scripture sometimes would modify a letter or sound in a biblical text to reapply it figuratively. Thus the Greek text of Matthew 1:10 reads "Amos" (the prophet) rather than "Amon" (the wicked king—2 Kings 21), and Matthew 1:8 reads "Asaph" (the psalmist) rather than "Asa" (a good king turned bad—2 Chron 16); most translations have obscured this point.

1:17. Matthew omits some names, as was customary in genealogies (in this case perhaps following the Greek translation of the Old Testament); creating patterns like three sets of (roughly) fourteen made lists easier to remember. Dividing history into eras was common; a later Jewish text, *2 *Baruch*, divided history into fourteen epochs. By surveying Israel's past, Matthew suggests that Israel was due (or overdue) for a new event in salvation history. Less certainly, some commentators have argued that Matthew uses fourteen generations

because the numerical value of David's name in Hebrew letters is 14. (Unlike letters in the English alphabet, Greek and Hebrew letters were also used as numerals; the Jewish practice of counting the numerical values of words and deriving meaning from them came to be called *gematria*.)

1:18-25

The Birth of Jesus

Ancient biographers often included stories about the virtue of their subjects' birth or upbringing. Sometimes they even praised miraculous features of the births of their subjects (especially prominent in the *Old Testament*), *but there are no close parallels to the virgin birth. Greeks told stories of gods impregnating women, but the text indicates that Mary's conception was not sexual; nor does the Old Testament (or Jewish tradition) ascribe sexual characteristics to God. Many miraculous birth stories in the ancient world (including Jewish accounts, e.g., 1 Enoch 106)* are heavily embroidered with mythical imagery (e.g., babies filling houses with light), in contrast with the straightforward *narrative style of this passage (cf. similarly Ex 2:1-10).

1:18. Betrothal (*erusin*) then was more binding than most engagements are in the Western world today. If Joseph followed earlier tradition, he would pay a bride price, at least part of it offered during the betrothal. Betrothal, which commonly lasted a year, meant that bride and groom were officially pledged to each other but had not yet consummated the marriage; advances toward anyone else were thus regarded as adulterous (Deut 22:23-27). Two witnesses, mutual consent (normally) and the groom's declaration were necessary to establish Jewish betrothals (in Roman betrothals, consent alone sufficed). Although Romans sometimes used engagement rings, Palestinian Jews probably did not use them in this early period.

Mary may have been between the ages of twelve and fourteen (or even as old as sixteen); if this was Joseph's first marriage, he may have been between the ages of eighteen and twenty (the age for men's marriage considered ideal by later *rabbis). Their parents likely arranged their marriage, with Mary and Joseph's consent. Later traditions suggests that premarital privacy between betrothed persons was permitted in Judea but frowned upon in Galilee, so Mary and Joseph may well not have had any time alone together at this point.

1:19. The penalty for adultery under Old Testament law was death by

stoning, and this penalty applied to infidelity during betrothal as well (Deut 22:23-24). In New Testament times, Joseph would have merely been required to divorce Mary and expose her to shame; the death penalty was rarely if ever executed for this offense. (Betrothals were so binding that if a woman's fiancé died, she was considered a widow; betrothals could otherwise be terminated only by divorce.) But it could be difficult for a woman with a child, divorced for such infidelity, to find another husband, leaving her without means of support if her parents died. The unfaithfulness of a betrothed woman would also dishonor the man to whom she was pledged.

A husband could divorce his wife publicly before a judge if he were charging her with an offense; in this case he could dissociate himself from her publicly, get back any bride price he had paid, and acquire any dowry her father had given her for the marriage. Because divorces could be effected by a simple document with two witnesses, Joseph could divorce her without making her shame more widely known. Much later rabbinic tradition charges that Mary slept with another man, but Joseph's marrying her (v. 24) demonstrates that he did not believe this was the case.

1:20. In the Old Testament, angels often brought messages in dreams; in Greek literature, deceased people (as well as pagan deities) often brought messages, but this occurs nowhere in the Bible. The Old Testament does mention expert dream interpreters, like Daniel (Dan 1:17; 2:19-45) and Jacob's son Joseph (Gen 37:5-11; 40-41). Most stories from here in Matthew 1 to the end of Matthew 2 involve supernatural guidance (dreams or the star).

1:21. The name Jesus (*Aramaic *Yeshua*, Greek *Iesous*) means "God is salvation" in Hebrew. Parents often intended the names they gave children to have some meaning, but if God gave the name, it had special significance (cf. Gen 16:11; 17:19). The Old Testament taught that God's people would be saved in the time of the *Messiah (Jer 23:5-6), and Jewish readers in the first century would have understood this salvation to mean more than just personal forgiveness. They prayed for the day when God would deliver his people from the consequences of their sins—from subjugation beneath their enemies; many believed that this deliverance would occur when their people as a whole reformed and turned wholeheartedly to God. Jesus also came to deliver his people from personal sin and thus to deliver them from its judgment.

1:22-23. Matthew cites Isaiah 7:14 and indicates a broad familiarity with Isaiah's context. In that context, Assyria would lay waste Israel and Aram before the promised son was grown (Is 7:14-17); "a son" thus seems to refer to Isaiah's

own son in Isaiah 8:3-4. But all the names of Isaiah's children were meant as signs pointing to significant events beyond themselves (8:18), and to whom would "Immanuel," or "God with us" (7:14), more aptly point than to the son of David rightly called "Mighty God" (9:6; cf. 10:21; 11:1)?

1:24-25. Joseph acts like Old Testament men and women of God who obeyed God's call even when it went against all human common sense. Marriage consisted of covenant (beginning at the betrothal; the marital contract also involved a monetary transaction between families), a celebration and a consummation, which ratified the marriage, normally on the first night of the seven-day wedding banquet. Joseph here officially marries Mary but abstains from consummating the marriage until after Jesus is born. They abstain even though she could have proved her virginity on the wedding night; in this way Jesus has not only a virgin conception but a virgin *birth* (1:23). Newly married couples sometimes lived in very small quarters. Jewish teachers thought that men had to marry young because they could not resist temptation (many even blamed a woman's uncovered hair for inducing lust). Joseph, who lives with Mary but exercises self-control, thus provides a strong role model for sexual purity.

2:1-12

The Pagan Seekers

Ancient writers and audiences often compared or contrasted characters in the *narratives. Here Israel's ruler acts like a pagan king, while *Gentiles come to honor Israel's true king; meanwhile, the religious teachers who knew the most (2:5) failed to act on the truth, even already at Jesus' birth.

2:1. Herod the Great died in 4 B.C.; Jesus was thus born before 4 B.C., rather than in A.D. 1; our calendars are off by several years. "Magi" (not "wise men"—KJV) were pagan astrologers whose divinatory skills were widely respected in the Greco-Roman world; astrology had become popular through the "science" of the East, and everyone agreed that the best astrologers lived in the East. The *Old Testament explicitly forbade such prognostication from signs (Deut 18:11; cf. Is 2:6; 47:11-15), prescribing true *prophecy instead (Deut 18:15).

2:2. Astronomers have offered various proposals for the appearance of this star in the first decade B.C. The ancients thought comets and falling stars

predicted the fall of rulers; some emperors even banished from Rome astrologers who issued such predictions. Despite the biblical prohibition of divination, by this period many Jewish people accepted the idea that the stars could accurately predict the future (especially for Gentiles). Even though these Magi were pagans, God had chosen to reveal himself to them.

2:3. Many rulers feared astrological signs of their demise; the Emperor Nero later reportedly slaughtered many nobles in the hope that their deaths (rather than his own) would fulfill the prediction of a comet. Jerusalem was an important trade center; the Magi must have come with quite an entourage for the whole city to notice them. Then again, many people resented Herod's rule and rumors could have circulated quickly. King Herod, who was aware of broad currents of thought in the Roman Empire and sponsored pagan temples among Gentile cities in his realm, might have been especially apt to consider the Magi's mission significant.

2:4. The chief priests (*Josephus shows that in this period, the plural title applied to the aristocratic priests generally) belonged mainly to the wealthy aristocracy of *Sadducees*; "scribes" in the narrow sense in which the term is used here applies to experts in the Jewish *law, most of whom were also teachers of the law. That Herod exercised a great deal of influence over the prominent leaders of the people is not surprising; Josephus says that he executed the earlier Sanhedrin and after that assembled councils as he wished.

2:5-6. Micah 5:2 predicted Bethlehem as the *Messiah's birthplace, because the Messiah was to be a descendant of David, and Bethlehem had been David's hometown. It was a small town about six miles south of Herod's capital, Jerusalem. The Magi had come to Jerusalem because that was where they expected to find any Judean king—but Herod had apparently not had any new sons lately. Remarkably, the scribes who knew where the Messiah would be born did not act on that knowledge; successors of these Jerusalem leaders later sought Jesus' execution (26:3-4, 57).

2:9-10. The text might imply only that the star *appeared* to move due to the Magi's own movement. Even had the object been close enough to earth to calculate its relation to Bethlehem, Bethlehem was so close to Jerusalem that any distance would have been negligible unless the object was only a mile high. But the description of God's leading of the Magi by a moving, supernatural sign may recall how God had led his own people by the fire and cloud in the wilderness (Ex 13:21-22).

2:11. Their posture of worship was appropriate toward gods or toward kings

in the East. (Unlike most Mediterranean peoples, the Magi may not have been polytheists; they may have been Zoroastrian dualists. Scholars do, however, debate the exact nature of Zoroastrianism in this period.) Incense and myrrh were treasures characteristic of the East that the Mediterranean world typically imported from there (cf. 1 Kings 10:10; Ps 72:10-11, 15).

2:12. Most kings reacted with hostility to potential usurpers and to astrological predictions of their demise. That the Magi had to be warned by a dream not to return to Herod thus suggests their naiveté, an innocence Jews rarely expected of Gentiles. Most peoples in the ancient world paid attention to special dreams (1:20); some even had rules on how to interpret them; and the Greeks thought that Magi were specially adept at dream interpretation.

The main road they would need to take northward from Bethlehem went directly through Jerusalem, then eastward through Syria. Given the probably large size of their entourage, the Magi could not approach Jerusalem without being noticed, as Herod knew very well. Indeed, no major route could take them homeward without passing through Jerusalem. They may have ventured far south to Hebron; perhaps they then followed the rugged road to Gaza on the coast, where another road could lead them northward, then through Galilee and on to Damascus.

2:13-15

Egypt and a New Exodus

2:13-14. A very large Jewish community lived in Egypt in this period. Perhaps one-third of Alexandria, located in northern Egypt, was Jewish; with a population estimated at about one million, it was one of the empire's largest cities. Alexandria included a well-to-do Jewish element, schooled in Greek thought; most inhabitants of Egypt, however, were agrarian peasants, some of the poorest in the empire. Other Jewish communities had existed farther south, especially in Elephantine, for centuries. Literature from Palestinian Jews indicates that many of them questioned the devoutness of their Egyptian Jewish kinfolk, although Egyptian Jews considered themselves faithful to God.

The Nile made travel easy within Egypt, but the coastal road to Egypt from Palestine was not the finest. From Bethlehem one would take the poorer route southward to Hebron (see comment on 2:12). Egypt had served as a place of refuge in the past (1 Kings 11:40; Jer 26:21). In one Jewish tradition, God in a

dream predicted to Moses' father that Moses would be a deliverer, before Moses was born. By leaving "at night," Joseph's family made their route of departure impossible to trace; the language might also evoke Jewish readers' memory of Exodus 12:31. Especially if they had an animal, they could have taken some of the gifts (2:11) for their life in Egypt.

2:15. Matthew builds almost every paragraph from the genealogy to the Sermon on the Mount around at least one text in the *Old Testament, explaining some event of Jesus' life from Scripture. In context Hosea 11:1 refers plainly to the Israelites leaving Egypt in the exodus; Matthew applies this text to Jesus because Jesus epitomizes and fulfills Israel's history (Mt 1:1). The broader context of Hosea 11 promises a new exodus and era of salvation (Hos 11:5, 11).

Matthew could have learned this Israel/Messiah interpretive analogy from his reading of Isaiah. Isaiah 42–53 narrows down the mission of Israel as a whole to the one who can ultimately fulfill that mission and suffer on behalf of the whole people—the one whom Christians would later understand to be Jesus (see Mt 12:17–21).

Herod died in 4 B.C.

2:16–18

Herod's Slaughter: A New Captivity

2:16. Because the most natural route by which the Magi could have returned was through Jerusalem (2:12), Herod knew that the Magi had purposely avoided returning to him. He was known for acts like the massacre described here. A young but popular competitor, a *high priest, had a "drowning accident" in a pool that was only a few feet deep. Enraged at his favorite wife, Herod had her strangled (discovering her innocence only afterward); he was deceived into having two innocent sons executed; and on his own deathbed Herod had another son executed (admittedly a guilty one). Although probably fictitious, a purported comment of the emperor is appropriate: Better to be one of Herod's pigs than his son. Josephus reports that Herod ordered nobles executed at his death to ensure mourning when he died; they were instead released at his death, producing celebration.

One of his fortresses, the Herodium, was within sight of Bethlehem, and he could have dispatched guards from there. Jewish people saw infanticide (killing babies) as a hideous, pagan act; sometimes applied by the Romans to deformed

babies, it had also been used to control oppressed populations (Ex 1:8-22; 1 Maccabees 1:60-61; 2 Maccabees 8:4). Herod thus acts like a pagan tyrant, particularly Pharaoh in Exodus 1:22 (and secondarily Antiochus Epiphanes). Like Moses, Jesus escaped the fate of other male babies (Ex 1:22-2:10), and some Jews were expecting the coming of a prophet “like Moses” (Deut 18:15, 18).

2:17-18. Jeremiah 31:15 refers to the figurative weeping of Rachel, who was buried near Bethlehem (Gen 35:19). Jeremiah said she mourned for her descendants carried off into captivity during the Babylonian exile. Israel’s corrupt ruler Herod is not only like Pharaoh; he is like Israel’s subsequent oppressors. As Jesus’ escape presaged a new exodus (Mt 2:15), so here his people’s suffering echoes the captivity (cf. 1:11-12). The context of Jeremiah’s *prophecy might remind Matthew of Hosea 11:1 (see Jer 31:20), but the suffering in the context becomes a prelude to the hope of the new covenant (31:31-34; cf. Mt 26:28).

2:19-23

The Nazarene

2:19. On dreams, see comment on 1:20.

2:20-21. Matthew’s first readers would have undoubtedly caught the comparison Matthew implies between Jesus and Moses here (cf. Ex 4:19).

2:22. Archelaus, one of Herod’s surviving sons, not only exhibited his father’s worst flaws but also lacked his administrative skill. That his mother was a *Samaritan surely also failed to commend him to his Jewish subjects. His rule was unstable, and the Romans ultimately deposed him and banished him to Gaul (France); see Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.334; *Jewish War* 2.111.

2:23. Archaeological evidence in the region of Nazareth suggests that many people had moved there from Judea, including from the area near Bethlehem. Joseph may have had friends or relatives in Nazareth (cf. Lk 2:4). Nazareth was on a major road from the coast to Syria and only a few miles from the more cosmopolitan city of Sepphoris, which was being rebuilt during Jesus’ childhood (cf. Mt 13:55). Some scholars believe that only a few hundred people lived in Nazareth proper. Though small, Nazareth would not have been isolated from broader cultural currents of antiquity. Nevertheless, it also appears to have been fairly conservative in its Jewish practice.

No single text provides Matthew's citation here. But ancient authors sometimes blended texts together, and both Jews and Greeks used plays on words to make points in argumentation, so this text could be a play on the Hebrew word *netser*, "branch," a title for the *Messiah (Jer 23:5; Zech 3:8; 6:12; cf. Is 11:1). (The only problem with this suggestion is that it assumes Matthew's original readers already knew Hebrew; but perhaps some of the more skilled among them did.) Or it could be a play on "Nazarene": by changing some letters slightly, it could refer to the Nazirites, a class of people dedicated to God (cf. Num 6:1-21).

3:1-12

Jesus' Forerunner

See Mark 1:2-8 for more detailed comments. Isaiah 40:3, cited in Matthew 3:3, refers to a herald of the new exodus, when God would save his people again from the oppression they suffered.

3:1. "In those days" was a common *Old Testament expression, especially in (but not limited to) prophecies concerning the future. Many people in Jesus' day expected a great leader to bring deliverance to God's people from the wilderness, in a new exodus. In times of severe national apostasy in the Old Testament, some prophets (like Elijah) found it necessary to live outside society's boundaries.

3:2. The Jewish people recognized that God ruled the universe in one sense now, but prayed daily for the time when his *kingdom, or rule, would be established over all peoples of the earth. (See further comment on Mk 1:14-15.)

3:3. Isaiah 40:3 is in the context of Isaiah's *prophecy of a new exodus, when God would again deliver his people and lead them back to Jerusalem from all the nations among which they were scattered. Highways required adjustment of terrain to make them straight and level, and ancient kings, especially the kings of the East, expected the roads to be well prepared before they would travel on them. Perhaps in the interest of technical accuracy, Matthew deletes Mark's citation of Malachi here (used in Mt 11:10; Lk 7:27).

3:4. John's diet is that of the very poor; although domestic beekeepers were common, John eats only wild honey. (Honey was normally procured by smoking the bees out and then breaking open the honeycomb; honey was the only sweetener for food and was considered the sweetest of tastes.) But *Essenes and

other pious Israelites (2 Maccabees 5:27) ate such diets to avoid unclean food.

John dressed like Elijah (2 Kings 1:8) and other people who lived outside society (some, like *Cynics and *Josephus's Essene tutor Bannus*, were more ascetic). Elijah was to prepare the way for God's coming, suggesting Jesus' identity (Mal 4:5-6; cf. 3:1).

3:5-6. Pagans wanting to convert to Judaism would repent and be baptized, but John here treats Jewish people on the same terms as pagans (see further comment on Mk 1:4-5.)

3:7. An ancient tradition suggested that some kinds of vipers ate their way out of their mothers (see, e.g., Herodotus, *Plutarch). It was bad enough to be called a viper, but to be called a viper's child was even worse—killing one's mother or father was the most hideous crime conceivable in antiquity.

3:8. *Repentance meant turning from sin. The *Pharisees themselves are known to have questioned professions of repentance if the supposedly repentant person continued sinning. The Old Testament prophets had sometimes described the obedience one owed God, or God's future blessing of his people, in terms of fruit (a natural image in an agricultural society; cf. Is 5:2; 27:6; Hos 10:1, 12-13; 14:7-8; Prov 11:30-31).

3:9. Jewish people commonly believed that they were saved as a people by virtue of their descent from Abraham. The idea of God raising up people from stones would have sounded to John the Baptist's Jewish hearers more like pagan mythology (the Greeks had such stories) than reality, but ancients often used the metaphor figuratively. Some scholars have also suggested a wordplay on "children" and "stones" in *Aramaic; biblical prophets sometimes used puns to hold attention. The God who could create from dust (Gen 2:7; cf. 1:24) or ribs (2:21) could create from stones; moreover, stones could be used to symbolize God's people (Ex 24:4; 28:9-12; Josh 4:20-21; 1 Kings 18:31). Other prophets had emphasized that God did not need Israel to fulfill his purpose (as in Amos 9:7).

3:10. Jewish literature sometimes used trees (like many other things) to symbolize Israel; at times the Old Testament used trees in *parables of judgment against the nations (Is 10:33-34; Ezek 31:2-18; Amos 2:9) or Israel (Is 10:18-19; Jer 11:16; Ezek 15:6). The wood of a thick tree (like a cedar from Lebanon) would have been used for building, but much of the wood from Palestine's many slender fruit trees (e.g., olive or fig trees) would be useful only for small items or, often as here, for fuel.

3:11. Slaves of high-status individuals often had higher status than free

persons. A slave (unlike a *disciple, who also served a master) carried the master's sandals; John here claims that he is not worthy even to be Christ's slave—even though earlier prophets were often called "servants" of God (e.g., 2 Kings 9:7; Jer 7:25; Dan 9:6, 10).

The prophets had predicted the outpouring of God's *Spirit on the righteous at the time when God established his kingdom for Israel* (Is 44:3; Ezek 39:29; Joel 2:28). They also decreed fire upon the wicked (Is 26:11; 65:15; 66:24; Jer 4:4; 15:14; etc.). In Matthew 3:11, the wicked are baptized, or immersed, in fire (3:10, 12), the righteous in the Holy Spirit.

3:12. Because the same Greek (and Hebrew) word can mean both "spirit" and "wind," the picture of wind and fire carries over from 3:11. Winnowing was familiar to all Palestinian Jews, especially to the farmers: they would throw harvested wheat into the air, and the wind would separate the heavier grain from the lighter chaff. The chaff was useless for consumption and was normally burned. Some other writers also described the day of judgment as a harvest (*4 Ezra 4:30-32; cf. Jer 51:33; Joel 3:12-14) or the wicked as chaff (Is 17:13; Jer 13:24; 15:7; etc.). That the fire is "unquenchable" points beyond the momentary burning of chaff to something far more horrible (Is 66:24). Indeed, John presupposes the harshest view of hell available in his day, since Jewish tradition was far from unanimous concerning its duration (see "*Gehenna" in glossary).

3:13-17

Jesus' Accreditation by God

See Mark 1:9-11 for further details.

3:13-15. John anticipates Jesus' immediate *baptism in the Spirit (see comment on 3:11); Jesus identifies with Israel.

3:16. Many believed that the Spirit was no longer available in their time; others believed that the Spirit simply did not work as forcefully as in the days of the prophets, until the time of the end. That the Spirit comes on Jesus indicates the inauguration of the messianic era and marks Jesus out as the Spirit-bearer and hence *Messiah (3:11). The dove might evoke a new era (cf. Gen 8:11-12).

3:17. Many believed that voices from heaven were the closest anyone came to *prophecy in their time. Both kinds of witness support Jesus: the heavenly voice and John's prophecy. Matthew intends his more erudite readers to see allusions not only to a royal Messiah in Psalm 2:7, but also to the suffering

servant of Isaiah 42:1-4 (see comment on Mt 12:18-21).

4:1-11

Jesus Overcomes Israel's Tests

The devil tried to shape Jesus' understanding of "sonship" (3:17) according to worldly models of power; Jesus allowed Scripture to define his mission. The three texts from Deuteronomy (6:13, 16; 8:3) he cites (Mt 4:4, 7, 10) were commands God gave to Israel when he tested Israel for forty years in the wilderness, the context of the first one addressing God's "son." Unlike Israel of old, Jesus as Israel's representative (1:1; 2:15) passes the tests. Some scholars have compared the battle of wits between Jesus and the devil to the way rabbinic debates were conducted. Jewish stories also praised those who endured and passed the severest moral tests.

4:1. One of the most common recitations of God's acts in the *Old Testament was that he "led" his people in the wilderness (see especially Is 63:14), where they were tested. Although the Old Testament only rarely mentions the devil, his activity as tempter (cf. Job 1-2) had come into focus much more by Jesus' day. A surprising feature here for most Jewish readers would not have been that the devil was providing temptation, but that he was doing it in person.

4:2. Moses also fasted forty day and nights; Jesus may appear here as a new Moses, the new lawgiver (see Mt 5:1-2). Israel also was in the wilderness forty years (see the introduction to this section).

4:3. The ancients attributed this sort of feat to magicians, who claimed to be able to transform themselves into animals and to transform other substances, like stones into bread. Many Jewish people were also hoping for a new exodus led by a new Moses—complete with new manna, or bread from heaven. The devil challenges or seeks to define Jesus' sonship against God's Word (3:17; cf. Gen 3:1); models of power in that culture included magicians and (as in 4:8) worldly rulers. The devil wants to conform the definition of Jesus' divine role to contemporary expectations.

4:4. The devil offers worldly models for what it means to be God's "son" (4:3); trusting the Father's voice (3:17), Jesus defines his mission instead from Scripture. Jesus would have known the context of Deuteronomy 8:3, which he cites: he can depend on God's provision of manna in the wilderness because God

is Jesus' Father as God was Israel's (Deut 8:5).

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

4:5-6. "The holy city" was a standard title for Jerusalem. The devil takes Jesus to a part of the temple that overlooked 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; 91:10 makes clear that God's angelic protection (cf. Mk 1:13) is for events that *befall* his servants, not an excuse to seek out such dangers. The devil phrases his temptation in language a popular Jewish work applied to the wicked mocking the righteous (Wisdom of Solomon 2:18).

4:7. Using the same general context as previously, 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).

4:8-9. This realm did not technically belong to the devil (see Dan 4:32), who owned human hearts only as a usurper. The best the devil could do would be to make Jesus the political, military sort of *Messiah most Jewish people who expected a Messiah were anticipating.

4:10. Deuteronomy 6:13, which Jesus cites from the same context as previously, prohibits idolatry (see Deut 6:14), a commandment anyone who worshiped the devil would obviously violate. Cf. Mt 16:22-23.

4:11. The promised angels of Ps 91:11 serve Jesus (cf. perhaps Ps 104:4), who refused to abuse the promise out of context in Mt 4:6-7.

4:12-17

Foreshadowing the Preaching to Gentiles

4:12-13. Nazareth was a small agricultural village and suburb of the old Galilean capital, Sepphoris; Capernaum was a larger fishing town (some estimate of one or two thousand) on the northwest edge of the Sea of Galilee. The trade routes brought *Gentiles through those parts. Capernaum lay in the borders of Naphtali but not Zebulun; Matthew mentions the latter because they occur together in Isaiah 9:1, which he cites in 4:15.

4:14-16. Citing here Isaiah 9:1-2, Matthew undoubtedly knows the context: the light to which it refers involves the promised Davidic king (Is 9:6-7). (Matthew again is anticipating the evangelization of non-Jews by foreshadowing

it in his *narrative.) Many non-Jews in Galilee had been forcibly converted to Judaism in the second century B.C.; they had previously been aligned with Judea's Phoenician enemies (1 Maccabees 5:15). Subsequently, however, many Judeans settled in Galilee, and its inhabitants were primarily ethnically as well as religiously Jewish. More to the point, Galilee was surrounded on all sides (except its southern, *Samaritan border) by *Hellenistic city territories. Capernaum (like Sepphoris and Nazareth farther south) was situated along one of the major trade routes of Palestine, later called "the way of the sea." This was a caravan route from Damascus to Caesarea Maritima, which was on the Mediterranean coast.

4:17. Jesus' message is summarized as *repentance to be ready for the *kingdom; see comment on 3:2. First-century Jewish hearers would have heard in this proclamation a warning of the imminent day of judgment.

4:18-22

Examples of Repentance

Ancient writers often illustrated their teachings (here, 4:17) with narrative examples. See comment on Mark 1:14-20 for further details.

4:18. Most Galileans depended especially on salted fish, wheat and barley for sustenance; fish products like fish gravies were thus also common. The fish of the Sea of Galilee included large carp; the fish would be dried, salted or pickled to preserve them. Fishermen were central to the Galilean economy and could make a good living by the standards of their culture, far better than the large numbers of peasants who worked the land through much of the Roman Empire. It is thought that the casting net had a narrow end pulled by the boat and a wide end sunk by leads (contrast the larger dragnet of 13:47); nets were probably made of rope or cords woven from flax, papyrus or hemp. Archaeologists have recovered an ancient Galilean fishing boat.

4:19-20. *Disciples normally chose to become students of a particular rabbi. Only the most radical teachers called their own disciples.

4:21-22. Fishermen had more income than average people in Galilee, so James and John were not leaving their job just because it did not pay well. More than that, however, they suddenly left behind their father and the family business; such abandonment could easily bring them dishonor in the community. (Both Jews and Greeks, however, had similar accounts and would recognize this

sudden departure as a sure sign of radical discipleship.)

4:23-25

Examples of Kingdom Authority

Ancient literature commonly includes not only longer *narrative segments but also summary statements like this passage (also 9:35; 19:1-2; etc.).

4:23. Visiting teachers, especially popular ones, were normally invited to speak in *synagogues, which in this period were led by priests or laymen who were prominent members of their communities.

4:24. Because many Jewish people lived in Syria, Matthew presumably intends Syrian Jews here (Matthew probably would have eagerly mentioned Gentiles had they come). The presence of multitudes seeking relief at hot springs (like Hammath-Tiberias) in Galilee testifies to the vast numbers who sought healing in the first century; the few figures reputed as wonder-workers (e.g., Jewish exorcists or Gentile magicians) could also draw great crowds.

Although some (not all) contemporary medical writers thought epilepsy was due to demonic activity, Matthew here distinguishes the two.

4:25. The Decapolis, the “Ten Cities,” was a Gentile area that included a large Jewish population.

5:1-12

The Beatitudes, or Blessings

Matthew 5–7 is the first block of teaching material in Matthew, dealing with the ethics of the *kingdom*. In 4:17 Jesus summarizes his message: “Repent, for the kingdom is at hand”; Matthew 5-7 shows in greater detail the repentant lifestyle that characterizes the people of the kingdom. This block is introduced by a common Old Testament literary form called beatitudes: “Happy are those who . . . for they shall . . . ” (e.g., Ps 1:1). (The form appears also in some Greek literature, but is more common in Jewish sources.) Here the blessings are the promises of the kingdom for those who live the repentant life. Jesus’ hearers would have understood them especially as promises for the future time of God’s reign; we must read them in the light of the present aspect of the kingdom as well (see “kingdom” in the glossary). The future kingdom was sometimes defined by images from the creation *narratives or from Israel’s exodus from

Egypt, which the Jewish people regarded as their original redemption.

5:1-2. Although one would stand to read Scripture publicly, the most respected Jewish teachers would usually sit to expound it, often with *disciples sitting at their feet. Some scholars have compared the “mountain” (cf. Lk 6:17) here to Mount Sinai, where God through Moses first taught his ethics by the *law (Ex 19-20; cf. Is 2:2-3).

5:3. Ancient writers and speakers would sometimes bracket a section of material by beginning and ending with the same phrase. These blessings involve the gift of the kingdom (5:3, 10).

Many Jewish people believed that the kingdom would be ushered in only by a great war and force of arms; Jesus promises it for the “poor in spirit,” the “humble” or “meek” (5:5), the peacemakers (5:9). Poverty and piety were often associated in Judaism; the term *poor* could encompass either physical poverty (Lk 6:20), or the faithful dependence on God that it often produced (“in spirit,” as here).

5:4. Mourning was usually associated with either *repentance or bereavement; the conjunction with “comfort” means that the second aspect is in view here. It could mean grief over Israel’s sins, but in this context probably refers to the pain of the oppressed (it involves the broken, as perhaps in 5:3). “Comfort” was one of the blessings promised for the future time when God would restore his mourning people (Is 40:1; 49:13; 51:3, 12; 52:9; 54:11; 57:18; 61:2; 66:13).

5:5. Here Jesus cites Scripture (Ps 37:9, 11). Not those who try to bring in the kingdom politically or militarily but those who humbly wait on God will “inherit the earth.” The Hebrew of the psalm could mean “inherit the land” in a narrower sense (Ps 25:13), but in Jesus’ day Jewish people expected God’s people to reign over all the earth, as some other Old Testament passages suggest.

5:6. On the physically needy, see comment on Lk 6:20. Jewish people understood that God would also satisfy his people’s needs in the future kingdom (Is 25:6; 41:17-18; 55:2), as he had supplied for them in the exodus when he first redeemed them (Deut 6:11; 8:7-10). But the greatest object of longing should be God (Ps 42:1; 63:1) and instruction in his righteousness (Ps 119:40, 47, 70, 92, 97, 103; Jer 15:16).

5:7. Some later *rabbis uttered similar statements (cf. also Prov 11:17). Like the peacemakers (v. 9), the merciful are not those who seek to bring in the kingdom by force. The mercy Jewish people generally hoped to receive was expected in the day of judgment (cf. Mic 7:18-19).

5:8. The “pure in heart” (Ps 73:1) were those in Israel whose hearts were “clean,” or undefiled, those who recognized that God alone was their help and reward (Ps 73:2-28). The righteous would see God on the day of judgment (e.g., Is 30:20), as in the first exodus (Ex 24:10-11).

5:9. Both the Jewish people and the righteous were called “sons of God” in Jewish tradition; the ultimate declaration of that fact would be made in the sight of the nations on the day of judgment (cf. Hos 1:10). Those teachers who came to dominate Pharisaism after the war of A.D. 66–70 were the ones who emphasized the way of peace rather than the way of revolt espoused by others. But many other Jewish leaders had joined in the spirit of revolt and were killed or came to be viewed as illegitimate leaders after the revolt’s failure.

5:10-12. Many of the Old Testament prophets suffered in bringing God’s word to Israel (e.g., Jer 26:11); Jewish tradition amplified the number of prophetic martyrs further and made it a major emphasis. The burden of proof was always on the prophet who spoke what people wanted to hear (Jer 28:8-9; cf. 6:14; 8:10-11; 23:17).

Most Jewish people did not believe that prophets still existed in the Old Testament sense, so Jesus’ comparing his followers to the prophets indicated that they would have an extraordinary mission. To suffer for God was meritorious (Ps 44:22; 69:7), and Judaism highly honored martyrs for God’s law; yet no other rabbi called disciples to die for his own teachings or name.

5:13-16

Real Discipleship

A *disciple of the *kingdom who does not live like a disciple of the kingdom (5:3-12) is worth about as much as tasteless salt or invisible light.

5:13. Various scholars have emphasized different uses of salt in antiquity, such as a preservative or an agent regularly added to manure; but the use of salt here is as a flavoring agent: “if salt has become tasteless” (the Greek word can also mean “become foolish,” so it may include a play on words).

Although the salt recovered from impure salt substances taken from the Dead Sea could dissolve, leaving only the impurities behind, the point here may be closer to that expressed by a rabbi at the end of the first century. When asked how one could make saltless salt salty again, he replied that one should salt it with the afterbirth of a mule. Being sterile, mules have no afterbirth, and the

rabbi was saying that those who ask a stupid question receive a stupid answer. Real salt does not lose its saltiness; but if it did, what would you do to restore its salty flavor—salt it? Unsalty salt was worthless.

5:14. Jewish tradition considered Israel (Is 42:6; 49:6) and Jerusalem (as well as God and the *law) the light of the world. The “city” here could thus be Jerusalem; or it may be any elevated city at night, whose torch lights would make it visible to the surrounding countryside.

5:15-16. The small wicker oil lamps of this period gave little light in the average home, which had few windows; they would be most effective by being set on a lampstand. Something large placed over them would presumably extinguish the light altogether.

5:17-20

The Law Enforced

Jesus’ ethical demands (5:3-16) are no weaker than those of the *law given by Moses; cf. 5:21-26.

5:17. Jewish teachers said that one “abolished” the law by disobeying it (cf. Deut 27:26), because one thereby rejected its authority. Such highhanded rebellion against the law—as opposed to particular sins—warranted social and spiritual expulsion from the Jewish community. The charge of openly persuading others that the law was no longer in force would be even worse. Jesus opposed not the law but an illegitimate traditional interpretation of it that stressed regulations more than character.

5:18. Jesus refers here to the *yod*, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Later rabbis told the story that when God changed Sarai’s name to Sarah, the *yod* that was removed complained to God for generations till he reinserted it, this time in Joshua’s name. In another later story, a *yod* protested that King Solomon was trying to uproot it from the Bible; God replied that a thousand Solomons would be uprooted, but not a single *yod* would pass from Scripture. Jewish teachers used illustrations like this to make the point that the law was sacred and one could not regard any part as too small to be worth keeping.

5:19. Later rabbis debated which commandments were the greatest. Some decided that the greatest commandment was honoring one’s father and mother, and the least, respecting a mother bird; they reasoned that both merited the same reward, *eternal life (based on “life” in Ex 20:12; Deut 22:7). A modern reader

might ask, What happens to the person who breaks one and keeps another? But such a question misses the point of this hyperbolic language which other Jewish teachers also typically used to say, “God will hold accountable anyone who disregards even the smallest commandment.”

5:20. The *Pharisees were the most respected religious people in Judea, and the scribes the supreme experts in the law (especially, no doubt, the Pharisaic scribes).* Verses 21-48 show what Jesus’ demand for a “higher” righteousness involves. The Pharisees also stressed the right intention of the heart (*kavanah*); Jesus’ criticizes not their doctrine but their hearts as religious people. Religious communities led by Pharisaic teachers may have also been opponents of Jewish Christians in Syria-Palestine in Matthew’s day, giving Matthew additional incentive to record these words.

5:21-26

Anger as Murder

Six times in verses 21-43 Jesus cites Scripture and then, like a good rabbi, explains it (5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). The sort of wording he uses (especially “You have heard”) was used by other Jewish teachers to establish the fuller meaning of a text, although Jesus speaks with greater authority than Jewish teachers normally claimed.

5:21-22. “Raca” is Aramaic for “empty-headed or worthless”; the insult is about the same as the one that follows it, “Fool!” The punishments are also roughly equal: the (day of God’s) judgment, the heavenly Sanhedrin or supreme court, and hell. (Jewish literature described God’s heavenly tribunal as a supreme court, or sanhedrin, parallel to the earthly one.) “The hell of fire” is literally “the Gehenna of fire.” Teachers envisioned Gehinnom as the opposite of paradise; in Gehinnom the wicked would be burned up (according to some Jewish teachers) or eternally tortured (according to other Jewish teachers). Here the addition of “fire” makes Gehinnom’s fiery character all the more emphatic. Some other Jewish teachers would have agreed that not only the outward act of murder but also the inward choice of anger that generates such acts violates the spirit of God’s *law against murder.

5:23-24. Judaism stressed reconciliation between individuals; God would not accept an outward offering if one had oppressed or mistreated one’s neighbor and did not make it right. In the *Old Testament God accepted only sacrifices

offered with a pure heart toward him and one's neighbor (Gen 4:4-7; Prov 15:8; Is 1:10-15; Jer 6:20; Amos 5:21-24).

5:25-26. Again Jesus returns to the image of the heavenly court (5:22). Here he may use the custom of debt imprisonment as another image in the *parable*; *this was a non-Jewish custom, but Jewish hearers would have known about it among the Gentiles*. No mercy would be shown: the amount of money to be repaid extended to the last (literally) *quadrans*, almost the least valuable Roman coin, the equivalent of only a few minutes' wages. (Details like the "officer" make the parable work as a story but do not symbolize anything in particular. Ancient storytellers did not invest meaning in every detail of their parables; see "parable" in the glossary.)

5:27-30

Lust as Adultery

5:27-28. Many ancient Jewish sources warned against lust and emphasized women's seductiveness; Jesus here emphasizes only the responsibility of the one lusting. Other Jewish teachers also looked down on lust; some even went as far as Jesus in regarding it as adultery. The issue is thus not the doctrine of Jesus' hearers but their heart. The Greek word here is the same as in the opening line of the tenth commandment in the *Septuagint* (*the Greek version of the Old Testament*): "You shall not desire your neighbor's wife" (Ex 20:17). The tenth commandment, against coveting, forces Jesus' hearers to internalize Moses' other commandments.

5:29-30. Corporal punishment (cutting off appendages, e.g., Ex 21:24-25) is easier to bear than capital punishment, the decree of eternal death pronounced by the heavenly court. Some Jewish thinkers believed that one would be resurrected in exactly the form in which one had died (e.g., with limbs missing, as in the case of many martyrs) before being made whole, and Jesus employs this image. Many sources used physical "stumbling" (literally) as a metaphor for sin.

5:31-32

Remarriage as Adultery

Jewish *law about adultery technically addressed only intercourse with married women; the marital status of the man was not relevant. For this reason Matthew

addresses here only the status of the divorced wife.

Some Pharisaic rabbis allowed divorce for almost anything (just as Roman law did); others allowed it only if the wife were unfaithful (see comment on 19:1-10; both Jewish and Roman law *required* divorce for adultery). Most recognized it as tragic. Yet the stricter rabbis did not view more lenient divorces as invalid. Jesus thus goes beyond the stricter position: not only does he allow divorce only if one's wife is unfaithful, but he regards divorce for any other reason as invalid, thus making remarriage in those cases adulterous. This seems, however, to be *hyperbole (as in 5:29-30), a graphic way of forbidding divorce except when the other partner has already irreparably broken the marriage covenant (see comment on Mk 10:11).

If Jesus' interpretation of the law was stricter than what the law said at face value, no one would have thought that he was therefore contradicting the law; "building a fence" around the law was a standard Jewish practice that involved making certain that the law's intent was not broken.

5:33-37

Integrity, Not Oaths

Oaths invoked the witness of a deity; people assumed that the deity would avenge any false appeals to his or her testimony. People swore by all sorts of things other than God to testify that their word was true. They reasoned that if they broke their oath based on any of these lesser things, at least they were not bringing God's name into disrepute. It eventually became necessary for rabbis to decide which oaths were completely binding. Like a small number of other thinkers, Jesus emphasizes having such integrity that oaths are unnecessary. He says that everything by which one could swear is ultimately God's, and demands that people simply be as good as their word. Jesus argues the point in part from Scripture; Isaiah 66:1 declared that heaven is God's throne and earth is his footstool.

Most people in Jewish Palestine had black or dark hair, unless they were older, in which case their hair was turning white; verse 36 would have been heard as referring to God's control over aging. Jesus' rule here is stricter than the letter of the law *but in accord with its spirit* (Deut 23:21-23; Eccles 5:5). *It is possible that the* Essenes also avoided oath-taking after their initial oath to join their sect.

5:38-42

Nonresistance

The language is partly *hyperbole*—disciples did not all engage in behavior that would immediately lead to homelessness (cf. 2 Cor 11:20). But hyperbole was meant to provoke hearers to consider the radical nature of what they were being told. To put the point more literally, Jesus is calling his followers to value relationships supremely and regard possessions as nothing. (The point is absolute unselfishness, motivated by love; cf. 5:43-44.)

5:38. The “eye for an eye” and “tooth for a tooth” are part of the widespread ancient Near Eastern law of retaliation. In Israel and other cultures, this principle was enforced by a court and refers to legalized vengeance; personal vengeance was never accepted in the *law of Moses, except as a concession for a relative’s murder (Num 35:18-21)*. The Old Testament did not permit personal vengeance; David, a great warrior, recognized this principle (1 Sam 25:33; 26:10-11).

5:39. The blow on the right cheek (e.g., Job 16:10; Lam 3:30) was the most grievous insult in the ancient world (apart from inflicting serious physical harm), and in many cultures was listed alongside the “eye for an eye” laws; both Jewish and Roman law permitted prosecution for this offense. A prophet might endure such ill treatment (1 Kings 22:24; 2 Chron 18:23; Is 50:6).

5:40. The poorest people of the empire (e.g., most peasants in Egypt) had only an inner and outer garment, and the theft of a cloak would lead to legal recourse. Although conditions in first-century Palestine were not quite that bad, this verse could indicate divestiture of all one’s possessions, even (hyperbolically) one’s clothes, to avoid a legal dispute affecting only oneself. Jesus gives this advice in spite of the fact that, under Jewish law, a legal case to regain one’s cloak would have been foolproof: a creditor could not take a poor person’s outer cloak, which might serve as one’s only blanket at night as well as a coat (Ex 22:26-27).

5:41. Roman soldiers had the legal right to impress the labor, work animal or substance of local residents (cf. Mk 15:21). Although impressment may not have happened often in Galilee, it happened elsewhere, and the fact that it could happen would be enough to raise the eyebrows of Jesus’ hearers at this example of nonresistance and even loving service to the oppressor.

The Jewish hierarchy favored the status quo with Rome; some revolutionaries wanted to revolt. Most Palestinian Jews in this period wanted freedom but were not revolutionaries; at least some Galilean villagers, however,

may have sympathized with bandits known for their hostility toward the existing powers. By A.D. 66 Jewish Palestine was caught up in a war, and by 70 the wisdom of Jesus' course was evident: Rome won the war, and the Jewish people, led to defeat by the revolutionaries, were crushed.

5:42. Beggars were widespread. The Bible stressed giving to those in need (Deut 15:11; Ps 112:5, 9; Prov 21:13). God would take care of the needs of those who helped the poor (Deut 15:10; Prov 19:17; 22:9; 28:8). Biblical laws against usury and especially about lending to the poor before the year of release (Deut 15:9; every seventh year debts were to be forgiven; cf. Lev 25) support Jesus' principle here, but Jesus goes even farther in emphasizing unselfish giving (especially Lk 6:35).

5:43-48

Beyond Nonresistance

5:43-44. *The Old Testament did not explicitly teach hatred for one's enemies (Ex 23:4-5; Prov 25:21-22), although hating God's enemies was a pious way to feel (Ps 139:19-22); some Jewish groups, like the Essenes, emphasized hatred toward those outside the covenant. Greek ethics sometimes stressed learning from one's enemies' criticism but also could stress making sure to hurt one's enemies more than one was hurt by them (so Isocrates, a fourth-century B.C. Athenian orator and rhetorician).*

Although vengeance belonged only to the Lord (Lev 19:18; Deut 32:35), prayer for one's persecutors (except that God would strike them dead!) had not generally characterized even the most pious in the Old Testament (cf. 2 Chron 24:22; Jer 11:20; 15:15; 17:18; 18:23; 20:12; often in Psalms, e.g., 137:7-9). Some philosophers valued nonresistance, but others answered their critics harshly and arrogantly.

5:45. Jewish teachers emphasized this universal aspect of God's mercy and that he alone was sovereign over rain. (Many also stressed that the prayers of the righteous could bring rain in times of drought, an issue not addressed here.) Some Jewish texts said that by being like God, one would be his child (i.e., imitator; e.g., Sirach 4:10).

5:46-47. Some Jewish teachers emphasized kindness to pagans (*Gentiles) to draw them to the truth, but most people greeted and (apart from charity) looked after only those they knew. *Tax gatherers were considered among the most

apostate Jews; Gentiles were considered (usually rightly) immoral, idolatrous, often anti-Jewish pagans. Jews agreed that one should not be like the pagans (so also the Old Testament: Lev 18:3; Deut 18:9; Jer 10:2).

5:48. Ancient rhetoric often included summary statements at the end of a speech or section. The *Aramaic word for “perfect” can mean “complete” or “whole,” including the nuance of “merciful” (Lk 6:36). The Bible already commanded being holy as God is holy (Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26), and Judaism (as well as some Greek philosophers) sometimes argued ethics on the basis of imitating God’s character.

6:1-4

Secret Charity

6:1. Where appropriate, ancient speakers liked to offer a starting summary, and sometimes to illustrate with three main points. This verse is the thesis statement that introduces the three examples of private piety in 6:2-16. Judaism stressed that one should not perform deeds for the sake of reward but nonetheless promised reward, as Jesus does here; this reward is rendered at the day of judgment, as in Judaism. Prayer, fasting and gifts to the poor were among the basic components of Jewish piety (Tobit 12:8), and many *rabbis listed qualities (e.g., virtues on which the world was founded) in sets of three.

6:2-4. In general, Greeks and Romans did not emphasize personal charity; wealthy contributions to public projects or to *clients of slightly lower status were meant to secure the giver’s popularity. In contrast, charity was central to Jewish piety; some writers even said that it saved a person, although some later rabbis’ restrictions technically did not permit one to give over twenty percent above his tithes.

Some commentators have taken the trumpet sounding literally, but it is hyperbolic (people did not blow trumpets when giving alms) and might reflect a play on words (charity boxes were often shaped like trumpets). Not letting one’s left hand know about the right hand’s gift is *hyperbole (cf. Jon 4:11), and some similar graphic pictures appear elsewhere. The language of “having” a reward “in full” is the language of repayment in ancient business receipts.

6:5-15

Secret Prayer

The parallel structure of the larger section (6:1-18) and of this passage on prayer is augmented by the presence of a sample prayer (6:9-13; thus how one should not pray, 6:5, 7-8; and how one should pray, 6:6, 9). Judaism was much more serious about regular prayer than were Greek and Roman religions.

6:5-6. The problem is not public prayer but motives directed toward other people rather than toward God. It was probably common for pious people to recite their prayers at least individually in the *synagogue; it is not clear that everyone prayed simultaneously in all synagogues as early as Jesus' time. Some suggest that the "chamber" was a storeroom; most people did not have private rooms in their houses, and only that room would have a door on it. Standing was a common posture for prayer.

6:7. Jewish scholars were debating the use of fixed prayers in this period; they generally held them to be acceptable if one's intent was genuine. Greek prayers sometimes 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.

6:8. Judaism recognized that God knew everything; the issue here (and often with respect to Jesus' teaching) is thus not Jesus' hearers' doctrine but their hearts. Jewish people saw God differently than Greeks saw their gods (even though even monotheistic faith was not always what it should have been). In Judaism, God was a Father who delighted in meeting the needs of his people; Judaism also recognized that God knew all a person's thoughts. Jesus predicates effective prayer on a relationship of intimacy, not a business partnership model, which was closer to the one followed by ancient paganism.

6:9-10. Greek sources often called the supreme deity "father," including in prayers, but this practice is pervasive in Jewish sources as well, even as early as the *Old Testament* (*Deut* 32:6; *Ps* 68:5; *Is* 63:16; 64:8; *Jer* 3:4, 19; 31:9; *Mal* 1:6; 2:10) and other very early Jewish works (e.g., *Tobit* 13:4; 3 Maccabees 5:7; 7:6). 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 (the Kaddish) proclaimed, "Exalted and hallowed be his . . . name . . . and may his kingdom come speedily and soon." Because God was Father, his children could depend on him (cf. 18:3).

Jewish prayers recognized that God's name would be "hallowed," or

“sanctified,” “shown holy,” in the time of the end, when his *kingdom would come, as the Bible also said (Is 5:16; 29:23; Ezek 36:23; 38:23; 39:7, 27; cf. Zech 14:9). Jewish people would also recognize the importance of living consistently with what they valued in prayer. In the present God’s people could hallow his name by living rightly; if they lived wrongly, they would “profane” his name, or bring it into disrepute among the nations (cf. also Ex 20:7; Jer 34:16; 44:25-26; Ezek 13:19; 20:14; Amos 2:7). Some regard the *kiddush hashem*, the hallowing of God’s name, as the most fundamental principle of later rabbinic ethics; they counted profaning God’s name as almost unforgiveable.

It was understood that after his kingdom came God’s will would be done on earth as in heaven.

6:11. This verse alludes to God’s provision of “daily bread” (manna) for his people in the wilderness after he first redeemed them. Some Jewish people looked for a renewal of manna in the end time, but prayers for God to supply one’s basic needs—of which bread and water are the ultimate examples—were common in the ancient world (cf. Prov 30:8).

6:12. Prayer for forgiveness appears in standard ancient Jewish prayers (note the sixth of the Eighteen Benedictions). Jewish teaching regarded sins as “debts” before God; the same *Aramaic word could be used for both. Biblical *law required the periodic forgiveness of monetary debtors (in the seventh and fiftieth years), so the illustration of forgiving debts would have been a graphic one (especially since Jewish lawyers had found a way to circumvent the release of debts so that creditors would continue to lend).

6:13. Parallels with ancient Jewish prayers, and possibly the Aramaic wording behind this verse, suggest that the first line means: “Let us not sin when we are tested”—rather than “Let us not be tested” (cf. 4:1; 26:41 in context; cf. Ps 141:3-4). Some scholars have suggested an allusion to the final time of suffering here, which was expected to precede the coming kingdom, but while such testing could be included, most Jewish prayers about testing were for strength in the present era. Because Jewish prayers were commonly used in liturgical contexts that ended with a statement of praise, later texts’ addition of the benediction (“Thine is the kingdom . . .”) to the original text of Matthew is not surprising.

6:14-15. Although others felt differently, some Jewish sages recognized that only those who forgave would be forgiven (Sirach 28:1-8). The principle of forgiveness that Jesus states here seems to be that only people of *grace know how to accept grace. See comment on 18:21-35.

6:16-18

Secret Fasting

Jewish people conjoined fasting with mourning, *repentance*, or *sometimes prayer*; *most fasts ran from sundown to sundown*. *During at least the dry seasons, many of the most pious people fasted (without water, though this was unhealthy) two particular days a week*. *This fasting was considered meritorious, although* ascetic fasting (e.g., fasting only to “beat down the flesh”) was forbidden. Jewish fasting required abstinence not only from food but also from other pleasures, which would include the usual practice of anointing one’s head with oil to prevent dry skin; avoiding all these practices made fasting obvious. (Greeks oiled their bodies before exercise and then used a metal utensil called a strigil to scrape off the sweaty dirt accumulated on the oil. But Jews did not practice this custom, and it is not in view here in Mt 6.) God had never settled for outward fasting only (Is 58:3-12; Jer 36:9).

6:19-24

Don’t Seek Possessions

One should not value possessions enough to seek them (6:19-24)—or enough to worry about them—because God will provide one’s basic needs (6:25-34). Ancient views on possessions varied from denial of personal possessions (like the *Essenes) to viewing wealth as a blessing (more common); but most people then, like most people today, sought as much as possible.

6:19. Ancient teachers like *Hillel, a famous Jewish teacher, generally acknowledged the corruptibility of earthly treasure. Because thieves could dig through walls and steal a strongbox in one’s home, well-to-do people usually tried one of several other methods to safeguard their wealth: investing money with moneychangers, depositing it in a temple for safekeeping (even most robbers balked at “robbing gods”), or burying it in the ground or in caves, where, however, moth (for expensive apparel) or rust (for coins, cf. Sirach 29:10-11; but the term here in Matthew may involve decay by creatures, e.g., worms) could destroy its value in time.

6:20-21. Jewish texts spoke of “laying up treasure” with God or in heaven (e.g., Tobit 4:7-10). Sometimes this meant that the generous person could trust that God would help him in time of need; sometimes it referred (as here) to treasure in the world to come.

6:22-23. Jesus speaks literally of a “single” eye versus a “bad” or “evil” one. This saying may involve several plays on words. A “single” eye normally meant a generous one but also sets the reader up for 6:24. 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. Although here Jesus compares the eye to a lamp, he speaks of “diseased” eyes which fail to *admit* light. Such eyes become a symbol for the worthlessness of a stingy person.

6:24. Two masters rarely shared slaves, but when they did (sometimes through joint inheritance) it led to divided interests. “Mammon” is an *Aramaic word for possessions or money, and Jesus seems to be personifying it as an idol, using another ancient figure of speech (personification).

6:25-34

Don't Worry About Possessions

6:25. Most people in antiquity had little beyond basic necessities—food, clothing and shelter. Because their acquisition of these necessities often depended—especially in rural areas—on seasonal rains or (in Egypt) the flooding of the Nile, they had plenty of cause for stress even about food and clothing.

6:26-27. Some ancient philosophers taught about or drew morals from nature as well as from philosophy. Many Jewish teachers said that God's concern in the laws of the Bible was only for humans (although it was clear that God watched over all creation; cf. Ps 104:27). But Jesus' argument was a standard Jewish “how much more” (*qal vahomer*) argument: If God cares for the birds (and rabbis agreed that he sustained all creation), how much more does he care for humans?

6:28-30. Jesus' term could apply to any of the flowers in Galilee's fields, though some commentators have suggested anemones, which were purple, the color that many ancient readers would have envisioned for Solomon's royal robes (6:29). In any case, such flowers were fuel for women's bread-baking ovens. The perishing of grass and flowers as they dried up in each year's summer heat was a natural image for human mortality (cf. Ps 103:15-16; Is 40:6-8).

6:31-33. The pagan world did indeed seek after such necessities, but Jesus

reminds his hearers that they could trust their Father (v. 32; see comment on 6:7-8) and should seek the kingdom (v. 33).

6:34. Other Jewish teachers after Jesus gave the same advice; whether Jesus used a common saying or his teaching in this case became a common saying is hard to determine.

7:1-5

Reciprocal Judgment

7:1-2. The idea of a measuring scale (the image is from the ancient marketplace) was used elsewhere for the day of judgment or divine retribution. “As one measures it will be measured back to one” occurs a number of times in later Jewish sources and may have been a maxim. For the principle, see 5:7, 6:14-15 and Proverbs 19:17. Compare also the *Old Testament principles that false witnesses were to receive the penalty they sought for the accused (Deut 19:18-21) and that God opposed unjust judges (Ex 23:6-8; Deut 16:18-20).

7:2-5. Although ancient eye surgery sometimes involved lancing the eye, here Jesus clearly uses *hyperbole. The imagery is vivid, shocking, ludicrous and probably humorous to Jesus’ hearers, but it communicates the point. The prophets had appealed to graphic images, often employing plays on words to communicate their message (e.g., the Hebrew of Mic 1; Jer 1:11-12). The Old Testament (e.g., Prov 15:32) and subsequent Jewish tradition stressed that people should always be humble enough to accept correction.

7:6-12

Imitating God’s Gifts

7:6. Pigs and dogs were considered unclean animals (Prov 26:11; 2 Pet 2:22), which had no appreciation for valuable things (Prov 11:22). Pigs typically ate the vilest foods, and dogs were scavengers, consuming even human blood. Stray dogs were known to growl at those who tossed them food as well as those who ignored them. The image would thus be forceful and beyond dispute for ancient hearers.

The more debated question is what the verse means in the context. Perhaps it means not correcting (cf. Mt 7:1-5) those who would not listen (cf. Prov 23:9).

7:7-8. Even as a general principle, the boldness with which this text promises

answers to prayer is quite rare in ancient literature; only a few special men of God were thought to obtain most of what they requested.

7:9-11. Jesus adapts a standard Jewish argument here called *qal vahomer* arguing from the lesser to the greater (if the lesser is true, how much more the greater). Fish and bread were basic staples, integral to the diet of most of Jesus' hearers; they do not stand for the fineries of the wealthy.

7:12. That one should not do to others what one would not wish done to oneself was a common teaching; it occurred in the Jewish book of Tobit, reportedly in the teaching of the early Jewish teacher Hillel and in Greek sources as well (cf., e.g., the negative form in Tobit 4:15; Philo, *Hypothetica* 7.6; *Babylonian Shabbat* 31a; positively, *Letter of Aristeas* 207; cf. also Sirach 31:15; Greek sources and even Confucian teaching). The version attributed in a later source to *Hillel adds, "This is the whole law" (cf. Mt 22:40).

7:13-27

The Two Ways

7:13-14. Jesus' hearers would have been familiar with the image of "two ways"—one leading to life and the other to death; it was common in Judaism (see already Deut 30:15). Jesus' emphasis that few are on the right way occurs in *4 *Ezra* but is not as common as the general image of the two ways. Apparently most Jewish people believed that Israel as a whole would be saved and that the few who were lost would be exceptions to the general rule.

7:15. Although many educated Jewish people did not believe that prophets had continued in the *Old Testament sense, they believed that false prophets (cf., e.g., Jer 2:8; 5:30) continued; *Josephus mentioned many of them in the first century. The contrast between vicious wolves and harmless lambs or sheep was proverbial. Stories existed of some using skins as disguises, but the image here is more graphic: wolves do not wear clothes.

7:16. Like wheat and barley, grapes and figs were among the most valuable and widely consumed fruits of the earth; thorns and thistles were worthless and troublesome to harvesters, as the Old Testament often mentions. For a figurative use of "fruits" in the Old Testament, see Isaiah 5:6 and comment on Matthew 3:8.

7:17-20. The repetition of "know them by their fruits" (7:17, 20) brackets this illustration; such bracketing was commonly used as a literary device (called

inclusio) to mark off a paragraph. Prophets were known to be false if they led people away from the true God (Deut 13) or their words did not come to pass (Deut 18:21-22). The *rabbis allowed that prophets might temporarily suspend a teaching of the *law the way rabbis themselves would, but if they denied the law itself or advocated idolatry, they were false prophets. Jesus teaches that if they do not live right, they are false (Mt 7:21-23). Cf. Luke 6:43-45.

7:21-23. The miracles Jesus mentions are not necessarily false; it is possible to prophesy by the *Spirit's inspiration and yet be disobedient to God and unsaved (1 Sam 19:20-24). The admonition to depart is from a psalm about the vindication of the righteous (Ps 6:8; cf. 119:115; 139:19). Some tried to use Solomon's name to cast out demons (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.47), but many acted or prophesied in God's name (Deut 18:22; 1 Sam 17:45; 1 Esdras 6:1).

7:24-27. The rabbis debated whether hearing or doing the law was more important; most concluded that hearing it was more important, because one could not do it without hearing it. But they did insist that both were necessary.

Again the image is 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 of Jesus' more biblically literate hearers may have thought of Proverbs 24:3 ("by wisdom a house is built") and the contrast between wisdom (which builds a house in 9:1) and folly in Proverbs 9:1-18. Later rabbis told a *parable very similar to that of Jesus here, but whereas their foundation involved heeding the Torah (e.g., *Avot de Rabbi Natan* 24A), *here* it involves heeding Jesus' words.

7:28-29

Response of the Masses

The teachers of the *law never claimed as much authority as Jesus had (7:24-27); they derived their authority especially from building on previous tradition.

8:1-4

Touching the Unclean: Leprosy

Matthew groups together nine stories containing ten specific miracles (some

commentators have suggested that Matthew wants his readers to remember Moses' ten miracles) in chapters 8–9: three miracles in 8:1-17, then teaching on true discipleship (8:18-22); three more miracles (8:23–9:8), then teaching on true discipleship (9:9-17); and finally three more miracle stories, one of which includes two miracles (9:18-33).

Ancient writers used examples to illustrate points: Jesus' authority over sickness, *demons and nature summons people to recognize his authority over their lives. In ancient thought, miracles could call attention to or attest teachers or their views (in contrast to modern rationalistic attempts to deny them).

8:1. People in power viewed mobile teachers with followings of large crowds as threats to social stability; the Romans were always concerned about uprisings in Jewish Palestine. Readers familiar with this situation in pre-70 Jewish Palestine might recognize here a hint of impending conflict.

8:2. Leprosy was an unattractive skin disease for which the Bible had prescribed quarantine from the rest of society (Lev 13:45-46). Lepers were thus largely outcasts from society (2 Kings 7:3). In personal address, "Lord" could also mean "Sir"; the degree of respect connoted depended on the person addressed. Prostrating oneself before another signified extreme respect for another's dignity or power to meet a difficult need.

8:3. Touching a leper was forbidden (cf. Lev 5:3), and most people would have been revolted by the thought of it. Indeed, the *law enjoined the leper's isolation from society (Lev 13:45-46). See further comment on Mark 1:40-45. The miracle itself would have been viewed as the work of a mighty prophet, however (cf. 2 Kings 5:14).

8:4. Jesus here follows the injunctions detailed in the *Old Testament law of leprosy (Lev 14:1-32). The instructions not to tell anyone else resemble the clandestine activity of some Old Testament prophets; they would also appear honorable in view of ancient Mediterranean disdain for boasting and perhaps because Jesus avoids competing with those in power here. Of course, preventing excessive crowds that could deter his mission could be another consideration, since reports about divine works drew crowds. On the messianic secret, see further the discussion of Mark's message in the introduction to Mark.

8:5-13

A Non-Jew's Faith

By including this story from his source, Matthew encourages his Jewish Christian readers in the *Gentile mission. Even a single exception should be enough to challenge racist stereotypes.

8:5. The nearest legion of Roman troops was stationed in Syria; in Judea, several cohorts were stationed at Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast with additional soldiers in the fortress Antonia in Jerusalem; Capernaum, as a customs post, might have warranted some soldiers, or the centurion might come from elsewhere or be retired. Soldiers in Palestine were largely auxiliaries, many of them from the local region; while they would become Roman citizens when discharged (and would represent Rome for Matthew's audience), many were Syrian ethnically. Centurions commanded a "century," but in practice this consisted of roughly eighty troops, not one hundred. Unlike higher officers, most centurions worked their way up through the ranks. They were the backbone of the Roman army, in charge of discipline. In view of the Judean-Roman War (or even soldiers' abuses in the East; see comment on 5:41), most of Matthew's audience would probably not typically like centurions.

8:6. On "Lord," see comment on 8:2. During their minimum of twenty 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 might be moved around more frequently, might be less likely to have such informal families than most soldiers. The centurion may or may not have had an unofficial wife and children. 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. Centurions were paid much better than lower-ranking troops. At average prices, a slave would have cost about one-third of the annual wages of the best-paid legionary (and more for other soldiers), but centurions made between fifteen and sixty times the wages of typical soldiers.

8:7. Jesus' response may be read as a question, a challenge, rather than a statement: "Shall I come and heal him?" (cf. 15:26). If one reads it as a statement, it declares Jesus' willingness to cross an important cultural boundary. It seems that pious Jewish people did not normally enter Gentile homes; see comment on Acts 10:27-29.

8:8. The centurion, who knows that Jewish people rarely entered Gentile homes, concedes Jesus' special mission to Israel (cf. 15:27). At the same time he expresses great faith, for among all the stories (both true and spurious) of healing miracles in antiquity, long-distance healings were rare and considered especially

extraordinary.

8:9. The centurion's response demonstrates that he (backed by Rome's authority) understands the principle of authority that Jesus exercises. Roman soldiers were very disciplined and (except in times of mutiny) followed orders carefully; they provided the ultimate model of discipline and obedience in the Roman Empire. "Go" and "come" appear elsewhere as summary examples of expressing authority.

8:10. Gentiles were generally pagans, with no faith in Israel's God.

8:11. This verse reflects the standard Jewish image of the future banquet in God's *kingdom. Although the Bible declared that it was for all peoples (Is 25:6; cf. 56:3-8), Jewish literature by this period emphasized that it was prepared for Israel, who would be exalted over its enemies. People were seated at banquets according to rank. They "sat" at regular meals but "reclined" (as here) at feasts; table fellowship signified intimacy, so fellowship with the great patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was thought to represent a future hope for the Jewish people, not for Gentiles, with whom Jewish people did not eat.

8:12. The "rightful" heirs are cast out; other Jewish texts used outer darkness to describe hell, often where mighty evil spirits were imprisoned; the gnashing of teeth may allude to Psalm 112:10.

8:13. Some Jewish stories circulated about miracle workers, but reports of long-distance healings were rare and regarded as extraordinary. This healing would thus have been viewed as especially miraculous.

8:14-17

Messiah the Healer

8:14. Archaeologists have found what some think is this very home in a site close to the *synagogue. Adult children were expected to care for their aged parents. Newly married couples often lived with the groom's family. (For more details, see comment on Mk 1:29-34.)

8:15. Some religious men refrained from touching women in general to avoid any possibility of becoming unclean, unless they had means by which they could ascertain their status (based on Lev 15:19). That Peter's mother-in-law was able to "serve" them at table, a common womanly role in antiquity (cf. Lk 10:40), indicates the extent to which she was genuinely healed.

8:16. Exorcists often used magical incantations and sought to manipulate

higher spirits into helping them drive out lower ones; sometimes they also used smelly roots and similar techniques to expel *demons. In contrast, Jesus simply drives out spirits “with a word.” Anthropologists have documented experiences indigenously interpreted as spirit possession in a majority of the world’s cultures.

8:17. In context Isaiah 53:4 emphasizes particularly healing from the ravages of sin (53:5-6; cf. Hos 14:4, etc.), as some other Christian writers noted (1 Pet 2:24-25). But given Isaiah’s emphasis on physical restoration in the messianic era (35:5-6) and the connection between physical and spiritual healing in Jewish tradition (cf. also Is 33:24), it makes good sense that Matthew also finds the nuance of physical healing here: Jesus inaugurates the messianic era, making some of its benefits available even in advance of the cross.

8:18-22

Jesus’ Demands

8:18. *Disciples generally acted as servants to their *rabbis, following practical orders relevant to the work of the teacher and his school as well as learning his teachings.

8:19-20. Disciples usually sought out their own teachers. Some radical Greek philosophers who eschewed possessions sought to repulse prospective disciples with enormous demands, for the purpose of testing them and acquiring the most worthy. Those who joined radical Jewish sects such as the *Essenes had to relinquish their property. David warned a prospective follower about the suffering that would attend following him (2 Sam 15:19-20), but the proper response was to follow anyway (2 Sam 15:21-22). Like fishermen and *tax gatherers, carpenters had a much better income than agrarian peasants; Jesus’ call, not involuntary poverty, summoned him and his followers to a sacrificial lifestyle.

Comparisons with animals constituted a fairly common teaching technique (e.g., the now famous animal fables attributed to Aesop). Jewish people could compare righteous sufferers with birds finding refuge for nesting only with difficulty (Ps 11:1; 84:3; 102:6-7; 124:7); foxes nested in desolate places (Lam 5:18; Ezek 13:4).

8:21-22. One of an eldest son’s most basic responsibilities (in both Greek and Jewish cultures) was his father’s burial; failure to meet this obligation could

make one a social outcast in one's village. The initial burial took place shortly after a person's decease, however, and family members would not be outside talking with rabbis during the reclusive mourning period immediately following the death. Thus some argue that what is in view here instead is the secondary burial: 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's wall. The son in this *narrative could thus be asking for as much as a year's delay. Others note that in some Semitic languages, "wait until I bury my father" is a way of asking for delay until one may complete one's filial obligations, even if the father is not yet dead.

Even on these interpretations, however, Jesus' demand that the son place him above the greatest responsibility a son had toward his father would have horrified hearers: in Jewish tradition, honoring father and mother was one of the greatest commandments (see, e.g., Josephus, *Apion* 2.206), and to follow Jesus at the expense of not burying one's father would have been viewed as dishonoring one's father (on the need to bury parents, cf. Tobit 4:3-4; 6:15; 4 Maccabees 16:11). While some sages demanded greater honor than parents, only God could take precedence over them to this degree (cf. Deut 13:6).

8:23-27

Lord of Nature

Greek stories about those who could subdue nature were normally about gods or about demigods who had acted in the distant past. Jewish tradition reported some earlier teachers who could pray for rain or its cessation like Elijah. But absolute authority over waves and sea in Jewish tradition belonged to God alone. It is not difficult to understand why the *disciples did not know what to make of Jesus!

Only local people described the lake of Galilee as a "sea" of Galilee, as here (8:24). Philosophers valued serenity during storms at sea as a sign of genuine belief in philosophy; similarly, ability to sleep in the face of danger could reveal faith in God (Ps 3:5; 4:8).

8:28-34

Lord over Evil Spirits

Proposals vary on why Matthew has two, and Mark but one, demoniac here (see

comment on Mk 5:1-20); one suggestion is that Matthew knows of one that Mark omitted. Another is that he includes an extra one here because he left one out by omitting the story recorded in Mark 1:21-28; the doubling of characters here would not have violated standard Jewish writing conventions of that time.

8:28. Tombs were ceremonially unclean and were thought to be popular haunts for evil spirits (a belief the spirits were apparently happy to accommodate). Both Gadara (here) and Gerasa (Mk 5:1) were predominantly *Gentile cities in the region of the Decapolis, but Gadara was much closer to the Sea of Galilee (Gerasa, a prominent and magnificent city, was over thirty miles southeast). Roughly six miles to the southeast, Gadara probably controlled the land where this *narrative occurs. Violent behavior is still frequently associated with many cases of spirit possession in cultures that recognize the phenomenon.

8:29. “Before the time” means before the day of judgment. Apparently even the *demons did not expect the *Messiah to come in two stages, a first and second coming.

8:30. Jewish people lived in this region, but it was predominantly non-Jewish; hence the pigs. Herds could be huge; one ancient source speaks of a thousand pigs from a single sow.

8:31. Ancient stories about demons suggest that they liked to negotiate the least difficult terms if they were going to have to leave one whom they possessed. Hearing that demons would want to inhabit unclean pigs, Jewish listeners might have responded, “But of course!”

8:32. Though it was known that pigs could swim, they could not survive in this situation. In Jewish tradition, demons could die or be bound (sometimes beneath bodies of water); because Matthew says nothing to the contrary, his readers would probably assume that these demons have been imprisoned or otherwise deactivated.

8:33-34. Pigs required little oversight to graze, but some herdsmen, responsible to the owners, would nevertheless watch over them, and pigs might respond to their voices. The *Old Testament* narratives of Elijah and Elisha allowed Jewish people to place some miracle workers in the category of “prophet,” but Greeks usually categorized miracle workers as magicians or sorcerers. Because magicians and sorcerers were usually malevolent and Jesus’ coming had already cost these Gentiles from the Decapolis economically (a lot of pork), they were naturally terrified of him.

Authority to Forgive and to Heal

It was common to abridge accounts, as Matthew often does; reciting Mark's story about the paralytic (see comment on Mk 2:1-12), he omits even the dramatic letting down through the roof.

9:1-2. For many poor people, "beds" could be mats; thus the paralytics' friends may have carried him on the bed on which he lay all the time. "His own town" here is Capernaum (4:13).

9:3. Judaism believed that only God could forgive sins, but most Jews allowed that some of God's representatives could speak on God's behalf. The *Old Testament penalty for blaspheming God's name—reproaching rather than honoring it—was death (Lev 24:10-23). According to later rabbinic law, blasphemy technically involved pronouncing the divine name or perhaps inviting people to follow other gods. According to the more common, less technical usage, it applied to any grievous insult to God's honor (cf. Num 15:30). But these legal scholars were mistaken in interpreting Jesus' words as blasphemy, by any definition.

9:4. Judaism recognized that God sometimes revealed to prophets what others were thinking or planning.

9:5-7. Jewish teachers knew that only God could ultimately forgive (on the Day of Atonement in response to sacrifice); but they also recognized that healing ultimately came from God as well. *Josephus shows us that many false prophets in Jesus' day promised to work miracles but actually failed to work them; some of Jesus' critics may have placed him in this category, until they witnessed the miracles.

9:8. When ancient writers reported accounts of miracles, they generally concluded the account with the amazed response of the crowds who witnessed it.

9:9-13

A Physician for Sinners

9:9. Levi may have been a tax farmer working for Herod or the municipal government; situated at an office in Capernaum, many think that he was a customs agent, charging import duties on wares brought through this town on important nearby trade routes. Whether or not this is the case, his reputation seems to at least associate him with other kinds of tax collectors. Even more than

the fishermen, he had a secure and prosperous job, which he surrendered to follow Jesus' call.

9:10. Most people regarded a man of wealth inviting a religious teacher over for dinner as honorable behavior. *Tax gatherers, however, were regarded as collaborators with the Romans or Herod's dynasty and were despised by religious people. Tax gatherers assessing property were free to search anything except the person of a Roman matron, seizing undeclared property; some were so brutal that they might beat an elderly woman to discover where her son had fled to evade payment. In poor areas in Egypt, we even hear of entire villages relocating to evade the tax gatherers. Presumably few agents in Galilee would have been so brutal, but tax gatherers were generally ill-liked. Even when tax gatherers did not extort additional money, taxes were high.

Some commentators have argued that "sinners" may refer to all who did not eat food in ritual purity, but the term probably refers to anyone who lived sinfully rather than religiously, as if they did not care what the religious community thought of them.

9:11. Table fellowship indicated intimate relations among those who shared it. Later *rabbis sometimes contrasted tax gatherers and Pharisees* as the epitomes of impiety and piety respectively. The Pharisees were particularly scrupulous about their special rules on eating and did not like to eat with less scrupulous people, especially people like tax gatherers and sinners. Here they assume that Jesus, being a wise teacher, ought to share their religious convictions, which they believed were scriptural (Ps 1:1; 119:63; Prov 13:20; 14:7; 28:7; the biblical principle, however, is to avoid being influenced by, not to avoid influencing, the ungodly). Judaism affirmed God's mercy (cf. Ps 25:8), but for Jesus as a teacher to pursue those known as sinners violated conventional expectations of holiness.

9:12. Jesus' reply plays on a common image of the day (comparing physicians and teachers) to make his point. Quick, witty repartee was characteristic of popular teachers in both Jewish and Greek traditions.

9:13. Other rabbis often said, "Go and learn" or "Come and see" to direct hearers to scriptural proofs for their position. Hosea 6:6 does not reject sacrifice or ritual, but elevates right relationship with God and right treatment of the poor, the oppressed and the outcasts above sacrifice and ritual (cf. similarly 1 Sam 15:22; Ps 40:6; 50:7-15; 51:16; 69:30-31; Prov 21:3).

Appropriate Fasting

9:14. People often held teachers responsible for the behavior of their *disciples*. The law required fasting only on the Day of Atonement, but many other fasts had been added by religious Jews, especially by groups like the Pharisees. Many of the Pharisees may have fasted two days a week without water, especially during the dry season (cf. Luke 18:12). 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. If Jesus compares himself with the bridegroom (one should not press comparisons into every detail in *parables), it may be significant that God is the bridegroom in some OT images (e.g., Hos 2:14-20).

9:15. Wedding feasts could involve seven days of festivity; so crucial an obligation was joy that rabbis were said to pause their instruction to hail passing bridal processions. 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.

9:16. Again, the issue is the inappropriateness of fasting in the present circumstance. Older clothes would have already shrunk somewhat from washing.

9:17. Wine could be kept in either jars or wineskins. The animal skins were often goatskins, often with two or three sewn together. Old wineskins had already been stretched to capacity by fermenting wine within them; if they were then filled with unfermented wine, it would likewise expand, and the old wineskins, already stretched to the limit, would burst.

9:18-26

Touching the Unclean: Blood and Death

Raising the dead was an extraordinary miracle, attributed to Elijah (1 Kings 17:21-22) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:33-35) in the Old Testament. Physical contact with either communicated ritual impurity (Lev 15:19-33; Num 19:11-12). See comment on Mark 5:21-43 for further details.

9:18-19. “Rulers of the *synagogue” were leaders in synagogues and were prominent members of their communities. (When honorary, the title may refer to

benefactors only, but most Jewish people with this title were likely both significant donors and influential in the synagogue.) If the setting is still Capernaum (9:1), it is significant that Jesus' following could include both this man and more questionable elements of the community (9:9).

One would fall at the feet of someone of much greater status (like a king) or prostrate oneself before God; thus for this prominent man to humble himself in this way before Jesus was to recognize Jesus' power in a serious way.

9:20-21. 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 and religious problem in addition to the physical one. 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). Because she rendered unclean anyone she touched, she should not have even been in this heavy crowd. Many teachers avoided touching women altogether, lest they become accidentally contaminated. Thus she could not touch or be touched, she had probably never married or was now divorced, and she was marginal to Jewish society. Leviticus forbade intercourse with a menstruating woman, and Jewish tradition mandated divorce when marriages did not yield children.

In an act of scandalous faith, she touches Jesus' garment's "fringe"—no doubt one of the tassels (*zizith*) worn by Jewish men, in obedience to Numbers 15:38-41 and Deuteronomy 22:12, on the four corners of their outer garment, and later on the prayer shawl (*tallith*). The tassels were made of blue and white cords woven together.

9:22. Many ancient people 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.

9:23-24. Flute players were there to lead the crowd in mourning. Tradition preserved in the rabbis insisted on several professional women mourners for the funeral of even the poorest person; the funeral of a member of a prominent family like this one would have many mourners. The cathartic release of mourning included shrieking and beating of breasts. Because bodies decomposed rapidly in Palestine, mourners were to be assembled, if possible, immediately upon someone's death. Sleep was a common euphemism for death (though contrasted here).

9:25-26. The most defiling kind of ritual uncleanness one could contract in Jewish law came from touching a corpse, generating seven days' impurity (Num

19:11-22).

9:27-34

Healing Blind Eyes

9:27-31. “Son of David” was the title of the *Messiah, but in most expectations the Messiah was a political or military figure rather than a healer. But these blind men understand a connection between healing and Jesus’ identity that went beyond Jewish tradition. God ruled over blindness and sight (Ex 4:11; Prov 20:12) and could answer prophets’ prayers to remove and restore human sight (2 Kings 6:18-20). Matthew repeats or offers an analogous account at 20:29-34; Genesis and other earlier works likewise reported analogous incidents, inviting their audiences to read each incident in light of the others (e.g., Gen 12:10-20; 20:1-18; 26:7-11).

9:32-34. Elijah and Elisha had done extraordinary healing miracles; David is the only recorded *Old Testament figure God used in exorcism (1 Sam 16:23). Matthew 9:33 thus indicates that the crowds were greatly impressed with his miracles.

9:35-38

More Laborers Needed

The works of Jesus in 8:1–9:35 must become those of his disciples in chapter 10. Disciples were typically expected to carry on their teachers’ works.

9:35-36. Without Moses (Num 27:17) or a king (1 Kings 22:17; 2 Chron 18:16) Israel had been said to be “without a shepherd,” or ruler. When Israel was without other faithful shepherds (religious leaders), God himself would become its shepherd (Ezek 34:11-16, esp. 34:5: scattered for lack of a shepherd); the shepherd’s ministry included feeding (34:2-3), healing (34:4) and bringing back the lost sheep (34:4-6). Matthew 9:36 thus also implies that those charged with shepherding Israel, its leaders, were failing.

9:37-38. Harvest was urgent and had to be completed within a narrow window of time. “Harvest” could be used as an image for the end time (cf. comment on 3:12). A late first-century rabbi said something similar to 9:37; perhaps it was already a standard Jewish saying.

10:1-4

Sending the Twelve

Israel had twelve tribes, and groups that chose twelve leaders (as in the *Dead Sea Scrolls) did so because they believed that their own group was the true, obedient remnant of Israel.

Ancient sources often include lists of names, including of *disciples*. *Some of the names here are among the most common in ancient Judea and Galilee: Simon, James, Judas, and the like (“Mary” was most common among women). The lists in Luke and Acts replace Mark and Matthew’s “Thaddeus” with “Judas son of James” (cf. also Jn 14:22). Ancient documents show that it was common for people to go by more than one name, so the different lists of apostles probably do refer to the same people. Nicknames were common, appearing even on tomb inscriptions. “Cananaean” is Aramaic for “zealot” (Lk 6:15); thus some translations simply read “Simon the *Zealot” here. In Jesus’ day, this word could just mean “zealous one,” but it may mean that he had been involved in revolutionary activity before becoming Jesus’ follower, as it would probably mean when the Gospels were written.*

“Apostles” means “sent ones,” or commissioned representatives. The analogous Hebrew term was used for business agents, although the general concept is broader than that; a “sent one” acted on the full authority of the sender to the extent that one accurately represented the sender’s mission. Commissioning *narratives appear in the *Old Testament, as when Moses commissions Joshua to carry on Moses’ work and take the Promised Land (Deut 31:23). Teachers often allowed their advanced students to practice teaching while they were still students, to prepare them for their own future work.

10:5-15

The Mission

10:5. “Way of the Gentiles” probably means a road leading only to one of the pagan, Greek cities in Palestine; many Jewish people avoided roads that led into such cities anyway. Galilee was surrounded by *Gentile regions except in the south, where it shared borders with Samaria. (On *Samaritans, see comment on Jn 4:1-4.)

10:6. A common Jewish belief was that ten tribes of Israel had been lost and would be found in the time of the end. Here, however, Jesus uses “lost sheep of

Israel” in the more common Old Testament sense: they have gone astray from the Lord (Is 53:6; Jer 50:6; cf. Ezek 34:5). But cf. Matthew 10:18.

10:7-8. That the apostles’ mission is the same as Jesus’ is appropriate for “sent ones” (see comment on 10:1-4): they acted within the limits of their authorization. “As I [God] [gave the *law] for free, so you should” was a later Jewish saying applied to teachers of the law; whether it was a proverb Jesus was citing this early we cannot be sure.

10:9-10. They are to travel light, like some other groups: (1) peasants, who often had only one cloak (cf. 5:40); (2) some traveling philosophers, called *Cynics* (not present in Jewish Galilee, though probably represented as nearby as Tyre and the Decapolis, Gentile cities surrounding Galilee), who ideally had only a cloak, staff, cup, and, for begging, a bag; (3) some prophets, like Elijah and John the Baptist (see e.g., 1 Kings 18:13; 2 Kings 4:38; 5:15-19; 6:1; Mt 3:4). They are to be totally committed to their mission, not tied down with worldly concerns. A traveler could use a staff to fend off animals or robbers, or to keep one’s balance when walking; though homeless, even Cynics used staffs. The prohibited “bag” could have been used for begging (so the Cynics used it), different from depending on hospitality in 10:11; on “money belts,” see comment on Luke 6:38. It is said that Essenes received such hospitality from fellow Essenes in various cities that they did not need to take provisions when they traveled.

10:11-13. Showing hospitality by taking in travelers was one of the most important virtues in Mediterranean antiquity, especially in Judaism; Jesus could have drawn on Old Testament precedent for traveling ministers depending on such hospitality (2 Kings 4:8-11); cf. comment on Matthew 10:41. (Indeed, Israelite tradition had required even most wicked kings to respect prophets and to spare them despite their criticisms, which other ancient kings would not have endured.) Though hospitality was a virtue highly valued in Mediterranean antiquity generally, hospitality might prove less dependable during later missions in the *Diaspora. In Galilee, however, probably only the inhospitable or those hostile to Jesus’ message would refuse them altogether.

To whom and under what circumstances greetings should or should not be given were important issues of social protocol, especially because the common Jewish greeting, “Peace,” was really a blessing (a prayer implicitly invoking God but addressed to the recipient) meant to communicate peace. Jesus cuts through such issues of protocol with new directives.

10:14-15. Pious Jewish people returning to holy ground would not want even

the dust of pagan territory clinging to their sandals; Jesus' representatives here treat unresponsive regions as unholy or pagan. Sodom is set forth as the epitome of sinfulness both in the prophets and in subsequent Jewish tradition; the point here is probably that they rejected God's messengers, albeit lesser ones than Jesus (Gen 19). Earlier Scripture often used Sodom as the archetypical site of judgment (Is 13:19; Jer 50:40; Zeph 2:9) and applied the image to Israel (Deut 32:32; Is 1:10; 3:9; Jer 23:14; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46-49).

10:16-23

Promise of Persecution

10:16. The contrast between vicious wolves and harmless lambs or sheep was proverbial, and aggressors were often compared with wolves. Jewish people sometimes viewed themselves (Israel) as sheep among wolves (the Gentiles). Many also viewed doves as weak, timid or inconspicuous.

10:17. Before A.D. 70, local courts, or councils deciding cases, were run by local elders or priests, probably with an average of seven of them (in later rabbinic tradition, a minimum of three). Synagogues were the local places of public assembly, and thus provided the natural location for hearings and public discipline. Sometimes discipline was administered in the form of flogging; under second-century *rabbis' rules, Jewish flogging consisted of thirteen harsh strokes on the breast and twenty-six on the back with a strap of calf leather (forty is the maximum permissible, Deut 25:3). These words would have struck Jewish Christians as particularly painful, because they signified rejection of their preaching among their own people.

10:18. In Jewish thinking, a Jew betraying any Jew to Gentile persecutors was a horrendous act. "Governors" are Roman overseers in the provinces; the three levels were *propraetors*, *proconsuls* and *procurators*. "Kings" may refer only to Rome's vassal princes (e.g., Herod the Great earlier or Agrippa I later) but probably includes Parthian and other rulers from the East, indicating virtually universal persecution.

10:19-20. Jewish people thought of the *Holy Spirit especially as the Spirit of prophecy* who had anointed the prophets to speak God's message. Greek and Roman rhetoric emphasized careful preparation, yet people also respected those skilled enough to speak extemporaneously based on the knowledge they had already acquired.

10:21-22. See Micah 7:5-7 (more explicit in Mt 10:35-36); this family divisiveness also became part of other Jewish images of the end time (e.g., *1 *Enoch* 100:2). In a culture where family loyalty was essential and honor of parents paramount, these words would have sounded particularly horrific.

10:23. A Jewish tradition that may have been in circulation in Jesus' day warns that in the time of final tribulation, Jewish people persecuted for their faith would have to flee from one city to another. The disciples may have understood Jesus' words in these terms. Jesus may emphasize that his followers' mission to Israel will continue until the end (cf. 23:39), and some will survive till then (cf. 24:22). Some people viewed fleeing as dishonorable, but (at least outside battles) most people preferred it to death (cf. 2:13).

10:24-33

Comfort in Persecution

Like most early Christians and zealous Christians in many parts of the world today, Matthew's readers faced persecution and often other dangers as part of their daily lives. Jesus' words would comfort them.

10:24-25. Disciples were to serve their teachers, in hopes of ultimately becoming master teachers themselves, yet always owing the teacher respect. A slave could attain status if owned by a prominent master, and under rare circumstances (e.g., if owned by a *freedperson), he could attain equal status after—but never before—becoming free and attaining wealth too. Verse 25 contains a play on words: by reading “Beelzebul” as if it meant “master” (*Aramaic *be’el*) of the house (Hebrew *zebul*), Jesus spoke of the “master of the house.” “How much more” arguments were common (see e.g., 7:11; 10:29-31).

10:26-27. Secretive acts were often performed in darkness. Everything would come to light on the day of judgment, as was widely agreed; there was therefore no point in concealing anything now. The flat rooftops provided the best place for shouting messages out over the crowded streets.

10:28. Fearing (respecting, only in a much stronger way than we use the term *respect*) God was central to Jewish wisdom tradition and is repeatedly stressed in Jewish literature; some Jewish writers made affirmations about martyrdom similar to this passage (*4 Maccabees 13:14-15). Body and soul were instantly destroyed in some Jewish traditions about hell; in others, they were perpetually destroyed and tormented. Contrary to the assertions of many modern

scholars, many Jewish people in this period agreed with most Greeks that soul and body were separated by death.

10:29-31. Sparrows were one of the cheapest items sold for poor people's food in the marketplace, the cheapest of all birds. Two were here purchased for an *assarion*, a small copper coin of little value (less than a sixteenth of a denarius, hence less than an hour's wages); Luke 12:6 seems to indicate that they were even cheaper if purchased in larger quantities. Some Jewish traditions preserved later recognize God's sovereignty even over birds, which they sometimes considered inconsequential. 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 people! "Not a hair of (one's) head" falling was a familiar biblical promise of protection (1 Sam 14:45; 2 Sam 14:11; 1 Kings 1:52; Acts 27:34). While not itself a promise of universal protection, Matthew 10:30 thus invites trust in God's care and ability to protect.

10:32-33. Jewish teachers spoke of "confessing" God and warned against denying him; Jesus here speaks of himself in these terms. In some Jewish descriptions of the day of judgment, the testimony of righteous persons for or against others bore much weight with God. Rabbis spoke of God's angels or his attributes of mercy or judgment pleading a case before him. Here Jesus' advocacy before the Father weighs more heavily than anything else in this world.

10:34-39

The Cost of Discipleship

10:34. It was generally believed that there would be great sufferings before the end, and that the *Messiah would lead his people in a triumphant war, followed by a time of peace. Jesus assures his listeners that the promised era of peace is yet some time off and goes on to explain the nature of the current sufferings and conflict.

10:35-36. The context of Micah 7:6, cited here, describes the awful evils in the land and the untrustworthiness of even the closest relatives and friends that would continue until the Lord would come to vindicate those who hoped in him. At least some Jewish people applied that text to the final tribulation. Given the belief held by many Jewish people that a time of sufferings would precede the end, the *disciples may have understood this saying as suggesting that they were

already experiencing the sufferings of that time. A newly married couple often lived with the groom's parents (hence the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law here).

10:37. Jesus here expounds on the text just cited (Mic 7:6) to make a point virtually inconceivable to most of his hearers. Loving family members, especially parents, was one of the highest duties in Judaism; the only one who could rightfully demand greater love was God himself (Deut 6:4-5; cf. Exod 32:27; Deut 13:6-11; 2 Maccabees 7:22-23).

10:38. Crucifixion was a violent, painful and humiliating death by slow torture. A condemned criminal would carry on his back the horizontal beam of the cross out to the site of his execution, generally amid an antagonistic, jeering mob. This verse means a shameful, painful road to a dreadful execution.

10:39. Most Jewish people contrasted the life of this world with the life of the world to come.

10:40-42

Receiving Christ's Messengers

This passage returns to the theme of hospitality toward the messengers of the *gospel* (10:11-14). *The principle here is like that of the appointed messenger or agent in Judaism, who represented his sender to the full extent of his commission. God, his glory and law, and Israel were also connected in this way in Jewish tradition. This principle had always been true of the prophets (e.g., Exod 16:8; 1 Sam 8:7; cf. Num 14:2, 11; 16:11): one who embraced them embraced their message and thus God's will. Those who provided for them were likewise rewarded (1 Kings 17:9-24; 2 Kings 4:8-37). A cup of water was the only gift of hospitality the poorest person might have available, but it would symbolize enough. Cold water was highly preferred for drinking (see comment on Rev 3:15-16).*

11:1-19

More Than a Prophet: The Forerunner

Matthew 11:1 is an epilogue to 9:37–10:42; in 11:2-19, John, like Jesus and the Twelve, becomes a model for Christian discipleship.

11:1. Emissaries would often be sent to prepare people for the coming of a

king or other important figure before his arrival. “Cities” is meant in a broad rather than a technical Greek sense: there is no indication that Jesus approached major cities like Sepphoris or Tiberias. Even most of the larger agricultural towns had fewer than three thousand inhabitants, and the Galilean countryside was full of villages.

11:2-3. John’s attitude here contrasts strikingly with 3:14. Some commentators have suggested that John is concerned about reports that Jesus has been touching the unclean (8:3; 9:20, 25); to this report Jesus replies with the results of those touches (11:5). More likely, John, like most of his contemporaries, is tempted to think of a *kingdom bringer* (3:11) or *royal Messiah* rather than a “mere” miracle worker, so Jesus vindicates his healing mission with a text about the blessings of the messianic era (11:5). John’s *disciples had probably traveled on the main road northward from Herod’s Perea fortress Machaerus, where John was imprisoned, through Perea beside the Jordan, to cross west into Galilee, where Jesus was teaching.

11:4-6. Jesus cites signs from Isaiah 35:5-6 that refer to the arrival of the messianic era; cf. Isaiah 26:19; 61:1. (In a messianic context, a *Qumran text apparently attributes to God *eschatological healing and Isaiah 61’s preaching to the poor, as here.)

11:7. Reeds were fragile (Is 42:3; *3 Maccabees 2:22), so a figurative “reed shaken by the wind” was notoriously weak (1 Kings 14:15) and undependable (2 Kings 18:21; Ezek 29:6). Tall reeds (as high as five meters) grew around the Jordan where John ministered. The image may also contrast with the pampered prince implied in 11:8: Antipas employed a reed as an emblem on his coins a few years earlier (up until A.D. 26).

11:8. Prophets were rarely well-to-do, and in times of national wickedness they were forced to operate outside societal boundaries. (In David’s time, Nathan and Gad could be court prophets; but by Ahab’s time the court prophets were corrupt, and Elijah and others had to hide out in the wilderness or, in better days, at least remain outside the king’s palace.) Even the plural “houses” could allude to Antipas’s multiple palaces (or to multiple buildings comprising such palaces), although a broader application is also possible. Though Antipas was no king (see comment on 14:1), he was closer to royalty than anyone else in Galilee; his palaces included the fortress of Machaerus where John was executed.

11:9-10. Some Jews in the first century believed that full-fledged prophets had died out long ago, but they would have been open to the restoration of

prophets in the end time. By fulfilling Malachi 3:1, John is more than just any herald of God; he is the direct announcer of the Lord, fulfilling the *prophecy of Elijah's return (Mal 4:5-6).

11:11. This statement elevates Jesus' disciples rather than demeans John (cf. 11:9-10). 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. Greek rhetoric often used comparison with an esteemed person to praise another all the more. Calling John the "greatest" was a typically Jewish form of praise, which could even be applied to more than one person at a time; *rabbis, for instance, could in the same breath speak of both Joseph and Moses as the greatest figures of Israel's history (in the Old Testament cf., e.g., 2 Kings 18:5; 23:25)*. Those "born of women" was a familiar Old Testament and Jewish expression for humans (e.g., Job 14:1).

11:12. Revolutionaries, such as those later known as *Zealots, wanted to bring in the kingdom by military force. Jesus may use their zeal (cf. Prov 11:16) in a figurative way for the single-minded commitment necessary to enter the kingdom; he describes his followers as *spiritual* zealots (cf. Mt 10:34).

11:13. Jewish people sometimes summarized the Bible as "the Law and the Prophets"; many of them believed that after the biblical prophets the prophetic voice was muted until the messianic time. John thus introduces the messianic era.

11:14-15. Malachi 4:5 had promised the return of Elijah, who had reportedly never died (2 Kings 2:11); Elijah's return thus became part of Jewish expectation for the future.

11:16-17. "To what may we compare . . . ?" was a familiar idiom preceding a rabbinic *parable or argument from analogy. The marketplace was a town's open, most public place.

Although scholars debate the question, spoiled children who pretend to have weddings and funerals (one later game was called "bury the grasshopper") may stand for Jesus' and John's dissatisfied opponents; dissatisfied with other children who will not play either game, they are sad no matter what. The term for "mourn" here can mean "beat the breast," a conventional mourning custom in Jewish Palestine. Custom mandated that bystanders join in any bridal or funeral processions.

11:18-19. John the Baptist fit the role of an apparently *ascetic prophet, like Elijah; Jesus follows a godly model more like David, but both are proper in their*

place. The charge that John “has a demon” suggests either that he is a false prophet possessed by an evil spirit, or that he is a sorcerer who manipulates a spirit guide; either charge would warrant the death penalty under earlier biblical *law (Deut 13:1-11; 18:9-20). “Glutton and drunkard” was also a capital charge (Deut 21:20). The charges against both prophets thus constitute serious accusations.

11:20-24

Judgment on Cities

Judgment oracles against nations were standard in the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Amos); they also appear in the Jewish **Sibylline Oracles* before, during and after the *New Testament period. The principle that those who had more light were judged more strictly appears in the Old Testament (cf. Amos 3:2; Jon 4:11).

11:20-21. Jewish people thought of Tyre and Sidon as purely pagan cities (cf. 1 Kings 16:31), though some of their inhabitants who were exposed to the truth had been known to repent (1 Kings 17:9-24). “Sackcloth and ashes” was dressing characteristic of mourning, including the mourning of *repentance (Job 42:6; Dan 9:3). Chorazin and Bethsaida were among the small villages on the lake of Galilee where Jesus ministered; Chorazin was a short walk, less than two miles, from Capernaum. It was unknown to people outside Palestine.

11:22. According to some Jewish stories about the time of the end (“the day of judgment,” as it was often called), the righteous among the pagan nations would testify against the rest of their people, making clear that no one had any excuse for rejecting the truth about God.

11:23. Judgment was often described in the terms Jesus uses here (Is 5:14; **Jubilees* 24:31), especially against a ruler who exalted himself as a deity (Is 14:14-15, of the Babylonian king’s death).

11:24. See comment on 11:22.

11:25-27

God’s Revelation

In Jewish wisdom tradition, it was not those who were wise in their own eyes and leaned to their own understanding who were genuinely wise (Job 12:24-25;

Prov 3:5-7; 12:15; 16:2; 21:2; 26:12), but the simple who began with the fear of God (Job 28:28; Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10). God confounds the wisdom of the “wise” (Is 19:11-12; 29:14; 47:10; Jer 8:8-9; Ezek 28:3-12). Only God fully knew personified Wisdom (Baruch 3:31-32), so only he could reveal it (Wisdom of Solomon 9:16-17). As the revealer of God in 11:27, Jesus assumes a position often assumed by divine Wisdom in Jewish tradition. For the image of infants, cf. 10:42 and 18:1-10; God had always favored the lowly (e.g., 1 Sam 2:3-9).

11:28-30

The True Sabbath

11:28. God offered rest to the weary (Is 40:28-31; cf. the invitation of divine Wisdom in Sirach 24:19).

11:29-30. Animals often carried yokes; when a man carried a yoke he was normally very poor and would carry it on his shoulders (cf., e.g., Jer 27:2); Judaism applied this image to subjection or obedience. Jewish people spoke of carrying the yoke of God’s *law and the yoke of his *kingdom, which one accepted by acknowledging that God was one and by keeping his commandments. Jesus speaks of his own yoke in similar terms. Matthew intends Jesus’ words about rest as a contrast with Pharisaic sabbath rules in the following passage (12:1-14): the promise of “rest for your souls” comes from Jeremiah 6:16, where God promises to stay his wrath if the people turn to him instead of to the words of the false religious leaders (6:13-14, 20). The labor, rest and yoke together also echo Sirach 51:23-27; greater than the sage Ben Sira, Jesus presents himself as wisdom itself.

Using the term translated “gentle” or “meek” here, Greeks did praise rulers who showed kindness and mercy. Except for those of low status, Greeks did not normally welcome self-abasement, a value more prominent in Jewish piety.

12:1-8

Food on the Sabbath

Other details are noted in Mark 2:23-27, although details in Matthew, written mainly for Jewish Christians, would have sounded less like a sabbath violation to Jewish ears than Mark’s wording would. Matthew’s structure follows the standard form for many ancient reports of arguments: he summarizes the

situation (12:1-2), presents arguments by example (12:3-4), analogy (12:5), comparison (12:6), citation (12:7) and ultimate basis (12:8).

12:1. Jewish *law based on Deuteronomy 23:25 (cf. Ruth 2:2-3) provided for the poor to eat food as they passed through a field. The issue here is thus not that the *disciples took someone's grain but that they picked it on the sabbath; later rabbinic interpretation specifically designated harvesting and grinding grain as forbidden on the sabbath.

12:2. The modern picture of *Pharisees as legalists unfairly trivializes the Pharisees' piety (sometimes intentionally, so modern legalists will not have to address Jesus' real bases for criticism). Not only the Pharisees but other Jewish people throughout the ancient world honored the sabbath and celebrated it with joy. The Bible itself had forbidden infractions of the sabbath under pain of death.

12:3-4. Although highhanded rejection of the sabbath was regarded as rebellion against God, different Jewish groups made arguments for differing interpretations of sabbath laws and were not in a position to legally enforce their views against others. Jesus' arguments here would not have satisfied the Pharisees, but they might have satisfied elders or priests serving as judges on local courts. Outright rejection of the sabbath was viewed as rejecting the law, but Jesus rejects only its abuse.

12:5-6. As we know from later sources, most *rabbis would have questioned an argument based merely on an example such as the one in 12:3-4 and Mark 2:25-26; it is significant that Matthew, writing for Jewish readers, has an argument from the law itself. The stricter school of Pharisees, the Shammaites, accused the more lenient *Hillelite school of Pharisees of breaking holy days; Hillelites, like Jesus in 12:5, offered analogies with the priests or could appeal to temple service overriding the sabbath.*

The law of Moses commanded work for priests on the sabbath (Num 28:10). This is a Jewish "how much more" argument: if acceptable for the guardians of the temple, how much more for one greater than the temple? The temple had become the central symbol of the Jewish faith, and the suggestion that a human being could be greater than the temple would have struck most ancient Jewish ears as presumptuous and preposterous. Jewish teachers could, however, accept and argue from the principle that some things took precedence over sabbath observance (temple ritual, saving a life, defensive warfare, etc.).

12:7-8. Jesus goes on the offensive here with a still higher principle of the *Old Testament; cf. 9:13.

12:9-14

Healing on the Sabbath

Other details are noted in the comment on Mark 3:1-6. Whereas Mark's argument would not have been as persuasive to Pharisees, being an argument from analogy from greater to lesser (3:4), Matthew includes a more helpful argument from lesser to greater (12:12).

12:9-10. As one may gather here, informal dialogues could occur in smaller *synagogue gatherings in this period that are quite different from the stricter ritual observed in most churches and synagogues today*. The predominant school of Pharisees in this period, the *Shammaites*, *did not allow praying for the sick on the sabbath; the minority school, however, the Hillelites* (who later became predominant after 70), allowed it.

12:11. The *Essenes would have forbidden even rescuing an animal on the sabbath, but many Pharisees and most other Jewish interpreters would have agreed with Jesus. Pits were sometimes dug to capture predators such as wolves, but livestock could fall into them as well. Counterquestions (as here, answering 12:10) were common in the debates of Jewish teachers.

12:12. Jesus here uses a standard Jewish argument, "how much more" (*qal vahomer*): If one is concerned for a sheep, how much more for a person? This too was an argument his opponents had to understand, and by analogy it showed the inconsistency of their interpretation of biblical sabbath laws.

12:13. Pharisees debated whether medicine could be applied on the sabbath. By contrast, Jesus here not only applied no medicine; he did not even lay hands on the man.

12:14. Pharisees, who had little political power in this period, could do no better than plot. Jewish courts could not enforce the death penalty in this period, although the law of Moses allowed it for sabbath violation (Ex 31:14; 35:2). Indeed, these Pharisees violate standard Pharisaic ethics, which could tolerate opposing biblical arguments and which emphasized leniency, especially regarding death sentences. The issue is not their official ethics (which often resemble those of Jesus) but their hearts.

12:15-21

The Spirit-Anointed Servant

12:15-16. Withdrawing from this synagogue with new followers was not

actually destroying the synagogue; first-century Palestinian Judaism was very diverse, and not everyone in a synagogue need hold the same views.

12:17-18. The servant passage in Isaiah 42:1-4 in context refers inescapably to Israel, not to the *Messiah, despite a later Jewish tradition applying it to the Messiah (see 44:1, 21; 49:3). But because God's servant Israel failed in its mission (42:18-19), God chose one within Israel to restore the rest of the people (49:5-7), who would take the remainder of the punishment due Israel (cf. 40:2) in its place (52:13–53:12). Thus Matthew declares that the Messiah takes up the servant mission of Isaiah 42:1-4, and he is marked by the presence of the *Spirit. Matthew translates Isaiah to conform to the language of Matthew 3:17 (“my beloved . . . in whom I am well pleased”), which was otherwise closer to Genesis 22:2.

12:19-21. This passage stresses Jesus' meekness, in contrast to the warlike Messiah many people hoped for; this was a reason for the messianic secret (on which see the introduction to Mark in this commentary). It was customary to quote only part of a passage, because the more biblically informed hearers would know the context; Matthew wants all of his readers to catch the note on which he concludes: salvation for non-Jews (12:21; cf. 12:18).

12:22-37

Blaspheming the Spirit

See further comment on Mark 3:20-30.

12:22-23. The *Messiah of Jewish expectation, a descendant of David, was not a miracle worker, but since God was with Jesus in such extraordinary ways, it is not difficult to see how messianic hopes would be attached to him. David was also the closest example to an exorcist reported in the Old Testament (1 Sam 16:23); Jewish tradition associated exorcism especially with his son Solomon.

12:24. Pagan exorcists sought to remove *demons by magical incantations*. *In the second century rabbis still accused Jesus and Jewish Christians of using sorcery to achieve the miracles that everyone acknowledged they were performing. Sorcery merited the death penalty under Old Testament law (Ex 22:18).*

The title Beelzebul, “Lord of the House,” probably alludes to “Beelzebub” (“lord of flies,” a possible corruption of Baal-zebul), the local deity of Ekron (2 Kings 1:2-3). The title was appropriately applied in some later Jewish sources to

*Satan (**Testament of Solomon* 3).

12:25-26. Jesus does not deny the existence of other exorcists here. But a demon's retreat that meanwhile drew attention to another of Satan's servants would only be a strategic retreat; such possible activity of magical exorcists contrasts with the wholesale exorcizing of the masses that Jesus undertakes, which clearly signifies a defeat of Satan (12:29). Quick, witty repartee was characteristic of popular teachers in both Jewish and Greek traditions.

12:27. Other Jewish circles also affirmed the need for exorcism (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.47; 4Q242 f1 3.4; cf. Tob 8:3). "Your sons" probably means "members of your own group" or disciples (just as, e.g., "sons of the prophets" in the Old Testament meant "prophets"). Because some of the Pharisees' associates also cast out demons (by methods that would look more magical than Jesus'), they should consider their charge carefully. On being the judges of others in a group, see comment on 12:41-42.

12:28. It was generally believed that the *Spirit had been quenched or muted in some way after the Old Testament prophets had died, but that this withdrawal of the Spirit would be reversed in the time of the kingdom*, when the Messiah came. In the context of 12:18, Matthew wishes his readers to hear this text as Jesus' claim to be the Messiah (12:23).

12:29. Many early Jewish sources report that Satan or demons were "bound," or imprisoned, after God subdued them; magical texts often speak of "binding" demons by magical procedures. Here, however, the *parable about tying up a protective householder means that Jesus had defeated Satan and could therefore plunder his possessions—free the demon-possessed. Some plausibly find an allusion to God's activity in Isaiah 49:24-25.

12:30. Ancient Jewish teachers stated their points as starkly as possible; this statement and the one in Mark 9:40 both mean "A person is either on one side or the other." Other contrast sayings similar to this one circulated in antiquity.

12:31-32. Many Jewish teachers taught that one's sufferings in this life could make up for sins; but certain grave sins would be carried over into the world to come. (Some teachers declared similarly that King Manasseh's *repentance allowed him to be forgiven in this world but not in the world to come.) "Highhanded" sins—deliberate rebellion against God—could not be *atoned for under Old Testament law. Blasphemy was punishable by death (Lev 24:10-23).

Jesus thus regards blasphemy against the Spirit—permanently rejecting his identity (Mt 12:18) even when attested by the Spirit's works (12:28)—as the worst of sins. (On the meaning of blasphemy in general, see comment on 9:3-8.)

12:33. For a figurative use of “fruits” in the Old Testament, see comment on 3:8; the fruits here are their words (12:34-37).

12:34-35. Their words (12:36-37) against him revealed their heart; on “offspring of vipers,” see comment on 3:7 (cf. also Is 57:3-4; 59:5-8). Other Jewish teachers also often stressed the importance of a right heart (though believing something and being something are not always the same thing, as the lives of many who claim to be Christians today testify). People were characterized by their actions or speech as fools, wise, sinners, etc., in Jewish wisdom tradition.

12:36-37. Many proverbs emphasize the importance of sound speech and that silence is better than unhealthy speech (e.g., Prov 10:11; 15:4; 17:27-28). In context (Mt 12:32), Jesus’ opponents reveal their hearts especially by rejecting testimony about Jesus’ identity that was just as critical as the basic Jewish confession, the Shema’ (Deut 6:4). Most Jewish people would have agreed that God will bring everything to light on the day of judgment.

12:38-45

A Demonized Generation

Here Jesus returns the charge: they, not he, are servants of Satan. Returning charges was standard practice in ancient courts and presumably other accusation settings.

12:38-41. Jewish discussions of the end times featured converts among the poor who would testify against those who said they were too poor to follow God, converts among the rich, converts among the Gentiles and so on. Here Jesus appeals to pagans who converted. Some Jewish teachers disliked Jonah for his initial disobedience to God “on behalf of Israel”—they said that he feared that Nineveh’s repentance would leave unrepentant Israel condemned (*Mekilta Pisha* 1.80-82). In the Old Testament, Nineveh, responsible for permanently destroying the northern kingdom of Israel, epitomized wickedness (e.g., Nahum 2:8; 3:1, 7); but the repentance of Nineveh in Jonah 3:10 also taught that God could spare pagans who turned to him (Jon 1:15-16; 4:10-11) as well as judge his disobedient servants (1:14-15). (Some rabbis appreciated Jonah, suggesting that he resented Gentile repentance because it showed up Israel’s lack of it.)

“Three days and nights” (Jon 2:1) need not imply complete days; parts of a twenty-four-hour day counted as representing the whole day. In early Jewish

law, only after three days was the witness to a person's death accepted.

12:42. Some traditions identified the "Queen of the South," the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1), with the queen of Ethiopia (cf. Acts 8:27).

12:43-45. Jesus' point: Although he is casting out *demons, this wicked generation is inviting all the more back in. The desert was a natural haunt of demons in much of Jewish tradition, and "sevenfold" was a traditional way to express severe punishment (Gen 4:15, 24; Lev 26:18), so the hearers would have readily caught Jesus' point. Jesus thus reverses his opponents' charges in 12:24; reversing charges was standard practice (including in ancient defense speeches in courts).

12:46-50

Jesus' Real Family

See comment on Mark 3:31-34. Fidelity to and respect for one's family were so heavily emphasized that such words must have struck their hearers quite forcefully. Many Jewish interpreters regarded the command to honor father and mother as the most important in the *law.

Family relationships in the ancient world were often defined by hierarchy even more than by kinship ties, so that wives and especially children (and, in wealthy homes, slaves) were expected to obey the father of the household. Jesus can thus define his "mother, brothers and sisters" as those who obey his Father. To disavow literal family members was so repulsive that even using the image would have been culturally offensive. Further, spiritual or figurative kinship language in Judaism (especially "brothers") was usually viewed ethnically (fellow Israelites).

13:1-9

The Sower, the Seed and the Soils

Jewish sages from before till long after Jesus' era commonly taught in *parables, sermon illustrations to communicate their main point or points. Parables illustrated their teaching and also could provoke new ways of considering it. In the *New Testament, though others use illustrations, only Jesus uses story parables, a Palestinian Jewish teaching form; it cannot be attributed to composition by the later church outside Jewish Palestine.* The range of Jesus'

parables (e.g., stories, similes, riddles) fit the *Old Testament range of the Hebrew term *mashal*.

Later *rabbis developed fuller story parables like those of Jesus, though theirs (reflecting their higher-scale audience) included more royal courts and conventional values and fewer purely agrarian images. Most of the Roman Empire's inhabitants were rural peasant farmers or herders. The literate elite often ignored this large population, but Jesus' illustrations show that he ministered frequently among this class.

13:1-2. Jesus gets in the boat for the purpose of relieving the overcrowding, but this would also make him easier to hear; a speaker to a crowd on shore would produce an ideal acoustic situation.

13:3-4. Jewish teachers often told illustrative stories like this one, although Jesus, addressing Galilean farmers, focuses more on agrarian images than later rabbis usually did. See "parable" in glossary. Most Galileans (like the majority of people in the empire generally) were agrarian peasants; Galilee had only two significant cities, in neither of which is Jesus recorded as ministering. Seed was sometimes (though not always) sown before the ground was plowed; it thus commonly befell any of the fates reported here. A farmer could either cast the seed by hand, as probably here, or let it trickle from holes in a sack carried by an animal. The "path" or "road" is one of the many footpaths through the field.

13:5-6. Much of the land in Palestine has only a thin layer of soil over rock; if the sower had not plowed first, he would not be aware that he wasted seed on this soil until after the fact.

13:7. These thistles were probably unseen too; instead of having been pulled out, they may have just been cut or burned, leaving roots from which thistles could grow with the seed to choke it out. In April, thistles could grow taller than a meter around roads.

13:8. Thirtyfold, sixtyfold and a hundredfold are tremendously good harvests from Galilean soil. The Jordan Valley normally yielded between ten-and a hundredfold, so a hundredfold need not be a miraculous harvest (Gen 26:12; cf. Amos 9:13). But for much of Palestine, the average yield was tenfold (meaning that ten seeds were harvested for every seed sown), and all the figures Jesus reports here are very good yields.

13:9. *Disciples learned especially by carefully listening to their teachers.

13:10-23

The Sower Explained: Understanding the Word

The Sower Explained: Understanding the word

That some members of the community of disciples would not persevere fits Old Testament models; in the Old Testament, some persons, like Saul, turned away from obedience to God, whereas others, like David, persevered through many trials.

13:10. Disciples asked their teacher questions, normally away from crowds and interlocutors, till they understood what he meant. In the case of obscure or vague public teaching, they sometimes questioned their teacher privately as a group.

13:11-13. Parables were meant to explain a rabbi's point by illustrating it; the majority of ancient Jewish parables include an interpretation, sometimes with multiple points of correspondence to the story (in contrast to what some earlier modern scholars contended). If the point of the parable were not stated, however, the parable would amount to no more than a story—or a riddle. The *Qumran sectarians believed that God had given them special revelation of divine mysteries not available to outsiders. Rabbis (and some other ancient teachers) had some more secretive teachings that they thought only their closest disciples could handle, and they reserved these for private instruction. The meaning of Jesus' parables, then, would be understood only by those who chose to become insiders. They functioned like sages' riddles, inviting contemplation.

13:14-15. The people in Jesus' day were like the people in Isaiah's day who heard the word but could not really hear and repent (Is 6:9-10).

13:16-17. Some Jewish texts describe how the righteous in the Old Testament 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 in contrast to the blind of 13:15) was an accepted rhetorical technique of the day.

13:18-19. Greek writers could use seed for word, and sometimes used "sowing seed" to symbolize education; Jewish writers applied God "sowing seed" in Israel to the *law* (e.g., 4 Ezra 9:31-37). Contrary to the assumptions of many scholars about Jesus' parables, ancient Jewish teachers often told parables with multiple points of comparison. Even more often, they offered interpretations immediately following their parables.

13:20-23. Outsiders chose what they would do with the word when it came to them. Rabbis sometimes said that one would be consumed with either the law or with the cares of this world (v. 22).

13:24-30

The Story of Wheat and Tares

Wealthy landowners controlled most of the rural land throughout the Roman Empire; their estates were worked either by free peasants or by slaves, whose options in life were roughly the same (except that slaves could also be beaten or sold). Many of Jesus' hearers (13:34) may have been rural farmers on larger estates, who would have readily identified with the difficulty of the situation he described.

13:24. "The kingdom is like someone who . . ." does not mean that the *kingdom is compared only to the person*. Rabbinic parables often began with, "To what may such and such be compared?" or, "Such and such is like . . ." In these parables the phrase meant that the subject was being explained by the whole analogy that followed, not just by the next word. Thus the kingdom here is compared not with the person alone, but with the entire situation Jesus goes on to describe. Parables sometimes compared God with a landowner.

13:25-27. People usually slept after lunch, but especially (and at greatest length) at night. Ancient farmers sometimes feuded, and Roman law even had to forbid the practice of sowing poisonous plants in a neighbor's field. The most basic staple of the Palestinian diet (and the ancient diet in general) was bread; thus wheat was critical. But a poisonous weed, a kind of ryegrass known as darnel (*lolium temulentum*; usually translated "tares") looked like wheat in the early stages and could only be distinguished from it when the ear appeared.

13:28-29. The fields were normally weeded in the spring, but if the weeds were discovered too late—as here—one would risk uprooting the wheat with them; the master does not want to risk his wheat. Once they were fully grown, however, harvesters could cut the wheat just below the head, leaving the shorter tares to be cut separately.

13:30. Although first-century Palestine was undoubtedly more forested than it became in subsequent times, much of the earlier forest had been cut down, and fuel could not be wasted; once dried, the darnel at least proved useful for something—fuel for burning.

13:31-33

The Stories of Mustard Seed and Leaven

The point of both *parables is that the mighty kingdom everyone expected could*

issue from apparently obscure beginnings—like Jesus and the disciples.

13:31-32. Scholars still dispute what plant is meant by the “mustard seed.” Nevertheless, by no conjecture is it the smallest of all seeds that Jesus’ listeners could have known (the orchid seed is smaller); the point is that it was recognized as very small and yet yielded a large shrub. Around the Sea of Galilee, it can reach a height of ten feet and has sometimes reached fifteen feet. Its usual height, however, is about four feet; because it would grow anew each year, birds could not nest in it when they built nests in early spring. The *hyperbole Jesus applies to the best image of growth from tiny to large he had available does not change the point, however; the kingdom might begin in obscurity, but it would culminate in glory.

Even if birds could not nest in the mustard plant, they could perch in it (Matthew’s term here was sometimes used that way); Matthew’s language here alludes to Daniel 4:12, the splendor of another ruler’s kingdom. Sources suggest that Palestinian custom relegated mustard seeds to fields rather than gardens; one may thus contrast Matthew 13:31 with Luke 13:19, each adjusting the image for their respective readerships.

13:33. Roman cities had bakeries, but the image here is that of a rural Galilean woman fixing her own bread. Leaven, or yeast, would be mixed through the meal. Three pecks of flour, roughly a bushel, was all that a woman could knead, and the resulting bread would feed about a hundred people. This extraordinary quantity may prefigure the unexpected greatness of the kingdom.

13:34-35

Secret Teachings

See comment on 13:10-13. Matthew cites Psalm 78:2, where the psalmist describes his knowledge in traditional terms of Hebrew wisdom, then goes on to give its content in the rest of the psalm: the history of God’s faithful, saving acts and of his people’s rebellion.

13:36-43

The Final Separation of Wheat and Tares

Many *Essenes and a small number of other Jews withdrew from mainstream Jewish society to seek greater purity; *Pharisees limited certain kinds of contact*

*with those they considered impure. But most expected the righteous and wicked in the world to be separated only on the day of judgment, recognizing that God alone knew the hearts of all people. Only at the end, at the day of judgment, would the righteous and the wicked be effectively separated. The harvest is used elsewhere (e.g., 4 Ezra 4:30-32; *2 Baruch 70:2; cf. Is 32:13-15; Jer 31:27-28; Hos 2:21-23; 6:11) as a symbol for the end, and Jewish texts sometimes compare hell with a furnace (*1 Enoch 54:6; some manuscripts in 98:3; 4 Ezra 7:36). The *Son of Man's authority might evoke Daniel 7:13-14. Other Jewish texts (perhaps following Dan 12:2-3) also spoke of the righteous shining with glory in the future kingdom.*

13:44-46

The Kingdom's Value

13:44. Treasures were often buried for safekeeping. The most likely circumstance envisioned here is that of a peasant who, while working the field of a wealthy landowner, found the treasure but covered it again lest the landowner claim it for himself. The peasant then invested all his own resources into that field to procure the treasure. Rabbis told stories of abandoning much for the study of the *law. Stories of finding lost treasures naturally circulated among the poor; they usually emphasized the wealthy outcome, but Jesus uses the story line to stir his hearers to sacrifice whatever necessary for a treasure far greater than any on earth.

13:45-46. Divers sought pearls in the Red Sea, Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, and some pearls, imported by the rich, could be worth the equivalent of millions of dollars. Jesus' hearers were probably familiar with the basic story line; there seems to have been a folktale that ran similarly, although it did not make the same point about the *kingdom.

13:47-50

The Final Separation of Good and Bad Fish

For further discussion see 4:19; on separation, 13:36-43; for the furnace, see comment on 13:40. Different kinds of nets were used for fishing; dragnets (the kind used here) were much larger than the fishing nets employed in 4:18. Dragnets had floats on top and sinkers on the bottom to keep one part of the

wide end of the net at the surface while the other part dragged below, catching fish in the seine.

13:51-52

Scribes for the Kingdom

The *law and wisdom were often compared with treasure (and sometimes with a pearl); *scribes, who were specially conversant with the law, naturally had the “old” treasure, and the message of the kingdom gave them something new.* The image is that of a householder paying out old and new coins kept in a strongbox hidden in his home. Some scholars have suggested that Matthew’s Gospel addresses especially Christian scribes whose vocation is to disciple the Gentiles to the greatest teacher, Jesus (28:19).

13:53-58

Dishonor at Home

See comment on Mark 6:1-6 for more details. The tradition of prophets being rejected by their own town was old (Jer 1:1; 11:21-23), but the theme of prophets being persecuted had developed even further in subsequent Jewish lore.

When Jesus was growing up in Nazareth, the demand for carpenters there was great (to rebuild nearby Sepphoris, which had been burned and its surviving inhabitants enslaved); thus it is not surprising that this was Joseph’s occupation. Carpenters engaged in woodwork, such as wooden plows, chairs and the woodwork on roofs. They could also engage in masonry where buildings were made of stone. Nazareth itself was a small village in this period, with perhaps sixteen hundred to two thousand inhabitants according to high, older estimates and perhaps five hundred by some more recent ones; Jesus would thus have been known to most of his townspeople. The size of Jesus’ family here would not be unusual by the standards of his era. As in 13:57, biblical prophets were sometimes rejected in their home town (Jer 1:1; 11:21-23) and even more often by their own people; early Judaism developed this emphasis even further.

14:1-12

Herod Executes John

See Mark 6:14-29 for considerably more detail. This passage refers not to Herod the Great, who died within several years of Jesus' birth, but to Herod Antipas, Herod the Great's son by a *Samaritan mother, and full brother of Archelaus (2:22). He had ruled in Galilee and Perea (the latter was a narrow strip of land on the east of the Jordan) since about 4 B.C., and continued in power till A.D. 39. John's martyrdom foreshadows that of Jesus; ancient authors and audiences understood suspense and foreshadowing.

14:1. Matthew uses Herod Antipas's actual title, "tetrarch," rather than the sarcastic or loose one Mark gives him ("king"). "Tetrarch" originally meant ruler of one-quarter of some territory, but Romans applied it to rulers of any portion; Herod the Great's kingdom had been divided in 4 B.C. among Archelaus (later supplanted by Roman procurators), Antipas and Philip.

14:2. Probably Antipas envisions a temporary resuscitation like those performed on behalf of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:22; 2 Kings 4:34-35), rather than the permanent *eschatological *resurrection, which was a corporate resurrection reserved for the end of the age (Dan 12:2).

14:3-4. The first-century historian *Josephus also reports Herod Antipas's affair with his sister-in-law Herodias. The tetrarch and his paramour divorced their spouses to marry one another, and Herod thereby offended his former father-in-law, the Nabatean king, ultimately leading to a war in which Herod's honor suffered greatly. John thus surely expected that Herod would resent his preaching, but he preached anyway; Herod could well have taken John's moral preaching as a political criticism. Many of Antipas's own subjects, especially in the region where John was probably preaching and was finally imprisoned, were ethnic Nabateans with divided loyalties, and Antipas would want to stifle criticism.

14:5-6. Jewish people did not normally celebrate birthdays in this period (Josephus declares celebrating birthdays forbidden). But though most Jews considered birthday celebrations a *Gentile custom, culturally prestigious Greek customs influenced the aristocracy. Rejecting invitations to such parties without good excuse would risk enmity. Lewd dancing was common entertainment at drinking parties; normally a princess would never participate, but the Herodian family already had a reputation for its moral extravagances. At Herod's fortress Machaerus, men and women dined in separate halls (a custom known in the eastern Mediterranean), so Herodias would not have directly witnessed Herod's behavior toward her daughter Salome.

14:7. Herod's oath is a drunken one; as a vassal of Rome, he had no

authority to compromise any of his territory. (Cf. comment on Mark 6:23.) Hearers could also recoil at Herod's lust (cf. Mt 5:28); to sleep with the daughter of one's wife was incest (Lev 18:17).

14:8-9. It was an affront to one's honor to break an oath in front of guests, even if (as in this case) Jewish teachers would have preferred to absolve the oath. Antipas would not wish to shame himself at a party designed for his honor.

14:10-11. Pious Jewish *law required a trial before execution; here Herod, given power by the Romans, ignores this tradition. Beheading was the fastest and least painful method of execution and was carried out with a sword. But it was a Greek and Roman custom, contrary to Jewish custom. In ancient literature, only the most brutal amused guests by executing someone or presenting a head at a banquet.

14:12. One's son would normally be in charge of the burial; either John had no adult sons (which is probable) or his *disciples were the only ones ready to fulfill this role. Although the whole ancient world (except for some eccentric philosophers) considered lack of proper burial the worst possible fate, some tyrants forbade it or forbade public mourning. Even Jewish custom forbade public mourning for those executed according to Jewish law. Potentially Herod could have resented whoever showed up to claim the body.

14:13-21

Feeding the Five Thousand

See comment on Mark 6:32-44 for more details. The most significant ancient reports of feeding miracles are the reports of Israel's eating manna in the wilderness of Sinai and miracles performed at the hands of prophets (e.g., Elisha in 2 Kings 4:42-44).

14:13-15. Bread and fish were basic staples of the Palestinian diet; meat was more expensive and rarely eaten except at feasts. Teachers were not normally responsible for feeding their disciples from their own means.

14:16. Ancient students often paid their teachers (though other teachers were self-supporting); it was honorable to invite teachers to dinner and to show them the utmost hospitality. But here Jesus, the teacher, assumes the role of host or provider. The ancient emphasis on hospitality included providing food as well as shelter for guests. Teachers sometimes delegated to disciples duties like procuring provisions for their school.

14:17-18. Even in a more inhabited region (cf. 14:13), an abundance of countryside villages could not have provided for a crowd of perhaps ten thousand people (cf. 14:20); even the largest villages rarely held more than three thousand residents. Compare especially 2 Kings 4:42-43 for the incredulity of prophet-disciples when Elisha tells them to distribute the food to the people.

14:19. It was customary for the head of the household to “bless,” or give thanks for, food before a meal.

14:20. It was expected that the most generous hosts who had means normally provided enough food that some was left over. Ancient moralists condemned wastefulness.

14:21. A crowd of five thousand men plus women and children was larger than most of the villages that covered the Galilean countryside.

14:22-33

Walking on the Water

See also Mark 6:45-52. Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha had all done water miracles, parting the sea or the river Jordan; but the only one the *Old Testament said “trode” upon the waters was God himself.

14:22. Because a teacher controlled the duration of the learning situation, it would be understood that Jesus could send the crowds home.

14:23. The very pious could set aside two specific hours a day for prayer; Jesus here spends the whole remainder of the day in prayer (though how long this time was is uncertain, given Matthew’s ambiguous use of “evening” here—vv. 15, 23). Mountains were places of prayer for Moses and Elijah; here, away from the crowdedness of Galilean town life, Jesus could find solitude.

14:24. Harsh storms often arise suddenly on the Sea of Galilee.

14:25. The fourth, or final, shift of the night watch was between 3 and 6 a.m.; the watches started at 6 p.m. Jewish people often divided the night into three watches, but the Romans had four.

14:26. Belief in ghosts or disembodied spirits was common on a popular level in antiquity, even though the idea of ghosts contradicted popular Jewish teachings about the *resurrection from the dead.

14:27. Jesus’ answer is literally “I am”; although this can easily mean “It is I,” it may also allude back to God’s self-revelation in Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 43:10, 13: “I am.”

14:28-32. Despite Peter's failure to follow through, by beginning to walk on water he had done something that not even the greatest prophets of the Old Testament had done. Walking on water might remind readers of Israel passing through the Red Sea or the Jordan but was a greater miracle. (In one story told by the *rabbis—we cannot determine whether it is as early as Jesus' time—the first Israelite to cross the Red Sea began to sink in the waves but was rescued by Moses' rod, which divided the sea.) Faith to step into water could evoke Joshua 3:13-17. For Jesus' rescue, cf. Psalm 18:16 and 144:7.

14:33. The term *worship* was applied to homage offered to pagan kings as well as that offered to deities. Although it could indicate prostration as a sign of respect (e.g., 1 Sam 24:8; 25:23), it is an unusual term to express Jewish disciples' amazement at a human teacher, even in miracle stories. Though the disciples would not yet have verbalized Jesus' deity, Matthew is ready to do so (cf. 28:17-19). Ancient miracle stories (including many in the Gospels) often concluded with the observers' awe and praise.

14:34-36

Healings at Gennesaret

The "fringe" of Jesus' garment no doubt refers to the tassels he wore as an observant Jew; see comment on 9:20; cf. 23:5. Ancient literature commonly includes not only longer *narrative segments but also summary statements like this passage (cf. 4:23-25). Gennesaret was a plain on the northwest shore of the Lake of Galilee.

15:1-20

Human Tradition Versus God's Word

See Mark 7:1-23 for more detail.

15:1-2. Contemporary Jewish sources always characterize the *Pharisees as observing the traditions of the elders; in this way they felt they could depend upon a repository of the wisdom of the pious who preceded them. Washing hands before meals was one of the most prominent of those traditions but had no direct basis in Scripture.

15:3. Jesus responds to the Pharisees' question with a counterquestion, as *rabbis often did.

15:4-6. Judaism universally demanded honor of father and mother and included financial support of aged parents as part of this honor. Some, like *Josephus and many rabbis, regarded this demand as the most important commandment in the *law. The Pharisees therefore could not have disagreed with Jesus' example; they did not recommend that people fail to support their parents, but their allowance of special vows dedicating things only to "sacred" use created this loophole for those who could have wished to exploit it (cf. Prov 28:24). Some legal loopholes (such as the *prozbul*, an early rule circumventing the law's cancellation of debts in the seventh year) were intended to uphold the spirit of the law; this one unwittingly undercut even that.

15:7-9. Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13, which complained that Israel in Isaiah's day was outwardly religious but inwardly far from God (cf. Is 1:10-20). It goes on to criticize the folly of Israel's "wise" people.

15:10-11. In a later story Johanan ben Zakkai, a Jewish teacher from the generation after Jesus, admitted privately to his *disciples that outward impurity did not really defile; one should simply keep God's commandments about purity. But this sort of teaching, even if it had been widespread, was not emphasized publicly, lest people fail to keep the ceremonial laws (as happened among some well-to-do Jews in Egypt).

15:12. Although the Pharisees (from whose teachers most of the later rabbis seem to have come) had virtually no political power as a group in this period, they were respected and highly influential among the people. Offending them thus did not appear to be prudent.

15:13-14. The images of uprooting (Jer 42:10; 45:4; cf. 1:10; 11:16-19; 12:2; 24:6; 31:28), blindness (15:14; cf., e.g., Deut 29:4; Is 6:10; 42:19) and leaders guiding others astray with falsehood (Is 3:12-15; 9:16) are standard *Old Testament judgment language*; the Dead Sea Scrolls similarly describe the *Qumran community as a shoot planted by God. The image here is that of a farmer preparing his field and ridding it of unwanted weeds (cf. 13:30). The point of Jesus' response to his disciples is: Do not worry about the Pharisees' power, because their day of judgment is coming (Mt 3:10).

15:15-20. Such views were rare, and even more rarely divulged publicly; see comment on 15:10-11. Liberal Alexandrian Jews who no longer believed in literal observance of the food laws (Lev 11; Deut 14) were particularly despised by their more conservative colleagues. But everyone would at least have had to agree with Jesus that the heart matters most (see Is 29:13, cited in Mt 15:8-9; cf. also Is 59:13).

15:21-28

Mercy on the Canaanites

15:21. Tyre and Sidon were traditionally pagan territory; Sidon had been the home of Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31). But in the same generation a woman from that region had miraculously received food and healing for her child from the prophet Elijah and so became a full believer in Israel's God (1 Kings 17:8-24). Some argue that in Jesus' period, their territory stretched inland, so that one had to pass through territory belonging to Syrophenicia, as here, even to get from Galilee to Caesarea Philippi. Many Jewish people still lived here, however.

15:22. Canaanites, many of whose survivors had been driven northward into Phoenicia during the Israelite conquest, were the most morally despised of Israel's enemies in the Old Testament; Matthew's characterizing this woman with this term may have set Jewish hearers on edge. But by acknowledging Jesus as "Son of David"—*Messiah—she also acknowledges the right of the kingdom of David (who had also embraced many non-Jews as allies) over the land. How could a Jewish person remain prejudiced against a Canaanite woman such as this one? David had welcomed many *Gentiles.

15:23-24. Jesus' statement in verse 24 need not preclude a later mission to Gentiles. By way of comparison, the servant of Isaiah 53:6-8 suffers on behalf of the lost sheep of Israel (cf. 40:11; 56:11), but the servant's mission was ultimately to reconcile all nations to God (42:6; 49:6-7; cf. 56:3-8; perhaps 52:15).

15:25-28. Certain people in the Old Testament, such as the Sidonian woman to whom Elijah came (1 Kings 17:18-19) and the Shunammite woman with Elisha (2 Kings 4:28), laid their need before a prophet and would not take no for an answer; God answered their prayers with a yes. (Some Jewish teachers closer to Jesus' time were reported to exercise the same kind of holy chutzpah in praying for rain, etc.) Women, who often had little other access to justice and had less to lose than men by protesting, might also be specially insistent (see Mt 20:20-21; Luke 18:3). Even those who were most intimate with God approached him with only the greatest respect when praying an insistent prayer (Gen 18:22-32); but they also refused to be deterred. "Dog" was one of the harshest insults in antiquity. Even though here it is at most an implied analogy (playing more on the Gentile custom of using dogs as pets), it would take great humility for this woman to take up the analogy. People often respected witty retorts.

15:29-31

Lame, Crippled, Blind and Mute Healed

Here Jesus cures many traditional categories of serious ailments. Even in a culture where people did not deny the existence of miracles, these cures would be viewed as extraordinary. Matthew's summary of such miracles may recall prophecies of Isaiah (35:5-6; cf. 29:18-19, 23).

15:32-39

The Second Feeding

Jesus' first feeding miracle (see comment on Mt 14:13-21) was not an exception; he was able to repeat it at any time. Some have identified Magadan (v. 39), possibly Mary Magdalene's home town, with the Galilean village of Tarichea, associated with fishing; it apparently imbibed some Greek culture, but had strong Jewish patriotism.

16:1-4

No Sign but Jonah's

16:1. The *Pharisees and Sadducees* differed on most matters. The Pharisees had great popular support, whereas the Sadducees held most of the political power. Together they could make a dangerous team. Probably writing after 70, Matthew often links the various leaders together, though by this time the Sadducees and temple establishment had apparently lost power and Pharisees were gaining greater influence. On such testing, cf. 4:3. "From heaven" was sometimes a circumlocution for "from God," but the context may suggest they mean a heavenly sign (16:2-3).

16:2-3. They ask for a sign from heaven in verse 1 (cf. 2 Kings 20:8-9; Is 38:7; 2 Chron 32:24); astrologers used signs in the heavens to predict the fall of emperors, and *rabbis also tried to interpret such signs. Jewish writers like *Josephus* believed there were portents in the heavens when disasters were about to occur (cf. also Mt 24:29-30). Some prophets, like *Elijah*, actually had produced signs from heaven—he called down fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:38)—but most prophetic signs were not so spectacular (Judg 6:17; Is 7:11-14; 8:18; 19:20; 20:3; 37:30; 38:7; 66:19; Ezek 4:3; 12:11; 24:24, 27). But in

ancient Jewish parlance, “from heaven” can mean “from God” (cf. Mt 21:25), so they could simply seek any sort of divine sign (but cf. 16:2-3). Perhaps Jesus’ opponents desire a sign to validate that he is a prophet—some rabbis believed that prophets could temporarily even set aside some commandments of the law, provided they were attested by signs—or perhaps they merely want him to make a prediction. Many rabbis, however, rejected the validity of signs favoring positions that contradicted their interpretation of Scripture. In Palestine, a red morning sky indicated Mediterranean winds bringing rain from the west.

16:4. Like their ancestors who did not heed God’s acts already done among them, this generation is evil (Deut 32:5, 20 in context). Signs had already been given them (Mt 16:3), even clearer than God’s usual signs from the heavens (16:2), but the final attestation would be the *resurrection (12:40). Many Jewish people expected a particularly evil generation directly before the end. Sages sometimes challenged hearers with riddles.

16:5-12

Evil Yeast

16:5-6. Jewish tradition sometimes used yeast to symbolize evil; most fundamentally, it was something that spreads. Some Jewish teachers made such comparisons (e.g., describing false teaching as poisoned water); the *disciples should thus have recognized that their rabbi could speak figuratively. On the Pharisees and *Sadducees, see comment on 16:1 and glossary.

16:7-11. Like Israel in the wilderness, Jesus’ contemporaries quickly forgot God’s past provision, and he often called them to remember (e.g., Deut 8).

16:12. Among other beliefs, Sadducees denied the resurrection (Mt 22:23) and Pharisees held to human traditions (15:2-3); throughout Matthew, both oppose Jesus.

16:13-20

The Christ and the Rock

16:13. Caesarea Philippi (a city distinct from the usual *New Testament Caesarea, which was on the coast) was pagan territory, near a grotto devoted to the worship of the Greek woodland deity Pan; Herod had also dedicated a temple for the worship of Caesar there. Few Jewish people would have expected it as a

site for a divine revelation. The city was some twenty-five miles from the Lake of Galilee and about seventeen hundred feet higher, hence they would have needed to stop along the way (15:21, 39); it lay near the source of the Jordan, at the *Old Testament Dan, the northern boundary of ancient Israel.

16:14. All these answers about who Jesus is fall into the “prophets” category; though many members of the Jewish elite held that prophets had ceased, popular expectation of end-time prophets remained strong. Elijah was expected to return (Mal 4:5), and many of Jesus’ miracles resembled Elijah’s. His judgment oracles (Mt 11:20-24) or downplaying the temple (cf. 12:6; 24:1-2) may have evoked the comparison with Jeremiah.

16:15-16. Peter has the right title, though the wrong concept of what *Messiah means (16:22). David’s royal line was adopted by God (2 Sam 7:14), so it was natural for the ultimate successor to his throne to be called God’s Son (Ps 2:7; 89:27), as a few Jewish interpreters in this period noticed (e.g., in the *Florilegium* from Qumran Cave 4, an Essene commentary on 2 Sam 7).

16:17. “Blessed are you” is a standard form of blessing (cf. comment on Mt 5:1-12). “Barjonah” is Aramaic for “son of Jonah.” “Flesh and blood” was a typical Jewish phrase for “human being(s).” Although all Jews emphasized learning by studying the Scriptures, some also recognized divine illumination (e.g., in the Dead Sea Scrolls) or revelation (*apocalyptic literature; some mysticism).

16:18. In Aramaic, “Peter” and “rock” are the same word; in Greek (here), they are cognate terms that were used interchangeably by this period. For the idea of a person as the foundation on which something is built, cf. Isaiah 51:1-2; Ephesians 2:20. (In context, the point appears to be that Peter is the rock in his role as confessor—v. 16—and others build on the foundation by their proclamation of the same confession.)

The Old Testament often spoke of those who “built” God’s people (e.g., Ruth 4:11; Jer 1:10) and prayed for God to build Israel up (Ps 51:18; 69:35; 147:2; Jer 24:6; 31:4, 28). The “gates of Hades” in the Old Testament (Job 38:17; Ps 9:13) and subsequent Jewish tradition referred to the realm and power of death; death itself (cf. Mt 16:24-26) would not silence the *church. Against those who presuppose that Jesus could not have planned the church, though he chose twelve disciples as the nucleus of a remnant for Israel (compare the symbolic use of twelve in the Dead Sea Scrolls), the language of a “church” was already being used for a remnant community among his contemporaries (Dead Sea Scrolls; see “church” in glossary for further information). Teachers who

founded schools normally expected their disciples to carry on after them.

16:19. The keeper of the keys was one of the most important roles a household servant could hold (cf. Mk 13:32-34). Because keys were bulky and might be carried by only a single person, they also symbolized authority; a high official held the keys in a royal kingdom (Is 22:20-22) and in God's house, the temple. Keys here may signify the authority to admit into the *kingdom (Mt 23:13), based on the knowledge of the truth about Jesus (16:16). The Qumran community also had officials deciding whether to admit members; the decision was made based on the prospective member's acceptance of the community's rule of life.

Many Jewish people felt that the Jewish high court acted on the authority of God's tribunal in heaven, in a sense ratifying its decrees. "Binding" and "loosing" (also 18:18) could refer to detaining or releasing prisoners, hence could function figuratively in a judicial setting. Rabbis also used these terms regularly for legislative authority in interpreting Scripture ("prohibiting" and "permitting"). Because "binding" and "loosing" also were figurative images for punishing and releasing, they could likely be used judicially as well (cf. 18:18).

16:20. For comment on the messianic secret, see the introduction to Mark's Gospel.

16:21-28

Redefining Messiahship

Peter had divulged Jesus' secret identity (16:16) yet retained a faulty concept of what that identity entailed.

16:21. Even most of the *Old Testament prophets sought to avoid martyrdom insofar as possible and complained about their sufferings (1 Kings 19:3-4; Jer 20:7-18). Although martyrdom was associated with the prophets, it was not their *goal*; but it seems to be Jesus' goal here (cf. especially 20:28). Jesus could foreknow his death as a prophet, but he also orchestrated it in a sense: no one could stir a commotion in the temple and defy its officials as Jesus did, then remain in the city unarmed, without expecting martyrdom.

16:22. Jewish tradition in this period emphasized a triumphant *Messiah; apparently only a century after Jesus' teaching did Jewish teachers begin to accept the tradition of a suffering Messiah in addition to a triumphant one. One of the first rules of ancient discipleship (with noticeably rare exceptions) was:

Never criticize the teacher, especially publicly. Here Peter breaks that rule, even on standard cultural grounds.

16:23. Disciples sometimes walked behind their teachers to signify submission. The term *stumbling block*, referring to something over which people tripped, had come to be used figuratively for things that led people to sin or stumble in their faith. Peter here offers the same temptation as *Satan: the kingdom without the cross* (4:9-10). Rabbis sometimes punned on the names of disciples; here the “rock” (16:18) becomes a “stumbling stone.”

16:24. For 16:24-28, see comment on Mark 8:34–9:1. Carrying the horizontal crossbeam en route to crucifixion (where the upright stake sometimes already stood awaiting the condemned person) often meant enduring mockery and scorn on a path leading to death as a condemned criminal. Crucifixion was the worst form of criminal death, the supreme Roman penalty, normally inflicted only on lower class provincials and slaves; even talk of it could evoke horror. “Follow” can be the language of discipleship, since disciples followed their teachers; here disciples follow to the cross.

16:25-26. Although God had sometimes accepted a substitution (Ex 30:12), no treasure could really ransom one’s life eternally (cf. Ps 49:7-8), and treasure was valueless without life. Various Jewish thinkers recognized that losing one’s life in the present age was worthwhile if it would preserve one’s life in the *age to come.

16:27-28. Jesus alludes to the *Son of Man in Daniel 7:13-14. He also applies Old Testament language for God as judge to himself (Ps 62:12; Prov 24:12; Jer 17:10; 32:19; Ezek 18:30). The reference to angels is probably from Zechariah 14:5, though it also fits the context of the image in Daniel 7:13-14. “Taste death” was idiomatic for “die.” Verse 28 is a transition to the proleptic revelation of the kingdom to follow in 17:1-8 (“proleptic” means that this revelation anticipates the kingdom).

17:1-13

The Glory Shines Again

This passage includes so many allusions to God revealing his glory to Moses on Mount Sinai that most ancient Jewish readers would certainly have caught them. For more details on the passage, see comments on Mark 9:2-10.

17:1. The six days alludes to Exodus 24:16, when God began to speak to

Moses from his cloud on the mountain.

17:2. Both Greek myth and Jewish *apocalypses told of transformations or transfigurations (in the latter describing glorious angels or the resurrected righteous, sometimes shining like the sun). The most obvious primary background for biblically literate hearers, however, would have been Moses' glorification on Mount Sinai (Ex 34:29, where Moses' face radiated glory because of God's revelation of himself to Moses).

17:3. Jewish people understood Scripture as denying that Elijah had ever died; God himself had buried Moses. Jewish people expected the return of both Elijah and Moses at the end of the age (Deut 18:15-18; Mal 4:5). Both of them (Ex 24:15-16; 1 Kings 19:8) heard from God at Mount Sinai (also called Horeb).

17:4. Israel had dwelt in tabernacles in the wilderness while the presence and glory of God was among them. Jews commemorated this annually by building shelters, so Peter would know how to build one.

17:5. The cloud of glory overshadowed the mountain in Exodus 24:15 and the tabernacle in 40:34 (the same Greek word is used in the *LXX of Ex 40:35 that Matthew uses here).

To the biblical allusions in Matthew 3:17, the voice in this passage apparently adds words from Deuteronomy 18:15: When the prophet like Moses comes, "give heed to him."

17:6-8. The *disciples' fear and falling on their faces were characteristic of people in the Old Testament and later Jewish tradition when they experienced revelations of God* (e.g., Ezek 1:28; Dan 8:17). The revealers also sometimes told people to arise and not be afraid (e.g., Ezek 2:1-2; Dan 8:18; 10:11-12)

17:9-13. Jewish people believed that Elijah would return before the time of the end to make matters right (Mal 4:5-6); the *resurrection of all the righteous dead was to follow his coming, at the end. Malachi 4:6 speaks of Elijah "restoring" families (not just their genealogies, as in later rabbinic tradition). Jesus interprets the promise of the end-time Elijah more figuratively than most of his contemporaries would have.

17:14-23

Inadequate Faith for Exorcism

17:14-18. See comments on Mark 9:14-29 for more detail. It might be relevant that, like Moses, Jesus must deal with the failure of those he left in charge once

he comes down from the mountain (Ex 24:14; 32:1-8, 21-25, 35), though Jesus has not been absent as long. In some cases of spirit possession noted by anthropologists, persons become violently out of control and risk injury to themselves, as here. Although some compare symptoms here with epilepsy, Matthew does not always associate that affliction with *demons (Mt 4:24).

17:19-21. The disciples might inquire privately to avoid further increasing their public shame. “Removing mountains” was apparently a Jewish figure of speech (attested among later *rabbis for extraordinary mastery of the Torah) for that which was incomparably difficult. Mountains were thought to be the most stable of all things (cf. Ps 46:2; 125:1; Is 54:10); mustard seeds were used to define a proverbially small quantity. Jesus is thus telling the disciples that nothing God asks them to do will be impossible if they trust him; the issue is not how small their faith might be, but how large is the God in whom their faith rests. Most relevant here may be Zechariah 4:6-9; before God’s servant, God would bring down all obstacles against the tasks God designates.

17:22-23. Jesus predicts what would have been obvious to the disciples had they known that he planned to drive the moneychangers from the temple courts without either flight or resistance: he would die (cf. Mt 18:31; 19:22; 26:22). Because the disciples understand his resurrection to mean the general resurrection at the end of the age (17:9-10), they miss his point. In ancient parlance, “after the third day” could mean parts of three days.

17:24-27

The Children Are Exempt

17:24. Although Capernaum apparently had a customs post (see comment on Mt 8:5), the tax at issue here was paid by free adult Jewish males throughout the world. They showed their solidarity with the temple and the Holy Land by paying a half-shekel tax (Ex 30:13-16). Though the literal Greek double drachma seems no longer to have been in circulation, scholars argue that “two drachmas” was now an expression for the payment of the half-shekel tax (Ex 30:13-16). So much was gathered that the keepers of the temple eventually began using the excess to construct a massive, golden vine. After 70, in Matthew’s time, the Romans confiscated this tax for the upkeep of a pagan temple, and some Jews may have refused to pay it on principle. In Jesus’ day, most Jews loyal to Judaism would have paid it, but *Sadducees disapproved and *Essenes believed

they need pay only once in a lifetime. The local collectors of the tax may have wondered about Jesus' position on the matter if he had already hinted God's judgment on the temple (as later in 21:12-14; 23:38–24:15); moreover, collectors did not force those living off charity (as they could assume Jesus to be—27:55; Lk 8:3) or beggars to pay. Or they may have simply been wondering if he would pay it in this locality or elsewhere, because the disciples were moving about. (At the least, they know that Jesus sometimes disagrees with mainstream views.)

17:25-26. Like a good prophet, Jesus responds to Peter before Peter even brings up the matter (1 Sam 9:20; 1 Kings 14:6; 2 Kings 5:26; 6:32).

In tax contexts, “free” normally means “free from obligation” concerning tax or tribute (e.g., 1 Esdras 4:49-50). Since a royal family did not tax itself, Jesus' point is that the *Son of God should not be taxed for the upkeep of his Father's house. (The principle of an exemption was known: Roman provincial taxes often exempted Romans or high-class Greeks from payment. The principle was also known in Judaism: the temple's attendants, the priests, applied it to themselves, to the chagrin of some of their Pharisaic contemporaries—Mishnah *Sheqalim* 1:3-4.) For Matthew's readers this saying might mean: It is not because Jesus is not in solidarity with Judaism (for he is), but rather because he is the *hope* of Judaism, that he is not obligated to pay.

17:27. On the basis of solidarity with the rest of the Jewish community, however, Jesus pays the tax. If some of Matthew's Jewish Christian readers were looking for an excuse to avoid paying the tax in their own day, this text would encourage them to pay it instead.

A stater was worth four drachmas (4 denarii); hence it covered the tax for both Jesus and Peter. Jewish teachers had several stories describing how God rewarded faithful Jews who bought fish and found gems in them; if these stories are as early as the first century (their date is not certain), Peter might be surprised that something similar had actually happened to him. Some fish in the Lake of Galilee had mouths large enough to hold staters; one such fish was what is now called the *Chromis simonis* (named after Simon Peter).

18:1-6

Offending the Children

See comment on Mark 9:33-37 for more information.

18:1. Some Jewish texts speak of different rewards and ranks in the *kingdom*.

Rank and status were issues that members of ancient society confronted daily. Jewish sources valued the virtue of humility, often extolling rabbis who humbled themselves, for example, before other rabbis or before their parents. Yet such humility was rarely expressed toward children or by exalting children.

18:2-4. The most powerless members of ancient society were little children; in most of ancient society, age increased one's social status and authority. In Jewish culture, children were loved, not despised; but the point is that they had no status apart from that love, and no power or privileges apart from what they received as total dependents on their parents. The posture of children as dependents may recall 6:9. "Converted" may allude to the Jewish idea of turning, returning or repenting, often found in the biblical prophets.

18:5. On receiving representatives, see 10:40-42 (on the name, cf. also comment on Jn 14:12-14).

18:6. Both Greeks and Jews used "stumble" figuratively; for Jews, it often meant "sin" or "fall away from the faith." Millstones were used to grind meal. They were extremely heavy, and the term here refers to the heavier kind of millstone turned by a donkey, rather than the lighter kind a woman would use. One of the most horrible punishments executed by Romans (abhorred by Jews) was to tie a person in a sack and throw them into a large body of water. Death at sea was considered terrible; some pagans believed that the ghost of the unburied would hover forever over the spot where the person had drowned. Others could apply this image to judgment (cf. *1 Enoch 48:9). Jewish teachers sometimes warned of judgments with, "Better for a person who . . . than if . . ." (cf. also Mt 26:24).

18:7-14

Offenders of the Powerless

This passage extends the metaphor to all the weak in the *church, certainly including children. Church leaders and members must seek not only to avoid causing stumbling but also to bring back anyone who has stumbled.

18:7-9. Judaism also balanced God's sovereign plan with human choice and responsibility. To the extent that one's poor eyes could cause one to trip, they could be viewed as a sort of stumbling block; on stumbling blocks, see comment on 18:6. An apparently widespread Jewish belief was that God in the future would raise the dead initially in whatever form they had (e.g., with missing

limbs) before restoring them to wholeness; on the removal of limbs, cf. comment on 5:29-30 or Mark 9:42-47.

18:10. Jewish readers would generally recognize here the concept of the guardian angel; it was typically believed that every Jewish person had one (cf. Tobit 5:22; Pseudo-Philo, *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 11:12; 59:4; *Tosefta Shabbat* 17:2-3; *Sifre Numbers* 40.1.5). Further, angels received their orders from God's throne; but unlike lower angels and mortals, the very highest angels (normally not thought to be guardian angels) regularly saw God's glory. Those who mistreated these "little ones" would hence be reported directly to God by the greatest angels, and the report would stand them in bad stead in the day of judgment.

18:12-14. One hundred was an average-sized flock in Palestine. Greek and Jewish literature affords other examples of pasturers who had to leave the flock or herd to look for a lost animal (cf. 1 Sam 9:3); a shepherd could leave his own flock with the other shepherds with whom he worked, who would be watching over their own flocks (cf. Lk 2:8). Shepherds did often graze flocks on mountains or in hill country, and sometimes became capable mountaineers. Religious leaders who failed to care for the broken and powerless are rejected by God (Ezek 34:2-10), and God himself would then seek after the sheep (34:11-16). God's people were commonly described as sheep in the *Old Testament (cf. comment on Jn 10:1-18).

18:15-20

Disciplining Offenders

We should keep in mind that the whole context of this passage on church discipline is mercy and forgiveness; forgiveness qualifies (but does not annul) the force of this passage on disciplining unrepentant offenders in the Christian community. The contextual emphasis is the hope of bringing back the erring, not confirming them irreparably in their guilt.

18:15. This procedure reflects standard Jewish custom; the *Dead Sea Scrolls, the rabbis and others demand that one begin with private reproof. Publicly shaming someone unnecessarily was considered sinful, and Jewish teachers stressed the importance of receiving reproof.

18:16. Deuteronomy 19:15 (cf. 17:6-7) was the standard text Jewish authorities cited for requiring two witnesses. (Later rabbis took this principle so

far that one eyewitness was not sufficient even if the eyewitness caught the murderer with the bloody knife in hand.) A final warning was merciful (e.g., Deut 25:8). Strict judicial procedures are being followed at this point because a judicial action is about to take place; Jesus here agrees with the Jewish practice of private rebuke, witnesses and finally, if *repentance is not forthcoming, the judicial assembly (18:17).

18:17. A church by definition would function as an ancient *synagogue would, and ancient synagogues were not only assembly halls for prayer and study but community centers where discipline would be inflicted on an erring member of the community. (Both “synagogue” and “church” ultimately render the same Hebrew expression for God’s community.) This discipline could take a variety of forms, including public beating, but the most severe were several levels of dismissal from the community. After the most severe level of discipline the offending member would be treated as a pagan instead of as a Jew. Pagans and *tax gatherers alike—tax gatherers were seen as agents of a pagan government—were excluded from the religious life of the Jewish community. Giving a person a final warning before a court would take action (e.g., Deut 25:8) was an act of mercy.

18:18. Continuing the judicial thought of 18:15-17: many Jews felt that the Jewish high court acted on the authority of God’s tribunal in heaven, in a sense ratifying its decrees (the verb tenses here probably indicate that the heavenly court has decided first). Those who judged cases on the basis of God’s *law accurately represented his will.

“Binding” and “loosing,” terms normally used for tying up or imprisoning versus freeing or releasing, provide a natural metaphor for condemning or acquitting in a court. As terms regularly used for rabbis’ legislative authority in interpreting Scripture, they could naturally apply to judicial situations as well.

18:19-20. The “two or three” must refer to the “two or three witnesses” of 18:16. These verses may refer to the prayer of execration given at a Jewish excommunication; or they could represent prayers for the repentance and consequent forgiveness of the excommunicated person (see 1 Jn 5:16). In either case, it is of interest to note that the witnesses in the Old Testament were to be the first to execute the judgment of the court (Deut 17:7); here they are the first to pray.

Later sources report that ten Jewish males was the minimum quorum to constitute a synagogue assembly, but also (probably reflecting a more widespread tradition) that God’s presence was with even two or three who met

together to study his law (cf. *Mishnah* 'Avot 3:2, 6; *Mekilta Bahodesh* 11). Jesus' presence is thus presented here as identical with God's (cf. also Mt 1:23; 28:20). (Indeed, one of the most common names for God among the later rabbis was "the Place," i.e., the Omnipresent One.)

18:21-35

Forgiving the Forgivers

18:21-22. Seventy times seven (some interpreters read seventy-seven; cf. Gen 4:24) does not really specify 490 (or 77) here with mathematical precision; it is a typically graphic, hyperbolic way of saying "Never hold grudges." Because true *repentance should involve turning from sin, some later rabbis limited opportunities for forgiveness for a given sin to three times; Peter might have thought his offer of seven times was generous, until hearing Jesus' further expansion.

18:23. On "the kingdom may be compared," see comment on 13:24. The story here is about a *Gentile king, such one of the Greek, Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt before the Romans conquered it. "Servants" here could mean his upper-level slaves—who were better off than nearly all the free people of Egypt, most of whom were peasants. In this case, however, "servants" might refer to free provincial satraps, who functioned as the ruler's tax farmers in various regions; they too were vassals of the king. The ruler would allow them to collect taxes for him at a profit, but he demanded efficiency. If they collected taxes after the harvests, the king might settle accounts with them afterward.

18:24. Many peasant agricultural workers struggled to pay taxes, especially after droughts, but this difficulty did not mitigate the tax collectors' responsibility to submit the requisite amount to the king. Some of the *disciples and perhaps Jesus himself could have smiled as the master storyteller told how far the king had let one of his servants get in debt: ten thousand talents* (cf. *Esther* 3:9) *probably represented more than the entire annual income of the king, and perhaps more than all the actual coinage in circulation in most kingdoms (such as Egypt) at the time! In one period, the silver talent represented six thousand drachmas, or six thousand days' wages for an average Palestinian worker; ten thousand talents would thus be roughly sixty million days' wages (in another period, one hundred million). Although taxes were exorbitant in those days, especially for rural peasants, Josephus reports the annual tribute from*

Galilee and Perea under wealthy Herod to be only two hundred talents, with perhaps six hundred more from Judean territories; it was thus inconceivable that one official could get so far in debt.

Ancient Judaism often viewed sins as debts before God (see comment on 6:12).

18:25. Enslaving family members for the man's debt was a Gentile practice that the Jewish people in this period found abhorrent. The math does not work here; the price of an average slave was between five hundred and two thousand days' wages, hence the king cannot recoup even one-thousandth of his losses on this sale. But the *parable is deliberately hyperbolic, to speak of guilt before God. A king with better math skills would not have let the man get so far in debt to begin with! The point here in any case is not economics but anger.

18:26. "I will repay" was a standard promise in ancient business documents. But given the debt of ten thousand talents, however (18:24), this promise is as absurd as the hope of recouping the loss by debt enslavement in 18:25.

18:27. Jesus' humorous *hyperbole continues. Given the ruthlessness of ancient Near Eastern kings and the greatness of the debt, that this ruler would forgive his servant is almost as impossible in the real world as the size of the debt. Sometimes rulers had to forgive Egyptian peasants' past tax debts when failed crops rendered them simply unable to pay, but the sums involved were comparatively small.

18:28. One hundred denarii represented one hundred days of a common worker's wages, which would be a small sum for his fellow tax farmer, after he had finished his accounting with the king (18:23). It was also a ridiculously minuscule sum compared to what the first servant had owed the king. But apparently the forgiven slave, instead of internalizing the principle of *grace, had decided to become ruthlessly efficient in his exacting of debts henceforth. Such extreme actions as choking are reported of angry creditors elsewhere in antiquity as well.

18:29-30. Someone in prison could not pay back what he owed (v. 34), unless friends came to his aid with the requisite funds. In pre-Roman Egypt, no one could charge a servant of the king, a policy the aggressor neglects.

18:31-33. The king is naturally angry; the forgiven servant has put another of his servants out of active commission, hence costing the king more lost revenues. The king had gained more advantage by convincing his people of his benevolence than he would have gained profit from the sale of the first servant; but once it was rumored that this first servant, his agent, was acting mercilessly,

it reflected badly upon his own benevolence.

18:34. Jewish *law did not permit torture, but Jewish people knew that Gentile kings (as well as Herod) practiced it. Because this servant had fallen from political favor, he would have no allies who would dare come to his aid; and even if he had, given the sum he owed, his situation would have remained hopeless. He would never be released. (On liability for all sins if one did not stay righteous, cf. Ezek 18:24.)

18:35. The great contrasts of the parable are humorous and effective in relaxing the ancient listener's guard, but the horrifying details of debt slavery, torture and so forth bring home the point forcefully. This story would have communicated effectively for the ancient hearer. For a parable's sudden conclusion challenging the hearer, cf. 2 Sam 12:7.

19:1-12

Grounds for Divorce

This passage follows the sequence of a rabbinic debate.

19:1. *Pharisees (19:3) were more common in Judea than in Galilee. Sometimes Galilean pilgrims to Judea crossed the Jordan into Perea (to avoid Samaria), then crossed it again into Judea.

19:2-3. The Pharisees themselves debated the grounds for divorce implied in Deuteronomy 24:1-4: the school of *Shammai, predominant in Jesus' day, argued that the passage allowed divorce only if one's spouse was unfaithful; the school of *Hillel*, which eventually won out, said that a man could divorce his wife if she burned the toast (a later rabbi of this school added, "Or if you find someone more attractive"!); see *Mishnah Gittin* 9:10; *Sifre Deuteronomy* 269.1.1; more generally for the freedom to divorce, see, e.g., Sirach 25:26; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.253; *Life* 415, 426; Philo, *Special Laws* 3.30. Although Shammai's school was generally dominant before A.D. 70, other sources indicate that the more liberal position of Hillel's school was closer to general practice on this issue (though Pharisees apparently widely regarded divorce as tragic). The success of a protagonist's wisdom under "testing" with difficult questions was an ancient theme (cf. 1 Kings 10:1); some questioners had hostile intentions.

19:4-6. It was standard interpretive practice to counter one proof text by appealing to another. Like the sectarians who wrote the *Dead Sea Scrolls (who

used the text against royal polygamy, CD 4.20–5.2; 11QT 56.18-19), Jesus appeals to God’s original purpose in creation in Genesis 1:27; 2:24.

19:7. They cite Deuteronomy 24:1, the basic text Jewish interpreters used to discuss grounds for divorce.

19:8. Jewish teachers of the *law recognized a legal category called “concession”: something that was permitted only because it was better to regulate sin than to relinquish control over it altogether. Given God’s purpose in creation (Gen 2:24), divorce naturally fell into such a category (cf. Mal 2:14-16). (Cf. similarly the law’s regulation rather than abolition of polygyny and debt slavery.)

19:9. The exception stated here (the spouse’s unfaithfulness) is one that counted as a charge in much ancient law. The school of Shammai (see comment on 19:1-3) did not permit divorce except for the wife’s unfaithfulness (whether successful or attempted), but they did not consider remarriage afterward adulterous. Because all ancients recognized that one could not remarry unless one’s divorce was valid, so Jesus presses the Shammaite position to its logical conclusion: if one divorces one’s spouse without valid grounds (unfaithfulness or analogous sins; cf. 1 Cor 7:10-13), the marriage is not truly dissolved and subsequent marriage is adulterous. This statement (that all subsequent unions are invalid unless the first marriage was dissolved by infidelity) may be hyperbolic rather than literal, but *hyperbole is stated the way it is to make its point forcefully. Divorce must never be taken lightly.

Because men could divorce women unilaterally but women could demand a divorce only under certain very narrow conditions (and then needed the court’s help), Jesus’ opposition to this sort of divorce was also a defense of married women. Unmarried women had limited access to economic support.

19:10. Jewish men took the right to divorce for granted. Parents arranged marriages; marriages created kin ties and social pressure to stay married, but if the marriage failed, people counted on having a way out. Ancient marriage contracts often included advance arrangements in case a divorce occurred.

19:11-12. Later rabbis recognized different categories of eunuchs—those born without sexual organs (i.e., made eunuchs by God) and those made eunuchs by people, such as served in Eastern courts. But particularly offensive to Jewish sensitivities was making someone a eunuch, a practice that would exclude him from the people of God (Deut 23:1). Jesus uses this graphic language figuratively (cf. Mt 5:29-30) to describe a call to singleness for the *kingdom, although singleness too was generally outside the mainstream of Jewish social

life (see comment on 1 Cor 7). Cf. Isaiah 56:4-5.

19:13-15

Blessing the Kingdom's Children

See comment on Mark 10:13-16 for more details; Matthew's form of the story is abbreviated, but abbreviating such accounts was a common practice in ancient writing.

Children were socially powerless and dependent. Some people in the *Old Testament* would lay hands on others to bestow a blessing in prayer. Insensitive disciples trying to keep from the master those seeking his help might remind Jewish hearers of Gehazi, a disciple of Elisha who eventually lost his position (2 Kings 4:27; cf. 5:27).

19:16-22

The Price Was Too High

See Mark 10:17-22.

19:16. Greek traditions also reported aristocratic young men who wanted to study under a famous teacher but were too spoiled to carry out what the teacher demanded.

19:17. Jewish tradition emphasized the goodness of God (e.g., *Philo*: “*God alone is good*”) and even used “*the Good*” as a title for him (as well as for the law); by emphasizing God's unique goodness, Jesus hopes to confront the man with his own need. “Enter into life”: “life” was sometimes used as an abbreviation for “*eternal life”—the life of the world to come.

19:18-19. These commandments include the humanward (vs. Godward) ones among the Ten Commandments (except the humanly untestable prohibition of coveting) and the summary of humanward commandments: Love your neighbor as yourself (Lev 19:18; cf. Mt 22:39).

19:20. With the possible exception of the less specific “Love your neighbor as yourself,” most Jewish people could claim to have kept the specific commandments just mentioned. “Young man” probably places him between twenty-four and forty years of age.

19:21. Only a few radical Greek teachers demanded such things of would-be disciples. Jesus' demands are more radical than later Jewish charity laws

permitted (lest the benefactor reduce himself to poverty); later regulations limited charity to twenty percent (which was nonetheless considerable on top of tithes and taxes). This was a severe test, not only of whether the disciple would value the teacher above earthly possessions, but even of his claim to love his neighbor as himself.

19:22. The young man responds as most aristocrats would have responded and did respond when confronted with such demands. The *kingdom is not meant to be an extra benefit tagged onto a comfortable life; it must be all-consuming, or it is no longer the kingdom.

19:23-29

A Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Kingdom

See Mark 10:23-31.

19:23-26. Here Jesus clearly uses *hyperbole. His words reflect an ancient Jewish figure of speech for the impossible: a very large animal passing through a needle's eye. On regular journeys at twenty-eight miles per day, a fully loaded camel could carry four hundred pounds in addition to its rider; such a camel would require a gate at least ten feet high and twelve feet wide. (A needle's eye in Jesus' day meant what it means today; the idea that it was simply a name for a small gate in Jerusalem is based on a gate from the medieval period and sheds no light on Jesus' teaching in the first century.)

Mainstream Judaism never denied the rich a place in the *kingdom of God; many of its benefactors and leaders were rich. Jesus allows that the rich may, by God's mercy, enter in, but only by giving their abundance to the destitute.

19:27-29. "Regeneration" was a term used for the future renewal of the world in Greek circles and naturally applied to Jewish expectations of a new world order (such expectations appear in Is 65:17; 66:22; and in the Dead Sea Scrolls). That the twelve tribes would be restored was one of the standard Jewish beliefs about the end times. Judges were those who ruled Israel in the *Old Testament before the institution of Israelite kingship.

19:30–20:16

The Last and the First

The agricultural setting of this *parable agrees with what is known from other

ancient Palestinian Jewish sources. Other *rabbis also told parables like this one, although Jesus' point is different from the one preserved in similar rabbinic parables; both, however, typically portray God as a king or landowner.

19:30. Ancient literature often employed a framing device called *inclusio* to bracket off sections of material on a particular topic; 19:30 and 20:16 bracket off this parable, which follows naturally on the message of sacrificing in this age in 19:23-29. Most Jewish people believed that the day of judgment would set all things right. It would reverse the injustices of the present age; most notably, the *Gentiles would be cast down and Israel exalted.

20:1. The agricultural setting of 20:1-15 fits with what we know of much life in Galilee. Although Jesus told parables with agrarian settings more often than did most other rabbis whose parables are preserved, both could portray God as king or landowner. On "the kingdom is like," see comment on 13:24. Wealthy landowners often had tenants to work their estates, but both they and less wealthy landowners hired extra workers temporarily to gather in the harvest. Work began around sunrise, about 6 a.m., before the day became hot. Some day laborers were also tenant farmers, with small plots of their own land; others were sons of those owning small pieces of land and had not inherited any of their fathers' land; still others had lost their land and traveled from place to place seeking employment.

20:2. A denarius was an average day's wage (though landowners often paid extra to get workers during the harvest). The daylong workers would probably develop a sense of camaraderie, often singing together during reaping.

20:3. Daylight during this season began a little before 6 a.m.; the "third hour" of daylight was complete a little before 9 a.m.. If it was harvest season and these men had any land of their own, they might have spent the morning gathering in their own ripe harvest. Idlers as well as people looking for work would gather in the marketplace.

20:4. These workers would expect less than a full day's wage.

20:5. The "sixth hour" is the period just before noon, and the "ninth hour" shortly before 3 p.m. About the sixth hour was the hottest time of the day, when workers would normally find a place in the shade to rest, eat or even nap for an hour or two; given the urgency of the harvest, they keep working (20:12). The laborers would finish by 6 p.m., so those newly hired would expect to receive considerably less than a full day's wages.

20:6-7. These laborers are hired for only a single hour of work; but the harvest must be gathered in quickly, before the day ends, and the work is not yet

done. These verses express the typical urgency surrounding the harvest in ancient times.

20:8. Jewish *law mandated that laborers be paid the same day, because the wages were often little more than sufficient for a day's needs (Deut 24:14-15).

20:9-12. The wealthy throughout the Mediterranean world often bestowed significant gifts on society that were widely praised as beneficent, increasing the public status of the donors. Because status defined roles in ancient society, those who complained about receiving a day's wage for a day's work would be viewed as rude and ungrateful.

20:13-14. Orators could focus on a representative member of the crowd. Hired workers were not landowners' "friends," and certainly not in this case; the respectful title might shame the complainers for their own lack of respect (cf. Mt 22:12; 26:50).

20:15. An "evil eye" (literally; cf. KJV) meant a "stingy eye" in common idiom (cf. Prov 28:22). The landowner had been fair to those who worked all day and generous to those who had not; by charging the complainers with ingratitude (socially equivalent to hubris) he shamed them. Jewish people all affirmed that God, who alone rightfully owned all things, was beneficent whatever he gave; they acknowledged that only his attribute of mercy would enable even Israel to survive the day of judgment.

Jewish teachers employed a similar folk story about the day of judgment, but they used it to make the opposite point. Israel, who had worked hard, would receive high wages; the Gentiles, who had labored little, would receive little (*Sifra Behuqotai* pq. 2.262.1.9). In this context, however, Jesus' point challenges those who have wealth and status in this world, Jewish or Gentile, and promises that in the world to come God will redress those who have been oppressed in this world.

20:17-19

Jesus as the Last

In this context of those with low status being exalted, Jesus gives the extreme example: voluntarily submitting to ridicule and execution as a common criminal at the hands of the Romans, to be vindicated by God in the *resurrection. Jewish people generally expected a victorious leader—not a martyr. Against some who doubt that Jesus could have foreknown his death: even apart from Jesus'

knowledge of the future, he provoked the hostility of the ruling authorities, publicly challenging their virtue and honor in 21:12-13.

20:20-28

The Greatest Is the Servant

See comments on Mark 10:35-45.

20:20-21. The indirect intercession of a motherly woman (cf. Mt 15:22) was often more effective than a man's direct petition for himself, in both Jewish and Roman circles (see also 2 Sam 14:2-20; 1 Kings 1:15-21; cf. 2 Sam 20:16-22). Women also could get away with making some requests that men could not. In this case, however, it does not work.

20:22-24. The "cup" represents Jesus' death (Mt 26:27-28, 39); Jesus may borrow the image from the "cup of wrath" in the *Old Testament prophets (see comment on Mk 10:38 for references).

20:25. Like many ancient teachers, Jesus offers both negative (20:25) and positive (20:28) examples. *Gentile ways are as negative an example as possible in Jesus' setting (5:47; 6:7; 18:17). Israelite kings had been bound by stricter moral conventions than neighboring pagan rulers (cf. Jezebel's more ready abuse of power than Ahab's). Jewish people recognized that most pagan rulers of postbiblical times were tyrants as well, including in their own time.

20:26-27. Inverting the role of master and slave was radical anywhere in antiquity; even the few masters who believed that slaves were theoretically equals did not go as far as Jesus goes here. (Even the temporary reversal during the Roman festival of Saturnalia served more to reinforce the traditional pattern than to overthrow it.) Jewish *disciples served their rabbis*; in the Qumran community, those of lesser rank obeyed those of greater rank.

20:28. Here Jesus probably alludes to the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, who offered his life on behalf of the many. It is also a standard Jewish "how much more" (*qal vahomer*) argument: if their master served, how much more ought they to do so.

20:29-34

Taking Time for the Blind

20:29-30. Although the road from Jericho to Jerusalem was notorious for

robbers (Lk 10:30), it was widely used, and larger companies (such as Jesus') would face no threat. Jericho was one of the wealthiest cities of Judea, but beggars nevertheless remained at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale (if on the scale at all)—“nobodies” who were dependent on the pity of passersby. Judaism did value care for beggars, but had such a high work ethic that only the truly destitute, such as (in that society) the blind, would take this role. “Son of David” indicates that they acknowledge Jesus as *Messiah. “Have mercy on us” could be a common cry for alms, though here they seek more.

20:31. Those believing that their trek to Jerusalem was leading to the establishment of the *kingdom might well feel that Jesus had more important things to do than to be stopped by these beggars, whether they just want alms or are seeking something more.

20:32-34. The beggars want more than alms, and Jesus again demonstrates the difference between his kingdom and the militant kind most people were expecting.

21:1-11

The Meek King

See Mark 11:1-10 for some other details.

21:1. Bethphage was a suburb of Jerusalem at the Mount of Olives across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem; it lay on the east side of Jerusalem, on the route from Jericho (cf. Mt 20:29).

21:2-3. This borrowing of a donkey may be seen in terms of royal emissaries temporarily impressing (demanding the service of) an animal; Jesus as Lord has the right to whatever his followers claim to own. On the historical level, the donkey's owner might have viewed it as helpful hospitality to visitors to the feast or as the honor of helping on his way a famous *rabbi*. *Some commentators have also suggested that the owner was away and those who kept the house, hearing that “the master” had need of the donkey, thought they were sending it to its real owner; but they surely would have recognized that the disciples were not part of the household.*

21:4-7. Colts that had not yet been ridden sometimes accompanied their mothers. Following a common Jewish practice of reading the Hebrew text for all one can get from it, Matthew reads Zechariah 9:9 as referring to two animals instead of referring to the same animal in two ways. The text is messianic, as

ancient interpreters generally acknowledged, but applying this part to himself redefines Jesus' messiahship: officials used donkeys for civil, not military, processions (e.g., 1 Kings 1:33). Thus this text is not a "triumphal entry" in the sense of Roman triumphal processions; it is Jerusalem's reception of a meek and peaceful king. With respect to leaders the term translated "meek" or "gentle" involved compassion and mercy as opposed to exploiting one's power.

21:8. Festal pilgrims were often welcomed in this way, though the acclamation of 21:9 suggests that in Jesus' case the welcome was on a larger and more significant scale. Cf. Psalm 118:27 (NIV).

21:9. Except for the acclamation "Son of David!" which indicates a recognition of Jesus' ancestry and a hope that he is the *Messiah, their cry is taken from Psalm 118:25-26 ("Hosanna!" means "O save!"). The Hallel, composed of Psalms 113–118, was sung regularly during Passover season and would be fresh on everyone's mind; later generations applied these psalms to the future redemption for which they hoped. Jesus cites Psalm 118 messianically in Matthew 21:42.

21:10-11. Jesus was better known in Galilee than in Judea; ancient sources often note regional divisions between the two.

21:12-17

Challenging the Temple Aristocracy

Like Jeremiah's smashing the pot in the temple centuries before (Jer 19), Jesus' demonstration there was a prophetic act inviting *repentance and warning of the temple's imminent destruction (see comment on Mt 24:1-2). Jesus' act may have been brief enough to prevent the temple's Levite police (or the Roman garrison, concerned about riot control) from intervening.

21:12. *Old Testament* law required visitors to the feast to purchase their sacrifices in Jerusalem, hence sellers of doves and other sacrificial animals were necessary. Because visitors would come with foreign currencies—even most Galilean towns had their own coinage—moneychangers had also become necessary. Although ancient moneychangers normally managed to turn an honest profit, those in the temple reportedly made very little. The issue appears to be not the commerce per se, and possibly not even whether it involves economic exploitation under the guise of religion, so much as *where* the commerce is occurring. Scholars have proposed several theories on the basis of later evidence,

including that the sale of animals had been introduced into the Court of the *Gentiles very recently; but this theory is uncertain. Some other groups (like the Essenes)* believed that the corrupt priestly leadership had morally desecrated the temple.

21:13. The Old Testament temple did not officially restrict the access of women or non-Jews, but by extending Jewish purity laws the architects of Herod's temple had excluded Jewish women from the Court of Israel, placing them on a lower level, and non-Jews outside even the Court of Women. Non-Jews could enter the Jewish part of the temple (including the Court of Women) only on pain of death, yet the noisy crowds around the merchants' tables no doubt consumed a significant part of the large space in the Court of the Gentiles at the crowded festivals. Jesus here cites Isaiah 56:7, which goes on to speak of the temple being for the Gentiles as well, a subtlety some of Matthew's more skillful readers might have caught. Matthew might emphasize especially Jesus' second text, Jeremiah 7:11 ("den of robbers"), which addressed religious leaders of Jeremiah's day who thought their vested interests in the temple would protect them from God's wrath and the temple's destruction. It did not.

21:14. Even hereditary priests who were blind or lame were not permitted in the sanctuary (Lev 21:18); at least some extended this rule in time to exclude all the blind and lame (cf. the Greek version of 2 Sam 5:8; see also the *Dead Sea Scrolls). Second-century rabbis permitted but did not require blind and lame men to attend the feasts like other men. Although those who controlled the temple would not have opposed their presence in the outer court (see, e.g., Acts 3:2), Jesus' emphasis on ministry to them here makes a countercultural statement.

The powerful Sadducean priests who ran the temple were generally not looking for a *Messiah; but had they expected him, they would have expected him either to challenge their power militarily or to seek an alliance with them. From the aristocratic standpoint, seeking followers among the weak was dishonorable and a foolish way to try to establish a kingdom.

21:15-17. Messianic claims threatened the stability of the temple hierarchy as much as overturning the tables would (cf. 27:11). Most of the Sadducean families were the elite priests who exercised most control over the city and temple; most were not looking for a "Messiah." This Galilean prophet had challenged their honor, and normally they would seek to avenge it by the challenger's public discipline—or at this level of public insult, his death. (A generation later another prophet merely announced judgment against the temple; the leading priests handed him over to the governor, who had him flogged until,

*Josephus reports, his bones showed.)

Because the *high priests probably spoke Greek as their first language (as suggested by their tomb inscriptions), Jesus quotes to them from the Greek translation of Psalm 8:2, which reads “praise,” rather than the Hebrew, which has “strength” (slightly less appropriate here). Jesus may argue *qal vahomer* (“how much more”): if God can bring strength or praise from the mouths of infants, how much more can he confound the powerful by the mouths of these children (cf. Mt 11:25; 18:3; 19:14)?

21:18-22

The Power of Faith

21:18. Jerusalem was full of visitors during Passover season—perhaps as many as five hundred thousand (Josephus even estimated more than five times that figure)—and many of the visitors consequently had to lodge in the countryside. “Morning” may mean as early as 6 a.m.

21:19-20. By this time of year fig trees near the Mount of Olives would have leaves, but only green fruit with an unpleasant taste appeared this early; edible figs appeared around early June. Often the green fruit would fall off, so that only leaves remained.

The sequence of events here differs from Mark (cf. Mk 11:12-14, 20-26); ancient biography was not required to be chronological, and Matthew’s changes in Mark’s sequence would have been considered negligible. For further details, compare comment on the Markan passage.

21:21-22. “Removing mountains” was a figure of speech for doing what was virtually impossible. From where Jesus and his disciples are standing, the Mount of Olives (cf. Zech 14:4, 10) and (from its slopes) perhaps the Dead Sea would be visible; thus Jesus’ illustration would have been vivid to his disciples. The Gospels’ own audiences might not know that, but Jesus, his disciples and the Gospel audiences all could have thought of Zechariah 4:6-9, where the *Spirit of God would remove all obstacles to God’s purposes; the obstacles appear as a mountain.

21:23-32

The Right Authority

The conflicts with the authorities in the next several chapters reflect standard methods of debate in antiquity: questions and answers, witty responses, and attempts to trap opponents in their own words. The temple courts, the city's most public venue, were a popular place for teaching and discussion. See comment on Mark 11:27-33 for more details.

21:23. Teachers in Jerusalem often lectured in the temple courts. Those who were publicly dishonored would seek to recoup their honor by publicly challenging their opponent. The next few chapters include many examples of the format of ancient public debate: questions, witty retorts and attempts to use a speaker's words against him.

21:24. Jesus replies to the authorities' question with a counterquestion, which was common in Jewish debate.

21:25-27. Jesus argues that his authority and John's derive from the same source—"heaven" (one Jewish way of saying, "from God"). This response follows the Jewish legal principle that a commissioned messenger acts on the full authority of the one who sent him. The rest of the interaction follows the standard debate procedure of the period.

The chief priests, mostly *Sadducees, were elite politicians—less popular than the politically powerless *Pharisees—who had to balance the interests of both their people and the Roman authorities. They belonged to a hereditary elite whose power was backed by Rome; such groups usually despised popular teachers like Jesus as demagogues. At the same time, the aristocratic priests would also keep popular opinion in mind when making decisions that might incur the displeasure of the people (21:26).

21:28-30. That a father should have asked his son to go work in the vineyard was natural. That the son should have refused to go would have offended Jewish moral sensibilities: this was an openly disobedient son, and disobedience was a punishable offense. But failing to go after promising to go was worse than not having promised; this son violated his word to his own father. The son who refused to go but repented acted preferably (cf. Ezek 18:21-24).

21:31-32. The pious regarded *tax gatherers and prostitutes as outside practicing Judaism. Jesus could not have chosen a much more offensive comparison. The rhetorical question or invitation to reconsider at the end of the *parable was a long-standing technique for challenging hearers (e.g., Is 5:4; cf. 2 Sam 12:1-7). On tax gatherers, see comment on 9:9; Jewish religion despised prostitution but it did exist in Judea. "Way of righteousness" means a righteous lifestyle (Prov 8:20; 12:28; 16:31), which was both John's practice and his

message.

21:33-46

The Evil Tenants and the Benevolent Landowner

Much of the rural Roman Empire, including parts of rural Galilee, was controlled by wealthy landowners, whose income from the land allowed them lives of complete leisure. Their estates were generally worked by tenant farmers, who were usually free peasants (as in Egypt), but sometimes by slaves (as in much of Italy). Although landowners gained great honor among the poor if they were benevolent, such landowners normally had little incentive to do so. They generally lived far away, often in cities, and had little personal contact with their workers. But the landowner in this *parable is so benevolent that aristocrats would have considered him naive.

Jesus addresses those who fancy themselves rulers of Israel (21:23), reminding them that they are merely custodians appointed by God (like the shepherds of Jer 23 and Ezek 34) over his vineyard.

21:33. Jesus' description follows the normal way to prepare a vineyard, but he clearly alludes to Isaiah 5:1-2, where Israel is the vineyard.

21:34. Payments were rendered at harvest time, either by percentage (usually at least twenty-five percent) or a predetermined amount; this would have been specified in the initial contract. Ancient business documents often called profit "fruit," but here a proportion of the harvest seems likely to be meant. (Although probably not relevant to the point of the story, it might take a vineyard four years after planting to become profitable for the planter.)

21:35-37. Landowners in the ancient Mediterranean world always had power, socially and legally, to enforce their will on the tenants; a few reportedly even had squads of hired assassins to deal with troublesome tenants. Here the tenants act as if *they* are the ones with power, and they exploit it mercilessly (as opposed to the ideal of a *benevolent* landowner). Contrary to what some modern commentators have supposed, ancient sources show that their behavior would have horrified ancient hearers. This attitude fits the Jewish tradition that Israel martyred many of the prophets God sent. Peasants tended to praise benevolent landowners, but no ancient landowners would have patiently appealed to their sense of honor this long; people would have regarded such benevolence as folly.

21:38-39. The tenants presume too much about the inheritance. Although

they could have seized it under certain legal conditions, the owner could also stipulate—and after their misdeeds certainly would—that someone else inherit the vineyard; or representatives of the emperor could have seized it. The story paints the tenants as incomparably wicked and stupid; yet the tenants are a transparent metaphor for the religious leaders who serve their own interests rather than yielding to God’s appointed heir—as Jesus’ hearers know (21:45).

21:40-41. Ancient hearers would wonder why the landowner had not intervened earlier to throw out the tenants. Landowners could replace tenants. Asking questions was a standard rabbinic way of involving hearers in the story or teaching; getting hearers of *parables to pronounce judgment on themselves was familiar from the biblical prophets (2 Sam 12:5-7; 14:8-17; 1 Kings 20:40-42).

21:42. Jewish parables often included a Scripture passage that the parable illustrated. This text is from Psalm 118:22-23, part of the Hallel, like 118:25-26 cited in Matthew 21:9. The building referred to seems to be the temple (see Ps 118:18-21, 25-27); as the cornerstone of a new temple, Jesus poses a threat to the builders of the old one (Jerusalem’s aristocracy). (Interpreters disagree as to whether the “cornerstone” refers to the stone located in the corner of the foundation or to the capstone of an arch, but this point is not crucial to the interpretation of the passage.)

21:43. Early Jewish parables especially often focused on the relationship between God and Israel. Israel was a “holy nation” (Ex 19:5-6), but the threat of transferring their status to others had been made before (Ex 32:10; Num 14:12). God rejected the builders’ rejection (Mt 21:42), and he could replace them (cf. 3:10). “Producing” fruit (cf. 3:8) here means turning over the fruit to the landowner (God), in contrast to the tenants in the parable (21:33-42).

21:44. Assuming that this verse is original in Matthew (as in Lk 20:18), “falling on” the cornerstone reflects Isaiah 8:14-15 (probably interpreted in conjunction with Is 28:16, which also mentions a cornerstone); the stone falling on the offender alludes to Daniel 2:34, 44, where God’s *kingdom, portrayed as a rock, crushes its earthly challengers. Jewish interpreters often explained texts by citing other texts employing the same term or idea (here, God’s powerful stone); Jesus here expounds a text (Mt 21:42) by citing others sharing the same concept of the divine stone. A later rabbi warned, “If a pot falls on a rock, woe to the pot; if a rock falls on the pot, woe to the pot—either way, woe to the pot!”

21:45-46. The priestly leaders were shrewd politicians who would be careful not to act *publicly* against the people’s wishes; the Pharisees were popular with

the people but not popular enough to directly challenge Jesus' own popularity here. The priestly aristocracy and the Pharisees acted in concert only when necessary to preserve their people against dangerous revolutionary sentiments; challenging a common adversary like a messianic claimant would fit this category.

22:1-14

Honor the King's Son—or Die

22:1-2. On “the kingdom is like,” see comment on 13:24. In *parables* rabbis often compared God to a king, whose son represented Israel (though not necessarily here); the setting was also sometimes a wedding feast for the son. Wedding feasts were frequently large gatherings; a very wealthy person could invite an entire city to one. Coming to a wedding feast required some commitment of valuable time on the part of guests (Jewish hearers could assume a feast lasting seven days, and a king might expect his guests, unlike those in lesser circumstances, to remain throughout the feast); this commitment would be difficult for peasants working the land. But the honor of being invited by a king—and the terror of displeasing him—would have motivated intelligent invitees to attend; refusal constituted an insult. The invited guests may have been aristocratic landowners anyway (22:5), who had the leisure for such activities. Many Jewish people expected a “messianic banquet” in the time of the *kingdom (cf. Is 25:6).

22:3. *Papyri attest the custom of a preliminary invitation and response. These guests had apparently already confirmed plans to attend (hence “those who had been invited”) but now refused. To refuse the first invitation was rude and offensive; to refuse in concert after having agreed to come would be no accident, but a deliberately treasonous insult.

22:4. Astonishingly, the generous king responds with a further invitation rather than punishment. Because those preparing the food could not calculate the exact time it would be ready, guests had been told only when it was ready. But now it was ready, and if the meat were not consumed quickly, it would spoil.

22:5. See comment on 22:3.

22:6. This behavior would obviously have been illegal even had the servants not belonged to the king; but servants of a king had higher status than most free persons, and as a king's messengers they represented his person. Ancient

peoples universally despised the mistreatment of heralds, or emissaries. In addition, the mistreatment of royal representatives was outright treason, constituting a declaration of revolt. Yet this was the treatment God's servant-messengers, the prophets, were known to have received.

22:7. Kings did not always live in the same place as most of their subjects (e.g., Rome's emperor vs. Jerusalem); the burning of the city probably alludes specifically to the destruction of Jerusalem, which was burned in A.D. 70 (see 24:15). Burning a city was the final step in its complete destruction. That the king would delay the feast to accomplish this (despite the risk of the meat spoiling) bursts the bounds of realism to reinforce a point.

22:8-10. Preparations for the wedding of a king's son would be massive, and it would dishonor the son not to have guests present. Thus, as a last resort, the king redefines "worthy" guests and invites commoners. The lower a person's status, the more punctual they might be expected to be!

22:11. Even commoners knew better than to enter the king's presence without appropriate (at least clean) attire; this would be a sign of insolent disrespect to the host (who at this point in the story is in no mood for further disrespect!). Even peasants often had a set of good clothes for special occasions, besides their work clothes (the latter would be soiled and not easily cleaned in time). (Some scholars also suggest that special attire was provided at the door.) Thus even some of those who showed up for the feast (perhaps representing Jesus' purported followers, like Judas) dishonored him.

Scholars have suggested a parallel with a later Jewish story in which a king invited guests to a feast without advance notice of the date. In this story, only the diligent subjects were dressed and ready at the door when the date came; the others had to wait outside in shame.

22:12-13. Again Jesus bursts the bounds of realism to drive home his point. Porters would screen invitees at the door; on outer darkness and gnashing teeth, see comment on 8:12.

22:14. The last part of the story illustrates the point that many are invited ("called") to a feast (22:3, 8), but few are in the end among the chosen.

22:15-22

Caesar and God

Here Jesus' opponents seek to force him to choose between revolution—which

would allow them to charge him before the Romans—and accommodation with the Romans—which they suppose he opposes (because he opposed their own leadership in the temple). The success of a protagonist's wisdom under "testing" with difficult questions was an ancient theme (cf. 1 Kings 10:1); Jesus' superior wisdom is demonstrated in Matthew 22:15-46.

22:15-16. *Pharisees tended to be nationalistic, whereas Herodians were clients of Herod, the Roman vassal; they worked together only in extraordinary situations. Pharisees would be concerned about Jewish legal requirements to have witnesses for a charge but would be ready to investigate charges concerning Jesus' disloyalty to the law.* The Herodians, who apparently wished for a restoration of Herodian rule in Judea (which *Pilate currently governed), were naturally disturbed by messianic figures who might cause Rome to tighten its direct control over the land.

22:17. The Pharisees pit the obligations of peace with Rome against the nationalistic, messianic fervor that they assume Jesus promotes; a disastrous tax revolt two decades earlier had shown where such fervor could lead. If he publicly takes the view characterized by those later called *Zealots (no king but God), the Herodians can have him arrested; if he rejects that view (which he does), he may compromise his following.

22:18-20. In contrast to King Agrippa later, at this time both Herod Antipas and Judea mostly circulated copper Roman coins without the deified emperor's image, which was offensive to Jewish sensitivity (though after A.D. 6 they were nonetheless *Roman* coins). The strictest Jews avoided images altogether. But foreign coins, which bore the emperor's image and mention of his divine status, were in common circulation in Palestine, where neither gold nor silver coins were permitted to be struck. The silver denarius, probably minted in Lyon, was required to pay taxes in Palestine as elsewhere in the empire, and Jewish people had to use it whether they liked it or not. In this period the side with the emperor's image read, "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus."

Revolutionaries in A.D. 6 had violently protested the tax involving such coins and incurred terrible Roman retaliation that destroyed Galilee's largest city (walking distance from Nazareth). If Jesus' questioners here are concerned about paying Roman taxes, they obviously ought not to be carrying this coin.

22:21-22. Some scholars think that Jesus alluded to people made in God's image (Gen 1:26-27), hence says to give Caesar the less important matter of money, but to give one's life to God. Repartee that put one's interrogators in a bad light was characteristic of popular teachers in both Jewish and Greek

traditions, and Jesus proves himself among the most effective of ancient teachers. In a society that emphasized honor and shame, Jesus' witty responses put them to shame.

22:23-33

The God of the Living

22:23. In ancient Judaism the *Sadducees were especially notorious for not believing in resurrection*; later *rabbis who considered themselves successors of the Pharisees often classified Sadducees as heretics for this view (although the Sadducees, who vanished in the years after A.D. 70, were probably no longer around to respond).

22:24. The Sadducees' question concerns the law of levirate marriage, a custom practiced in many cultures both in antiquity and today (see Deut 25:5). It provides economic and social protection to widows in certain kinds of family-oriented societies where women cannot earn adequate wages. Students of Jewish *law were still expounding this *Old Testament principle in Jesus' day and afterward, though rabbinic rules differed from the Old Testament in some respects (e.g., the brother married the widow and the children she bore him were now his own).

22:25-27. The Sadducees borrow the story line from the Jewish book of Tobit, where righteous Sarah's first seven husbands died, slain by the jealous *demon Asmodeus. Some second-century rabbis proposed that a two-or three-time widow should not marry again, lest she bring harm on her next husband too (cf. Gen 38:11).

22:28. In defining Jewish law, teachers often debated hypothetical situations. But later *rabbinic literature is also full of examples of mocking questions posed by pagans, apostates or those they considered heretics, like the Sadducees.

22:29-30. Most Jewish people did not believe that angels needed to procreate (since they did not die, and some believed that God also regularly created new angels), or (normally) to eat or drink. Sadducees reportedly denied the developed angelology of some of their contemporaries.

"Marry" refers to the groom, whereas "be given in marriage" refers to the bride betrothed by her father.

22:31. Jewish teachers sometimes contested their opponents' points by appealing to Scripture with phrases like, "Go and read." The accusation implied

in “Have you never read?” was even harsher (22:31; cf. 12:3; 19:4; 21:16, 42).

22:32-33. Arguing against their Sadducean opponents, the Pharisees commonly tried to prove the resurrection from the law of Moses (one rabbi even suggested that the resurrection was taught in every passage in the law; cf. also *4 Maccabees 7:18-19; 16:25; 18:19). Jesus here does the same. He argues that God would not claim to be the God of those who no longer exist; indeed, his faithfulness to his covenant demands that if he is their God after death, death is not the final word for them. Some other ancient Jewish writers used similar arguments to show that the patriarchs remain alive. One of the most common Jewish prayers of the period recites God’s faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as a living reality for their own time.

22:34-40

The Greatest Commandments

Jewish teachers often debated which commandments were the greatest or could summarize much of the *law; among options were honoring parents or loving neighbors as oneself. Following Jewish interpretive technique, Jesus links the two commandments (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18) by a shared key expression in Hebrew: “And you shall love” (*ve’ahavta*). Jewish ethics repeatedly stressed love of God and of others.

22:34-38. This commandment was so important to Judaism that it was regularly recited. Deuteronomy 6:5 demanded loving God with all one’s “heart, soul and might”; “might” here becomes “mind” (which was implicit in the Hebrew understanding of “heart”), but the image is still “with one’s whole person.” (*New Testament writers apparently revocalized the Hebrew term for “might” as “mind,” a Hebrew term that sounded similar; such revocalization was a common Jewish interpretive practice.)

22:38. Koine Greek sometimes used “great” (NASB) to mean (NRSV) “greatest.”

22:39. Jewish tradition sometimes joined the second commandment with the first.

22:40. Some other teachers also used these commandments as summaries of the law, which is how they also appear in their contexts in the *Old Testament.

22:41-46

David's Lord

By definition, the Christ, or anointed one, was the royal descendant of David (Is 9:7; 11:1; Ps 2; 89; 132). Yet people typically thought of a son as a subordinate, a perspective inappropriate concerning Jesus. The one who would reign in God's *kingdom was David's "Lord," not merely his descendant; he would thus be greater than the resurrected David.

Jewish people agreed that the *Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures* (22:43). *When Jewish teachers challenged their hearers to resolve apparent discrepancies in Scripture, they assumed that both texts were true (in this case, Jesus knows that he is both David's son and David's Lord; Mt 1:1) and were simply asking how to harmonize them. Jesus' opponents apparently have no answer to his question, perhaps because Jewish interpreters did not apply Psalm 110:1 to the Messiah.*

Those silenced by a speaker's wisdom had been publicly shamed and would be careful before engaging in such a public battle of wits with the speaker again. When contemporary literature reports hearers being overawed by a wise speaker's (usually the protagonist's) wisdom, the readers are meant to respect the speaker's wisdom too (e.g., 1 Esdras 4:41-42).

23:1-12

Serve More Humbly Than Pharisees

The other Gospels also record Jesus' disputes with *scribes and Pharisees* (Mk 12:38-40; Lk 11:39-52), but many scholars believe that Matthew focuses greater attention on these disputes than do Mark and Luke because scribes and Pharisees constituted the chief Jewish opposition his readers faced in Syria-Palestine (see the introduction to Matthew). That is, on this view, Matthew sometimes focuses on parts of Jesus' life and teachings most relevant to Matthew's audience, just as we sometimes do for our hearers today. Scribes and Pharisees were originally distinct though overlapping groups (Lk 11:39-52), but those who threatened Matthew's readers were the joint successors of both these groups. Matthew also intends this warning to apply against these opponents' counterparts in the *church (Mt 24:45-51).

23:1-2. Some scholars have pointed to a prominent seat in many *synagogues as a "seat of Moses" (cf. 23:6), but Jesus presumably means this expression figuratively. The Pharisaic scribes who articulated the *law believed

their traditions were rooted in Moses' own teaching and fancied themselves Moses' successors for their own generation.

23:3. Pharisaic teachers normally taught that knowing Scripture took precedence over obeying it, because knowing it was the prerequisite for obeying it; but they themselves would have agreed that one must obey it and not just learn it.

23:4-5. "Phylacteries" are *tefillin*, small boxes affixed by a leather strap to one's head and left hand during morning and evening prayers; Scripture passages were inserted in these boxes (the practice is based on an overly literal reading of Deut 6:8). These passages were then recited as part of the prayers; rules concerning this later became stricter under the *rabbis. For the tassels, see comment on 9:20 and 14:36.

23:6. Everywhere in Mediterranean antiquity, seating was a matter of honor or dishonor; in Jewish circles, seating was according to rank in the *Qumran assemblies, traditions about the Sanhedrin and later rabbinic schools. This practice also obtained at banquets; those assigned seats in lower-status places frequently complained, as ancient literature amply attests. The most prominent seats in the synagogue perhaps varied in this period before synagogue architecture was standardized; one first-century synagogue seems to suggest a lack of seating rank. Probably in most synagogues the most honored seats were on the bema, the platform for the reading of the Law; elders and people of status may have often been seated in benches along the walls. At least some synagogues had other benches as well; in some synagogues, however, many hearers may have remained on mats on the floor.

23:7. Greetings were an essential courtesy in Greek and Jewish cultures. Greetings ("Peace be with you") were so important socially that specific rules developed how to greet whom when; for example, the person of lower status coming upon a person of higher status should be first to offer a greeting. Not to hail a person superior in understanding the *law was a grievous insult. Marketplaces were the most crowded places in town.

23:8. "Rabbi" means "my master" and came to be commonly applied to teachers as a title of respect (something like "Reverend" or "Father" today); they were especially "masters" of their pupils. They were venerated in a variety of ways.

23:9-11. People in antiquity often addressed elders or community leaders as "fathers"; for this reason, some also called their teachers (cf. 23:8) "Abba," or "Papa," and teachers sometimes addressed their *disciples as their children.

Society emphasized respect for honor and rank, often hereditary, and rabbis' authority and honor placed them on a higher level than the disciples. Jesus says that only God is to receive such superior respect; all other Christians are peers.

23:12. The principle stated here occurs in Proverbs 25:6-7 with reference to seating at banquets, and elsewhere the principle refers to the future time when God equalizes everyone (Is 2:11-12; 5:15; cf. Ezek 17:24; 21:26).

23:13-28

Woes to the Hypocrites

Like beatitudes (see Mt 5:3-12), woes were an *Old Testament form of prayer. The prophets commonly employed them to pronounce judgment, and they are akin to "alases" or, perhaps here, curses ("Cursed be . . ." in contrast to the blessing formula, "Blessed be . . ."; cf. Deut 27-28).

Pharisees were not all of one kind, and the later rabbis, who generally considered themselves spiritual heirs of the Pharisees, report criticisms of several sorts of Pharisees whose hearts were not right (e.g., "the bruised Pharisee," who kept bumping into things because his eyes were closed to avoid seeing a woman). These reports emphasize that motives are critical; the best motive is fear of the Lord, or (in the more refined version) love of God. *Rabbinic literature regularly condemns hypocrisy and demands proper motives. Jesus' opponents would have agreed with most of his ethics, and perhaps protested that they were not really violating them.

Hypocrites originally meant play-actors but by this time the term was also used pejoratively for two-faced people, whose behavior either differed from their belief or varied when they were with different people.

23:13. The image of power to shut someone out is the image of the doorkeeper with the keys to the house; see comment on 16:19.

23:14. This verse is not in all Greek manuscripts of Matthew; for background on its content, see comment on Mark 12:40.

23:15. Pharisees did not have missionaries as such, but Jewish people outside Palestine were always eager to make converts among the *Gentiles, and the wing of Pharisaism most influenced by *Hillel was said to be especially open to converting non-Jews to Judaism. Judaism continued to make many converts for centuries, until it was finally stifled by the legislation of Roman Christendom, with which it was in competition (although the Romans had

always resented and tried to limit Jewish proselytism, including in pre-Christian times).

“Child of hell” means someone destined to go there. The problem here is not making converts (28:19) but teaching them wrongly.

23:16-22. Jews were no longer allowed to pronounce the sacred name of God in this period. By swearing lesser oaths, some people hoped to avoid the consequences of swearing by God’s name if they could not keep their vow or if their oath turned out to be mistaken. As people swore or vowed by things related to God instead of by God himself, more and more things became substitutes for the divine name and thus became roundabout ways of seeming to swear by God while hoping to buffer the consequences. See comment on 5:33-37.

23:23. The principle that virtues like justice, mercy and faith are most important is familiar from Scripture (Deut 10:12-13; Mic 6:8), and the rabbis themselves sometimes summarized the law in terms of general principles like love. Most Pharisees and other Jewish interpreters like Philo agreed that there were heavier and lighter parts of the law. They would have responded to Jesus that they attended to minutiae only because even the smallest detail of the law was important to the pious; they taught that one should devote as much attention to the little details as to the principles. But Jesus was not against the law (see Mt 5:19); his point is that they should have learned justice, mercy and covenant faithfulness first (9:13; 12:7).

Tithes were especially used to support the priests and Levites (and for a celebration shared by the entire community every third year). “Dill” and Luke’s “rue” (Lk 11:42) are similar words in *Aramaic, possibly reflecting an original Aramaic source here. The law did not explicitly require tithing these dried green plants. Different groups of Pharisees debated among themselves whether to tithe cummin.

23:24. The *hyperbole here is humorous and would certainly catch ancient hearers’ attention. Wanting to avoid the impurity caused by a dead insect in their drink, Pharisees would strain out any insect larger than a lentil before it could die in order to preserve the fluid (cf. Lev 11:32, 34). Pharisees considered gnats, which were smaller than lentils, exempt from this impurity, but the scrupulous Pharisee of Jesus’ hyperbole would not have taken any chances. Yet Jesus charges hyperbolically that they would leave a camel (the largest animal in Palestine and also ritually unclean, Lev 11:4) in the cup and gulp it down. Their attention to the law’s details was fine, but they had missed the main point (Mt 23:23). (The similarity between the Aramaic terms for camel [*gamlā*] and gnat

[*kamla*] may have also caught their attention.)

23:25-26. 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 this so that he can make a figurative statement about the inside of the heart.

23:27-28. Nothing spread ritual impurity as severely as a corpse (it made anyone who touched it unclean for a week—Num 19:11); 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 before Passover to warn passersby to avoid them and so avoid impurity; the Pharisees either lacked this telltale warning (Lk 11:44) or pretended that it was a mark of distinction rather than evidence of impurity. Matthew emphasizes instead whitewash’s function as a beautifying agent employed to conceal corruption. “Whitewash” probably alludes to Ezekiel 13:10-12 and 22:28; it may have covered over a wall’s weakness but would not stop its collapse.

23:29-39

Killing the Prophets

This is the final woe (23:29).

23:29-30. Ancient Judaism emphasized more often than the *Old Testament had that Israel had martyred its prophets (e.g., Jer 26:20-23; cf. 2 Chron 36:15-16). The Jewish community in this period built tombs as monuments for the prophets and righteous (including some who were not martyred, like David or Huldah).

23:31. Jesus’ point 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.).

23:32. This is an ironic challenge, typical of the prophets (Is 6:9; Jer 44:25; Amos 4:4-5): Go ahead and sin if you must, but God will judge you for it (Eccles 11:9)!

23:33. Being called vipers, or a kind of venomous snake, was bad enough (Ps 58:4; 140:3; cf. Gen 3). But the offspring of a viper was reputed to eat its

way out of its pregnant mother's belly, so calling someone the offspring of vipers could imply that one was guilty of the universally horrifying crime of matricide. In other words, this was worse than just calling someone a viper!

23:34. Prophets were sent by God according to the Old Testament, or by Wisdom (cf. Lk 11:49) in some Jewish traditions; here they are sent by Jesus.

Some Jews allowed that *prophecy still happened, many doubted that prophets in the Old Testament sense remained active (a notion apparently challenged here). Here Jesus mentions several clerical categories: prophets, wise men (wisdom teachers who circulated proverbs, etc.) and scribes to explain Scriptures (cf. 13:52). Crucifixion was the severest Roman punishment, reserved for the lowest classes of non-Romans; any Jew who delivered another Jew over to such a punishment was naturally despised by his people. Synagogue scourgings were a form of discipline inflicted on errant members of the Jewish community (see comment on 10:17); on "city to city," see comment on 10:23.

23:35. Bloodguilt was a serious matter, affecting the whole community and not just the individuals directly responsible (Deut 21:1-9). God himself would avenge it (Deut 32:43; Ps 79:10).

Insofar as one can speak of the sequence of the Hebrew Bible at all (it was then on separate scrolls), it was traditionally arranged in a different sequence than 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 not even the slaughter of thousands of priests could appease. Abel's blood cried out for vengeance (Gen 4:10), and in this tradition Zechariah's did the same (biblically, he explicitly prayed for judgment; 2 Chron 24:22). From the first martyr to the last, Jesus says, their judgment is saved up for the particularly wicked generation. The Zechariah murdered in the temple was son of Jehoiada the priest (2 Chron 24:22), not Zechariah son of Berechiah (Zech 1:1), who lived much later in Israel's history. But Matthew apparently uses the Jewish interpretive technique of combining key words to coalesce two Zechariahs, referring to one and alluding to the other, as he did with Amon/Amos and Asa/Asaph in his genealogy in chapter 1. (The suggestion of some scholars that "Zechariah" also alludes to a prophet martyred in A.D. 67 is unlikely.)

23:36. "This generation" occurs also in Matthew 11:16; 13:39, 45; and 16:4; see comment on 24:34. This is the generation that would see the destruction of the temple. For the image of generations of guilt climaxing in the guiltiest

generation on whom the whole judgment is poured out, see Jeremiah 16:10-13.

23:37. Jewish tradition claimed that Jewish people were under God's wings (cf. *1 *Enoch* 39:7; *2 *Baruch* 41:4; *Sifre Deuteronomy* 296.3.1; 306.4.1; 314.1.1-6), and when a Jewish person converted a *Gentile, he or she brought that Gentile "under the wings of God's presence" (*Sifre Numbers* 80.1.1). The Old Testament also portrays God as an eagle hovering over its offspring (Deut 32:11; cf. Ex 19:4), protecting Israel under his wings (Ps 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4) and terrifying Israel's foes in the same way (Jer 49:22). This is one Old Testament image of God's love for his people; here Jesus fills this divine role.

Prophets sometimes addressed Jerusalem directly (Jer 13:27), and repetition of a name in direct address is common in Jewish texts. On "killing the prophets," see comment on 23:29-30.

23:38. The "house" could mean Israel (Jer 12:7), but in this context almost certainly means the temple (e.g., Judith 9:13), which would also be left "desolate" (Mt 24:15) in A.D. 70. In the Old Testament, the temple was called God's house; perhaps it is called "your house" here to declare that God's presence has exited it, as in Ezekiel 10-11.

23:39. On the significance of this citation, see comment on 21:9. The Old Testament prophets and subsequent Jewish tradition suggested that the redemption would not come until after Israel's widespread *repentance (cf. Is 30:19; Jer 31:18-19; Hos 14:1-7).

24:1-3

Introduction to the Judgment Discourse

Chapter 23 began Jesus' warning of God's judgment against certain elements of the religious establishment; this chapter extends that judgment to the temple itself. After it was destroyed in A.D. 70, many of the Jewish people saw God's hand of judgment in the destruction.

24:1. Although Greeks counted Ephesus's Artemis temple as one of the seven wonders of the world, Jerusalem's temple was actually far larger and more magnificent. The Jerusalem temple was one of the most splendid structures of all antiquity and seemed strong and invincible (cf., e.g., **Letter of Aristeas* 100-101). It was the central symbol of Judaism and was renowned for its beauty. See further comment on Mark 13:1.

24:2. Some Greek philosophers were unimpressed with magnificent structures, but Jesus' response goes far beyond this attitude—he speaks of judgment. Some other Jewish groups (including the *Qumran sect) also expected the temple to be judged; but most Jews, regardless of their other differences, found in the temple a symbol of their Jewish unity and would have been appalled to think that God would allow it to be destroyed (as in Jer 7:4-15). Some stones were left on others (e.g., part of one wall still stands), but this fact does not weaken the force of the *hyperbole: the temple was almost entirely demolished in A.D. 70.

24:3. *Old Testament prophets often grouped events together by their topic rather than their chronology, and in this discourse Jesus does the same. He addresses what in Matthew are grammatically two separate questions: the time of the temple's destruction and the time of the end. The *disciples may have viewed these questions as integrally related, but Jesus will distinguish them: when will the temple be destroyed (within a generation)? What will be the sign of his coming (at an hour known to no one)?

24:4-14

Coming Events

Preliminary signs indicating the nearness of the end appear in many Jewish *apocalyptic writings (e.g., *2 *Baruch* 70:7), but much material characteristic of such texts (the final war, Rome's destruction, mutant babies, etc.) is missing here. Most of the preliminary signs that other apocalyptic thinkers expected for the end are explicitly *not* indicators of the end here (Mt 24:6-8).

24:4-5. Many false messianic figures arose in the first century (and subsequently); they often attracted large and devoted followings. Although *Josephus, writing for *Gentile readers, describes them as “false prophets” rather than as messiahs, their political aspirations are usually apparent in his descriptions.

24:6-8. These troubles were associated with the sufferings many Jews thought would immediately precede the end (e.g., *4 *Ezra* 9:3; 13:31-32; 2 *Baruch* 27:7; 70:3; **Sibylline Oracles* 2:22-24; 3:660-61). Some compared these troubles to “birth pangs,” or the “birth pangs of the *Messiah” or of the messianic era (e.g., in the *Qumran *Hymns*; cf. Is 13:8; Hos 13:13). For Jesus, they are only the “*beginning* of birth pangs” and characterize life as normal in

this age. He describes some of them in Old Testament language (2 Chron 15:6; Is 19:2; Jer 51:46).

24:9-14. Universal persecution, apostasy and worldwide missions revival mark the final era. These events began to characterize Jesus' movement in the first century, although not yet on a worldwide scale.

Under pressure, many converts to Judaism reverted to paganism, and Jewish texts warn of many Jewish people turning from God in the end time as they had just before the rise of the *Maccabees in the second century B.C. Apostasy and especially handing over friends to persecutors were considered horrible crimes.

Thus Jewish readers would have readily understood Jesus' warning about persecution and apostasy here; his teaching concerning the spread of the good news of the *kingdom among all nations, however, runs counter to prevailing Jewish teaching. Although apocalyptic writers expected persecution by the nations (cf. Dan 7:21, 25), they did not anticipate a widespread conversion of Gentiles before the end. (Some did envision the subjugation and/or conversion of nations during the end; others envisioned their destruction.)

24:15-22

The Events of 66–70

One prerequisite for Christ's return was the series of events fulfilled in A.D. 66–70, events accurately predicted by Jesus.

24:15. The “abomination that brings about desolation” in Daniel 9:27 occurs after the cutting off of the Messiah (a passage subject to various interpretations); Daniel 11:31 sounds as if it should have occurred in the second century B.C., and 12:11 at the time of the end, so some interpreters have felt that the *prophecy was accomplished in stages. Some interpreters believe that parts of Daniel's prophecy remain to be fulfilled; others believe that all of it was fulfilled in the first century.

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus felt that Daniel was fulfilled when revolutionaries slaughtered the priests in the temple in A.D. 66, committing a sacrilege for which God brought about the desolation of the temple (human bloodshed in the temple desecrated it; cf. comment on 23:35). This sacrilege would have been the signal for Christians to flee Jerusalem (24:16); early Christian historians tell us that Christian prophets warned the Jewish Christians to flee Jerusalem at this time.

Three and a half years later, the temple was left “desolate” in 70, when the Romans destroyed it with fire and then erected their own standards on the site. As Jewish people knew (it is lamented in the *Dead Sea Scrolls*), *these standards bore the insignia of the Roman emperor, who was worshiped as divine in the Eastern Mediterranean; they would thus have sealed the site’s desecration. Jerusalem’s citizens had felt that even bringing these standards into Jerusalem temporarily (as Pilate had done roughly three and one-half years before Jesus uttered this warning) defiled the holy city.* On several occasions the Jerusalemites had shown that they preferred death to their temple’s defilement.

24:16. The mountains were the easiest place in Judea to hide; armies had often used them for waging guerrilla warfare (cf., e.g., 1 Sam 23:26; 1 Maccabees 2:28). Early Christian tradition indicates that the Jerusalem Christians fled to Pella at the base of mountains to the north; although the Judean hill country lay all about Jerusalem, the route northward to Pella would be through the Jordan Valley. Both the mountains and the route to Pella could have provided places of refuge, but the flight to Pella shows that the mountain saying in 24:16 was not made up after the event.

24:17. The roof, which was flat, was used for prayer, drying vegetables and other functions. The staircase from this roof was on the outside of the house; one could thus descend without entering the house. Even if there is an element of *hyperbole, it graphically underlines the point of urgency.

24:18. Workers would wear an outer cloak to the fields when they began the day about 6 a.m.; as the day grew warmer, they left their cloaks on the edge of the field. Because people needed them as blankets to stay warm at night, creditors could not seize these outer cloaks overnight (Deut 24:13). Here haste (hence preserving life) takes priority over even the most crucial possessions.

24:19. Mothers may have nursed infants for their first two years before weaning them. Being pregnant or nursing a child made travel much more difficult. Famine would also make pregnancy and nursing much more problematic. Indeed, Josephus reports that the siege of Jerusalem became so difficult that some women ate their children (as in Lev 26:29; Deut 28:57; 2 Kings 6:29). Similar language elsewhere can refer to grief over the loss of young children, physically unprepared for the hardships.

24:20. Winter restricted conditions for travel, immobilizing even most armies. In the winter, the otherwise dry creek beds (wadis) were flooded with water and became difficult to cross; this was even more true of the Jordan River. In spring 68 some Jewish fugitives from another city did try to escape the

Roman army during the war and, delayed by Jordan's flooded waters, were mostly slaughtered.

Jewish *law prohibited riding horses, mules and other means of transportation on the sabbath; even one's walking distance was regulated. Transportation and passage would thus be difficult to obtain on the sabbath, especially if residents of Jerusalem wished to flee secretly without being challenged by the patriotic *Zealots. The sabbath could be violated to save life, but those who did not recognize the situation's urgency would not cooperate.

24:21. Here Jesus borrows the language of Daniel 12:1, referring to the final era of tribulation necessary before the dead would be raised (12:11-13). "Never before or again" was sometimes hyperbolic (cf. Josh 10:14 with Ex 8:13; Num 14:20; 2 Kings 6:18), although Josephus concurs that the sufferings of 66–70 exceeded any before them in human history.

24:22. Jesus might mean the 1,290 days of Dan 12:11-12; the time would be shortened to ensure survivors.

24:23-28

Beware of False Messiahs

24:23-24. Some Jewish false prophets in first-century Judea drew large followings by claiming that they could perform miracles, such as parting the Jordan or making the walls of Jerusalem fall down; they failed to make good on such promises. In addition, many magicians claimed to work miraculous cures, and some Jewish false prophets probably made similar claims. Some others reportedly prophesied that Jerusalem or the temple would not fall—some of them right up until their deaths in the burning temple.

24:25. Advance warning encouraged trust in God (Is 48:5).

24:26. Would-be messiahs most often came in the wilderness, trying to imitate Moses, who had long ago led his people through the wilderness. (Jewish people expected a deliverer like Moses, as in Deut 18:15.) After A.D. 70 and especially after the crushing defeat in A.D. 135, many Palestinian Jews grew more skeptical of messianic claimants (*Sadducees already had been).

24:27. False messiahs could not duplicate this sign. This is the coming of the Lord described by passages like Zechariah 14:3-8, with Jesus filling the role most Jewish readers expected God to fill.

24:28. Jesus' return will not be a secret event; it will be the place of the last

battle, leaving his enemies as food for vultures (Ezek 32:4-6; 39:17-20). Being eaten instead of buried was considered a horrible fate (Deut 28:26; 1 Sam 17:44; Ps 79:2). Greeks sometimes believed that such lack of burial precluded entrance into the underworld.

24:29-31

Final Signs

24:29. This reference to astronomical events is *Old Testament language for the time of God's judgment at the final battle* (e.g., Is 13:10; 24:23; 34:4; Ezek 32:7-8; Joel 3:14; Zech 14:6). *Similar cosmic language was sometimes applied to judgments or other divine acts in history as well* (e.g., Ps 18:6-19; Jer 4:20-28; Sibylline Oracles). Many in antiquity viewed darkness as a frightful judgment (cf. Ex 9:21-23); eclipses also usually generated fear. Both Jew and Gentile regarded signs in the heavens as portentous, and Josephus reports some signs in the heavens (on a much smaller scale) in connection with the fall of Jerusalem.

24:30. This heavenly appearance of the sign of the *Son of Man* is the *ultimate sign of Jesus' coming* (24:3)—*too late to prepare*. The text combines Zechariah 12:10-12, where in the end God brings his people to repent of the pain they have caused him, and Daniel 7:13-14, where a representative of suffering Israel would receive the kingdom from God and reign forever. (Cf. also Rev 1:7.) In the Dead Sea Scrolls, "clouds" refer to the hosts of angels at God's coming; in the Old Testament, this image could refer to the cloud of God's glory or to literal clouds.

24:31. Trumpets were used to announce the accession of kings and other great events. In the Old Testament they were especially used to gather God's people (most frequently for war); the prophets often used the trumpet as a symbol warning of impending battle and devastation (e.g., Jer 4:5, 19, 21; Zeph 1:16). The trumpet had already been used for the gathering of God's people in the end time (Is 27:13), a gathering associated with Israel's salvation (Is 11:12; 43:5; 49:5; 56:8; and commonly in Jewish tradition) and God's final war (Zech 9:14-16). A regularly recited Jewish prayer from this period mentions this future gathering of Israel at the sound of the trumpet; various other ancient Jewish texts agree. It was thus a natural image for the gathering of believers (cf. 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16).

“From one end of heaven to the other” may communicate in a popular image of the day: heaven was a dome over the earth, so this phrase is similar to our equally figurative “from one end of the earth to the other”—i.e., everywhere (cf. Mk 13:27).

24:32-35

Certainty of the Coming

24:32-33. This is the first of seven future-kingdom *parables*, *paralleling the seven parables on the presence of the kingdom* in chapter 13.

Unlike most Palestinian trees, fig trees lose their leaves in winter; they would have been in leaf by this time of year, however, predicting the fruit that should appear on them in the summer. Jesus had earlier used this tree as a parable for the temple’s destruction (see Mk 11:12-25). But the meaning is ultimately decided by the context: when the signs he had listed (including the temple’s destruction) were fulfilled, his coming would be imminent.

24:34. The temple was destroyed roughly forty years after Jesus spoke these words (which refer to the temple’s demise rather than to the Second Coming—see comment on 24:3). The Dead Sea Scrolls anticipated a final, forty-year generation of tribulation before the end; Jesus apparently leaves the period between the final earthly sign (the temple’s demise) and his return indeterminate.

24:35. Even Jewish prophets would not speak thus of their own words (Zech 1:5-6); such a claim was made only for God’s words, spoken through Moses and the prophets (cf. Jer 31:35-37). Those who claimed that their words were unchangeable believed that they spoke infallibly for God (cf. Zech 1:5-6; comment on Rev 22:18-19; *rabbis spoke thus concerning the authority of the Old Testament).

24:36-44

Uncertainty of the Time of His Coming

24:36. See perhaps Zechariah 14:7. Although God had made the crucial things known to his people, he always kept some mysteries secret (Deut 29:29; cf. *4 Ezra 4:52).

Jewish teachers struggled with a tension between two positions: (1) one could predict when the *Messiah would come, in a time ordained only by God;

and (2) one could not predict his coming, but he would come whenever Israel repented and wholly followed God.

24:37-39. Jewish tradition emphasized the evils of Noah's generation in much fuller detail than the Bible had, but the emphasis here is on their unpreparedness.

24:40-41. In the context of 24:37-39, "taken" may mean "taken to judgment" (cf. Jer 6:11 NASB, NRSV). Women worked together grinding at a shared handmill, perhaps in a courtyard shared with other houses, and often became as close as relatives. Wives of *Pharisees were allowed to work together with unreligious women (provided they did not involve themselves in any infringements of Pharisaic purity rules); thus the scenario of women of different convictions working together is not unusual.

24:42. "Watch" involves staying alert and ready the way a night watchman or guard would (cf. 24:43).

24:43-44. Thieves could "break in" by digging through the clay wall of the average Palestinian Jewish home, or by (more quickly but loudly) breaking in a door. (A more well-to-do householder with stronger walls would often have servants to watch the doors for him.) A thief who broke in at night, unlike one who broke in during the day, could be killed with impunity because he was regarded as potentially dangerous to life, expecting people to be home at night (Ex 22:2-3). God's judgment, of course, would be more dangerous than the average night thief (e.g., Jer 49:9; Obad 5).

24:45-51

Watchful Servants

Often a well-to-do householder had a slave who was a "manager," or "steward," managing his estate. Such a high-level slave could be in charge of giving rations to the other servants and could abuse his authority only if the master were not present. (Absentee landowners and householders were common, especially if they owned other estates at a great distance. In some stories of the period, absentee kings, landowners or husbands posed temptations to those remaining behind.)

Some laws viewed slaves as persons, while other laws viewed them as property (for economic matters). Although masters were allowed to beat slaves, it was in their economic interests not to do so often or severely. A slave who

abused the other slaves was mistreating his master's "property"; often these other servants were also objects of the master's personal concern. Drunkenness was despised, especially if slaves drank wine and banqueted at the master's expense without his knowledge. Dismemberment (normally after death) was a punishment considered too cruel by Jews but nevertheless practiced by some Gentiles.

25:1-13

Watchful Bridesmaids

Being a bridesmaid was a great honor; to be insultingly unprepared and shut out of the feast was the stuff of which young women's nightmares were made. Professed believers must endure in faith to the end (24:13).

25:1. On "the kingdom is like," see comment on 13:24. Weddings were held toward evening and torches were used as part of the celebration, which focused on a procession leading the bride to the groom's house. It is unlikely that "lamps" refers to the small Herodian oil lamps, which could be carried in the hand; all the evidence points instead here to real torches, which were also used in Greek and Roman wedding ceremonies. For many people, these torches may have been sticks wrapped with oil-soaked rags. In many traditional Palestinian villages in more recent times, the wedding feast occurs at night after a day of dancing; the bridesmaids leave the bride, with whom they have been staying, and go out to meet the bridegroom with torches. They then escort him back to his bride, whom they all in turn escort to the groom's home.

25:2-7. Torches like these could not burn indefinitely; some evidence suggests that they may have burned for only fifteen minutes before the burnt rags would have to be removed and new oil-soaked rags would need to be wrapped on the sticks of which they were made. Because not all the details of ancient Palestinian weddings are known, it is not clear whether the *parable envisions the lamps as burning while the bridesmaids slept (to avoid the delay of having to rekindle them) or as being lit only after the first announcement of the bridegroom's coming (as many scholars think). Either way, if the bridegroom delayed longer than they anticipated, their lamps would not last unless they had an extra reserve of oil. Bridegrooms were often late, and their comings were repeatedly announced until they arrived.

25:8. The bridesmaids needed sufficient oil to keep the torches lit during the

procession to the groom's home and the dancing.

25:9. Trying to share the oil would have left too little for any of the torches and ruined the wedding ceremony. It would have been difficult to find dealers at this time of night, however (although some catering shops could have been open if they were near a large city); the foolish bridesmaids were definitely going to be late.

25:10. The young women were supposed to meet the bridegroom, who would then fetch his bride from her home and lead the whole procession back to his father's house for the feast. Some suggest that by portraying himself as the bridegroom, Jesus implies his deity (Is 54:5; Jer 2:2; Hos 2:14-20). Although people would often come and go during wedding feasts, the bolt used to shut doors was noisy and cumbersome; perhaps it represents an effort to be repeated only if necessary, making new visitors unwelcome (cf. Lk 11:7).

25:11-13. The foolish bridesmaids missed the entire procession back to the groom's house, their primary role, along with the festive singing and dancing. They also missed the critical element of the Jewish wedding, in which the bride was brought into the groom's home under the wedding canopy. "I do not know you" could be used in deliberate refusals to recognize someone indeed known. As they had (through lack of seriousness about their responsibility) insulted the wedding families, so now they receive a deliberate insult. Weddings typically lasted seven days, and much of a village would be welcome; these foolish girls, however, were unwelcome, and might carry this shame in village gossip for years. In one later rabbinic parable, a king invited guests to a banquet without specifying the date. Only the most conscientious invitees were dressed and waiting at the door when the banquet arrived, leaving the others outside in shame. Rabbinic parables also address readiness for death (though Jesus refers here to his return).

25:14-30

Making Use of the Interim Time

Wealthy landowners usually delegated the control and multiplication of their wealth to trained accountants, who could be free persons or, as here, servants. In view of the impending day of reckoning, believers must make the wisest use of all that the Lord has entrusted to them, to make it count for him; they must never take their stewardships for granted (24:45-51).

25:14. Well-to-do masters often went on long journeys, sometimes to oversee properties elsewhere or on government assignments. Given the uncertainties of transportation in those days, the time of return for even a well-planned trip would be uncertain. Wealthy persons usually depended on trained accountants to multiply their capital; such workers could be either free or (as here) slave. (Slaves could also be managers of estates.) In antiquity, slaves could often earn money and even buy property.

25:15. Although the exact value of a talent varied from period to period and place to place, we may estimate the values of these investments at roughly thirty to fifty thousand, twelve to twenty thousand and six to ten thousand denarii. Since one denarius was close to an average day's wage in this period, this would be a "small sum" (25:21, 23) only to a very rich master.

25:16-17. Those with sufficient capital could invest it at a profit; for instance, they could lend it to moneychangers who would use it to turn a profit and give them a substantial share. Lending money at interest directly was also profitable, given the exorbitant interest rates of the period. The normal Roman rate for private loans was twelve percent, though one *patron is reported to have lent to an entire city at roughly fifty percent interest! Because most people did not have capital available for investment, those who did could reap large profits.

25:18. One of the safest—and least profitable—ways of protecting one's money was to bury it in the ground; such buried reserves are still occasionally found where someone never returned to retrieve his or her deposits. (Lk 19:20 portrays a worse method.)

25:19-23. One could normally at least double one's investment; those with capital could often accomplish far more. The principle that integrity in smaller matters qualified one to prove one's integrity in larger matters was often invoked in antiquity. Some have suggested that Jesus used an *Aramaic term for "joy" that also means "festival" (cf. 25:10); the master threw a feast at his return and honored his helpful servants.

25:24-25. The smallest possible investment, providing some interest on a savings deposit, could not have endangered the deposit; it would have been as safe as burying the money. The third slave should have known better; he simply did not care what happened to his master's property (see comment on 25:15-17). The phrase "You have what is yours" was used in Jewish transactions to say, "I am not responsible for this any further."

25:26-27. Although usury, charging interest on a loan or a deposit, was technically against Jewish *law (Ex 22:25; Lev 25:36-37; Deut 23:19-20; Neh

5:7; Ps 15:5; Prov 28:8; Ezek 18:8, 13, 17; 22:12), *Gentiles were not bound to refrain from it; further, Jewish people could charge Gentiles, and many wealthy Jewish aristocrats followed Greek custom more than official Jewish teaching anyway. In any case, Jesus could expect his Jewish hearers to grasp the full imagery of this parable, just as other *rabbis could tell parables about kings long after kings had ceased in Jewish Palestine.*

25:28-30. Darkness is elsewhere used as an image for hell (8:12).

25:31-46

Judging Sheep and Goats

25:31. The *Son of Man was going to come to reign for God (Dan 7:13-14; cf. the **Similitudes of Enoch*, of uncertain date), and some Jewish *apocalypses (perhaps following Greek images of the realm of the dead) described human judges before the final day of judgment. But the description of absolute authority afforded Jesus here fits most precisely the standard Jewish picture of God judging the nations in the day of judgment. For the angels, see comment on 16:27.

25:32. God judging the nations (e.g., Is 2:4; Mic 4:3) was a standard part of Jewish expectation for the future. God would distinguish among the sheep (Ezek 34:17). Although sheep and goats grazed together, some scholars write that Palestinian shepherds normally separated sheep and goats at night because goats need to be warm at night while sheep prefer open air. Certainly sheep were considered more valuable than goats, so that owners usually had many more sheep than goats (though this is not part of Jesus' analogy here; cf. 7:13-14). The greater profitability of sheep may have influenced how these terms would be heard figuratively; for instance, in a pagan dream handbook sheep were associated with good while goats were associated with trouble. Most people in the eastern Mediterranean preferred goats' and sheep's cheese to that made from cows' milk. Sheep were shorn for wool twice a year; people used both sheepskins and goatskins for leather when the animals died, but preferred goatskins.

25:33. The right is the preferred side in ancient texts; in the few scenes of judgment where it occurs, the right side is for the righteous and the left for the wicked (e.g., the *Testament of Abraham* recension A).

25:34. "Inherit the kingdom" is a familiar phrase; in Jewish tradition, the

*kingdom was prepared for Israel, who had been predestined by God. The king in Jewish parables is virtually always God; here it refers to Jesus.

25:35-36. Except for visiting the imprisoned, the deeds Jesus lists are standard righteous deeds in Jewish ethics. Providing for the poor, giving hospitality to the stranger and visiting the sick were basic to Jewish piety.

25:37-39. An unclear statement followed by a counterquestion was a standard method of moving an argument forward (see, e.g., Mal 1:6-7).

25:40. In some Jewish apocalyptic texts, the nations would be judged for how they treated Israel. In the Bible, God also judged people for how they treated the poor (e.g., Prov 19:17). But given the use of “brothers” or “sisters” (12:50; 28:10; the Greek term can include both genders) and perhaps “least” (5:19; 11:11; cf. 18:4; 20:26; 23:11) elsewhere in Matthew, many argue that this passage refers to receiving messengers of Christ. Such missionaries needed shelter, food and help in imprisonment and other complications caused by persecution; see comment on 10:11-14. Receiving them was like receiving *Christ (on the Jewish principle of agency, see comment on 10:40-42). The judgment of all nations thus had to be preceded by the proclamation of the kingdom among them (24:14).

25:41-45. Some Jewish traditions (like the *Qumran War Scroll*) report that *Belial* (Satan) was created for the pit; destruction was not God’s original purpose for people (*4 Ezra 8:59-60). In many Jewish traditions, the *demons were fallen angels (cf. comment on 2 Pet 2:4). Jewish tradition was divided on the duration of hell; this passage’s description of it as “eternal” was certainly not merely a concession to a universal image in Judaism.

25:46. *Eternal life was promised to the righteous after their *resurrection at the end of the age (Dan 12:2). Some Jewish teachers believed that hell was temporary and that at the end some people would be burned up and others released; other Jewish teachers spoke as if hell were eternal. Jesus here sides with the latter group.

26:1-16

How Much Is Jesus Worth?

See comments on Mark 14:1-11 for further details on this passage. Ancient writers and speakers often communicated points by contrasting characters. This *narrative provides three contrasting evaluations of Jesus’ worth: lavish

devotion (26:7); less devotion (26:8); and the biblical price of a slave (26:15). Regarding the passion narrative more generally, ancient biographers generally devoted greater attention to a person's death when it was particularly significant (e.g., martyrdom), as is certainly the case with Jesus.

26:1-2. Inhabitants of the Roman Empire, especially in places like Jewish Palestine, saw crucifixion as the cruelest, most painful and most degrading form of common criminal execution. Passover commemorated God redeeming Israel through the blood of lambs.

26:3-5. Rome ruled through local aristocracies; the leading priests and elders of Jerusalem largely belonged to the social elite there. Jerusalem's Sanhedrin, or municipal ruling council, drew from the local elite; despite their influence, their sentiments should not be confused with those of the rest of their people, and certainly not with Jesus' Jewish followers from Galilee. Most other Jewish groups, including *Pharisees* and *Essenes*, had conflicts with this group. A private meeting to plot the execution of a person not yet convicted violated conventional Jewish ethics (and Roman ethics as well). Their fear of a riot at the festival (v. 5), however, was entirely reasonable: under the crowded conditions of the festivals, riots were more likely than at any other time, and hundreds of people had been trampled in tumults at some previous festivals. The Roman governor came from Caesarea at the feasts to forestall any trouble, and Roman security was increased during this season. The priestly aristocracy were, above all, guardians of the status quo, and they would have to deal with messianic claimants in the most politically expedient way; they dare not arrest Jesus publicly (26:55). On Caiaphas, see comment on John 11:47-48.

26:6. Bethany was one of those villages near Jerusalem where Passover pilgrims could spend the night with hosts (though Jesus will eat the Passover within the city, 26:18). On Simon the "leper," see comment on Mark 14:3.

26:7. It was customary to anoint the heads of important guests, but this woman's anointing of Jesus is extraordinary. This perfume (undoubtedly imported from the East) was expensive, worth a year of a common laborer's wages, and had probably been kept in her family as an heirloom. Its fragrance was preserved by its sealing in alabaster (the favored container for perfume). Once the flask was broken, the freshness could be lost, and the contents would have to be used quickly.

26:8-9. Although Judaism valued charity toward the needy at all times, some Jewish tradition suggests that people thought about this virtue even more during festival seasons (Tobit 2:2; *Mishnah Pesahim* 9:11; 10:1).

26:10-11. Jesus' reply probably contains an allusion to Deuteronomy 15:11, which urges generosity to the poor, who will always be in the land. Ancient comparisons did not always denigrate the lesser element in the comparison. He does not play down giving to the poor but plays up what follows: devotion to Jesus himself must precede and inform all other important and godly agendas.

26:12. In Jewish tradition, kings (including, by definition, the *Messiah, or "anointed one"), priests and others had to be anointed for service. But Jesus here stresses a different kind of anointing undoubtedly unintended by the woman: anointing a body for burial (see Mk 16:1); he will soon wear a different crown. Similar flasks found in tombs show that such ointments were often used for the dead.

26:13. Ancients applied such statements to those whose memory was preserved in epics or other famous works.

26:14-16. People in antiquity usually viewed betrayal (e.g., of one's people or friends) as a heinous crime. Chief priests would be easily located, but they would not have been accessible to Judas (especially during the festival) had his mission been less in line with their interests. The average price of slaves varied from place to place and period to period, but Matthew's biblically informed readers would probably recognize thirty pieces of silver as the average *Old Testament compensation for the death of a slave (Ex 21:32); Judas sells his master cheaply. Matthew also thinks of the rejected but faithful shepherd in Zechariah 11:12-13 (see the quotation in Mt 27:9-10). Ancient writers often made use of irony; Matthew's use of the term *paradidomi* ("betray," "hand over") ironically connects the guilt of Judas (26:15-16, 21, 23-25, 45-48), Jerusalem's elite (27:2, 18) and *Pilate (27:26).

26:17-30

Betrayal and Death in the Passover

See comments on Mark 14:12-26 for further details.

26:17. By this period "the Feast of Unleavened Bread," which immediately followed Passover in the Bible, had been extended in popular parlance to include the Passover itself. Representatives from each family would "prepare the Passover" (i.e., have the priests slaughter a lamb for them in the temple), then return with it for the later meal, eaten after sundown. Others would prepare the other dishes.

26:18-19. Because the Passover was supposed to be eaten within Jerusalem's walls (or its immediate environs), most homes included guests during the night of the feast. Bethany (21:17) lay outside the city's larger boundaries.

26:20. The Passover was to be eaten at night. In April, at the time of the Passover, sundown in Jerusalem came by 6 p.m., so their meal could have started then. Table fellowship was intimate at the feast; one or two families normally shared the meal (later sources, probably reflecting at least an average minimum, stipulated a minimum of ten persons); here Jesus and his closest *disciples make up the family unit. The usual posture at meals was sitting, but reclining on couches (if available), originally a Greek practice, was customary for feasts.

26:21-23. Bitter herbs were dipped into a mixture of nuts, fruit and vinegar to lessen their bitterness. That someone who was betraying a person would "dip in the bowl" with that person would have horrified ancient readers, who saw hospitality and the sharing of table fellowship as an intimate bond establishing a covenant of friendship. Based on the *Dead Sea Scrolls, some suggest that if "with me" refers to timing, Judas's dipping would have also been a deliberate mark of rebellion, since the group's leader should dip first.

26:24-25. Those lamenting in Greek tragedies and in the Bible often mourned the day of their birth (Job 3; Jer 20:14-18). Such laments were rhetorical expressions of deep grief, but Jesus here uses the same language as a statement of fact. Other Jewish teachers also observed that it would have been better for a person never to have been born than to have denied the eternal God, been unfaithful to the *law, or the like; it seems to have been a common statement of Jewish wisdom (*rabbis; *4 *Ezra* 7:69; *1 *Enoch* 38:2; 2 *Enoch* 41:2).

26:26. It was customary for the head of the household to give thanks for the bread and wine before any meal, but special blessings were said over bread and wine at the Passover meal. We should not understand "This is my body" literally, in a chemical sense, just as Jesus' contemporaries did not take literally the standard Jewish interpretation spoken over the Passover bread: "This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate when they came from Egypt." (Taken literally, that bread would have been centuries old, and it had already been eaten anyway.) Rather, Jewish people were in a sense reenacting Passover so as to participate in the experience. The lifting up and explanation of the unleavened bread took place after the first cup.

26:27. Adapting some Greek banquet customs, four cups of red wine came to

be used in the annual Passover celebrations, and if these were in use by the first century (as is likely), this cup may be the third or fourth. The leader of the group would take the goblet in both hands, then hold it in his right, a handbreadth above the table.

26:28. In the *Old Testament, covenants were ratified by the blood of sacrifice; God had also redeemed his people from Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb. The language alludes especially to Exodus 24:8, when Moses sprinkled the people with sacrificial blood at Mount Sinai. “On behalf of the many” probably alludes to Isaiah 53 (see comment on Mt 20:28). Passover ritual interpreted the cup but did not interpret it as blood, because Jewish law and custom were revolted by the idea of drinking any creature’s blood—especially human blood.

26:29. Jewish people often offered vows of abstinence: “I will not eat any such and such until this happens,” or “I vow that I will not use this until that happens.” Jesus vows not to drink wine again until the kingdom comes, and he apparently abstains from the fourth cup. Jewish tradition commonly portrayed the time of the kingdom as a banquet (based on texts like Is 25:6), when the Bible had promised an unending supply of wine (cf. Amos 9:13-14).

26:30. Jewish tradition suggests that after the meal, it was customary to sing psalms antiphonally from the Hallel, which consisted of Psalms 113–118. The walk to the Mount of Olives took at least fifteen minutes.

26:31-46

The Other Betrayers

See comment on Mark 14:27-42.

26:31-32. On “stumbling” (“fall away”—NASB), see comment on 18:6. Zechariah 13:7 (the shepherd quotation) is not clearly messianic (Zech 13:1-9 refers to striking false prophets in judgment, following Deut 13:1-11; cf. Zech 10:2; 11:3, 15-17), but the principle of sheep scattering from a smitten shepherd certainly applies equally well to the divine shepherd (Mt 25:32; cf. 18:12-14). Some other ancient Jewish readers understood Zechariah 13:7 positively (CD 19.5-9).

26:33-35. Ancient sources typically regarded the rooster as a reliable reporter of the advent of dawn, and night guards, shepherds and others who were awake at night were also familiar with other crowings, which, depending on the

time of year, varied between 11:30 p.m. and 3:30 a.m. The point is that the denial was imminent.

26:36. They may have arrived at Gethsemane by 10 or 11 p.m. (which was well into the night in that culture). Gethsemane seems to have included an olive grove and probably an olive press (hence its name, which means “oil press”); it was on the western slope or base of the Mount of Olives, facing Jerusalem. Because Passover night had to be spent within the larger boundaries of Jerusalem, which did not include Bethany, they would not return to Bethany that night (21:17).

26:37-38. Jesus’ description of his grief draws on *Old Testament language (Ps 42:5-6, 11; 43:5; Jon 4:9; cf. Ps 142:3-6; 143:3-4); compare Matthew 27:46. Greek philosophers emphasized facing death calmly, but Jesus, like the OT tradition (and most people), approached the experience of death with anguish.

26:39. The cup (20:22; cf. 26:27; 27:48) may allude to the Old Testament image of a cup of judgment given to the nations; see comment on Mark 10:39. Jewish readers would regard applauding God’s will even to one’s own hurt as virtuous (e.g., 1 Maccabees 3:59-60; rabbis; Dead Sea Scrolls).

26:40. The disciples were to “stand watch” like the porters, slaves in charge of the door, in the *parable in Mark 13:34-36. It was customary to stay awake late on the Passover night and to speak of God’s redemption. They should have been able to stay awake to keep watch; they had probably stayed up late on most other Passovers of their lives. According to one Jewish teaching, if anyone in the Passover group fell asleep (not merely dozed), the group was thereby dissolved; the teaching may, however, be too late for relevance to this period.

26:41. On watching and praying in the night, compare perhaps Ps 63:6; 77:6; 119:148. “Temptation” here is “testing”; given the common Jewish religious uses of the word, Jesus is saying: “lest you fall prey to the testing you are about to face.” The contrast between “spirit” and “body” simply means that one may mean well on impulse (26:33; cf. the use of “spirit” in many cases in Proverbs), but the body is susceptible to exhaustion.

26:42-46. Romans appreciated loyalty to one’s sense of duty; Judaism stressed faithfulness to God’s law even to the point of dying for it. Thus all ancient readers would have recognized heroism in Jesus’ intense faithfulness to his calling.

26:47-56

Completion of the Retrial

Completion of the Betrayal

See further comment on Mark 14:43-52.

26:47. Because they are sent by prominent men of Jerusalem, the band that comes to arrest Jesus is probably the temple guard. They come prepared for armed resistance from one they suppose is a messianic revolutionary.

26:48. Although there may have been a full moon, a sign would make it easier to find the right person, especially since they had to act quickly before confusion ensued. Arresting others might not be necessary (see comment on Jn 18:8). Judas' kiss might also delay the other disciples' suspicions of the large party approaching them.

26:49-50. A kiss (usually a light kiss on the lips in that culture) was a sign of special affection among family members and close friends, or of a disciple's honor and affection for his teacher. Judas's kiss is thus a special act of hypocrisy (cf. Prov 27:6). Given ancient values concerning hospitality, friendship and covenant loyalty, any of Matthew's readers encountering this story for the first time would have been horrified by the narration of the betrayal. Judas appears as the most contemptible of traitors; Jesus appears as one unjustly betrayed.

26:51. Although this servant is probably not a Levite and thus unable to minister in the temple anyway, some point out that those who were missing appendages such as ears were barred from serving in the sanctuary. (Jesus' disciple is probably *aiming* for the neck or something more substantial than an ear, however.)

26:52. These are not the words of a violent revolutionary (26:47). End-time schemes often included a great battle between the people of light and the people of darkness, and Jesus certainly expected violence (24:1-2); but his own followers were to stay clear of it. Matthew's readers might hear this possibly familiar saying (cf. the *Sentences* of the Syriac Menander 15-19) ironically: the temple authorities' behavior, perhaps partly motivated by the desire to keep peace for the Romans (Mt 26:1-5), invited the sword of judgment at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 66-70.

26:53-54. Legions normally had six thousand soldiers, so Jesus is saying that he could summon around seventy-two thousand angels (a legion per disciple). Even a human force of this size could have easily crushed the whole temple guard and the Roman garrison in the fortress Antonia, many times over; rarely did any nation field such vast armies in one place. The whole of Syria had only three legions (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.286). Such an angelic force could have easily defeated any human army raised against them. God's heavenly

armies occasionally appear in the *Old Testament, and they were invincible (e.g., 2 Kings 6:17; cf. 2 Sam 5:24; 2 Kings 19:35). *Qumran's War Scroll expected angelic help at the final battle.

26:55-56. Subversives (like the later assassins who slew Jewish aristocrats under cover of the crowds in the temple) did their acts secretly or in a way that would enable them to avoid capture; the Romans and their local agents were always concerned about such groups. Far from being hidden, Jesus' teaching had been public and unconcealed—unlike his enemies' current action under the cloak of night.

26:57-68

Jesus' Trial

See comments on Mark 14:53-65. Brutal as the narrative appears, it depicts how justice was sometimes carried out in antiquity, including by the Sanhedrin. *Josephus recounts another prophetic figure, Joshua ben Hananiah, who predicted the temple's destruction a few years before it came about. The priestly leaders arrested him, handed him over to a Roman governor, and he was flogged, Josephus says, until his bones showed. Joshua was then released, because he had no following and was considered insane (Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.300-305). By contrast, Jesus had followers and could appear to the elite as a challenge to their political power; he could not be safely released.

26:57. Later tradition recounts that the full Sanhedrin normally met in their special meeting hall in the temple, the Chamber of Hewn Stone; writing in the first century, Josephus suggests that they met instead very close to the temple. In this case, many members of the Sanhedrin hold a secret night meeting without advance notice in the *high priest's home, though they are investigating what they will claim is a capital offense. At least according to later Pharisaic legal ideals, such a meeting was illegal on all these counts: capital trials had to meet during the day, and only after a day had intervened might the court render a verdict. Only the worst criminals could be executed at festivals. Pharisaic rules forbade executions at feasts except for the most heinous crimes. But the priestly aristocracy would pay little attention to Pharisaic scruples, and they had to hurry before Jesus' popularity with the crowds forced his release or made him more of a hero. Given the short notice, possibly many members of the Sanhedrin not inclined to consent were not invited. Most ancient ethics prohibited such a

sudden, nocturnal trial, but political necessity often trumped legal ethics.

26:58. Trespassing on the high priest's private property required much courage from a Galilean fisherman. The guards are presumably members of the temple guard, probably waiting to see the results of the trial inside. Regardless of whether they had all been assigned guard duty that night, they may have stayed up later than usual because it was Passover.

26:59-60. The virtuous Jewish tradition of diligent cross-examination of witnesses brings the false testimony into question. But once these witnesses had contradicted one another, they should have been declared false and the case against Jesus regarded as fabricated; under Jewish (and Roman) law, in a capital case, false witnesses were supposed to be put to death (see Deut 19:16-21; also the Dead Sea Scrolls). Even though Rome had not given the Sanhedrin jurisdiction to execute false witnesses, the Sanhedrin should have at least disciplined them; that the case continues uninterrupted demonstrates severe bias among the council members gathered there.

26:61. Many Jewish people expected that God would establish a new, purified temple when he put down the Romans. Outsiders had naturally misinterpreted Jesus' teaching about a new temple and warning about the old temple's destruction as the threat of a mad, messianic revolutionary or end-time prophet, hence as a threat to public security. But they still fail the cross-examination.

26:62. In the *Old Testament, a judge would normally stand to render the verdict. At least according to later rabbinic law, the high priest could not legally force Jesus to convict himself out of his own mouth, but the priestly aristocracy would pay little attention to Pharisaic regulations even if this rule were already widely held. The official finally asks whether Jesus thinks of himself as a *messiah—hence, to a high priest's mind, as a revolutionary.

26:63. The high priest tries to compel Jesus to speak by appealing to the divine name; thus the phrase "adjure" (KJV, NASB, RSV), "charge under oath" (NIV; cf. NRSV; cf. also 1 Sam 14:24; 1 Kings 22:16). False oaths in God's name were forbidden in the Old Testament as "taking his name in vain." From the Jerusalem aristocrats' standpoint, a false messiah was a threat to peace with Rome, which allowed no kings except Caesar and his approved vassals.

26:64. "You say so" may indicate that this is their choice of wording and not his. Jesus' statement here is a claim to be not only a mortal messiah but the cosmic ruler of Daniel 7:13-14, the embodiment of Israel's call, the one who would come in glory and reign forever; the phrase "from now on" is especially

offensive, because he thereby claims this role in the present, which would imply that he is their judge rather than they being his judges. “Power” was one Jewish title for God. (See “*Son of Man” in the glossary.)

26:65. One would tear one’s clothes as a sign of mourning or *repentance, including when hearing the sacred name blasphemed. According to stricter Pharisaic standards, unless Jesus mentions the sacred Hebrew name of God, or summons them to idolatry (e.g., by calling himself God, which he does not do at this point) or in some other way insults God’s dignity, he is not technically guilty of blasphemy (see comment on 9:3). Jesus’ association of himself with God could be considered offensive, but the high priest had not proved it untrue. The priestly aristocracy had fewer restrictions against conviction than Pharisees did, however.

26:66. The high priest was not permitted to judge a case alone; he had to solicit the council’s vote. (If later rabbinic sources give any indication concerning how the Sanhedrin may have functioned, the clerk may have called for each member’s vote by name, but such technicalities may be out of place in this less formal hearing.) Judicial excuses aside here, Jesus clearly poses a threat to the temple establishment, and as a messianic claimant he threatens their power and the nation’s stability (cf. Jer 26:9, 11).

26:67-68. Unlike public flogging, the behavior represented here—spitting on, striking and taunting a prisoner—was against Jewish law. Abuse of prisoners was common but violated ancient ethics. Ironically, while they mock Jesus as a false prophet, his *prophecy about Peter is being fulfilled (26:69-75).

26:69-75

Peter’s Final Betrayal

See comment on Mark 14:66-72.

26:69-72. As a servant in an aristocratic household near the temple, this woman may have been near the temple and could have gotten a good look at Jesus’ *disciples in the temple courts. Peter’s evasive answer in verse 70 is not precisely betrayal—in contrast to verse 72. “I do not know what you say” is the standard form for denial in Jewish legal texts; calling a known person “the man” was sometimes used contemptuously. Taking God’s name in vain (Ex 20:7) involved the swearing of false oaths (Mt 26:72), which essentially invited God’s punishment if one were lying.

26:73. Galilean accents differed from Judean accents; Galileans were careless with their vowels and failed to clearly differentiate the various guttural consonants. The high priest's servants and temple guard would have lived in Jerusalem and viewed themselves as Judeans. Some scholars have suggested that Judeans associated Galileans with revolutionaries, but the evidence for this suggestion is at best ambiguous; given the ancient mistrust between urban and rural dwellers, however, it is not unlikely that many Jerusalemites looked down on Galileans. But the point here is simply that the hearer assumes—rightly—that disciples of a Galilean teacher were themselves Galileans.

26:74. The “curses” Peter utters are not vulgar words; rather, he swears by various things that he does not know Jesus (cf. 5:33-37), invoking curses on himself if he is lying.

26:75. For most people in the ancient Mediterranean, rooster's crowing marked daybreak. Those who were awake much earlier may have recognized an earlier Palestinian rooster crowing between 12:30 and 2:30 a.m. In any case, it was fulfilled speedily.

27:1-10

The Other Betrayer's Remorse

Ancient writers often laid contrasting pictures of characters side by side. Peter's remorse (26:75) contrasts here with that of Judas, who killed himself instead of repenting (27:5).

27:1-2. To provide legality, the leaders have a brief, early morning “official” hearing to ratify the night's decision; only daylight hearings were legal. Presumably this meeting was in the Sanhedrin's regular meeting place near the temple. Jerusalem's authorities have to bring Jesus to *Pilate, because they were not authorized by the Romans to execute the death penalty themselves. Pilate would be available as early as sunrise; like other Roman officials, he would finish his regular public day before noon.

27:3-4. Some later Jewish teachers held that even the recantation of a false witness for the prosecution could not reverse the verdict; the officials here seem less concerned with legal theory than with political expediency, however.

On thirty pieces of silver, see comment on 26:15. Those who dealt in bribes were accursed under the *law* (*Deut 27:25*), and a false witness was liable to the punishment appropriate for the alleged crime of the accused (*Deut 19:18-19*).

Having innocent blood on one's hands meant that one was guilty of murder; in the Old Testament, this guilt could be expiated only by the blood of the murderer or, if the murderer was unknown, through a sacrifice (Gen 4:10; 9:6; Num 35:33; Deut 21:1-9). God could, however, grant mercy to the repentant (Gen 4:15; 2 Sam 12:13-14).

27:5. Judas's suicide is an act of despair (cf. Saul—1 Sam 31:4; the traitor Ahithophel—2 Sam 17:23). Roman tradition considered suicide a nobler way to die than letting others kill one. To some Jewish people it was likewise noble if it was performed to avoid falling into the hands of torturers or to avoid being defiled (e.g., in *Josephus* and in 4 Maccabees, possibly under Greek influence). But Judaism, especially strict Palestinian Judaism, normally regarded it as evil. (Ancient readers would thus view Judas's act in a more negative light than they would view that of the jailer in Acts 16:27.) Hanging was often viewed as a dishonorable form of suicide.

According to ancient thought, if Judas had hanged himself in the sanctuary he would have defiled it (though he may have just “gone away” to locate a more convenient place). Flinging the money in the temple alludes to Zechariah 11:13 (see comment on Mt 27:9).

27:6. Ancient writers often used irony, and Matthew is no exception: the chief priests are more concerned about the legal technicality of blood money for the treasury than that they issued the money for a judicial murder or that Judas is about to kill himself (cf. 23:23-24). Although the Old Testament did not explicitly prohibit the use of such money, they are careful to use it for something possibly doubly unclean (burying strangers). Some commentators have suggested that the mention of the treasury could reflect a Hebrew pun on the word translated “potter” (27:7; by a slight change of Hebrew spelling one could read “potter” as “treasury”), but this suggestion is not certain.

27:7-8. Burying people who had no one else to bury them was an act of piety (cf. the story of Tobit). Many Jews from around the world visited Jerusalem or moved there in their old age, and if they died without sufficient funds others would need to pay for their burial; the “strangers” might also include unclean *Gentiles*. (*There is also a Jewish tradition of burying condemned criminals in such a field.*) Thus the high priests no doubt saw their behavior as pious!

27:9-10. Jewish scholars could cite some texts while simultaneously alluding to others. Matthew here quotes Zechariah 11:12-13, but by attributing it to Jeremiah he also alludes to a similar text that he wishes his more skillful readers to catch (Jer 32:6-10; cf. 19:1-4, 10-11). (Because the composite quotation is

nearly verbatim from these texts, and because large works like Matthew's Gospel normally went through multiple drafts tested before audiences, Matthew probably was well aware of what he was doing, rather than merely accidentally citing the wrong author, unless he is using a list of standard messianic proof texts instead of citing directly from Zechariah. He probably deliberately evokes both texts.) Zechariah 11:12-13 refers to the low valuation God's people had placed on him; they valued him at the price of a slave (Ex 21:32).

27:11-26

The Messiah or the Revolutionary

27:11. The governor had complete latitude in his decisions, though he would normally respect custom. This interrogation presumably occurs at Herod's old palace, where Roman governors resided when in Jerusalem. The charge presented to Pilate is clearly that Jesus claims to be a king, i.e., that he is a revolutionary acting for the overthrow of Rome. The charge "King of the Jews" interprets Jesus' messianic role for Pilate as treason against the emperor's majesty; calling oneself "king" was a capital offense. Under Tiberius (the current emperor), even suspicion of minor forms of treason led to execution, and Tiberius' agents dare not fail to prosecute such offenses.

27:12. A defendant who offered no defense was normally convicted by default.

27:13-14. Jewish martyr stories also report rulers' amazement at martyrs' refusal to compromise. Although most of these stories are fictitious, they reflect not only the genuine astonishment of *Gentiles unfamiliar with Jewish commitment to the details of their law but also the ancient ideal of bravery in standing against tyrants.

27:15-18. Customs like this release of a prisoner varied locally. Roman law recognized two kinds of amnesty: acquittal before the trial and pardon of the condemned; this is the latter. Pilate was not required by law to cooperate, but governors often followed local traditions. Moreover, Pilate had severely irritated the priestly aristocracy and Jerusalemites at the beginning of his tenure and may have wished to avoid further problems; several years later, his further actions led to complaints and his recall from Judea. (If the trial is as late as October of A.D. 31, Pilate's main political supporter in Rome had just been executed, and he was on shaky ground politically; but the events of Mt 27 probably occurred before

then.) Having heard of Jesus' popularity, he may miscalculate whom the crowds would choose.

27:19. The "judgment seat" seems to have been outside the palace. Although traditionally governors had to travel without their wives, by this period they were allowed to take their wives with them to the provinces. Further, although Roman matrons were ideally quiet, many stories praised aristocratic Roman women who privately influenced their husbands to some noble course of action. Dreams were respected in all Mediterranean cultures as sometimes being revelatory (see comment on 1:20; 2:12).

27:20-23. These events occur early in the morning (see 27:1-2), and much of the crowd may not be those whom Jesus had been teaching after arriving from Bethany each day. Jesus' primary supporters were probably especially fellow Galileans. But ancient literature also reports how quickly the masses often changed allegiances (e.g., in *Tacitus; 1 Sam 11:12). The chief priests were well respected and more visible than Jesus, especially to local Judeans and to foreign Jews visiting Jerusalem for the feast and unfamiliar with local politics. Barabbas would also appeal to those drawn to more militant responses to Roman oppression than Jesus provided. The leaders view Jesus, who has a significant following, as a greater political threat than Barabbas.

27:24. Washing hands was a typically Jewish (but also sometimes Gentile) way of declaring one's innocence (Deut 21:6; **Letter of Aristeas* 306), but Pilate's words and action absolve his guilt no more than the exactly parallel words of the chief priests in Matthew 27:4, or those of others who acceded to subordinates' unjust demands for the cause of political expediency (e.g., Jer 38:5). This was not the first time that the threat of riots had forced Pilate to relent; he had brought Roman standards (viewed by Jews as idols because they venerated the "divine" emperor) into Jerusalem, and withdrawn them only because mass protests forced him to either slaughter the populace or relent.

27:25. Once the responsibility for a murder or crime was attached to one person, another was considered free (cf. Gen 27:13; 2 Sam 3:28-29). Matthew probably relates this cry of the crowd to the judgment of A.D. 66-70 that crushed the next generation of Jerusalemites; he would not have approved of the anti-Semitic use to which this verse was subsequently put (cf., e.g., Mt 5:39, 43-44).

27:26. One would be stripped before a scourging or execution. Crucifixion was prefaced by scourging, either on the way to the cross or before the victim began the trip to the cross. Tied to a post, the condemned person would be beaten with the *flagellum*: a leather whip with metal knotted into its thongs. This

whipping bloodied the victim's back, leaving strips of flesh hanging from the wounds. By weakening the victim's constitution, it would shorten the time it would take the condemned person to die on the cross.

27:27-44

Executing the King of the Jews

Crucifixion was the most shameful and painful form of execution known in antiquity. Stripped naked—especially shameful for Palestinian Jews—the condemned would be hanged in the sight of the crowds, regarded as a criminal, unable to restrain the excretion of wastes in public and subjected to excruciating torture. Sometimes the victim would be tied to the cross with ropes; in other cases, as with Jesus, he would also be nailed to the cross. His hands would not be free to swat away insects attracted to his bloodied back or other wounds. The victim's own weight would pull his body into a position that eventually prevented breathing, if he did not die by dehydration or (if nailed to the cross) blood loss first. A footstand on the cross allowed him some support, but sooner or later his strength would give out, and (usually after several days) he would die from suffocation or (usually more quickly) dehydration.

27:27. The Praetorium in this period was Herod the Great's old palace, where the Roman prefect stayed when he visited Jerusalem. A cohort of six hundred men was normally stationed in Jerusalem (at the fortress Antonia on the Temple Mount), reinforced by additional troops who accompanied Pilate to the feast in case they were necessary for riot control.

27:28. Nakedness was especially embarrassing to a Jewish person in antiquity. Red robes would be those most readily available, because soldiers wore red capes; this garment could resemble the purple robe of the pre-Roman Greek rulers of the East. Roman soldiers often played games to pass time: they carved on the stone pavement of the fortress Antonia, where they were garrisoned on the Temple Mount, and knucklebones used as dice have also been recovered there.

27:29. The soldiers' kneeling before Jesus parodies royal homage in the Greek East. The reed is meant to parody a scepter; military floggings often used bamboo canes, so one may have been on hand among the soldiers. "King of the Jews" is an ironic taunt but may also reflect some typical Roman anti-Judaism; as auxiliaries in this region, the soldiers are probably ethnically Syrian. "Hail!"

was the standard salute to the Roman emperor.

27:30. Spitting on a person was one of the most grievous insults short of violence; Jewish people considered the spittle of non-Jews particularly unclean. Some think that the soldiers' spitting on Jesus might parody the kiss of homage expected by rulers of the Greek East, but it could be simply pure contempt.

27:31. Those being crucified by the Romans were stripped naked; Jewish *law on stoning stripped a man of all but a loincloth. An actual execution squad on average consisted of four men, but is perhaps more here given the multiple victims.

27:32. Cyrene, a large city in what is now Libya in North Africa, was ethnically divided among Libyans, Greeks and Jews; the Jewish community probably included some local converts. "Simon" is a Greek name commonly used by Jewish people (because of its resemblance with the biblical "Simeon"). Like multitudes of foreign Jews, Simon had come to Jerusalem for the feast. Roman soldiers could impress any person into service to carry things for them. The condemned person himself normally had to carry the horizontal beam (Latin *patibulum*) of the cross out to the site where the upright stake (Latin *palus*) awaited; but Jesus' back had been too severely scourged for him to continue this (see comment on 27:26).

27:33. The likeliest site for Golgotha (near the Holy Sepulcher) used the remains of an ancient rock quarry.

27:34. The women of Jerusalem had prepared a painkilling potion of drugged wine for condemned men to drink; Jesus, committed to the full agony of the cross, refuses it (cf. 26:29). Psalm 69:21 speaks of both "gall" and "vinegar" (Mk 15:36 emphasizes the latter). The *Aramaic term for "myrrh" (Mk 15:23) resembles the Hebrew term for "gall."

27:35-36. Romans completely stripped the person being executed. Roman law permitted the execution squad any minor possessions the executed person carried (cf. also Ps 22:18). The custom of casting lots, common in both the *Old Testament and Greek culture, was a common ancient way to make decisions of this nature.

27:37. The condemned person sometimes carried the charge (Latin *titulus*) to the site of execution.

27:38. The word for "robbers" here is the standard term in Josephus for revolutionaries; presumably they had been colleagues of Barabbas. Executing criminals at festivals increased the publicity, hence the deterrent value, of their deaths.

27:39. The Gospel writers purposely describe the ridicule in the language of the righteous sufferer of Psalm 22:7.

27:40. Those who pass by repeat *Satan's taunt of Matthew 4:3, 7, still emphasizing their expectation of a political messiah*. Ironically, even those within the *narrative should have realized how closely the accusers' words echo the mocking words of the *wicked* in Wisdom of Solomon 2:18: "If the righteous person really is a son of God, God will help him and deliver him from those who resist him."

27:41-42. Compare 4:3, 6.

27:43-44. The language of the religious authorities exactly parallels Psalm 22:8; the righteous sufferer himself quotes this psalm in Matthew 27:46 (Ps 22:1).

27:45-56

The King's Death

27:45. The "sixth hour" begins by noon, the "ninth hour" by 3 p.m.; crucifixions rarely ended so quickly. The latter time, when Jesus dies, was close to the time of the evening offering in the temple. Darkness was one of the plagues in Egypt (the one preceding the sacrifice of the first paschal lamb) and occurs in the prophets as a judgment for the end time; both Jews and most pagans considered darkenings of the sky (especially eclipses) bad omens. Cf. Amos 8:9.

27:46. Here Jesus quotes Psalm 22:1, which may have been part of the Scripture recitation at this time of day. His opponents do not pause to consider that the psalm ends with the sufferer's vindication and triumph (Ps 22:25-31). Whereas Mark's quotation is in Aramaic, Matthew's is mainly in Hebrew.

27:47. Because Elijah was thought never to have died, some *rabbis felt that he was sent on errands like the angels, often to aid or deliver pious rabbis from trouble. Matthew's Hebrew version of the prayer (*Eli*, 27:46) sounds closer to "Elijah" (*Eliyahu*) than Mark's Aramaic version (*Eloi*).

27:48. This offer of a wine-soaked sponge may have been an act of mercy, because the wine could act as a painkiller. Perhaps the man thinks Jesus is delirious from pain. But sour wine was usually a remedy for thirst, and it may have been an attempt to revive him to perpetuate his suffering.

27:49. See comment on 27:47.

27:50. "Giving up one's spirit" is used elsewhere to refer to death.

27:51-53. Stories were told of catastrophes occurring at the deaths of pious rabbis, especially those whose intercession had been vital to the world; on rare occasions, Greek writers also applied such stories to the deaths of prominent philosophers. These events would have communicated Jesus' importance quite well to ancient observers and readers.

27:51. The veil (or curtain—NIV) is probably the one between the holy of holies—inhabited only by God—and the sanctuary where the priests ministered (Ex 26:33). Matthew might intend this tearing of the veil to recall the rending of clothes at the hearing of blasphemy (Mt 26:65). The point of the veil's rending may be that by the cross God provides access for all people into his presence, or it may indicate the departure of God from the temple (as in Ezek 10–11). *Apocalypses sometimes mentioned a major earthquake shortly before the coming of the kingdom.*

27:52-53. Although these raisings of the dead *saints, like those in the Old Testament*, do not mean that they will not die again, they prefigure Judaism's anticipated final *resurrection, when the dead will be raised never to die again. Archaeological evidence indicates that in popular (not official) Judaism, the tombs of saints were venerated. Gentiles sometimes understood appearances of the (not-raised) dead as omens of coming disaster (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.797).

27:54. Here pagans—the executioners—are the first people after Jesus' death to recognize, to some extent, his identity, although they may mean “*Son of God” quite differently than Jewish people and Christians (including Matthew) would have (cf. Dan 3:25, 29): a semidivine hero, son of a deity, rather than *Messiah.

27:55-56. Although an execution squad might restrict close access (lest the crowd's view be obstructed), family and close friends might be present to lament at an execution; only the male *disciples would have been in danger as suspected allies of a revolutionary. Women often (though much less than men) performed the office of *patron, or benefactor, supporting religious or other groups; it became problematic only for critics already opposed to a group. But in ancient Jewish Palestine, critics could have denounced as scandalous these women accompanying Jesus' disciples.

27:57-61

Jesus' Burial

27:57. Arimathea was only about twenty miles from Jerusalem; given the location of Joseph's tomb (27:60) and his historic membership in the Sanhedrin (Mk 15:43), Joseph's primary residence is apparently now Jerusalem. Even if the sabbath had begun (hence "evening"), the urgent washing and preliminary burial were permitted even on the sabbath (before decomposition would begin).

27:58. Joseph is said to have been wealthy; he must have been prominent to have secured an audience with Pilate after his official public hours (which ended at noon). When Romans crucified persons, they usually denied them burial (leaving them to be eaten by vultures or dogs); Jewish scruples in Palestine demanded burial (Deut 21:23), but for the first year this could be in a dishonorable grave site for criminals, not a family tomb. Exceptions were often made when relatives asked for the body, but in the case of treason (as claiming to be the Jewish king would be) an exception would not be made unless the deceased had a prominent advocate. Jesus had a posthumous ally in this man of influence, who was not ashamed to go on record as his follower. Because prominent people viewed as allies of a condemned revolutionary could risk their lives by speaking up for him, Joseph risks a great deal to come forward.

The term used for "evening" included late afternoon as well as just after sundown. In any case, in this hot climate under Jewish *law the preliminary disposal of the body (including its washing, also practiced by other peoples) took precedence over celebration of the sabbath, even if the rest of the treatment of the body had to wait. Burying the dead was an important duty of the pious in Judaism. Public mourning was important for all the dead but was illegal for anyone who had been executed.

27:59-60. Being wrapped in a fine linen shroud would mark an honorable burial. To bury someone in one's own family tomb was a special act of reverence and affection (cf. 1 Kings 13:30-31; cf. Is 53:12). (Cemeteries and burial plots in this period nearly always belonged to families.) In the first century, the body would normally be left to rot in the tomb's antechamber for the first year; at the end of the year, the bones would be gathered into a box, which would slide into a slot on the wall. This practice probably related to the standard Jewish hope in the resurrection of the body at the end of the age. The stone rolled in front of the tomb was a carved, disk-shaped stone probably about three feet in diameter, rolled into place in a groove and moved back from the entrance only with great effort.

27:61. Women generally took part in preparing bodies for burial in the ancient world. The oldest tradition for the site of Jesus' grave (the Roman

Catholic location of the Holy Sepulcher) is a clearly first-century tomb located inside the walls of Jerusalem since the forties of the first century, even though the *New Testament and Jewish law required that the crucifixion happen outside the city walls. But King Agrippa I expanded the city walls during his reign (A.D. 41–44); at the time of Jesus' crucifixion, that area was still outside the walls. Thus the tradition of the approximate site of Jesus' burial and resurrection goes back to within roughly ten years of the event. (The traditional Protestant site contains tombs from a much later period and has no evidence to commend it.)

27:62-66

Making Sure He Stayed Buried

The priestly aristocracy, ever politically astute, takes no chances, and despite the sabbath and festival they obtain an audience with Pilate to secure the tomb. It is debated whether Pilate here provides them with Roman guards or tells them where the tomb is and permits them to post some of their temple guard; the guards' fear of Pilate's reprisals (28:14) could indicate that they are Roman guards, but they also answer to the *high priests (28:11) and it seems unlikely that Pilate would put his own soldiers at the chief priests' disposal. The seal on the stone would make any tampering obvious. That the Jerusalem authorities would have acted thus on the sabbath indicates their special interest in the case as well as suggests the selectiveness of their piety.

28:1-10

The First Witnesses of the Risen Jesus

That women are chosen as the first witnesses is highly significant; both Jewish and Roman law severely minimized the value of their witness. It fits Jesus' countercultural and counterstatus ministry and certainly runs counter to what outsiders would have valued or anything the later *church would have chosen to invent.

28:1. Sabbath ended at sundown on Saturday evening; the women are on their way to the tomb by 6 a.m., as soon as there is enough light for them to see. Jewish mourners as well as pagans were often known to visit tombs within the three days after the burial, to ensure that their relative was dead; given the nature of crucifixion, however, such a precaution would be unnecessary here, and their

primary interest is undoubtedly mourning.

28:2-4. Angels, especially visibly fiery ones (many ancient Jewish people believed that angels consisted of fire), generally terrified people (e.g., Judg 6:22-23; 13:19-20; cf. *4 *Ezra* 10:25-27; *3 *Enoch* 22:4-9). Jewish *apocalyptic literature sometimes portrayed angels or other figures with superhuman radiance. Jewish people normally expected angels to be clothed in white (though this was also true of priests and of some others). Stones closing tombs were usually extremely heavy and disk-shaped, so rolling it back singlehandedly and sitting on it underlines the superhuman character of the angel.

28:5-8. Jerusalem was the religious center of Judaism; Judeans sometimes still looked on Galilee as a place of former non-Jews (4:15). Yet Galilee was where some of Jesus' revelations to his *disciples would take place; all four Gospels report that Jesus was better received there.

28:9-10. Whereas reports of ghosts were not very controversial in antiquity, bodily *resurrection differed and was, in the Roman empire, distinctively Jewish (see Dan 12:2). The witness of women was generally considered unreliable in that culture; *Josephus even claims that the Torah rejects women's testimony in view of the weakness of their gender. Jesus, however, goes against the culture by revealing himself to the women and telling them to bear his message to the other disciples. This detail is definitely not one that ancient Christians would have invented; it did not appeal to their culture.

28:11-15

The Final Subversion

Guards faced serious consequences for falling asleep on the job (indeed, Roman guards could be executed), including jobs guarding the corpses of crucifixion victims (see the first-century Roman writer *Petronius *Satyricon* 112). But the priestly aristocracy had enough influence to protect their own interests. Like Judas (26:15), the guards act partly on mercenary motives; the bribe and the potential penalty they face for allowing Jesus' body to disappear ensures their cooperation. (The officials' promise to protect the guards from *Pilate may involve more bribery; despite Roman policy, Pilate is known to have been susceptible to this form of persuasion.) Matthew would be unlikely to report a charge against the resurrection that had not actually been made (28:15), and his report indicates that the Jerusalem authorities had sought to explain the empty

tomb—but had never tried to deny it.

28:16-20

Jesus' Final Orders

Ancient works sometimes contrasted characters: the true testimony of the women (28:1-10), in contrast to the false testimony of the guards (28:11-15), offers the proper model for the testimony of the church (28:16-20). Ancient works sometimes summarized major themes in their conclusions; Jesus' closing words in 28:18-20 connect many dominant themes in Matthew's Gospel, including Jesus' authority, his commandments, his identity and God's interest in even *Gentiles (cf. 1:3-5; 2:1-2; 3:9; 4:15; 8:5, 11, 28; 11:21-22; 12:41-42; 15:22; 24:14; 25:31-32; 27:54). Some have pointed out that Matthew 28:16-20 resembles some *Old Testament "commissioning narratives."

28:16. God had often revealed himself on mountains in biblical tradition, especially in the *narratives about Moses.

28:17. Some who see Jesus' appearance are doubtful, perhaps because it does not fit current expectations of the end time: all the dead were to be raised together, not the *Messiah first.

28:18. Here Jesus alludes to Daniel 7:13-14 (going beyond Mt 9:6 and climaxing a *kingdom theme in Matthew's Gospel).

28:19-20. "Making *disciples*" was the sort of thing rabbis would do, but Jesus' followers are to make disciples for Jesus, not for themselves. Subordinate participles explain the command, "Make disciples," suggesting that making disciples involves three elements:

(1) Going, presumably to "the nations" who are being discipled. Many Jews outside Palestine sought converts among the "nations" (which can also be translated as "Gentiles" or "pagans"). But only a few converts ever studied under rabbis, so the idea of making Gentiles full disciples—followers of Jesus who would learn from and serve him—goes beyond this Jewish tradition. Isaiah predicted that Israel would be a witness to (or against) the nations in the end time (e.g., 42:6; 43:10; 44:8).

(2) Baptizing them. Because *baptism was an act of conversion (used for Gentiles converting to Judaism)*, it means initiating people to the faith. Jewish people recognized God as "Father" and his Spirit as divine (sometimes as an aspect of God), but would find shocking "the Son" named between them.

(3) Teaching them Jesus' commandments recorded in Matthew. Rabbis made disciples by teaching them.

Jewish literature called only God omnipresent; Jesus' claim that he would always be with them (cf. also 1:23; 18:20), coupled with his being named alongside the Father in baptism (Jewish people did not baptize in the names of people), constitutes a proclamation of his deity.

Mark

INTRODUCTION

Authorship. *Large narrative works rarely circulated anonymously, especially in the first generation when the recipients generally knew the authors. The titles of the Gospels, which unanimously attribute them to particular authors, circulated in diverse parts of the Roman world from an early period; their wide circulation without contradiction indicates that the tradition is early. Although “Mark” was a common name, early church tradition attributes this Gospel to John Mark (Acts 15:37; Col 4:10; 1 Pet 5:13), who was said to have derived his information from Peter. Because there is no evidence against this attribution, many scholars support Mark as the most likely candidate for the author. A relative of Barnabas (Col 4:10), John Mark may have had stronger ties with the *Diaspora than with Judea even when living in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 4:36). Similarly, some believe that this Gospel’s writer was more familiar with Diaspora Judaism than with details of Galilean geography or Pharisaic customs.*

Date, Setting and Purpose. The most common suggestions are that Mark wrote his Gospel to Roman Christians during the time of the great persecution in Rome, about A.D. 64 (for more discussion see 1 Peter), or that he wrote shortly before the conclusion of the Judean-Roman War (A.D. 66–70). The earlier of these dates helps explain the emphasis on suffering and may allow more easily for the most probable dating of Luke (who wrote after Mark), but certainty remains elusive.

Place of Writing. Various proposals for Mark’s provenance have been offered: Galilee, Alexandria and, most often, Rome. Mark’s audience probably lived outside Palestine and most of them were non-Jewish; Rome is the most likely of these proposals (favored by some early Christian traditions), though it is not certain. Internal evidence confirms that Mark himself comes from the eastern Mediterranean world.

Genre. See the introduction to the Gospels in this commentary.

Why Mark Wrote. Those who heard Mark read in the churches already knew many of the stories about Jesus, whom they worshiped as Lord. Mark

connects these stories into a sort of biography of Jesus, perhaps following some of the plot movements familiar from Greek tragedy, except with a happy ending, like traditional Jewish stories that emphasized the faithfulness of God. Ancient biographies often made particular moral points through the example of their heroes, and Mark is no exception: he wants his fellow Christians to understand that Christ's call involves both power and suffering in their conflict with *Satan's forces.

Thus Mark wrote to a community that needed to be reminded that God heard prayers and would work through their witness and faith; they also needed to be reminded that this might cost them their lives in persecution. Finally, they could be reminded through the failure of the disciples in Mark that if they had not yet achieved the radical lifestyle their Lord's words demanded, he would still work with them patiently to help them get to that level of commitment. Along with external evidence for Rome as the place of writing, such factors may support viewing Mark as addressing the suffering of Roman Christians under Nero starting in A.D. 64. Again, however, this hypothesis, like many reconstructions of Gospels' "target audiences," remains simply a best guess.

Mark's Message. Mark is written in the most basic Koine Greek from the eastern Mediterranean world; I have tried to keep Mark's more basic approach in mind by making this part of the commentary simpler than, say, comments on Luke-Acts or Hebrews. Some themes are especially prominent in Mark. One such theme is the so-called messianic secret (noticed as early as the church fathers): Jesus conceals his messianic identity, insofar as possible, from the public. This secrecy may be due to several factors. First, the Christ, or *Messiah*, *was the Davidic king and officially took this title only at his enthronement. Thus in Mark Jesus is finally "coronated" on the cross. Ancients typically despised unjustified boasting. Second—and this is probably more important—Jesus' mission was completely different from any of the political views about messiahs circulating at the time; "messiahship" was thus an inadequate category for him until he could define it by the character of his mission. His mission could be understood only retrospectively, in the light of his death and resurrection (9:9).* One might further compare Jesus' attempts to secure privacy when possible with some prominent *Old Testament prophets. Such prophets often worked clandestinely, not seeking their own glory but only to accomplish their mission (e.g., 1 Kings 11:29; 13:8-9; 21:18; 2 Kings 9:1-10); more of their time may have been spent in the humble lifestyle circles of their own disciples whom they were training (1 Sam 19:20; 2 Kings 4:38; 6:1-3).* Perhaps most important was a

logistical issue: the larger the crowds grew (e.g., Mk 1:45; 2:2; 3:9-10, 20), the greater the demands on Jesus' limited time, constrictions on his mobility and unwelcome attention of potentially hostile rulers.

A related theme in Mark is the failure of the disciples. In comic works, characters' failings could provide comic relief; in tragic works, characters' obtuseness could underline the tragedy of the outcome. Likely more relevant, ancient writings would sometimes play down the sensibility of secondary characters to make them foils for the main hero. In Mark, the disciples are obtuse with regard to Jesus' and their own mission, both the charismatic part (miracle working—4:40; 9:18-19, 28-29) and, more significantly, the suffering part. This theme is so pervasive that the Gospel apparently ends on this note (16:7-8). The opening proclamation of the kingdom climaxes in Jesus' crucifixion as king of the Jews, Mark concisely teasing his audience with the resurrection that lay beyond it. This pattern fits the hiddenness of Jesus' Messiahship. Mark knows that the kingdom will come in its fullness but recognizes that in the present it is visible only to some (4:11-12, 30-32). Jesus focuses on the sick, the poor, the morally and socially marginalized, and others, rather than cultivating the favor of the powerful. Yet as Paul emphasizes, God's power is revealed in the epitome of human weakness, in the cross (1 Cor 1:18-25).

Commentaries. Useful commentaries for cultural information include William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Hugh Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark*, NCB (1976; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). Among special studies, see particularly Martin Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Wendy J. Cotter, *The Christ of the Miracle Stories: Portrait Through Encounter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010); for one literary treatment in historical context, see Rob Starner, *Kingdom of Power, Power of Kingdom: The Opposing World Views of Mark and Chariton* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

1:1-15

Introduction of the One Who Brings the Kingdom

Ancient writers often mentioned the main themes of their works in their introductions (in Mark, this runs from 1:1 to perhaps 1:15, give or take a few

verses). The opening of the Gospel of Mark introduces Mark's presentation of Jesus as the proclaimer and bringer of God's *kingdom*. *In this passage Jesus, endowed with the Spirit, enters into conflict with Satan and defeats him; in the rest of the Gospel Jesus drives out demons and heals the sick, is opposed by Satan's religious and political agents, and ultimately overcomes Satan's opposition by the *resurrection.* This passage promises that Jesus endows his followers with this same Spirit for the same conflict they must face in proclaiming God's kingdom.

1:1. The Greek term translated “*gospel” refers to the good news a herald would bring, and the Greek translation of Isaiah used the related verb to refer to the good news that God was restoring his people and bringing the reign, or kingdom, of God (Is 52:7; cf. 40:9; 41:27; 61:1). (Because Jewish readers often named books for their first word or words, some scholars suggest that “the good news of Jesus Christ” is the title of Mark's Gospel; but these words are also simply a natural way to start off a book like this one.)

1:2-3. Jewish teachers often combined several texts or parts of texts, especially if they had a key word or words in common (here, “prepare the way”). Because they were so learned in the Scriptures, they did not have to say which texts they were quoting and often assumed the context without quoting it. Thus Mark cites both Isaiah (40:3) and Malachi (3:1) here, although he names only Isaiah. Isaiah refers to preparing the way for God, who is coming to restore his people; Malachi refers to God coming in judgment to set matters straight among his people. Mark applies these texts about God to Jesus (cf. also 1:7).

1:4-5. Like many other ancient peoples, Jewish people practiced ceremonial washings. Their only once-for-all ceremonial washing, however, was the immersion that non-Jews had to go through when they converted to Judaism. Non-Jews who were converting to Judaism would immerse themselves in water, probably under the supervision of a religious expert. John's baptizing activity fits this model.

Jewish people also practiced “*repentance*” *when they did something wrong, asking God's forgiveness and determining to change.* (The Old Testament prophets often used this Hebrew idea of “turning” from sin; it involves more than just a “change of mind,” which is the literal sense of the Greek term used here.) But the ultimate example of repenting, or turning from a wrong way of living to a right way of living, was when a non-Jew decided to obey the teachings of Israel's God.

To tell Jewish people that they had to be baptized or repent the same way

non-Jews did would have been offensive, because it challenged the prevalent Jewish belief about salvation. Most Jewish people thought that if they were born into a Jewish family and did not reject God's law, *they would be saved*; John told them instead that they had to come to God the same way that non-Jews did. A key point of John's baptism is that everyone has to come to God on the same terms.

The "wilderness" stretched about seventy-five miles north and south, but only about ten miles east and west, between the hill country of Judea and the Jordan Valley. Only one familiar with Palestine's topography would speak of people going into the "wilderness" to be baptized in the Jordan. The Jordan River was the most natural venue for John to have the people immerse themselves, but this location may have also evoked Israel's history of salvation (Josh 3–4). John's coming in the "wilderness" could evoke Israel's history too, especially because Isaiah 40:3 predicted the herald of a new exodus there, and many Jewish people expected the *Messiah to come as a new Moses there. Various Jewish groups withdrew into the wilderness to wait for a new exodus or to evade interference from authorities.

1:6. Some other poor people in John's day dressed the way he did and ate locusts and honey (the *Dead Sea Scrolls even give directions concerning the eating of locusts). But what is most important here is that the Old Testament emphasizes that Elijah dressed this way and, like John, did not depend on society for his sustenance (cf. 1 Kings 17:4, 9). Elijah was expected to return before the end (Mal 3:1; 4:5-6; Sirach 48:10); cf. comment on Mark 1:2-3.

Many Jewish people believed that there had been no true prophets since Malachi and that prophets would not be restored till near the time of the end. But Mark wants us to understand that John is definitely a prophet, and indeed, the predictor forerunner for God (here, Jesus).

1:7. *Disciples often served their teachers in the same ways that slaves would serve their masters, except for the most menial chores like taking off their masters' sandals. Even though earlier prophets were called "servants" of the LORD John feels unworthy even to be the coming one's slave.

1:8. Some passages in the Old Testament speak of the Spirit being poured out like water; only God, however, could pour out God's Spirit. These passages refer especially to the time of God's kingdom, when he would cleanse his people and endow them with power to speak for him (Is 44:3; Ezek 36:25-27; 39:29; Joel 2:28-29; cf. Zech 12:10). Some Jewish traditions in Jesus' day still stressed that the Spirit would cleanse and provide prophetic anointing in the end time.

1:9-10. The tearing of the heavens may also indicate that the kingdom is near (Is 64:1; 65:17). Opened heavens could also accompany heavenly revelations (see Ezek 1:1). Although ancient writers used the dove symbolically in many diverse ways (most often for Israel; rarely, the Spirit), it might here allude back to God's promise of a new world (Gen 8:10-12).

1:11. Jewish teachers who believed that God no longer spoke through prophets believed that he now spoke to them by means of a voice from heaven (*bath qol*) although this was not considered as important as *prophecy. Here Mark shows that both a voice from heaven *and* John's prophecy testify to Jesus.

In Jewish stories the voice from heaven occasionally quoted Scripture, and most scholars think that the voice here refers to two or three Scriptures: Psalm 2:7, applied to the royal Messiah, the *Son of God; Isaiah 42:1, about the suffering servant; and Genesis 22:2, about Abraham sacrificing his beloved son. The wording of Mark's text is closest to Psalm 2:7 and Genesis 22:2.

1:12-13. Sources suggest that many believed that demons were especially attracted to places like pagan temples, bathhouses, graveyards and deserts. Readers would thus sense the suspense as Jesus battled with Satan on Satan's own turf. Safety among beasts showed God's protection (Ezek 34:25; Dan 6:22).

1:14-15. The summary of Jesus' message may also be the summary of Mark's Gospel, or good news (1:1): people should turn their lives over to God (on repentance, see comment on 1:4-5) if they believe the good news that God is getting ready to fulfill his promises to his people (see Is 52:6; comment on Mk 1:1).

The Jewish people recognized that God ruled the universe in one sense now, but they prayed daily for the day when his kingdom, or rule, would be established over all peoples of the earth. Because the Gospels affirm that Jesus must come twice, they recognize that the kingdom comes in two stages: God's future rule is already established when Jesus dies as king (15:26), but over all the world when Jesus returns. John, however, was not yet in a position to make this distinction.

1:16-20

Downward Mobility and Jesus' Call

Ancient writers often liked to illustrate their teachings with examples, and Mark is no exception. After telling how Jesus summoned people to turn their lives over

to God, he reports a particular example illustrating how some followers of Jesus did so. The “Sea of Galilee” was a lake that only people from the region called a sea; Mark’s language here reflects early memories about Jesus.

Only a few people in Jewish Palestine were rich; most were relatively poor. Scholars often estimate that seventy to ninety percent of the empire consisted of rural peasants. Some people, however, like many fishermen, tended to fall between the rich and the poor (distinctions were less clearly drawn in Galilee than in much of the empire); Galilean fishermen were not peasants. James and John were clearly not poor—they had “hired workers” (v. 20), as only somewhat well-off people did (although some translations could suggest that they were rented slaves, the term probably simply means free hired workers). Peter and Andrew were probably in business with James and John (Lk 5:7-10); we know of other fishing partnerships at that time. This text suggests that none of these *disciples left their business behind because it was going badly; they left behind relatively well-paying jobs.

Even the departure of hired servants could be a hardship for a family business; departure of family members would be more difficult. Many Jewish teachers in Jesus’ day felt that the greatest commandment was to honor one’s parents. To abruptly leave behind one’s family and the family business was a great sacrifice that went against most of the culture’s values.

Disciples usually sought out their own teachers. Only the most radical teachers called their own disciples (e.g., 1 Kings 19:19). Because discipleship sometimes involved temporarily laying aside one’s livelihood and being apart from one’s wife and children for a time, the decision to choose a teacher would have normally been made only after much deliberation, especially when the teacher traveled from place to place instead of staying in one town to teach. Galilee was not so large as to require long journeys, however; they would be able to return to stay in their home towns periodically (see e.g., 2:1). Much instruction was also seasonal (especially for those needing to be home for planting and harvest), but it is not clear that this would have been the case with Jesus’ disciples.

1:21-28

Authority over Demons

For Jewish hearers the following succession of miracle stories might evoke the

Old Testament narratives about Elijah and Elisha in 1 Kings 17–19 and 2 Kings 1–8. The account of the fishermen demonstrates the claims Jesus’ authority makes on his followers’ lives, but the verses that follow it demonstrate his authority over evil spirits (cf. 1:12-13). The only recorded possible exorcist in the Old Testament was David (1 Sam 16:23), but Josephus and the Dead Sea Scrolls suggest that some other Jewish people in this era practiced exorcism. Although wandering demons appear frequently in Jewish literature, the only demons that appear in the Gospels (except Satan—Mk 1:13) are in people they possess (or, as a second choice, in pigs—5:12). The place that Jesus encounters his first demon may shock Mark’s readers: it is in a religious setting.

1:21. *Most synagogues were community centers and places of prayer and study. When visiting teachers were present, local synagogue leaders (priests, scribes, large donors, or other respected members of the community) would invite them to lecture, especially on the sabbath. Archaeologists have found the site of Capernaum’s synagogue, which was built from basalt blocks. Although later synagogues were more ornate, most people in this first-century Galilean synagogue probably sat on mats on the floor.*

1:22. *Synagogue services were conducted by priests or by what we would call “lay leaders,” but those most skilled in the Scriptures undoubtedly contributed their share when the Old Testament was to be expounded. Many local teachers were village scribes who also wrote down and interpreted legal documents for their village; some of them taught children the Bible. Most teachers would try to expound the *law (normally from their Scripture reading) by explaining the proper way to translate and apply it or by appealing to their traditions. More advanced teachers would also appeal to earlier traditions; this was especially true for those who belonged to the Pharisaic movement. Jesus’ teaching went beyond this kind of exposition.*

1:23-24. *Demons (also occasionally called “unclean spirits,” e.g., *Jubilees 10:1) were often associated with *magic, and magicians tried to subdue other spiritual forces by invoking their names. If the demon here 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, this ploy does not work. Ancients often recognized that demons had access to supernatural knowledge; it is not surprising that these demons perceive Jesus’ true identity, which the people there still do not recognize. “Holy One” was normally a title of God, but “Holy One of God” here probably means something like “God’s right-hand agent”; in Jewish literature, demons recognized their inability to harm those who*

walked close to God.

1:25-27. Jesus' action illustrates his authority (1:22, 27). Demons were apparently rebuked and subdued with orders like "Be silent" (the later **Testament of Solomon*); rebukes in the **New Testament* and other ancient literature never involved a *formal* statement like "I rebuke you." Exiting demons usually caused a commotion to make clear that they were leaving, regardless of the person who was casting them out.

Although exorcists—people who tried to chase demons out of other people—also occasionally used phrases like "Come out of so-and-so!" they used the phrases as parts of elaborate magical incantations. 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) using magical formulas or 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. Jewish tradition praised teachers who could draw special insights from the law and sometimes attributed miracle-working powers to popular teachers; but Jesus seems to earn a category by himself ("new teaching").

1:28. Galilee's villages were close together, and close kin and trade connections among them would allow word to spread rapidly.

1:29-34

The Healer's Popularity

1:29-31. A newly married couple often lived with the husband's family (perhaps in a shack on the flat roof) until they made enough money to move out on their own. Many parents died while their children were young adults, so it is possible that Simon and Andrew took over their parents' home. In any case, 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 in Mediterranean antiquity than it is in the West today.

1:32-34. The sabbath ended Saturday at sundown. Mark mentions that it was "after sunset" to let us know that the sabbath is over, because it would have violated the sabbath for anyone to have carried someone on the sabbath. The whole town gathers "at the door" because most homes around Capernaum had only one room, and even a larger home could not have accommodated many

people. The doorway may have opened to a courtyard shared with other homes, as often in Galilean towns, but this door may be to an outside street. The few teachers reputed to work miracles rapidly drew large crowds.

1:35-39

Prayer Alone

1:35-37. This crowdedness also leads to another problem: it would be nearly impossible to find a place to be alone in such ancient towns, with their narrow streets and sometimes ten or twenty people living in the common one-room houses; most town blocks consisted of four homes all facing a common courtyard. Galilee was also heavily populated, and villages were commonly close together. But one could find a place alone in the hills outside one's village if one arose early enough. People got up for work as soon as the sun rose, so Jesus has to get up well before dawn to go out and find a solitary place for prayer.

1:38-39. The word used for the other "towns" suggests large agricultural towns still governed according to regular village structures; these were apparently places that had not yet heard of Jesus. He probably could have drawn the largest crowds in the synagogues on market days and sabbaths, and in late afternoons or early evenings when laborers had finished their day's work.

1:40-45

Cleansing a Leper

Leprosy was an unattractive skin disease (or diseases) for which the Bible had prescribed quarantine from the rest of society (Lev 13:45-46). Some later Jewish teachers blamed the disease on the leper's sin (often the sin of slander). Lepers were thus outcasts from the rest of society, the kind of people most healthy people preferred to ignore. People ordinarily avoided touching lepers, lest they contract impurity.

The leper approaches Jesus with humility, which was the proper *Old Testament way to approach God for prayer, although the fact that he even approaches Jesus also indicates a measure of holy boldness. Acknowledging that God had the right to refuse the prayer and that one depended on his mercy was not in any way a lack of faith (Gen 18:27, 30-32; 2 Sam 10:12; Dan 3:18).

The *law 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. (Later Jewish laws also insisted that the leper be checked by a local priest before going to the temple, but it is not clear whether these prescriptions were in effect in Jesus' day.)

Teachers thought to perform miracles would normally have large followings, because many people were sick; the number of people suffering from various afflictions is attested by how many people flocked to hot springs in Galilee that were thought to relieve ailments. Jesus, who performs miracles without the common pagan use of magical incantations, acquires such a large following that for a period of time he cannot accommodate them inside a town (v. 45).

2:1-12

Healed and Forgiven

Just as Jesus violates his culture's religious sensibilities by touching a leper (1:41) and claims more authority than a normal *rabbi would dare accept (cf. 1:17, 27), and just as Mark's *narrative challenges cultural religion by beginning with a demoniac in a house of study and prayer (1:21-28), Jesus' role in this passage challenges the theological categories of his culture's religious establishment.

2:1-2. The capacity of the average Capernaum home may have allowed only about fifty persons standing close together (the longest span in excavated homes is eighteen feet). We thus should not think of literally the whole town inside or just outside the door.

2:3-4. Poorer people often had only mats for "beds"; thus the paralytics' friends may have carried him on the bed on which he lay all the time. Some homes in Capernaum were private dwellings, but others were built around courtyards shared with neighbors. Houses often had an outside staircase, so they could reach the roof unimpeded. The roof of single-story homes was sturdy enough for walking 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, though it would make a mess and presumably leave the diggers liable to cover subsequent repairs.

2:5-7. Undeterred determination to get to Jesus counts here as "faith," as similar determination counted in the *Old Testament (e.g., 2 Kings 4:27-28). In

a positive way, teachers called *disciples*, and older men could call younger men, “son” or “child.” Sins were to be atoned for by offerings in the temple. Judaism taught that only God could forgive sins, but most Jews allowed that some of God’s representatives might speak on God’s behalf. The passive form, “are forgiven,” could be interpreted in this way (Jewish teachers often used the passive form to describe God’s activity); but Jesus was not a priest, no one had offered sacrifice, and the *scribes had heard no basis for the pronouncement of forgiveness, not even clear indication of repentance.*

The Old Testament penalty for blaspheming God’s name—reproaching rather than honoring it—was death (Lev 24:10-23). According to later rabbinic sources (known for restricting capital cases as much as possible), blasphemy involved pronouncing the divine name or inviting people to follow other gods. But the term was used much more broadly in popular parlance in this period, and these legal scholars may view Jesus as claiming a divine role and so dishonoring the divine name.

2:8. Because supernatural knowledge was especially attributed to prophets (e.g., 2 Kings 6:12), Jesus’ hearers would probably view him here as a prophet; “speaking in one’s heart” may be idiomatic (Deut 15:9; 18:21; 30:14). Most Jewish teachers believed that “prophets” in the Old Testament sense had ceased, but most of the people were happy to entertain new prophetic figures, many of whom they saw as harbingers of the end.

2:9-12. 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 the teacher’s interpretation of Scripture.

Jewish teachers knew that only God could ultimately forgive (on the Day of Atonement in response to sacrifice); but they also recognized that healing ultimately came from God. Both were from God but could be announced through God’s agents acting according to his will. *Josephus shows us that some false prophets in Jesus’ era promised to work miracles but actually failed to work them; some of Jesus’ critics may have placed him in this category. His act in front of these witnesses, however, should have challenged them to rethink their case.

2:13-17

A Tax Gatherer Follows

As in 2:1-12, Jesus' behavior here runs counter to standards of piety among his Jewish contemporaries.

2:13. Most prominent local teachers taught regular groups of *disciples and also performed other local services in their town. Translocal teachers who had large followings, however, could threaten the establishment as potential revolutionaries.

2:14. Because Levi was situated at an office in Capernaum, many suspect that he was a customs agent, charging import duties on wares brought through this town on important nearby trade routes. This is possible, but others' disdain (2:16) might point toward him being a more general tax farmer working for Herod Antipas. In any case, even more than the fishermen, he has a secure and prosperous job, which he abandons to follow Jesus' call.

Some taxes went directly to the Roman government, but tolls and customs taxes (usually levied at two to three percent, but multiplied for traders who passed through many territories) supported the cities where they were taken. Even if Levi is a locally valuable customs agent, however, this *narrative shows that many still regarded his activity as unwholesome; the municipal aristocracy supported Roman interests against those of the Jewish poor.

2:15. Many religious people despised *tax gatherers as collaborators with the Romans or agents of oppressive aristocracies who collaborated with Rome. Some commentators have argued that "sinners" may refer specifically to those who did not eat food in ritual purity, but the term probably refers to anyone who lived sinfully rather than religiously, as if they did not care what the religious community thought of them.

2:16. Table fellowship normally established a bond of friendship. Upright people would not want to appear to approve of those who may not have tithed on the food, much less with outright and publicly known sinners. To eat with such would seem to overlook their actions and embrace shame in the eyes of one's peers. Teachers sometimes contrasted tax collectors with *Pharisees, models of piety. Here they presumably expect that Jesus, being a wise teacher, ought to share their religious convictions.

2:17. Jesus' reply plays on a common image of the day (comparing physicians and teachers) to make his point.

2:18-22

The Right Time to Fast

Again (see 2:13-17) Jesus does not appear religious enough for the traditionalists; but he has a new kind of religious lifestyle in mind.

2:18. The *law required fasting only on the Day of Atonement, but Jewish tradition had added many other fasts. Pharisees were said to often fast twice a week, without water (at least in the dry season). 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 usually regarded as responsible for the behavior of his disciples.

2:19-20. Wedding feasts ideally involved seven days of festivity; one was not permitted to fast or engage in other acts of mourning or difficult labor during a wedding feast. Here Jesus makes an analogy about the similar inappropriateness of fasting in his own time. If Jesus compares himself with the bridegroom (one should not press comparisons into every detail in *parables), it may be significant that God is the bridegroom in some *Old Testament images (e.g., Hos 2:14-20).

2:21-22. Again the issue is the inappropriateness of fasting in the present circumstance. Jesus uses two ordinary facts to make his point. Older clothes had already shrunk somewhat from washing. Wine could be kept in either jars or wineskins; the latter would stretch. Old wineskins had already been stretched to capacity by fermenting wine within them; if they were then filled with unfermented wine, it would also expand, and the old wineskins, already stretched to the limit, would break.

2:23-27

The Right Use of the Sabbath

Jesus' conflicts with the religious establishment in the preceding passages come to a head over details of sabbath observance (2:23-3:6). Their religious priorities differ; whereas the religious establishment may think that Jesus questions the Bible's authority, he demands instead a different way to understand it and so apply it.

2:23-24. Many argue that few *Pharisees lived in Galilee and question whether they would be in a grainfield on the sabbath; on this view, it is possible that Mark applies the more specific term *Pharisees* to local religious teachers responding to reports about what Jesus' *disciples had done. Others recognize that some Pharisees may have lived in Galilee, and suggest that some Pharisees

had been investigating or traveling with Jesus, or that some had come even from Judea to investigate him. Others could also allow that this narrative occurred during one of the festival visits to Judea.

In any case, they would not be more than a “sabbath day’s journey” from wherever they were staying—that is, two thousand cubits (about 960 yards or 1120 meters; i.e., over half a mile or over a kilometer). Thus the disciples, who encounter Pharisees, are surely within walking distance of food in a village, if it had been properly prepared the preceding day. Teachers were held responsible for the behavior of their disciples, and many rabbis considered it proper to defend the honor of their disciples.

2:25. Whether or not his opponents agree with Jesus’ argument, he has cited biblical precedent for hunger overriding a standard biblical rule; therefore they could not have him disciplined by a local court for defying Torah. Because Jesus is defending his disciples, he mentions “those who were with” David. Even if David was actually alone (1 Sam 21:1), the point is that the priest accepted and acted on David’s word that there were others (21:2). Hunger was allowed to take priority over ritual law.

2:26. Abiathar was not yet *high priest when David was given the bread, but Mark employs the term in the standard manner of his day: “high priest” was applied to any member of the high priestly family with administrative power, which would have included Abiathar when David came to Ahimelech, Abiathar’s father.

2:27-28. Although Jesus claims the right to interpret sabbath rules as the authoritative *Son of Man* (Dan 7:13-14), *his opponents probably understand him to mean that because the sabbath was made for people (other Jewish teachers also mentioned this point), human beings had authority to do what they needed on the sabbath.* (“Son of Man” was a standard Aramaic term for “human being,” and his hearers may have assumed he meant this, whereas his authority suggests that he claimed to be the Son of Man of Daniel 7:13-14.)

3:1-6

Healing or Killing on the Sabbath

3:1. The muscles and nerves of a “dried” or “withered” hand were inactive; thus the hand, smaller than usual, did not function (see 1 Kings 13:4; cf. *Testament of Simeon* 2:12). No cure was known for this paralysis.

3:2. Although some *Pharisees allowed for medical treatment, especially if the medicine was prepared before the sabbath, some others believed that cures were permitted on the sabbath only to save a life. (Even the strictest observers of the sabbath allowed compromising the sabbath to save life or to fight in a defensive war.) Their rule against cures applied to physicians, however, not to healings performed by God, and Pharisees disputed among themselves whether prayer for the sick was permitted on the sabbath. Fundamental human animosity more than technical Pharisaic principles are at work here.

3:3-5. Jesus might mean that “killing” is permitted on the sabbath, as it was during the Maccabean warfare (second century B.C.); more likely he draws a legal analogy from the principle that one could violate the sabbath to save life but not to kill except in self-defense; by extension, one could do good but not harm (cf. 2 Kings 5:7).

3:6. Unintentional violations of the sabbath or issues of disagreement about what constituted work (matters that were debatable in Jewish courts) were normally treated lightly; capital punishment (Ex 31:14; 35:2) was thought appropriate only for those who willfully rejected the sabbath. Punishments actually inflicted rarely exceeded fines or public beatings in the *synagogues. The majority school of Pharisees in this period, the *Shammaites*, *prohibited prayer for the sick on the sabbath, but did not seek to kill the minority school of Pharisees*, Hillelites, for allowing such prayer (though conflicts occasionally did escalate). Again, like many human beings, Jesus’ opponents go far beyond their own traditions here. On the Herodians, see comment on 12:13.

3:7-12

Increasing Popularity

3:7-8. Idumea was south of Judea; east of the Jordan River was Perea, and Tyre and Sidon were to the northwest. Like Galilee, Idumea and Perea were religiously Jewish territories once dominated by *Gentiles; Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities, although it seems most likely here that Jewish residents of those cities are intended (cf. 7:27).

3:9-12. Finally Jesus has to find another way to deal with the growing crowds (3:9). Any prophet supposed to perform signs drew large crowds in Jewish Palestine, and Jesus seems to have drawn larger crowds than most others. Other “signs prophets” sometimes tried miracles like making the walls of

Jerusalem fall down or the Jordan part (they failed), but no prophets since Elijah and Elisha had been reported as doing as many miracles as Jesus.

3:13-19

Commissioning Twelve Representatives

3:13. Mountains were often considered places for communion with God (cf., e.g., the experiences of Moses and Elijah; Ex 3:1-2; 1 Kings 19:8, 11-18).

3:14-15. Israel consisted of twelve tribes, and if groups chose twelve leaders (as apparently those who wrote the *Dead Sea Scrolls did), they did so because they believed that their own group was the true, obedient remnant of Israel, perhaps a source of renewal for all Israel. *“Apostles” means commissioned representatives, the point here being that Jesus’ authority to proclaim the kingdom and expel *demons continues through his agents who act on his behalf.*

3:16-19. Luke (and possibly “Q,” a source he shares with Matthew) lists “Judas son of James” rather than Matthew’s and Mark’s “Thaddeus.” Ancient business documents show that people were commonly known by more than one name. (The differences in the lists do show that the lists were not copied from one another or standardized, and thus that the tradition of Jesus choosing twelve is older than the particular lists themselves.) Nicknames were common, appearing even on tomb inscriptions.

As one of the most popular male names in this era, “Simon” needed a distinguishing epithet. (Although a Greek name, Simon was popular among Jews as a close equivalent to Simeon.) “Cananaean” is *Aramaic for “zealot” (Lk 6:15); thus some translations simply read “Simon the Zealot” here. In this period, this term could just mean “zealous one,” but it might suggest that he had been involved in revolutionary activity (some revolutionaries soon after this time came to be known as “*Zealots”). “Boanerges” is apparently a Greek rendering of the Aramaic for “sons of thunder” (*rgs* for Aramaic *r‘m*). “Iscaiot” may mean “man from Kerioth,” but this is unclear; yet most other proposals (e.g., a Greek transliteration of an Aramaic corruption of the Latin *sicarius*, “assassin,” but the title arose later; see comment on Acts 21:38) appear even weaker.

3:20-30

Jesus Raids Satan’s House

3:20-22. Exorcists often invoked a higher spirit to get rid of a lower one, so Jesus' opponents accuse him of gaining his power for exorcism from sorcery—relying on *Satan himself. Insanity (3:21) was sometimes associated with *demon possession (3:22), though his family itself need not have made this connection. Because false teachers were sometimes thought to be inspired by demons and the official penalty for misleading God's people this way was death (Deut 13:5; 18:20), Jesus' family (probably the meaning here; see 3:31) may have felt they had reason to want to reach him before the legal experts did. (The legal experts could not enforce the death penalty, because Palestine was under Roman domination; in some places, mental incompetence could even shield one from prosecution. But the public charge alone would humiliate the family.) Teachers offended by reports of the events of 2:1–3:6 may now be taking the offensive.

3:23-27. Magical texts sometimes speak of “binding” demons by incantations (to manipulate them), but this is not the idea here (nor does Jesus ever say, “I bind you” to a demon). Rather, this is a *parable, and Jesus has conquered the strong man by resisting temptation (1:13) and/or expelling demons (1:25-26). (If Jesus alludes to Is 49:24-25, in that passage *God* freed his people from captivity to the strong man.)

3:28-30. “Blaspheming the Spirit” here means opposing Jesus' *messiahship so firmly that one resorts to accusations of sorcery to get around the Spirit's* signs confirming his identity. Different teachers debated whether some sins were eternally unforgivable; Jesus probably means that by rejecting even the Spirit's testimony to Jesus' identity and mission, expressed through exorcisms, Jesus' accusers show themselves dangerously close to being incapable of *repentance.

3:31-34

Jesus' Real Family

Thinking of one's coreligionists as brothers and sisters was common; respecting older persons as mothers or fathers was also widespread. Some even felt that teacher-*disciple relations took precedence over family ties, but never to the extent that appears here. (In later rabbinic teaching, when a pagan converted to Judaism, he or she valued Judaism above previous family obligations; but Jewish people were not supposed to neglect genetic kin. Still, Jesus was not the only Jewish teacher to employ *hyperbole, or rhetorical exaggeration. He is not

rejecting his earthly family altogether but stating his priorities. This may be the case especially if, as some suggest, they want to declare him mentally incompetent to rescue him from the dangers he is sure to face from religious authorities if he continues on his present path; cf. 3:21.)

4:1-20

The Parable of the Sower and Four Soils

4:1-2. The acoustic setting from the boat would have been ideal for Jesus' voice to carry to the crowds. Some places in Palestine have natural acoustics. One cave near Capernaum allowed as many as seven thousand people to hear a person speaking in the center of the cove.

Rabbis commonly taught in *parables; although the subjects of many parables centered on royal courts, teachers explaining points to common folk probably often used more down-to-earth parables like the harvest stories Jesus uses here.

4:3-7. When seed was sown before the ground was plowed up (as it often was), it commonly befell one of the fates reported here. The "road" (NASB) is probably the footpath through the field (cf. NRSV: "path").

4:8. Thirtyfold, sixtyfold and a hundredfold are tremendously good harvests from Galilean soil. The fertile Jordan Valley normally yielded between ten-and (less often) a hundredfold, so a hundredfold need not be a miraculous harvest (though it is an astonishing one; Gen 26:12); but for more of Palestine, the average yield was seven and a half to tenfold (meaning that seven and a half to ten seeds were harvested for every seed sown), and all the figures Jesus reports here are very good yields. The yield is worth the sown seed that was wasted (cf. Eccles 11:1-6).

4:9. "Ears to hear" reflects the motif in the *Old Testament prophets that many had ears but were deaf to God's voice (e.g., Is 6:10; 43:8; 44:18; Ezek 12:2).

4:10-11. Jewish teachers typically used parables to illustrate and explain points, not to conceal them. But if one tells stories without stating the point they were meant to illustrate, as Jesus does here, only those who listen most astutely (4:9) and start with insiders' knowledge could possibly figure out one's point. They would function instead as sages' riddles. The members of the *Qumran community believed that God gave secrets to the prophets that they encoded in

the Bible, and that God revealed the interpretation of those biblical texts to their own teacher, who shared it only with them. Greek teachers like *Plato and sometimes Jewish teachers would leave certain points obscure to keep them from outsiders; only those who were serious enough to persevere would understand. God revealed mysteries to Daniel (Dan 2:18-19, 27-30, 47), including about God's kingdom (2:44).*

4:12. The point in the context of Isaiah 6:9-10, which Jesus quotes here, may be that God's people had hardened their hearts so that they could not hear him; God thus chose to harden them further (what some have called "penal blindness") by sending them his message anyway. They thus held some moral responsibility for their inability to hear. For ears without truly hearing, see comment on 4:9.

4:13-14. This most basic message is the foundation for the rest: Jesus' message must be embraced with endurance and without distraction from the world to produce its intended effect. Others had also compared words to seeds. Agricultural images predominate in Jesus' parables more than in the later *rabbis, presumably because Jesus' largest audience probably consisted of Galilean farmers.

4:15. Judaism recognized *Satan's role as the ultimate accuser and tempter; Jesus thus shows his *disciples the seriousness of forgetting his word. Other rabbis also taught that forgetting a teaching of Scripture was a serious offense, but they would have resented a teacher who claimed unique authority for his own message.

4:16-17. Judaism valued its heroes of the past who had refused to compromise God's word, even in the face of death. Jesus' description of apostasy when persecuted for the message of the kingdom thus might evoke the disciples' discomfort and self-examination.

4:18-19. Jewish tradition valued seeking wisdom above earthly treasures (e.g., Prov 2:3-4; 3:13-14; 8:10, 19; 16:16; 20:15).

4:20. Well-trained disciples of rabbis were supposed to multiply disciples when they became teachers in their own right; part of the goal was to increase obedience to the *law. Concerning these yields, see comment on 4:8.

4:21-25

Accountability for the Word

Had another rabbi uttered the words of 4:21-25 in this context (contrast the setting in Mt 5:15), it would normally mean bringing forth treasures (special insights) concealed in Scripture. Thus Jesus claims to reveal God's message; he calls his disciples to understand and build on his teaching.

4:21-23. Jesus is a master of the graphic illustrations in which Jewish teachers sought to excel: invisible light is pointless (cf. Sirach 41:14: concealed wisdom is as useless as invisible treasure), and God wants the light of his word to be received. The lamps were small clay lamps that had to be set on a stand to shed much light in a room; an external wick led into the oil they contained. A bushel basket placed over the lamp would conceal and probably extinguish it.

4:24-25. Some later rabbis claimed that those who heeded some of the *law would learn more of it. The conventional wisdom was that each person is accountable for what he or she does with what he or she had originally been given; Jesus applies this principle to his own teaching. Thus if the crowds did not obey what light they had received, they would never receive more. The language of "measuring" is the language of weighing food and other commodities at the market; Jewish texts sometimes use it for God's measuring out just judgments in the final day.

4:26-32

A Microcosm of the Future Kingdom

It was commonly realized that God would someday establish his *kingdom, or rule, unchallenged over all the earth. Jesus and his small band of close followers may have seemed too obscure to contain the future glory of the kingdom, but the seed of the word would continue to spread from them until the final coming of the kingdom. Jesus' teaching challenges prevailing views of how the kingdom would come.

4:26-29. Every farmer would have agreed that God's providence, not the farmer's power, made the grain grow. (Thus pagan and Jewish farmers alike sought divine help for their crops; pagan farmers relied heavily on sacrifices. Some see an allusion to Joel 3:13, but emphasizing hope rather than Joel's final battle; more likely, harvesting with sickles was simply a familiar image.)

4:30-32. Scholars still dispute what plant is meant by the "mustard seed." Nevertheless, by no conjecture is it the smallest of all seeds that Jesus' listeners could have known (the orchid seed is smaller). The point is that it was

proverbially small and yet yielded a large shrub. Around the Sea of Galilee, the plant that many scholars currently think Jesus meant can reach a height of ten feet and has sometimes reached fifteen feet, although its usual height is about four feet. Because it would grow anew in spring each year, birds could not nest in it when they built nests in early spring; but small birds could light on it, all that is necessary to fulfill the language here (language borrowed as an allusion to a larger tree in Dan 4:12, which refers to a different kingdom destined to be replaced by God's). The *hyperbole Jesus applies to the best image of growth from tiny to large that he had available does not change the point, however; the kingdom might begin in obscurity, but it would culminate in glory.

4:33-34

Secret Teachings

Sometimes Jewish (and other ancient) teachers had some special esoteric teachings that they could confide only in their closest pupils, because they were not for public knowledge. People could not be ready to grasp the secret of the nature of Jesus' *kingdom until the secret about the nature of his *messiahship had been revealed (see the introduction to Mark in this commentary). Parables were normally sermon illustrations, but illustrations without the sermon would normally remain obscure.

4:35-41

Lord of Creation

Rousing a sleeping prophet to secure his prayers may have reminded the *disciples or first hearers of Jonah 1:5-6, but Jesus appears quite different from Jonah here. Some ancient pagan stories told of powerful individuals able to subdue even the forces of nature, but these were nearly always gods or, rarely, heroes of the quite distant and unverifiable past. Many Jewish people believed that angels controlled the forces of nature, such as winds and sea; yet such angels did have one to whom they must answer. In Jewish tradition, the one who ruled the winds and sea was God himself (Ps 107:29; cf. Jon 1:15). The disciples' surprise 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. Presumably the one place least inundated in a small fishing boat during a storm would be on the elevated stern. Commentators suggest that one could use the wooden or leather-covered helmsman's seat, or a pillow kept under that seat, as a cushion for one's head. Jesus' sleep during the storm may indicate the tranquillity of faith (Ps 4:8; cf. 2 Kings 6:16-17, 32; Prov 19:23); in some Greek stories, the genuineness of philosophers' faith in their own teachings on tranquility was tested in storms.

5:1-20

Overpowering a Legion of Demons

Jesus could bind the strong man no one else could bind (cf. 3:27; 5:3-4).

5:1. Matthew's "Gadara" (Mt 8:28), nearly eight miles from the lake, is more precise than Mark's "Gerasa," a prominent city over thirty miles southeast from the lake by a straight line and a longer journey by road. (Some, however, think that Mark intended Gergesa, modern El Koursi, adjoining the lake, as suggested even in some manuscripts and early Christian tradition.) But the mention of either Gadara or Gerasa would identify the general region for people who did not live there: that is, the area of the Decapolis, a predominantly non-Jewish area. Matthew apparently identifies the vicinity by reference to a nearer city, and Mark, writing for readers farther from this area, prefers a better known city as an identifier even though it is farther away.

5:2. Jewish people considered tombs unclean and a popular haunt for *demons. People in many ancient cultures brought offerings for the dead, which might also appeal to these spirits (demons were associated with pagan religion; see comment on 1 Cor 10:20). The time is night (4:35), when evil spirits were thought to exercise the greatest power. Mark thus sets the stage for ancient readers to feel the suspense of the ensuing conflict.

5:3-5. Some pagan worship had involved cutting oneself with stones (1 Kings 18:28), and anthropologists report both self-mortification and supernatural strength in conjunction with some cases indigenously defined as spirit possession in various cultures today.

5:6-8. In ancient *magic, practitioners often invoked higher spirits to drive out lower spirits, and the demons here appeal to the only one higher than Jesus to keep Jesus from driving them out: "I adjure you by God" (not "Swear to God"—ESV). This language invokes a curse on Jesus if he does not comply.

(Phrases like “I adjure you” and “I know you”—Mk 1:24—appear in ancient magical exorcism texts as self-protective invocations to bind the spiritual opponent.) The attempt at magical self-protection proves powerless against Jesus. Not only Jews but also *Gentiles sometimes called Israel’s God “the Most High.”

5:9. Identification of spirits’ names or the names by which those spirits could be subdued was standard in ancient exorcism texts (see ancient magical texts and the **Testament of Solomon*); but this case, where many demons are present, is the only recorded example of Jesus seeking a name, and here he does not seem to use it in the exorcism.

A legion (perhaps meant here hyperbolically) included five thousand four hundred to six thousand troops. This man is therefore hosting a large number of demons; they probably outnumber the pigs (5:13).

5:10. Ancients were familiar with demons pleading for mercy or other concessions when they were about to be defeated (e.g., *1 *Enoch* 12–14; *Testament of Solomon* 2:6). Perhaps they wish to stay in the area only because of the tombs, but in ancient lore spirits were often associated with particular local areas.

5:11-12. Although Jews lived in the Decapolis, most of its residents were Gentiles. Only Gentiles (or very nonobservant Jews) raised pigs, and Jewish readers would think of pigs as among the most unclean animals and perhaps thus as obvious hosts of unclean spirits. Ancient (and some modern) exorcists found that demons often asked for concessions if the pressure for them to evacuate their host was becoming too great for them to stay.

5:13. In some Jewish traditions demons could die, so some ancient readers may have assumed that the demons had been destroyed (or at least disabled) with their hosts. (Some traditions also portrayed at least some demons as fearing water—*Testament of Solomon* 5:11-12; but in other traditions, certain demons lived in water.) In other early traditions, demons were sometimes imprisoned in bodies of water. In any case, their activity here shows their continued destructiveness. Demons depend on their hosts in the Gospel accounts much more than in most other sources from the period.

5:14-17. The opposition to Jesus arises from both economic interests—the loss of a large herd of swine—and some Greek conceptions of dangerous wonderworking magicians, whom the people would fear.

5:18. In ancient stories, those recovering from madness might be unaware of their prior state (e.g., Leucippe in **Achilles Tatius*, or Heracles in an ancient

drama), but this was not always the case (Dan 4:34-37).

5:19-20. The Decapolis was a loose confederation of ten *Hellenistic cities* (*predominantly Gentile, though many Jews lived there*), with ties also to the *Nabatean Arabs*. Perhaps 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 perceive him as a magician, he urges his new *disciple to spread word about what *God* had done, thereby correcting the people's misunderstanding (cf. 2 Maccabees 3:36).

5:21-43

Healing a Girl and an Outcast Woman

This passage includes two cases of reversing uncleanness: a woman with a continual flow of blood and a corpse (see Lev 15:19-33; Num 19:11-22). Even after the flow stopped, the first woman would be counted unclean for seven days (Lev 15:28); the dead girl was even more unclean, so that one who touched her contracted impurity for a week (Num 19:11).

5:21-24. The precise duties of “rulers of the *synagogue” probably varied somewhat from one place in the empire to another; sometimes the title designates simply benefactors, perhaps to honor them, but elsewhere they were the chief officials in synagogues (perhaps not unrelated to their social influence); virtually always they were prominent members of their communities. Jairus's daughter had been a minor until that year and on account of both her age and her gender had little social status apart from her family. One would fall at the feet of someone of much greater status (like a king) or prostrate oneself before God; for this prominent man to humble himself in this way before Jesus was thus to recognize Jesus' power in a serious way.

5:25. 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 15:25-28)—a social and religious problem on top of the physical one. Sometimes this condition starts after puberty; if that was true in her case, given a common ancient life expectancy of about forty years and the “twelve years” that she had been ill, she may have spent even half or all her adult life with this trouble. Since she could not bear children in this state, and Jewish men often divorced women who were incapable of bearing (cf., e.g., Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 42:1), this woman probably had never married or (if the sickness began after

marriage) had been divorced and remained single. In a society where single, celibate women could not easily earn much income, the illness affected virtually every area of her life.

5:26. Although some remedies were genuinely empirically based, many practices of both Jewish and Gentile physicians in biblical times were no more than superstitious remedies, which not surprisingly often proved ineffective (cf. 2 Chron 16:12; Tobit 2:10; *Qumran *Genesis Apocryphon* 20:19-20). Although many physicians in the Greek world were slaves, Palestinian Jewish sources suggest that physicians in Palestine had ample incomes. Some Palestinian Jews were skeptical of physicians' value.

5:27-29. If this woman touched anyone or anyone's clothes, she rendered that person ceremonially unclean for the rest of the day (cf. Lev 15:26-27). Some uncleanness was unavoidable, but it was inconvenient to fulfill the required bath, and men avoided uncleanness when they could. Because she rendered unclean anyone she touched, she should not have even been in this heavy crowd. Later Jewish tradition made this danger even more serious than Leviticus had (e.g., Mishnah *Toharot* 5:8), so many teachers avoided touching women (other than their wives) altogether, lest they become accidentally contaminated. Thus she could not touch or be touched, was probably now divorced or had never married, and was marginal to Jewish society.

5:30-34. Jewish people 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. (By law, she was still counted as unclean for seven days after her flow of blood stopped; Lev 15:28.) Given the frequent failure of the male *disciples' faith (8:17-21; 9:19), Mark's record of this woman's faith (cf. 7:29; 12:44; 15:40-41) is all the more striking, especially for readers whose culture considered women less stable and emotionally weaker than men.

5:35-39. Childhood deaths were common (in Egypt, which was poorer, perhaps half the children born did not survive into adulthood). Tradition expected at least two or three professional mourners (two flutists and a mourning woman) to facilitate grief at the funeral of even the poorest person; more mourners would assemble at the death of a member of a prominent family like this one. Because bodies decomposed rapidly in Palestine, mourners had to be assembled immediately upon someone's death (presumably especially when it had been expected), and in this case they had gathered before word even reached

Jairus that his daughter had died. Messengers were normally dispatched immediately to bring a parent or spouse the sad news.

5:40-43. In that culture, at the age of twelve the girl was a virgin probably soon to be married (with very rare exceptions, women were not able to continue in education as they do today). Young girls usually looked forward eagerly to their wedding day as the most joyous event in their life, and to die unmarried—especially just short of it—was lamented as a particularly great tragedy. Jewish interpreters sometimes linked texts by a common word; that this girl had lived the same number of years as the woman with the flow of blood had been ill (5:25) provides a useful literary connection. Whereas contact with the bleeding woman would render Jesus unclean for a day in the eyes of others (Lev 15:19-33), touching a corpse led to seven days of uncleanness (Num 19:11-22, esp. 19:11). Jesus spoke to her in *Aramaic, perhaps her first language, although Greek was widely spoken in Palestine. (On the use of Aramaic in healings, see comment on 7:34-35.)

6:1-6

Jesus' Rejection in His Hometown

The *Old Testament often reiterates the principle of the prophet without honor: Jeremiah, Moses, Joseph and so forth; subsequent Jewish tradition emphasized this concept even more. That Jesus is “unable” to do works because of their unbelief (6:5) presumes a limitation not of his power but of his mission: to heal without morally directed faith would be to act like the pagan magicians of antiquity.

In 6:3, Jesus is called a “carpenter.” In A.D. 6, early in Jesus' childhood, Sepphoris, then Galilee's capital and most prominent city, had been destroyed by the Romans, and rebuilding had begun immediately. Thus carpenters (mostly working in wood), like stone masons, were no doubt in demand in Nazareth, a village four miles from the ruins of Sepphoris. Joseph, Jesus' father, probably taught his son his own trade, as was common for fathers to do. After Sepphoris had been rebuilt, they probably did most carpentry work from their home, as most Galilean carpenters did. The observation that Jesus is a carpenter is meant to identify him, not to suggest the unlikelihood of a carpenter being a teacher, for we also have traditions about other carpenters who became famous teachers (e.g., *Shammai).

“Brothers” and “sisters” are the usual terms for siblings; a different term for more general “kinfolk” (e.g., Rom 16:11) is not used with regard to Jesus’ siblings. The majority of scholars today, Catholic as well as Protestant, recognize that this text probably refers to children born to Mary after Jesus. Large families were common, with children often spread over a wide age range.

Jesus’ “inability” to do miracles in Nazareth (6:5) indicates a limitation not of his power but of his mission. In Scripture, God can act sovereignly, but the goal is relationship, not merely impressing people.

6:7-13

Traveling Representatives of Jesus

6:7. On the “twelve,” see comment on 3:14-15. It was customary to send heralds, or messengers, by twos, in both Greek and Jewish culture. In Judaism, such pairing also provided validation for their testimony (Deut 17:6; 19:15). Authority could be delegated.

6:8-9. They are to travel light, like some other groups: (1) some urban Greek philosophers, called *Cynics (although none were Jewish, and their presence is barely attested in Palestine); (2) perhaps more relevantly, peasants, who often had only one cloak (though they did not travel much); (3) most relevantly, some prophets, like Elijah and (probably Jesus’ most immediate model) John the Baptist. They are to be totally committed to their mission, not tied down with worldly concerns. The “bag” may have been used for begging (like the Cynics’ bags), or likelier just carrying supplies; Jesus forbids it here.

6:10. Antiquity in general and Judaism in particular highly valued hospitality. The mission here is apparently a short-term one; in normal circumstances, hospitality (which included taking a person in) usually lasted at most a few weeks. Like some of the early *synagogues, early *churches found it most practical to meet in homes (with no overhead cost) and to use them as a base of operation in reaching the rest of the community.

6:11. When entering the holy land or the temple, some scrupulous Jewish people would shake off the defiling dust of less clean soil; here the *disciples must treat apostate Jewish cities as if they are unclean *Gentile territory (cf. Mt 10:14-15).

6:12-13. Oil was sometimes used medicinally, and in the *Old Testament it was often associated with divine commissioning. Such associations could make

it a useful symbol in prayer for healing (Jas 5:14).

6:14-29

The Politician Murders the Prophet

6:14-16. Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great and Malthace, a *Samaritan (Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.562), was technically tetrarch (with Matthew and Luke), not “king”; Mark may use the latter term loosely or possibly even ironically: it was precisely Herod’s appeal for the title “king” under Herodias’s influence that ended his tetrarchy and led to his banishment in A.D. 39 (cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.250-255).

Reincarnation is not in view in this passage. Some Greeks (and Jews influenced by them) did believe in reincarnation; but John’s return is said instead to be a “rising from the dead” (as a few persons had been raised through *Old Testament prophets); Elijah had never died, and many Jewish people anticipated his *eschatological return (Mal 4:5).

6:17-19. Herod’s affair with his sister-in-law, whom he had by this time married, was widely known. Indeed, because Herodias insisted that Antipas divorce his first wife before marrying her, the first wife fled to her father, king of the Nabatean Arabs, who later went to war with Antipas and defeated him. John’s denunciation of the affair as unlawful (besides being adultery, it violated biblical incest prohibitions; see Lev 18:16; 20:21) was an attack against Herod’s adultery, but Herod could have perceived it as a political threat, given the political ramifications that later led to a major military defeat. (*Josephus claims that many viewed Herod’s humiliation in the war as divine judgment for his executing John the Baptist; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.116-119.)

Some scholars suggest that Herod’s half-brother Herod Philip may be called by the secondary name Philip here to avoid confusing him with the main Herod in the story, Herod Antipas.

6:20. Despite Antipas’s grounds for animosity toward John (6:17-19), it is not incredible that he would enjoy hearing him (cf. Ezek 33:31-33; Lk 23:8). Many well-to-do Greeks, fancying themselves *patrons of intellectual pursuits, supported philosophers more for respectable cultural and entertainment purposes than for ethical edification. Influenced by upper-class Greek ideals, Herod undoubtedly considered himself as open-minded culturally as he was brutal politically.

6:21. Celebrating birthdays was at this time a Greek and Roman but not a Jewish custom, although the Jewish aristocracy had imbibed plenty of Greek culture by this period. Herod held tight, centralized control over Galilee, and the officials he invites probably include local village and regional leaders loyal to his government; in all Galilee, only Tiberias and probably Sepphoris were cities organized after the Greek model.

6:22. Other ancient sources testify that the Herodian court was given to the sorts of astonishing excesses described here. Whereas Vashti refused to appear naked before Xerxes's guests, Herodias' daughter Salome offers Herod's guests a lewd dance. Some scholars suggest that Herodias's daughter Salome is at this point no longer a young girl and is already married to the tetrarch Philip. Other historical data about her, however, suggest that she may be no older than twelve or fourteen (which was a common age for virgins to marry in Jewish Palestine); it is possible that she is even slightly younger. On any reading, Herod's vulgarity is perverse; after taking his brother's wife (cf. Lev 20:21), he lusts after his wife's daughter (cf. Lev 20:14).

6:23. This is the sort of oath one might make while drunk, but it is especially reminiscent of the Persian king stirred by Queen Esther's beauty (Esther 5:3, 6; 7:2), though the depravity of this girl's request ironically contrasts with Esther's virtuous request. But Herod's oath is not backed up with genuine authority; as a Roman vassal he has no authority to give away any of his "kingdom." Salome will need to think of a more practical request.

6:24. The girl has to go "out" to ask her mother. Excavations at Herod's fortress Machaerus suggest two dining halls, one for women and one for men. Herodias has thus presumably not been present to watch Herod's reaction to the dance. Josephus characterizes Herodias the same way Mark does: a jealous, ambitious schemer (she and Antipas ultimately did themselves in; see comment on 6:14-16).

6:25. Beheading by the sword was the method of executing Roman citizens and other individuals of status; lower-class individuals were usually executed by crucifixion or other means, unless the matter were urgent. Salome's asking for John's head on a platter suggests that she wants it served up as part of the dinner menu—a ghastly touch of ridicule. It was the sort of grisly touch that ancient writers often associated with horrible abuses of power (e.g., of Nero).

6:26-28. Although an oath like Herod's was not legally binding, breaking an oath before dinner guests would have been embarrassing in a culture that highly valued honor; it is known that even the emperor would not lightly do it. Ancient

sources report various rulers or governors who had people visibly executed during dinner to please those to whom they were attracted; all those who report these actions view them as despicable. Unlike Judean Jewish leaders who needed *Pilate's approval to enact legal executions, Herod Antipas was acting ruler in his own domain.

6:29. If a man had sons, the eldest son was normally responsible for his father's burial; here John's *disciples must fulfill this role for him. Those who sought the body of a person who had been executed could risk being identified with the crime, especially if they were not family members; while Antipas had executed John only reluctantly, these courageous disciples may not know that. (Contrast the absence of Jesus' apparently less courageous male disciples in 15:42-47!)

6:30-44

A Shepherd Feeds His Sheep

The true ruler's gracious meal in this passage contrasts starkly with Herod's wicked banquet in the previous passage.

6:30-34. “*Apostles” were Jesus' commissioned agents, representatives authorized with his authority. Jesus' care for the sheep (6:34) is modeled on God's care for his people in Ezekiel 34:5, 15; this care is likewise expressed by providing sound teaching (cf. Ezek 34:4; Jer 23; Num 27:17). The traditional leaders were not giving them what they needed, including truth (cf. Ezek 34:1-10; Jer 23).

6:35-38. Fish (particularly around the lake) and especially bread were central components of the Palestinian diet; meat was probably rarely available for most people except at feasts, when large numbers of animals were sacrificed. Food was always sold in village markets, and the Galilean countryside was full of villages (6:36); but Jesus had withdrawn his followers some distance from the nearest villages (6:32). Even the largest villages would have under three thousand inhabitants; despite Galilee's agricultural self-sufficiency, feeding this crowd in the villages would thus have been difficult. But it would have taken more than two hundred days of an average person's wages (around seven months of hard labor) to feed the great multitude that had assembled. Compare the analogous instruction, astonished question from a *disciple, and following miracle in 2 Kings 4:42-44.

6:39. That the grass is green indicates that it is spring, around Passover (cf. Jn 6:4), and might explain the better conditions for sitting.

6:40. The purpose is to facilitate the distribution of food, but some scholars suggest that some people in the crowd may have thought that Jesus was organizing them as ranks for a messianic army (cf. Jn 6:15). (The *Old Testament and *Dead Sea Scrolls show such organization into ranks for armies. Mark records this organizing, however, simply to emphasize the great numbers fed.)

6:41. People sometimes looked up to heaven when they prayed. It was customary to begin a meal by giving thanks for the bread and then dividing it.

6:42-44. The multiplication of food is reminiscent of the miracle of God supplying manna for Israel in the wilderness (of hopes for a new Moses), and especially of Elisha multiplying food (2 Kings 4:42-44, where some was also left over). Ancient ethics frowned on wasting leftovers, although aristocrats often flaunted such waste. The term for “baskets” here was often used for wicker food baskets but could also mean the large baskets in which Roman soldiers carried their supplies.

6:45-52

Walking on Water

6:45-48. The language of “passing by” may refer to how God’s glory “passed by” in the *Old Testament (Ex 33:19; Job 9:11), which also (in one of the same contexts) described God as “treading” upon the waves (Job 9:8); see also comment on 6:50-52. God parted waters for others, but in the Old Testament only God himself is said to walk on them (cf. Ps 77:19).

6:49. Although not all Jewish teachers sanctioned a belief in ghosts, it existed on the popular level and ultimately contradicted the more common Jewish (and *New Testament*) teaching that the *righteous and wicked dead are separated at death in view of the coming resurrection*. Some Hellenized Jews accepted a common Greek notion of souls persisting in the air; many people also thought that the souls of those who died at sea, hence were unburied, hovered around the site of their death.

6:50-52. “It is I” (NIV, NASB, KJV, etc.) is literally “I am.” Although the former is the primary meaning here, in this context it is possible that Jesus (or Mark) also intends to allude to a particular nuance of the latter meaning: “I am”

may refer back to the God of the Old Testament (Ex 3:14; Is 41:4; 43:10; see comment on Mk 6:45-48).

6:53-56

Crowds Seek Healing

Carrying the sick on their mats or touching Jesus' cloak imitated earlier expressions of faith (see comment on 2:3-5; 5:27-29). Evidence from ancient pagan healing shrines suggests that once someone was healed in a particular way or at a particular place, others often tried to get healing by the same method. The marketplaces (6:56) constituted the largest open area of a town or village, where larger crowds could gather. In contrast to Greek cities, market areas in Galilean towns were not always located in the center of the town.

7:1-23

True and False Religion

Controversy over Jesus' treatment of uncleanness (1:40-45; 5:21-43) and other religious issues (e.g., 2:1-3:35) climaxes in a confrontation over the failure of Jesus' *disciples to wash their hands.

7:1. Most *Pharisees and the most elite *scribes were centered in Jerusalem. Some commentators have suggested that they came to evaluate Jesus' teaching, to see if he were a false teacher leading people astray (see Deut 13:13-14), or to evaluate the teaching more generally. Perhaps these represent a small number of Pharisees who did live in Galilee. Plenty of scribes already lived in Galilee.

7:2-3. The Pharisees were scrupulous about washing their hands as part of ritual purity, though this rule was not found in the *Old Testament and may have originally derived from Greek influence. Mark gives his *Gentile readers only a cursory summary of a much more complex custom (which some scholars think was limited to particular days), although his readers may have been familiar with related Jewish purity practices in their own parts of the world* (Diaspora Jews were known for washing their hands).

7:4. Washing the hands removed partial ceremonial impurity picked up in the marketplace; hands were apparently immersed up to the wrist or purified by having water poured over them from a pure vessel. The Pharisees also had rules about immersing vessels to remove impurity.

7:5. People held teachers responsible for the behavior of their disciples. The Pharisees were known for observing the traditions of their predecessors; unwilling to innovate more than necessary, they grounded everything they could in tradition. Thus they want to know where Jesus, as a popular teacher, stands on issues on which their tradition commented (such as washing hands), so they can evaluate his teaching accordingly.

7:6-8. Jesus quotes a *prophecy of Isaiah decreed against the Israel of Isaiah's day (Is 29:13), which had been religious in form but not close to God in heart (Is 1:10-20). The very thing the Pharisees prized as spiritual—traditions derived from many pious and wise teachers who had tried to interpret and apply God's law—Jesus claims is undercutting the plain message of God.*

7:9-13. Many Jewish teachers regarded the commandment to honor father and mother as the most important in the law. Jewish interpreters included in this commandment providing for one's parents when they were old. At the same time, tradition allowed that various items could be sacrificed or dedicated to the use of God's temple. ("Corban" appears on sacrificial vessels and means "consecrated to God"; in popular usage, it could also mean "forbidden to so-and-so.") One school of Jewish teachers in Jesus' day declared that a vow that something was consecrated and forbidden to others applied even to family members, even if those to whom it was forbidden included them only accidentally.

Some apparently religious people had been using this practice to withhold what should have otherwise gone to the support of their parents—against the otherwise firm Pharisaic belief that one should support one's parents. Jesus attacks here not the Pharisees' religious theory but these Pharisees' inconsistency with that theory in practice: their love for the law had led them (like some modern Christians) to such attention to its legal details that it created loopholes for them to violate the spirit of the law.

7:14-15. Other teachers are occasionally reported to have uttered sayings similar to Jesus' statement here, but only rarely and in private, perhaps to avoid anyone disobeying the literal rules of the law. If Jesus' words are taken literally, they declare the whole clean/unclean distinction emphasized in the law as of only symbolic value. Because this distinction constituted one of the main barriers between Jews and Gentiles (see Rom 14), Jesus' statement opens the way for cultural unity in table fellowship.

7:16-19. Jesus says that food does not affect what a person really is; writing in a day of conflict between the customs of Jewish and Gentile Christians, Mark

applies this point to the kosher laws of Leviticus 11: pigs, dogs, bats, owls and so on are now “clean,” or acceptable to eat. Mark’s understanding of Jesus’ teaching would not have been popular among most Jewish people. Liberal Alexandrian Jews who no longer believed in literal observance of the food laws (Lev 11; Deut 14) were particularly despised by their more conservative colleagues in Egypt and certainly found few allies in Palestine.

7:20-23. Other Jewish teachers would have agreed that the vices listed by Jesus were evil and that they came from the heart. (Vice lists were also a common teaching technique of ancient moralists.) But teachers would not have agreed with Jesus that most of themselves were more concerned about legal details than ethics, even though as experts in the law they necessarily had reason to spend more time focusing on legal issues than on God’s work of transforming the heart.

7:24-30

A Gentile Woman’s Faith

If “unclean” foods such as pigs and dogs were no longer unclean (7:16-19), neither were Gentiles. Although Jesus wins all his controversies with the religious authorities in Mark, he allows himself to be persuaded by a Gentile woman’s desperate retort. This story would encourage Mark’s Gentile readers, who were being persecuted for a faith that many others simply regarded as a Jewish heresy.

7:24-26. Jewish people did not expect much faith from pagans. Like Sidon, Tyre belonged to ancient Phoenicia, and the most prominent woman from Phoenicia in the *Old Testament was the wicked Jezebel. But another Phoenician woman who petitioned Elijah in the same generation received God’s favor for her son (1 Kings 17:17-24). “Syrophoenicia” distinguishes this region from Libophoenicia, the region of north Africa settled by Phoenicians as Carthage. Greek culture had long influenced Syria, and after Alexander’s conquests many Greeks had settled there; the citizen class of the Phoenician republics Tyre and Sidon considered itself Greek and was thoroughly Hellenized. Thus she is both Syrophoenician and Greek.

7:27-28. Members of the Greek ruling class of Syrophoenicia exploited the labors of Syrians and some Jewish settlers in the surrounding countryside; the woman belongs to a group that in a sense has been taking other children’s bread.

Jewish people did not regularly call non-Jews “dogs,” as some commentators have argued. Rather, Jesus is making his point by way of illustration, as teachers in his day often did. Worthless food would be cast to the dogs (cf. Ex 22:31). Applied to either gender, “dog” was one of the gravest and most common insults in antiquity, although here it functions more as an analogy. In Jewish Palestine, dogs were regarded as scavengers, but in well-to-do households influenced by Greek custom (more familiar to the Syrophoenician woman), dogs were sometimes pets. Jesus is making an illustration: the children must be fed before the pets, and the Jewish people therefore had first claim (e.g., Ex 4:22). The statement would still sound offensive, but the woman surmounts the obstacle. Sometimes obstacles were provided to give opportunity for exercising faith.

He is saying that he will not heal like pagan magicians; he wants her to demonstrate faith, specifically faith in the supremacy of the true God. (Her reply takes up his illustration: she concedes the salvation-historical priority of the Jewish people, the children, but protests that even the dogs get to eat crumbs. In so arguing, she indicates her faith that only the smallest fraction of his power is necessary to heal her daughter.)

7:29-30. In the Old Testament, faith was often expressed in bold zeal, holy chutzpah, by women of faith (2 Kings 4:14-28), prophets (Ex 33:12-34:9; 1 Kings 18:36-37; 2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6, 9) and other heroes (Gen 32:26-30). These examples all combine humble respect for God or his prophet with boldly urgent entreaty, and God answers these prayers. Because most of Jesus’ ministry was to Israel and Mark’s audience included Gentiles, this Gentile’s deliverance by faith would encourage them that they were not excluded.

7:31-37

A Deaf-Mute Healed

7:31. The Decapolis, literally “ten cities” (see 5:1-20), was (like Tyre and Sidon) predominantly inhabited by non-Jews, though many Jews also lived there.

7:32-33. Deaf and mute persons were protected under Jewish *law but classed with other groups (women, slaves, imbeciles, minors) not educated enough to keep the law. Crowds gathered to see magicians do their tricks, and this crowd would have preferred to have seen Jesus heal a man in front of them, but he does not do so. On the spittle see 8:22-23. Magicians employed gestures, but Jesus, who does not regularly employ them, has a different reason here.

Jewish people knew that deaf people could use signs to communicate, so here Jesus may be acting out “healing,” “speech” and (7:34) “from God,” to encourage the man’s faith in what he is about to do. Mark’s term for “mute” occurs in the *Septuagint only at Isaiah 35:6, referring to the blessings inaugurated in the messianic era.

7:34-37. Some scholars point out that magicians often spoke unintelligible phrases during healings. Here, however, Jesus speaks *Aramaic, which would have been known to most people, Jewish or *Gentile, from Syria-Palestine (cf. also Mk 14:36). It was probably particularly common in the villages and rural areas.

8:1-13

Feeding the Four Thousand

See 6:30-44 for more background on this passage. Jesus was not limited to doing a miracle only once; he could repeat them whenever necessary (8:19-21; cf. 2 Kings 2:19-22; 4:1-7, 38-41, 42-44; 7:16).

8:1-4. Galilee was full of towns and villages, so Jesus purposely withdraws his *disciples some distance away, presumably to secure privacy for instructing his disciples. Villages could not provide sufficient food for such a crowd (see comment on 6:36), but in view of Jesus’ earlier miracle in 6:41-42 the disciples’ question of 8:4 displays obtuseness.

8:5-7. Bread and fish were basic staples; it was customary to give thanks before a meal. The standard blessing later preserved is: “Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has brought forth bread from the earth.”

8:8-10. The term for basket here (different from the one in chap. 6) refers to a reed basket often used for carrying fish, presumably available. This feeding miracle, like the earlier one, is reminiscent of Elisha (including leftover food; 2 Kings 4:42-44).

8:11-13. A sign “from heaven” could refer to any sign from God (cf. 8:12; Jewish people sometimes used “heaven” as a circumlocution for “God”) or could request that Jesus perform a heavenly sign (e.g., fire falling). But it also might refer to predicting a sign in heaven (cf. 13:24-25). Most ancient peoples, including most Jewish people by this time, believed that signs in the heavens could portend events about to take place; unusual signs could portend the death

of a ruler, the fall of a city and so forth. Deuteronomy 18:10 forbade divination, which would include astrological prognostication, but many Jewish people in this period accepted astrology.

In view of Mark 8:1-10, the reader recognizes how foolish Jesus' opponents are. Ancient *narratives sometimes cited the conspicuous denseness of opponents to highlight the protagonist's virtue.

8:14-21

Disciples Still Blind

Mark's Christian readers are confronted with a point less comfortable than the one in 8:11-13: not only Jesus' opponents but even his *disciples are dense.

8:14. One loaf would not feed all those in the boat. If they are headed for the less populated east side of the lake, it would be difficult to find bread; it would be simple, however, in Bethsaida (8:22). Their concern is heightened because bringing provisions had been their responsibility; teachers often delegated such matters to some of their disciples.

8:15. Yeast is used to represent various things in the Bible (unleavened bread in Ex 12:15-17 represents haste; in Mt 13:33, the *kingdom; in 1 Cor 5:6-7, someone's sin); the point here seems to be that it is something that spreads (as in Mt 13 and 1 Cor 5). Both Pharisaic piety and Herod as an agent of political power are corrupting influences.

8:16-18. The disciples are still spiritually half-blind, which is a moral fault in Mark 4:12 (and in the *Old Testament: e.g., Is 29:9-10; 42:19-20; 44:18; Ezek 12:2).

8:19-21. The disciples should have seen enough bread miracles not to worry about earthly bread and to catch Jesus' plain point. Instead, they are acting more like the Israelites in the wilderness, who never learned faith despite manna from heaven.

8:22-26

Blindness Half-Cured

In view of 8:17-21, scholars often view Jesus' use of two stages in healing as a sort of acted *parable, meant to illustrate a point while healing the man.

8:22-23. Some sources suggest that spittle was sometimes associated with

healing; it was also often considered disgusting and may have tested the blind man's desire to be healed.

8:24-25. This is the only two-stage healing in the Gospels, and miracle stories in antiquity usually stress the suddenness of the miracle; emphasis on healing by degrees was quite rare. Many therefore believe that Jesus provided here an acted parable: unlike Jesus' opponents, the *disciples have begun to see but remain blind (8:16-18) until he touches them again at his *resurrection* (9:9). *The Old Testament* prophets sometimes acted out parables to get people's attention and communicate their point (e.g., Is 20:2-6; Jer 19:1-15; Ezek 4:1–5:17; 12:1-11).

8:26. Prophets usually presented healed persons to their families (1 Kings 17:23; 2 Kings 4:36), but Jesus' private action here emphasizes the messianic secret (see the introduction to Mark in this commentary). Had the man returned to the town, everyone would have known of the miracle.

8:27-30

The Disciples Half-See

This narrative may illustrate how the *disciples remain half-blind regarding the nature of Jesus' identity.

8:27. Caesarea Philippi was a pagan city known especially for its grotto dedicated to the worship of Pan, a Greek bucolic god. (Jesus thus chose to raise the question of his own identity in a largely *Gentile area.) "Villages of Caesarea Philippi" accurately depicts the area; throughout the *Hellenistic world, surrounding villages normally had a close relationship with the city in whose territory they were located.

8:28. Because some Palestinian Jews (particularly among the educated elite) believed that prophets in the *Old Testament sense had ceased, ranking Jesus among the prophets could have seemed radical—but it was not radical enough to grasp his true identity.

8:29-30. The "*Messiah*," or "*Christ*," is literally the "*anointed one*"—not just any anointed one but the anointed king, descended from David, who would restore sovereignty to Israel (Is 9:6-7; 11:1-10; Ps 2). There were many different views of the Messiah (or messiahs) in Jesus' time, but they all revolved around an earthly deliverance and earthly kingdom. Peter is right to call Jesus "Messiah," but what Peter means by the term and what Jesus means by it diverge

widely at this point (see 8:31-32). Jesus may wish to avoid arousing the authorities' hostility prematurely; on the messianic secret (8:30) see the introduction to Mark.

8:31–9:1

Jesus Explains His Messianic Mission

8:31. People throughout Greco-Roman antiquity commonly believed that someone about to die could make predictions about the future, and many believed that holy men could forecast their own death. This background may be less relevant here, however. In addition to knowing *Old Testament examples of prophets' martyrdom (emphasized by his contemporaries) and texts such as Isaiah 52:13–53:12, Jesus knew the character of the temple authorities and what he planned to do in the temple (11:15-18). His actions virtually *provoked* his death.

8:32. Disciples were expected to respect their teachers and certainly never to reprove them. The *New Testament writers interpreted some Old Testament texts as referring 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.* Jesus' explanation of his mission in 8:31 thus seems to Peter to contradict his confession of Jesus' messiahship in 8:29.

8:33. “Satan” originally meant “adversary” and in a few sources could even be used in the plural (though the plural is extremely rare); but in early Christian and most early Jewish writings it refers specifically to the devil. One could be said to act like someone else, however (e.g., John “in the spirit and power of Elijah”—Lk 1:17), and Jesus apparently uses hyperbole to make the point: Peter is just like Satan in preferring the worldly to the divine (cf. Mt 4:8-10). Calling Peter by the name of the ultimate tempter and accuser underlines the seriousness of his failure as a disciple at this point.

The proper position of a disciple is “behind” his master, “following” him; “get behind me” may call Peter (who reproved Jesus; see comment on 8:32) back to his rightful position of subservience. In Greek circles as well a person could be reproached for thinking in human rather than divine terms.

8:34-37. To “come after” Jesus is to be his disciple (see comment on 8:33).

Although some used “crucifixion” figuratively for great suffering, Jesus’ means of death in this Gospel indicates a more demanding understanding. The cross was an instrument of violent and painful execution. To “take the cross” was to carry the horizontal beam of the cross out to the site of execution, generally past spectators, often 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 and death, for they must follow to the cross. Because life is worth more than the world itself, giving one’s life in this world to gain it in the world to come is a wise transaction (cf. *2 *Baruch* 17:2-3; 51:15-16); there was nothing else one could give in exchange for it (Ps 49:7, 15). Ironically, Jesus’ executioners later draft a bystander to fill the role of carrying the cross that none of his disciples are willing to undertake (Mk 15:21).

8:38. The coming “*Son of Man” here alludes to Daniel 7:13-14. Many others in Jesus’ day believed that a period of great suffering and sin would precede the kingdom; but Peter and his colleagues prefer the easier view that it would not, or at least that their side would triumph supernaturally at no cost to themselves.

9:1. This verse points to the future glory mentioned in the preceding verses by way of an anticipatory revelation of that glory they are to experience in 9:2-13. Because the future *Messiah had already come, the glory of his future kingdom was also already present.

9:2-13

Glory on the Mountain

Ancient texts as diverse as Greek myth and Jewish *apocalypses speak of various radiant supernatural figures (deities, angels, etc.) and transformations, but by far the most obvious shared background for all those familiar with the *Old Testament (as Mark’s hearers were) was Moses. God had revealed his glory to Moses on Mount Sinai, so that Moses had come down from the mountain reflecting God’s glory (Ex 32–34). In Mark 9:2-13, the glory of Jesus, who is greater than Moses and Elijah, is revealed on the mountain; he is thus the ultimate spokesperson for God (Deut 18:18-19).

9:2. Mount Sinai was where God revealed his glory. Jesus waits “six days” to ascend a mountain to make the same point (Ex 24:16). That Jesus takes three companions may allude to Exodus 24:1, 9, although this possible allusion is less

clear (seventy elders were also present in that account). (The *Qumran scrolls might speak of twelve leaders, with three being most prominent, though three is a small enough number to allow coincidence here.) Transformation or transfiguration appears in both Greek myth and Jewish apocalyptic literature, but the most obvious background of Jesus' transformation here must be Moses' glorification on Mount Sinai.

9:3. Jewish literature often described angels and other heavenly beings as being clothed in white. Cleaning clothes (cf. NIV "bleach") was normally a housewife's task, but this text refers to the widespread ancient profession of cloth refiners, who could be men or women. They had facilities that homes lacked and prepared fabrics for cloth, by means that included combing, cleaning and thickening them before spinning. These refiners often treated the fabric with urine (a practice for which fullers were consequently notorious) and clay, brushing it with brushes or thistles. They bleached white fabrics with chemicals, and often brightened and softened them by stretching them on a frame over burning sulfur. They also cleaned existing clothing, and could often remove stains from white garments.

9:4. Jewish people understood Scripture as denying that Elijah had ever died; Moses was buried by God himself, and some (unbiblical) Jewish traditions even claimed that Moses was still alive (cf. comment on Rev 11:6). These two figures were both expected to return in some sense before the end (Deut 18; Mal 4).

9:5-6. Israelites annually built tabernacles, or booths, commemorating the time when God's presence was with them in the wilderness, so Peter would know how to build one.

9:7. The cloud probably recalls the cloud of God's presence, for example, on Mount Sinai (Ex 24:15-16). The heavenly voice repeats the basic message of Mark 1:11 but may add another biblical allusion. "Hear him" may refer to Deuteronomy 18:15, where the Israelites are warned to heed the "prophet like Moses," the new Moses who would come.

9:8. One may compare Elijah and Moses' vanishing with a Jewish belief assumed especially by the later *rabbis that Elijah could come and go at will, like an angel. In any case, angels were thought able to appear and disappear.

9:9-10. Given their cultural presuppositions, it was difficult for the *disciples to understand what had happened; they assumed that all the righteous dead would be resurrected simultaneously at the end of the age (cf. Dan 12:2).

9:11. The Jewish people expected Elijah to come at the time of the end (Mal 4:5), to prepare the Lord's way (Mal 3:1; Sirach 48:1-10), though they held

different views on his exact function.

9:12. Elijah would come “to restore all things,” that is, to reconcile families (Mal 4:6; although later rabbis interpreted this restoration as straightening out Israel’s genealogies, people understood the text more broadly in this period; Sirach 48:10).

9:13. Most Jewish people were expecting the real Elijah (whom the disciples saw speaking with Jesus), but by applying the promise of Elijah to John, Jesus interprets it much more figuratively than most of his contemporaries would have.

9:14-32

Insufficient Faith for Exorcism

9:14-15. Like Moses, Jesus must deal with the failure of those he left in charge once he comes down from the mountain (Ex 24:14; 32:1-8, 21-25, 35). Most *scribes did not claim the power to work miracles, in contrast to Jesus’ disciples (6:12-13)*. Teachers of the law presumably knew the Hebrew Bible on a more sophisticated level than the disciples did, so if the disciples could not demonstrate God’s power in other ways, they risked their credibility. Foaming at the mouth also appears in an analogous ancient example.

9:16-18. The possessed person’s lack of control over his own motor responses is paralleled by examples of spirit possession in many cultures through history and is attested in anthropological studies of spirit possession today. Some writers have noted parallels between the form of demonized activity depicted here and epileptic behavior, but epilepsy has a neurological basis (epilepsy and demonic possession are distinguished in Mt 4:24). The parallels could indicate that the spirit interfered with the same centers in the brain where seizures could also be induced by other means. Brain research shows that neurological parallels to possession trances on some level occur even in REM sleep, sleepwalking, and a variety of other states; the brain is neurologically susceptible to altered states of consciousness, not all of which directly require the activity of alien spirits. Some of these states may, however, facilitate spiritual experiences (positive or negative); likewise, it would not be surprising that spirits invading some aspects of the personality could overload the human nervous system.

9:19. Mature disciples were supposed to be able to carry on in their teacher’s absence; sometimes a teacher would delegate lectures to his advanced pupils. The matter at hand requires a different sort of preparation than lectures did

(9:29), but Jesus had already prepared them (6:7-13).

9:20-22. Demoniacs were often self-destructive (cf. 5:5), which again characterizes a number of cases of spirit possession attested in diverse cultures. See also comment on 9:16-18.

9:23-27. Exorcists usually tried to subdue *demons by incantations (often invoking higher spirits), by using smelly roots or the like. Jesus here uses only his command, showing his great authority.

9:28-30. Jewish teachers often explained more mature subjects (too risky for the public to hear) to their disciples in private. In a culture dominated by honor and shame, rebukes and admissions of failure were also better carried out in private. The few reports of miracle-working sages do not suggest that such sages usually expected their disciples to be able to emulate their power (though Elisha carried on Elijah's work), certainly not on the same level. Nevertheless, teachers often prepared their advanced students to become teachers themselves. Few rabbis were seen as miracle workers, and few who were expected their disciples to be able to emulate their power (though Elisha carried on Elijah's work), certainly not on the same level, and certainly not in the rabbi's name (v. 39). Exorcists' methods normally focused on their own power or, more precisely, their ability to manipulate other powers; Jesus here emphasizes prayer instead (9:29).

9:31. The context of Daniel 7:13-14, which speaks of God entrusting his *kingdom to one like a *Son of Man, declares that suffering at the hands of the evil world ruler precedes exaltation (7:18-27).

9:32. Suffering was not part of the contemporary expectation for the *Messiah; to understand Jesus' message, the people need a paradigm shift in their categories and values (cf. 8:29-33). Disciples always strove to be respectful toward their rabbis. They would regard their fellow disciples as their peer group and thus might not include the rabbi in a dispute among themselves; confronting him would also cost them honor (cf. 8:32-33).

9:33-37

The Greatest Is the Child

9:33-34. Competition for honor was important in many ancient societies. Those with capital could advance economically, but most people in ancient society lacked sufficient capital for advancement and were thus locked into roles

determined by birth. Even those who improved economically could not break into the aristocracy. In other circles, rank was assigned by noble birth, by age, by being the academically most advanced pupils in a school, or by advancement in the law; thus, for example, the *Qumran sect annually reevaluated each member's rank, which determined their seating and speaking order. Most groups seated people according to social rank. By whatever means it was determined, rank was a critical issue in ancient life (cf. comment on 1 Cor 14:27). Many Jewish people hoped for a new status in the world to come, based not on noble birth but on faithfulness to God's covenant.

9:35. In antiquity, as today, heroes or benevolent people with power were preeminent. Rabbis stressed humility but expected their disciples to serve them.

9:36. Much more than today, in antiquity children were especially powerless in society and dependent on parents.

9:37. In Jewish custom, a person's agent, similar to a modern business representative, could act on behalf of the person who sent him. To the extent that he accurately represented the one who sent him, the agent was supported by the sender's full authority; the principle was applied in the *Old Testament to God's messengers, his prophets (1 Sam 8:7). How one treated the poor could also show one's treatment of the Lord (Prov 19:17).

9:38-41

Turning Away a True Believer

Here the *disciples, who shortly before could not cast out a demon* by using Jesus' name, criticize one of the "little ones" who did act in his name (cf. 9:37) by casting out demons (cf. Num 11:28). The format of this discussion resembles ancient *narratives in which a famous teacher refutes the contentions of the less informed.

9:38. Like individuals, different schools and sects often competed against each other. Sectarian attitudes were common in Judaism, as the *Dead Sea Scrolls testify. (Some Jewish groups would break away from others over such issues as the correct day for Passover.) Their zeal is misplaced (cf. Num 11:28; the reader may also recall other disciples' recent failure to expel a demon, 9:28).

9:39. Merely recognizing Jesus' name is one thing, but having the faith to do a miracle in that name indicates that this man was not just a typical exorcist trying to use a more powerful name to accomplish miracles, as exorcists often

did (Acts 19:13-16; cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.47). This exorcist probably seeks instead to act as Jesus' agent (cf. comment on Acts 3:6).

9:40. "He who is not against you is for you" may have been a proverb (cf. several sources, including *Cicero, a first-century B.C. Roman author); Jesus adapts it to make his point.

9:41. Jesus had spoken of welcoming his disciples (Mk 6:8-11); here Jesus refers to those who are so poor that they have only water to give when a disciple comes to them. Such people are very poor even by ancient standards (1 Kings 17:12). This action reflects faith and hospitality one would normally show to teachers one respects (1 Kings 17:12-16; cf. Lk 11:5-6) but not to those one thought to be false (2 Jn 10). Some ancients even told stories of people judged because they did not give even water or other available provisions to strangers, some of whom turned out to be divine or divine agents. Jewish teachers often spoke of receiving one's "reward" when God judged the world.

9:42-50

The Penalty for Turning a Believer Away

9:42. "Stumble" was often used metaphorically to refer to sinning or falling away from the true faith. Millstones were extremely heavy; one would certainly drown with a millstone tied around one's neck. Further, this term refers to the heavier kind of millstone turned by a donkey, rather than the lighter kind a woman would use. Jewish people regarded drowning as the awful sort that pagans might execute; thus the image is all the more dreadful. Death without burial (including death at sea) was regarded as the worst kind of death; pagans even believed that the spirit of the deceased hovered eternally over the waters where the person had died (see comment on Acts 27:20).

9:43-47. The imagery here may be corporal punishment (cutting off appendages, e.g., Ex 21:24-25) versus a form of divine capital punishment. Some Jewish thinkers believed that one would be resurrected in exactly the form in which one had died (e.g., with limbs missing, as in the case of many martyrs) before being made whole (cf. *2 *Baruch* 50).

9:48. Here the imagery is from Isaiah 66:24. Although one could read Isaiah as applying only to the eternal destruction of corpses (cf. Sirach 10:11; 19:3), the imagery had nevertheless apparently already begun to be applied to eternal torment (Judith 16:17).

9:49. Salt was used on sacrifices (Lev 2:13; Ezek 43:24; cf. **Jubilees* 21:11), so the image might relate to the burning of 9:48 (though salt is positive in 9:50). Or cf. perhaps Deut 29:23.

9:50. Here Jesus apparently changes salt to a positive metaphor, perhaps meaning “peace.” That real salt (as opposed to the impure salt mixtures from some inland sea deposits then known) by definition does not lose its saltiness only reinforces the strength of the image (see comment on Mt 5:13). Being “at peace with one another” contrasts with the divisiveness related in 9:33-38.

10:1-12

Divorce Forbidden

Because 10:1-12 addresses the treatment of spouses, 10:13-16 deals with the treatment of children, and 10:17-31 relates to one’s true household in the *kingdom, some scholars have compared 10:1-31 to the ancient literary form “household code,” except that this passage is in *narrative form. If this comparison is at all relevant, it is interesting that Mark’s point runs counter to the values of those codes in his culture, which stressed the absolute submission of wives, children and slaves (see comment on Eph 5:21-33).

10:1. Most teachers who taught in public did so in specific localities. Only figures popular with the masses drew such crowds as Jesus did wherever they went, and these popular teachers would naturally arouse the envy of many local professional scholars and the discomfort of the authorities.

10:2. Matthew’s wording (Mt 19:3; see comment there) is closer to the exact wording *Pharisees would normally have used at that time; the issue was the *grounds* for divorce, not whether divorce was ever valid. Because Moses had assumed the practice of divorce (Deut 24:1), Jewish interpreters debated only the grounds for divorce; to ask whether Jesus thinks divorce is permissible at all is to ask whether he knows or agrees with Moses’ *law.

10:3-5. Rabbis distinguished between what Scripture commanded and what it allowed as a concession; by asking what Moses “commanded” Jesus invites them to recognize that Moses explicitly only “permitted,” not “commanded,” divorce, on any grounds.

10:6-9. Taking for granted the unity of the law, Jewish interpreters commonly appealed to one clear text of Scripture to counter or explain another’s use of a text that they felt unclear. Some interpreters, like the scribes who wrote

the *Dead Sea Scrolls, appealed to the creation *narrative to show God's original plan for marriage. These interpreters used Genesis 1–2 to argue against polygamy; Jesus uses it to argue against divorce. (Reflecting Greek custom against polygamy, the Septuagint had substituted “two” for the original Hebrew “they” in Gen 2:24.)*

10:10. After a teacher offered an unsatisfying public response, *disciples could seek more detailed explanations from their teachers privately.

10:11. No one else in antiquity spoke of divorce in such strong terms. (Because most Jewish teachers allowed polygamy, they would not have seen marrying a second wife as adultery, even if they had agreed that the man was still married to the first wife. But Jesus eliminates the double standard; a man consorting with two women is as adulterous as a woman consorting with two men.)

Ancients allowed remarriage after valid divorces; this saying thus regards divorces as invalid in God's sight (hence subsequent unions as adulterous). That Matthew (Mt 5:32; 19:9) and Paul (1 Cor 7:15) state exceptions may suggest their recognition that the saying functions as *hyperbole, or as a general principle allowing exceptions (like many proverbs or other sayings of Jewish sages), reinforcing the literal point of 10:9. That he does not actually teach the ontological indissolubility of marriage—i.e., that a divorced person remains genuinely married even once divorced—is clear from the exhortation in 10:9 (cf. Jn 4:18). Hyperbole was a common teaching technique, but it was always meant to underline a point—here, that Jesus' followers must uphold their marriage covenants to the fullest extent in their power (as in 10:9). Jesus' point is to advocate fidelity to one's spouse, not to break up existing polygamous or remarried unions.

10:12. Unlike Roman law, Pharisaic interpretation of biblical law did not permit a woman to divorce her husband (although under extreme circumstances she could request that the court force him to divorce her). The only Jewish women known to have flouted this law were aristocrats like Herodias (6:17), who paid more attention to Greek custom than to Palestinian Jewish custom. Mark, who writes for readers living where wives could divorce their husbands, may be bringing out the implications of Jesus' teaching for them too. (Like modern preachers, ancient writers were expected to paraphrase sayings when needed to bring out their meanings.)

10:13-16

Images of the Kingdom

10:13. Children were loved but were socially powerless; the high childhood mortality rate meant that they were physically powerless as well, many dying before attaining maturity. (In the poorest places, like Egypt, perhaps as many as half of those born died by the age of twelve. Poorer *Gentile families often discarded babies if they thought they could not support them.*) Eager to get on with the business of setting up the kingdom, the disciples have little time for people who do not wield political power—compare the disciples’ response, and Jesus’ rebuke, with 2 Kings 4:27.

10:14-15. Some thought that the kingdom would be achieved by force of arms; others, by radical moral reform; and many, simply in God’s time. But although Jewish people (unlike Greeks) respected humility, no one expected the kingdom to come by becoming powerless like children. The totally powerless might learn to simply depend on a heavenly Father.

10:16. In Genesis some of the patriarchs conferred blessings by the laying on of hands (Gen 48:14), and their prayers were answered.

10:17-31

A Rich Man and the Kingdom

10:17. A pious man customarily sought out his own teacher; a man of wealth could normally find the best or most popular teacher for himself. For a man of wealth to bow before a teacher indicated tremendous respect. Ancient sources show that at least some disciples asked their teachers questions like the one this rich man asks Jesus. To “inherit *eternal life*” meant to share in the life of the coming world, the life of the kingdom of God.

10:18-19. Without denying that he himself is good, Jesus reminds the man of the standard Jewish conception of God’s goodness (others could be good, but no one compared with God); he then lists select commandments from the *Old Testament (five from the Ten Commandments) dealing with human relations (rather than directly with God) that people could test (not, for instance, a prohibition against a sin of the heart, coveting).

10:20. If only God is good, the man will have to admit he has broken some commandment; but the commandments Jesus had listed were kept by most well-raised, educated Jewish people.

10:21-22. Judaism stressed charity heavily, but ordinary Jewish teachers did not require a prospective disciple to divest himself entirely of funds. Several teachers, especially some radical Greek teachers, made such demands on rich students to see if they would value true teaching above their wealth; a few rich persons would give up their goods, but most disappointed such teachers. Jewish *Essenes relinquished property when they joined their movement; some Old Testament prophets also made radical sacrifices to follow God's call (see, e.g., 1 Kings 19:19-21).

10:23-24. Jesus turns the social order upside down. The well-to-do were often hailed for their generosity (though they had more to give); being less educated in the *law, the poor were sometimes seen as less pious (although poverty itself was certainly not seen as a sign of impiety, especially by the poor themselves). Others saw the "poor" as more pious, the oppressed who depended on God.

10:25. This image reflects a Jewish figure of speech for doing something impossible (Babylonian Jews spoke of an elephant going through a needle's eye, but camels were the largest animal in Palestine). The saying, a *hyperbole, refers to a literal needle. (Those who think Jesus refers here merely to a gate in Jerusalem called the "eye of a needle" are mistaken; the alleged "needle's eye" gate was built in medieval times.) A wealthy person could relinquish wealth only by God's *grace (10:26-27).

10:26-30. Fishermen and *tax gatherers had some economic independence; these disciples had abandoned their economic position to follow him. Their reward would be found in believers sharing possessions as a family in this world (cf. 6:10; Mt 10:42; Acts 2:44-45) and receiving the life of the *kingdom in the world to come.

10:31. Most Jewish people understood that the day of judgment would turn things upside down (cf., e.g., Is 2:11-12, 17); those who appear great in this world will be nothing in the next, and those who were nothing in this world will be great in the next. Jewish people applied this principle especially to the exaltation of Israel over the other nations, the oppressed righteous over their wicked oppressors, but Jesus applies it also to individual rank and status.

10:32-34

Third Passion Prediction

10:32. Despite their expectation of the coming *kingdom, the *disciples recognize the danger of going to Jerusalem and confronting the high priestly aristocracy there (perhaps based on experience with others, such as Pharisees who debated with Jesus, or from earlier festivals). Perhaps they are aware of Jewish traditions about a terrible war preceding the final establishing of the Messiah's kingdom—a war in which, according to some marginalized groups, the Jerusalem aristocracy would prove as evil as the Romans (cf. the Dead Sea Scrolls). Or perhaps they fear primarily the Roman garrison in Jerusalem.*

10:33-34. Jesus warns against both the Jewish aristocracy and the Romans, who will execute him in the manner customary for revolutionaries. On the suffering *Son of Man, see comment on 9:31. Many Jews condemned the corruption of the priestly aristocracy of this era.

10:35-45

The Greatest Is the Servant

10:35-37. James and John want the status of viceroys in an earthly *kingdom; this desire again reflects a popular conception of the *Messiah and God's kingdom that Jesus has repeatedly repudiated (see comment on 8:31-38).

10:38. Jesus elsewhere refers to the cross as his cup (14:23-24, 36), which may allude to the cup of judgment that appears often in the *Old Testament (Ps 60:3; 75:8; Is 51:17-23; Jer 25:15-29; 49:12; Lam 4:21; Zech 12:2). His *baptism in some way also prefigures his death (see comment on 1:11; cf. Lk 12:50; Ps 69:2, 14-15).

10:39-40. The positions on either side of a king's throne (especially the right side) were the most prestigious in a kingdom. (Jesus might, however, be alluding instead to those crucified on his right and his left; 15:27.) James was later the first of the twelve martyred (Acts 12:2), but according to *church tradition John lived into the nineties.

10:41-42. Competition for status was rife in Mediterranean antiquity. Jewish people knew well the *Gentile model of authority: many ancient near Eastern kings had long claimed to be gods and ruled tyrannically; Greek rulers had adopted the same posture through much of the eastern Mediterranean. The Roman emperor and his provincial agents (who often showed little concern for Jewish sensitivities) would have been viewed in much the same light: brutal and tyrannical. Jesus' reminding the disciples that seeking power was a Gentile (i.e.,

pagan) practice was tantamount to telling them they should not be doing it; Jewish teachers used Gentile practices as negative examples.

10:43-44. It was radical for Jesus to define greatness in terms of servanthood; despite Jewish rules requiring that slaves be well treated, Jewish free persons, like their Gentile counterparts, considered slaves socially inferior. Although both slaves and free persons varied in rank, slaveholders treated their slaves as inferior in rank to themselves.

10:45. By calling himself a “servant” and defining his mission as “giving his life a ransom for the many,” Jesus probably identifies himself with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:10-12 (despite contemporary debate surrounding this claim). Although the servant’s mission had been given to Israel as a whole (Is 41:8; 43:10; 44:2, 21; 49:3), Israel through disobedience could not fulfill it (42:19), so that the one who would fulfill it had to restore Israel as well as bring light to the Gentiles (49:5-7; 52:13–53:12). Because hardly anyone else had yet applied this passage to the *Messiah, Jesus is trying to redefine their expectation about his messianic mission. On the “many,” see comment on Romans 5:15. Some also compare traditional Jewish language for the deaths of martyrs assuaging God’s wrath against Israel (see “*atonement” in glossary).

10:46-52

Stopping for a Blind Beggar

The *disciples want to get on with the business of setting up the *kingdom (10:37; 11:9-10), not understanding that stopping for a blind beggar is the sort of thing Jesus’ kingdom is all about (cf. 10:13-14).

10:46. The blind, the severely disabled and others who could not engage in the traditional occupations of the day could support themselves only by begging, normally on a busy roadside. Judaism considered it righteous to help them. Jericho was a prosperous town with a good climate, and Timaeus’s son no doubt received adequate support there. “Bartimaeus” means “son of Timaeus” (*bar* is *Aramaic for “son”); Mark clarifies that this was literally true in his case (not simply a name or title as in some *bar* names in 15:7; Acts 1:23; 4:36; 13:6; 15:22).

10:47-48. Except for what they had learned from listening to others recite, blind people in that time were largely illiterate in the *law (Braille had not been invented yet, so they could not read, although like vast numbers of other

illiterate Jews they could hear the Torah read). Although they were protected under the law of Moses, they were largely socially and economically powerless, and Jesus' followers view this blind man's loud pleas as an intrusion, the way they had viewed the children (10:13). The disciples may have viewed Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem as a royal procession, and it was foolhardy and impudent to interrupt a royal procession.

10:49-52. Perhaps by "stopping" and standing still, Jesus allows the blind man to come to where Jesus' voice had last sounded. The "cloak" (10:50) is an outer garment, used as a coat in cold weather and as bedding at night, and possibly might have been spread before him for use in his daytime begging if he had no pouch. On the narrative level, the act of casting it aside may signify his forsaking dependence on anything else and trusting only in Jesus.

11:1-11

Jesus Enters Jerusalem

Although later Jewish teachers understood "the king coming on a donkey" (Zech 9:9) messianically, it is not clear that the whole crowd understands Jesus' claim to *messiahship here (he would not be the only person to ride a donkey). Had members of the Roman garrison been present outside the gates and recognized the implications of Jesus' claim, they would have arrested him.

11:1-2. Heralds or messengers were typically sent two by two (6:7; cf. 14:13). That Jesus chooses a colt over a grown donkey might reinforce Mark's portrayal of his humility (cf. also the final line of Zech 9:9). Also custom frequently preferred animals for divine use not yet used by people (Num 19:2; Deut 21:3; 1 Sam 6:7). In second-century Egypt, donkeys ranged in price from 50 to 350 drachmas—roughly between two and ten months' complete wages for a worker. Obviously borrowing an animal for the occasion was more economical than seeking to buy one!

11:3. Residents of the area around Jerusalem had to be particularly hospitable with their property around Passover season, when Jewish pilgrims from the whole ancient world came for the feast. The response to the potential question could have meant, "Lend these to Jesus, the teacher" (*Aramaic *rab* can be translated as "master" or "lord"), or "Lend these to the service of God." A king (or even Roman soldiers) could "impress" an animal for use (see comment on Mt 5:41).

11:4-6. In many cities, the doors of homes faced a courtyard shared by neighbors; in a small village, the doorway may have just faced a dirt road through the town. People would normally ride the adult, not the colt never before ridden, so the *disciples' purpose in untying the colt may not have been immediately obvious even had they owned it themselves.

11:7. A king "coming on a donkey" evokes Zech 9:9 (construed messianically by some later *rabbis), though it is not clear that the crowds recognize the allusion. The Romans would have arrested someone they suspected as a claiming to be a ruler, but no one would expect a genuine messianic claimant to enter Jerusalem peacefully and unarmed, since certain death would await such a person.

11:8. The spreading of garments represents what could be construed as royal homage (2 Kings 9:13). Branches were also waved in homage to rulers (cf. 1 Maccabees 13:51; 2 Maccabees 10:7). Jericho was 17 miles (about 27 km) uphill to Jerusalem, and possibly some larger branches were carried from there, though local ones (still smaller in the spring) might be easier for the colt to walk on. (Carrying branches was also part of the worship at the feast depicted in Ps 118:27.)

Pilgrims to the feast were typically welcomed by crowds already there, so it is unlikely that the whole crowd recognized the significance of Jesus' entry. Nevertheless, Jesus was well-known especially among the Galileans who had come to the festival. In view of the crowd's acclamation in 11:10, the image that may have come most readily to the minds of Mark's ancient hearers is probably that of a royal entrance procession.

11:9. "Hosanna" means "O save!" and both this and the next line of verse 9 come from Psalm 118:25-26. Psalms 113-118, called the Hallel, were regularly sung at Passover season, so these words were fresh in everyone's minds (cf. also comment on 12:10-11). Hopes for the restoration of the Davidic kingdom also ran high at this time of year; Rome thus had extra troops on hand at this season to control any unrest.

11:10. The coming of the *kingdom when David or his descendants would again reign (e.g., Is 9:7; 11:1; Jer 23:5-6) is here associated with the hope of one coming in the Lord's name. (David is their "father" in the sense of "deliverer," not their ancestor: cf. Is 9:6; 2 Kings 13:14.) Passover commemorated God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt; consequently, Jewish hopes for a future deliverance from their current problems ran high during this season, and the Roman governor had some extra troops in Jerusalem ready in case riot

control became necessary. By treating Jesus as the object of any of these hopes, the crowds are beginning to see in this teacher a possible messianic figure who could, on many views, lead them against the Romans.

11:11. The ancient workday began at sunrise; the “evening” offering in the temple was what we call afternoon (about 3 p.m.); people normally wanted to be near home by dark. “Late” may mean not “dark” but rather that the daily activity in the temple had begun to subside. Although eating the Passover in Jerusalem, as was expected, Jesus lodged in Bethany (11:11-12), about three kilometers east of Jerusalem on the southeastern slopes of the Mount of Olives.

11:12-25

The Temple and the Tree: Judgment Coming

Jesus’ prophetic act against the temple is enclosed by the story of his cursing the fig tree, also an acted *parable of judgment. Fig trees were one of the most common kinds of trees in Palestine.

11:12-14. At this time of year, edible figs were still about six weeks away, but the bland fruit had recently appeared on the tree in late March; they would become ripe by late May. These were the early figs that preceded the main crop of late figs, which were ripe for harvest from mid-August into October. If only leaves appeared, without the early figs, that tree would bear no figs that year—whether early or late. Because everyone would know that it was “not yet the season for [real] figs,” Jesus seems to be making a point about trees that only pretend to have good fruit (cf. Jer 24). In some Jewish stories, exceptionally holy men could curse others or objects and so destroy them; Jesus exerts genuine authority to curse only here, as an acted parable to his disciples.

11:15. Jewish people from other parts of the empire or even from different towns in Galilee would have local currencies that needed to be converted to some standard for use in the temple. Further, one was not to bring sacrifices from long distances but to convert their resources into money first (Deut 14:24-27) and buy the sacrifices in Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 7:17). The temple providing offerings (like pigeons here; Lev 1:14; 5:7; 12:8) locally was a service helpful for pilgrims. Moneychangers and sellers of doves were thus necessary and in some sense biblical. The issue is not whether there should have been moneychangers; it is whether it was valid to turn much of the outer court into a place emphasizing commerce to the detriment of worship. With hundreds of

thousands of pilgrims at Passover, the merchants' strip in the temple must have been quite large, consuming much attention. The Sadducean priests who ran the temple establishment would see actions challenging the peace of the temple as also direct challenges to their own honor; such challenges were usually met with arrest and its consequences.

11:16. Later rabbinic teaching also complained against defiling the temple courts by carrying unnecessary items through them (although it is not clear that anyone would have enforced this principle in the first century). But no one protested as strongly as Jesus does, and no one seems to have questioned the necessity of commercial activity in the outer court at a feast.

11:17. Jesus cites two texts as the basis for his challenge. The first is Isaiah 56:7. In context, Is 56:7 shows that God-fearing *Gentiles will be welcome in the restored temple (always God's purpose for the temple; cf. 1 Kings 8:41-43)*, and in the Old Testament the only separation in the temple was between priests and people. But in Jesus' day the temple was also segregated by ethnicity and gender for purity reasons, with Jewish women on a lower level outside the Court of Israel and non-Jews in the outermost court. Jesus shows his concern for the worship of the Gentiles and protests ethnic segregation in a divine institution.

The second text he cites is from Jeremiah 7:11, where Jeremiah condemns the idea that the temple is a safe haven for Judah in its sin; although those who have exploited the poor think that the temple will protect them, God will destroy his temple (Jer 7:3-15). Robbers' "dens" were the sort of places where robbers kept their loot. Some also point out that in A.D. 66 rebel brigands or "robbers" (for whom *Josephus uses the same term as Mark) took possession of the temple and slaughtered the priests, further inviting God's impending wrath (see comment on 13:14).

11:18. The priestly aristocracy undoubtedly saw in Jesus' attack on the temple establishment a threat to their own economic and social interests (see comment on 11:15). The priestly aristocracy maintained their power and prestige by maintaining peace for the Romans, and the foundation of their priestly power was the temple. Most other Jewish groups (excluded from power), including Pharisees, Essenes and reports in Josephus, portrayed the priestly aristocracy as abusive and corrupt.

11:19. Many pilgrims lodged in the surrounding villages and countryside. Jerusalem was too crowded at Passover season to accommodate all the pilgrims during this period, though as many pilgrims as possible would seek to eat the Passover meal itself within or near the city's walls.

11:20-24. Some Jewish texts speak of “removing mountains” as an infinitely long or virtually impossible task, accomplished only by the most pious (later rabbis applied it to mastering studies that appeared humanly impossible to master). Thus Jesus is saying that nothing will be too hard for the person who trusts God (cf. Gen 18:14). The image of God’s *Spirit bringing down a mountain before a faithful servant also appears in Zechariah 4:6-9; before God’s servant, God would bring down all obstacles opposing the tasks God designates. The promise of one’s commands coming to pass probably presupposes God’s leading or authorization (cf., e.g., 2 Kings 2:21-22; 4:3-7, 41-44; Lam 3:37; Acts 3:6, 16).

11:25. Standing (often with uplifted hands) was the normal posture for prayer; though kneeling occurred, it was much rarer.

11:27-33

By Whose Authority?

11:27-28. As guardians of the temple and the status quo with the Romans, the chief priests would see Jesus’ act as a direct challenge to their authority. Were Jesus not so popular, they might have already arrested him.

11:29. Counterquestions were common, and here one allows Jesus the opportunity to remain coy about the messianic secret (see introduction to Mark). An agent acted on the delegated authority of the sender.

11:30. Here Jesus argues that his authority and John’s derive from the same source, from “heaven” (one familiar Jewish way of saying “God”). This argument follows the Jewish legal principle that a commissioned messenger acts on the full authority of the one who sent him. If John’s authority were merely human (cf. Deut 18:20; Jer 23:16), they should have taken a firmer stand against him (Deut 13:1-11); if it was divine, God would hold them to account for not having listened (Deut 18:18-19; 2 Chron 20:20).

11:31-32. The chief priests were politicians—less popular than the politically powerless *Pharisees—who had to balance the interests of both their people and the Roman authorities. Holding most local political power, they had great incentive to prevent unrest. Thus they had to keep popular opinion in mind when making decisions that might incur the displeasure of the people (11:32).

11:33. Public admission of ignorance on an important matter would count against their honor, but offered less trouble than outrightly condemning John.

Counterquestion (11:29) was a legitimate means of debate; their withdrawal from the rules of debate *rhetorically frees Jesus from the responsibility to continue in dialogue with them.

12:1-12

The Greedy Tenant Farmers

On “*parables,” see the glossary. Jesus still addresses those who fancy themselves rulers of Israel, reminding them that they are merely custodians appointed by God (like the shepherds of Jer 23 and Ezek 34) over his vineyard.

Much of the rural Roman Empire, including parts of Galilee, was controlled by wealthy landowners, whose land was worked by tenant farmers. Landowners had great status in society, whereas tenant farmers had little except, perhaps, among their own peers.

12:1. Here Jesus describes a normal way to prepare a vineyard, but he clearly alludes to Isaiah 5:1-2, where Israel is the vineyard. Some Jewish interpreters by the time of Jesus saw Isaiah 5 as a prediction of the temple’s destruction in 586 B.C.; if such an allusion was in the mind of any of Jesus’ hearers, it would communicate his warning all the more forcefully.

Vineyards, unlike grain fields, often had walls to protect their fruits from animals and people. According to the most likely reconstructions, the “wall” was a rugged stone hedge, and the vat was a pit into which juice would run when workers trod down newly picked grapes. The top of the “watchtower” was a sentry post against intruders, but the building itself, sometimes a crude hut, may have also housed workers during harvest season.

12:2. Payments were normally rendered at harvest time, often one-quarter to as much as one-half the produce. (Landowners technically could be said to own all the produce until tenants paid their rent.)

12:3-5. Ancients appreciated the ideal of benevolent landowners, but also knew that landowners always had power, socially and legally, to enforce their will on the tenants; a few reportedly even had hired assassins to deal with troublesome tenants. They could displace the tenants if they chose. Here the tenants act as if they are the ones with power, and they exploit it mercilessly, without thought for consequences. Their behavior fits the Jewish tradition that Israel martyred many of the prophets God sent.

12:6. In the light of 1:11 and 9:7, the “beloved son” clearly represents Jesus

and probably alludes to Genesis 22:2, where similar Hebrew words were used by Jewish readers to emphasize the pathos involved in Abraham's willingness to give up his precious son Isaac. No ancient landowner, no matter how benevolent, would have gone to such ends to satisfy tenants who had already killed messengers; ancient hearers would view him as naive, but recognizing in his behavior God's continued mercy to Israel would also lead to affirming that God would be right to judge his people.

12:7-8. "Come, let us kill him" probably echoes Joseph's brothers in Gen 37:20. The tenants presume too much about the inheritance; although they could have seized it under certain legal conditions, the owner could also stipulate—and after their misdeeds certainly would—that someone else inherit the vineyard; or representatives of the emperor could have seized it. The story paints the tenants as more wicked and stupid than one would expect any *real* tenants to be; but it is transparent that the tenants represent the religious leaders who serve themselves rather than God (Mk 12:12).

12:9. Ancient hearers would wonder why the landowner had not come and thrown out the tenants earlier, after 12:3-5.

12:10-12. This text is from Psalm 118:22-23, part of the Hallel, like 118:25-26 cited in 11:9-10. The Hallel was particularly fresh on people's minds for the Passover. If the larger context is in view, the building referred to is presumably the temple (Ps 118:18-21, 25-27); as the cornerstone of a new temple, Jesus is a threat to the builders of the old one.

12:13-17

Caesar and God

Rabbis dealt with questions concerning legal, moral and exegetical issues as well as mocking questions posed by opponents (e.g., *Sadducees, *Gentiles*, *apostates* and *schismatics*). *Parallels to these basic categories of questions appear in 12:13-37, where Jesus' answers prove him a proficient rabbi.*

12:13. *Pharisees tended to be nationalistic, whereas Herodians were clients of Herod, the Roman vassal; they worked together only in extraordinary situations. Pharisees would be concerned about Jewish legal requirements to have witnesses for a charge but would be ready to investigate charges concerning Jesus' disloyalty to the law.* That they would try to test his teaching here is not surprising. The Herodians, who hoped for a restoration of Herodian

rule in Judea (which *Pilate currently governed), were naturally disturbed by messianic figures who challenged their idea of Herodian rule and might cause Rome to tighten its direct control over the land.

12:14-15. Knowing that much of the populace resents Roman taxation and that many may look to Jesus for deliverance, they know that Jesus cannot accept taxes without alienating his constituency. If Jesus denounces Roman taxes (as they probably hope), accepting no king but God, the view characterized by those later called *Zealots, he can be arrested as a threat to public order and handed over to Rome for execution on the charge of sedition and treason. A disastrous tax revolt two decades earlier had shown where nationalistic fervor could lead.

12:16-17. Jewish Palestine circulated copper coins that omitted the image of the deified emperor, which was offensive to Jewish tastes. (Although King Agrippa later used both the image of the emperor and his own, Herod Antipas, current ruler in Galilee, avoided any images on his coins, and so did local Judean coinage.) But Jesus' opponents have a silver denarius—which bore the emperor's image—available when he requests one. They are therefore hardly in a position to challenge his lack of nationalistic zeal. As for rendering to God what is God's, some commentators believe that Jesus appeals to what is made in God's image: humans should give themselves to God (Gen 1:26-27).

12:18-27

Sadducees and the Resurrection

12:18. One of the basic points of contention between Pharisees and *Sadducees* was that the latter did not accept the *future* resurrection of the bodies of the dead.

12:19. The Sadducees' question to Jesus concerns the custom called levirate marriage (Deut 25:5-6), which was meant to protect widows economically. In various forms, both ancient Middle Eastern cultures and many traditional societies today employ levirate marriage. It helps widows in societies where women cannot earn adequate wages.

12:20-23. The Sadducees take this story line from the Jewish book of Tobit, where seven successive husbands of pious Sarah die (though they were not brothers).

12:24-27. Jesus' response resembles standard Pharisaic responses. When Pharisees debated this issue with Sadducees, they argued for the resurrection

from the *law of Moses, and typically read a text for all they could get out of it. Standard Jewish interpretive technique would have read Exodus 3:6 as present tense, “I *am* the God of the patriarchs”—implying that the patriarchs still lived (cf. similarly 4 Maccabees 7:18-19; 16:25; Philo, *Abraham* 50–55). Phrases such as “in the passage about the bush” were standard, because the Bible had not yet been divided into chapters and verses.

12:28-34

The Love Commandments

12:28. A common issue of discussion among ancient rabbis was the question of which commandments were heavier (i.e., more important) and which were lighter (cf. comment on Mt 5:19).

12:29-34. Following Jewish interpretive technique, Jesus links the two commandments (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18) by a common key expression, “You shall love.” Some others also linked these passages (e.g., *Philo) and also summarized the *law in terms of devotion to God and to others. Some other teachers ranked these among the greatest commandments that summarized the law* (e.g., Rabbi Akiba in the early second century viewed Lev 19:18 as the greatest commandment; cf. *Sifra Qedoshim* pq. 4.200.3.7). This was especially true of “Love the Lord your God,” which followed directly on and applied the basic confession of Judaism, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord . . . is one” (Deut 6:4). Many Jewish teachers affirmed that the best motive for serving God was love. That many of Jesus’ hearers would recognize the plausibility of his reply makes it all the more difficult to dispute with him on the matter.

12:35-37

David’s Lord

When Jewish teachers challenged their hearers to resolve apparent discrepancies in Scripture, they assumed that both texts were true (in this case, Jesus knows that he is both David’s son, as in 10:47-48, and David’s Lord) and were asking how to harmonize them.

12:35. By definition, the Christ, or anointed one, was the royal descendant of David (Is 9:7; 11:1; Ps 2; 89; 132). But this view of *messiahship could lend itself to a primarily revolutionary view of the kingdom* (see 11:10) and was thus

inadequate by itself.

12:36-37. Jesus' opponents apparently have no answer, because extant sources do not suggest that Jewish interpreters applied Psalm 110:1 to the Messiah. Yet who else might the psalmist's second "lord" be, since Jewish tradition (reflected in the psalm's superscription) viewed David himself as the author? The one who would reign in God's kingdom was David's "lord," not merely his descendant; he would thus be greater than the resurrected David. Writing in Greek, Mark might want his hearers to connect this verse (Ps 110:1) with a verse he has cited in the preceding section, because Jewish interpreters often linked verses with a key word—there was only one Lord: God (12:29). If so, Mark offers another claim for Jesus' deity here (cf. 1:3).

12:38-44

The Pious Poor and Their Religious Oppressors

12:38. Like their Greek counterparts, some Jewish teachers wore a special identifying garb; this seems to have been a long, white linen robe, similar to those of priests and temple officials. Teachers were normally greeted with titles of honor; marketplaces, which were full of people, would provide many opportunities for these teachers to receive such recognition. Custom demanded greeting social superiors before the superior could greet the required greeter.

12:39. Synagogues were not all of the same shape or size, but in many later *synagogues, teachers could take a seat in full view of most of the rest of the assembly (like ministers in most churches today). In some, many people probably sat on the floor, with persons of greater status on benches around the wall and sometimes other benches, and the best seats on the raised platform where this existed. What is significant is their status in a status-conscious society; synagogues were the most important assembly places for the community. At banquets, those seated nearest the host were in positions of honor; ancient literature is full of complaints from those snubbed by being given socially inferior seats.

12:40. Widows had little means of support, were socially powerless and honorless in a society emphasizing status and honor, and were to be protected under Jewish *law. In legal cases they normally needed advocates to speak on their behalf.

Jesus could mean that these teachers exploit widows' resources by abusing

the letter of the law in legal decisions rather than showing special mercy to the poor, or by favoring more powerful relatives, or by seeking extensive contributions (or insisting on tithes, which Pharisees could set at twenty to thirty percent, on top of the heavy land taxes levied by the government). Whatever their specific crime, the charge of “devouring widows’ houses” portrays them as no better than the *tax gatherers.

They may have lingered long in their individual or public prayers in the synagogues (apparently covering up the lack of private relationship with God); it is not the longevity of prayers but the motive of this longevity that Jesus criticizes here. Like the *Old Testament prophets, Jesus denounces both social injustice and religious hypocrisy (e.g., Amos 2:7; 8:5-6), and he stands on behalf of the economically powerless (Is 1:17).

12:41-44. Jerusalem’s massive temple had a large treasury, reportedly adjacent to the Court of Women. A later tradition claims that thirteen receptacles for such gifts stood in the Court of Women, accessible to Israelite women as well as to men. Already probably the most massive temple in the Roman empire, supported by an annual temple tax on all adult male Jews (including in the *Diaspora), the temple sported ostentatious wealth (such as a massive golden vine). Its officials would probably waste this widow’s money; but this powerless woman, ignorant of that likelihood, acts in good faith in her devotion to God and is the greatest giver in God’s sight. Even if all else failed, the widow would not starve, given provisions for the poor in Jewish synagogues (cf. comment on Acts 6:1-4). The widow’s “mite,” or *lepton*, represented the lightest and least valuable coin of the period.

13:1-4

Setting of Jesus’ End-Time Discourse

Mark may have risked serious trouble with the Roman authorities for writing this chapter, if he wrote publicly in his own name; Jewish underground tracts about the time of the end usually included Israel’s exaltation, and Rome distrusted any threat to its power. Prophecies favoring Rome’s greatness were welcome, but not those implying its demise. But this chapter before Jesus’ arrest climaxes Jesus’ warnings to his *disciples in Mark: true followers must be ready to follow to the cross and share his sufferings.

13:1. Greek texts sometimes portray Greek philosophical teachers

conversing with their disciples while strolling about; this may have been a common teaching technique at least in particular schools (e.g., that of *Aristotle).

The temple complex consisted of many buildings and was perhaps the largest, most magnificent structure in the ancient world; it was twice the size of Solomon's temple. (Probably only anti-Jewish prejudice kept it from being ranked among the seven wonders of the ancient world, for it was larger than the Ephesian temple of Artemis, which was so ranked.) Construction had begun under Herod the Great before Jesus' birth and was still continuing at this time. Jewish people all over the world contributed to the temple, and so much was received that officials kept adding on to a golden vine that was part of its ostentatious glory. It was sacred to Herod's enemies as well as to his allies.

13:2. Many or most Jews considered the temple invincible, but forty years after Jesus spoke these words, in A.D. 70, the Romans destroyed the temple. The wording here is only slightly *hyperbolic: some stones in the retaining wall remained in place, but the temple proper was obliterated. As exemplified in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, some other groups also expected God to judge the temple authorities; but no one before A.D. 66 was as accurate concerning the timing as Jesus was (13:30).

13:3-4. Although Greek teachers often instructed their pupils while walking (13:1-2), they also often instructed them while sitting in front of a temple (a common form of public building in antiquity). The disciples' question to Jesus about the sign of the temple's destruction sets the scene for Jesus' answer in the rest of the chapter, in which he apparently describes both the imminent end of the Jerusalemites' world and the ultimate end of the age. In biblical prophets (e.g., Joel), nearer judgments sometimes prefigured more distant ones.

13:5-8

Not Yet the End

13:5-6. False messiahs often drew significant Jewish followings in Palestine, including known figures over the next few decades (see comments on Acts 5:36; 21:38) and as late as Bar Kochba, whom Rabbi *Akiba hailed as the *Messiah around A.D. 130. Within the decades immediately following Jesus some sought to emulate Moses or Joshua, perhaps viewing themselves as messianic.

13:7-8. Ancient Jewish *prophecy teachers usually listed events like these

(often along with some that Jesus does not list, such as mutant infants) among the signs of the end; the end was often portrayed as preceded by great sufferings or a final war, and was sometimes compared with birth pangs. Jesus says that instead these sorts of events characterize all of life until the end; history until the final time is only the *beginning* of birth pangs.

13:9-13

Sufferings to Expect Before the End

13:9. Before A.D. 70, local courts, or councils deciding cases, were probably run by local elders or priests; in later times *rabbis would staff them. Synagogues were the local places of public assembly and thus provided the natural place for hearings and public discipline. Sometimes discipline was administered in the form of flogging, with thirty-nine lashes (cf. 2 Cor 11:24). Under rules dating back to at least the second century rules, this meant thirteen harsh strokes on the breast and twenty-six on the back; the smiter was to strike as hard as possible. These words would have particularly pained Jewish Christians, because they signified rejection among many of their own people.

13:10. In context, this preaching will be carried out before officials of all nations (“kings”—v. 9—could refer just to Rome’s vassal princes, but “all nations” suggests that Parthian and other rulers from the East are also in view). Distant kingdoms already then known included Parthia, India and China to the east; Scythia, Germany and Britain to the north; and Subsahara Africa to the south. The context connects this universal proclamation with universal persecution.

13:11. Jewish people thought of the *Holy Spirit especially as the Spirit of *prophecy who had anointed the prophets to speak God’s message, and biblical prophets suggest this Spirit’s abundance in the end-time.

13:12. See Micah 7:5-7 (more explicit in Mt 10:35-36).

13:13. Enduring to the end might mean survival (cf. *4 Ezra 6:25), but more likely means avoiding apostasy, which was often associated with end-time sufferings.

13:14-23

The Prerequisite for the End

About a decade after Jesus uttered these words, his *disciples had good reason to remember them. When the Roman emperor Caligula declared himself divine and tried to set up his image in the Jerusalem temple (A.D. 39), Jesus' sayings about the impending abomination that would cause desolation must have been circulated with renewed vigor. Paul evoked these sayings a decade later (2 Thess 2:1-12) and to Mark when he wrote his Gospel (perhaps A.D. 64). The abomination that would bring about desolation was finally fulfilled in A.D. 66–70 (cf. earlier cases in e.g., Ps 74:3-7).

13:14. *Josephus, who lived through the war of 66–70, thought the “abomination of desolation” (the reference is to Dan 9:27; cf. 11:31; 12:11) happened in A.D. 66, when *Zealots shed the blood of priests in the temple. Others date the abomination of desolation three and one-half years later, in 70. The Jerusalemites had considered it a sacrilege for the Roman standards, which bore the image of the worshiped emperor, to enter Jerusalem (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.59; cf. 1QpHab 6.4). But in the year 70, when the temple was destroyed, the Romans erected these standards over the eastern gate of the temple and sacrificed to them, as they proclaimed Titus, their general, the supreme leader (Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.316). Both views may be true: if the phrase means “abomination that *causes* desolation,” then the abomination of A.D. 66 may have led to the desolation of A.D. 70.

The mountains were full of caves and represented the safest place to flee. Earlier David eluded Saul there; the second-century B.C. Jewish revolutionaries, the *Maccabees, practiced guerrilla warfare from the mountains; later, Jewish refugees hid there in the war of A.D. 132–135. Later Christian sources report that the Jerusalem Christians, warned by prophecies before Jerusalem's fall, fled to a place called Pella in the Decapolis, far to the north.

13:15. Housetops were flat and could be used for prayer, drying vegetables, chatting with neighbors and so forth. Because one approached them by an outdoor staircase or ladder and not from indoors, one who fled in haste would descend without entering the house to retrieve any possessions. Even if there is an element of *hyperbole, it graphically underlines the point of urgency.

13:16. Workers would wear their outer coats in the cool of the early morning but leave them on the edge of the field as the day grew warmer. Because poor people depended on these cloaks for warmth at night, loss of the cloak represented a serious difficulty (Ex 22:26-27). This exhortation again indicates haste; preserving life takes priority over even the most crucial possessions.

13:17. The difficulties of bearing or nursing a child under these

circumstances are obvious in any culture, especially to mothers. Mothers often nursed their babies for the first two years of life before weaning them (most Judeans would not have had wet nurses). The text could also indicate grief over the loss of the children (cf. *2 *Baruch* 10:13-15), physically unprepared for the hardships.

13:18. Winter brought colder nights, rains and (in the mountains) sometimes even snow; it also sometimes filled the dry Judean creek beds without warning with rainwater from the hills, making them difficult to cross. The melting of mountain snow in spring also could provide problematic flooding. Thus Josephus wrote of a group of Jewish fugitives (during the Judean War, but not from Jerusalem) who were delayed by the recently flooded Jordan in the spring of 68. As a consequence thousands were slaughtered by Roman soldiers (*Jewish War* 4.433-35).

13:19. Daniel 11 ends with Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C., and the final distress to which no other tribulation could be compared (spoken of in Dan 12:1) seems to occur at that time, to be followed by the *resurrection of the dead (Dan 12:2). But sometimes events in Israel's history (like the full promise to Abraham or the conquest of Canaan) were deferred until conditions were right (often Israel's obedience); moreover, Daniel 9:24-27 sounds as if it better fits a date in the first century A.D. than in the time of Antiochus.

Jesus' addition of "never shall be" (Joel 2:2) to Daniel's "such as never occurred" suggests that other tribulations could follow in history after the designated tribulation of A.D. 66–70.

13:20. "The days" refers presumably to Daniel's days of tribulation (Dan 12:11-12); given the severity of sufferings, the full period would have been too long to permit survivors.

13:21-22. False prophets and false messiahs had gained Jewish followings all through this period and usually challenged the authority of Rome, generally leading to the death of their followers. Josephus reports that some such prophets continued claiming that God would deliver Jerusalem up to their slaughter by the Romans at the fall of Jerusalem. After the temple's demise, hopes for the *Messiah's coming were presumably even more intense.

13:23. Knowing about events beforehand could give one the assurance that God did know and remain in control (e.g., Is 41:26; 48:5).

13:24-27

The End of This World

13:24-25. Here Jesus uses the language many of his contemporaries would have applied to the end or transformation of the present order that would lead to God's eternal *kingdom* (*Is* 13:10; 34:4; cf. 24:23; *Ezek* 32:7-8). *Sometimes this graphic, cataclysmic language was used for historical events (the Sibylline Oracles use it for an earthquake; cf. Ps 18:7-16; Jer 4:20-28), but usually ancient literature reserves it for the end or transformation of the present world order and the establishing of God's eternal kingdom.*

On this reading, the end Jesus predicted could have been deferred, as perhaps in Daniel; the temple was destroyed just as Jesus predicted, but he did not then return. *Old Testament prophecies sometimes blended together events according to the kind of event rather than the time they would occur. Jesus' point need not be the immediacy of the end after that period, though it might perhaps indicate its imminence, that is, its potential nearness at all times thereafter (see comment on 13:19).

13:26. Jewish texts sometimes speak of God's *eschatological coming with angels (as in *Zech* 14:5). Jesus thus depicts the *Son of Man in terms that Jewish literature usually reserved for God. The text especially alludes, however, to Daniel 7:13-14, where "one like a son of man" (i.e., like a human being) receives the kingdom from God. This Son of Man functions as a representative on behalf of Israel, who in the same context suffers and also receives the right to rule the world (7:25-27).

13:27. One of the most prominent features of Jewish future expectation was the regathering of the dispersed tribes of Israel (as in the prophets, e.g., *Is* 11:12; 43:5; 49:5; 56:8). (Mark probably applies the image to the dispersion of believers in Jesus here; cf. 2 Thess 2:1).

13:28-31

The End Is Imminent

13:28-29. The signs Jesus lists show that the end is imminent, just as a fig tree's leaves show what season it is: because fig trees lack smaller branches they appear barren in winter, but they bloom in late March and are ideal for shade in the summer. Some apply this image to Jesus' acted-out *parable with a fig tree, implying the imminent destruction of the temple (see comment on 11:12-25).

13:30. The length of generations varied but was often represented in the

*Old Testament by forty years (in the Dead Sea Scrolls, forty years represents the suffering of the final generation). Jesus speaks these words near A.D. 30; the temple would be destroyed in A.D. 70.

13:31. Others also noted that it was easier for heaven and earth to pass than for God to forget his covenant or his words (e.g., promises in Jer 31:35-37; warnings in Zech 1:5-6). Here Jesus speaks of his own words in the same manner.

13:32-37

The Time of the End Is Unknown

13:32. Jewish teachers were divided as to whether God had fixed the future time or whether Israel's *repentance could hasten it; most relevantly here, they were divided as to whether they could predict the time (offering a vast range of divergent predictions) or whether God alone knew it.

13:33-34. Other Jewish teachers also told parables of kings or householders going away and returning to find spouse or servants faithful or unfaithful. First-century readers heard enough stories about such events (including in the Bible—Prov 7:19-20) to relate to the image well. Slaves held many different roles, but in a household with enough slaves for specialization the doorkeeper's role was a prominent one, because he held the master's keys, kept out unwanted visitors and checked other slaves leaving the premises. But with the relative prestige of the doorkeeper's position (some were even married to freedwomen) came great responsibility as well.

13:35. The times of night that Jesus mentions represent the Roman division of the night into four watches (when enough were available, guards might take shifts on these watches). Jesus' only guarantee is that he will come at night while the servant is posted on guard duty. In most of the ancient Mediterranean a rooster's final crowing could function like a modern alarm clock, signalling the advent of dawn; but in this context it might refer to the "watch" by that name, the quarter of the night after midnight (see comment on 14:30, 72).

Because the roads were infested with robbers, one would not expect the master to travel at night when it was unnecessary. Thus a slave could be caught off guard if the master returned at night.

13:36-37. Falling asleep at one's guard post would lead to punishment.

14:1-11

Anointed for Burial

14:1. In this period, the adjacent festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread were often viewed together (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 14.21; 17.213; 18.29; 20.106; *Jewish War* 2.10). Jewish literature (from *Essenes*, Josephus and later *rabbis) reports that many aristocratic priests bullied those who opposed them. Thus they would certainly not tolerate someone who challenged their temple cult (cf. 11:15-17) or who threatened impending judgment on its unwatchful servants.

14:2. Jerusalem was crowded during the feast, with perhaps five times its usual population. Riots were known to occur; Josephus (who often inflated figures) reported that at one Passover several decades after the events of this verse, thirty thousand persons were crushed or trampled during a stampede in the temple. For this reason, extra Roman troops were garrisoned in Jerusalem during the feast, and the Roman governor came from Caesarea to be on hand in case of trouble. The danger of arresting Jesus at the feast (i.e., during the festal time, in public) reflects an important concern for the temple leadership.

14:3. Bethany was one of those villages near Jerusalem where Passover pilgrims could spend the night with hosts. One “sat” at normal meals; one “reclined” on couches (if they could afford them) at special meals like feasts or banquets. If Simon had been a “leper” (nicknames usually had some basis but were not always meant literally; e.g., a tall family was nicknamed the “Goliaths”), he was certainly not one by this point, if present; no one would have joined him for dinner if he had been. Jesus may have healed him.

14:4-5. It was customary to provide olive oil to anoint the heads of important guests, but this woman’s action is extreme. Whatever her economic status, this perfume (an oil from a root probably imported from India or South Arabia) was worth a year of a common laborer’s wages; her family had probably kept it as a status symbol. (“Myrrh” was technically a resin from a shrub-like balsam in north Somaliland and south Arabia, but Mark uses the term more generically and specifies it as spikenard, a pleasant-smelling oil from the root of the nard plant native to mountains in north India.) Many people preferred semitransparent alabaster bottles for expensive ointments; sealing it in such a container would preserve its fragrance, but once the bottle was broken, one would need to use up the perfume immediately. Her anointing of Jesus represents a major sacrifice and indicates the depth of her love, but given the great numbers of landless or tenant-

farming peasants, some people present think the worth of the perfume could have been put to better use.

14:6-7. Jesus' reply probably contains an allusion to Deuteronomy 15:11, which in context urges generosity to the poor, who will always be in the land. He does not play down giving to the poor; rather he plays up what follows.

14:8. In Jewish tradition kings (including, by definition, the *Messiah, or "anointed one"), priests and others had to be anointed for service; one anointed even honored guests. But Jesus here stresses a different kind of anointing, which the woman undoubtedly had not intended: anointing a body for burial. Long-necked flasks appear in many first-century tombs near Jerusalem, suggesting that others lavished such expensive ointments on their deceased loved ones. This woman's act of love was the only anointing Jesus would receive (16:1).

14:9. This commemoration does not mean that every individual would know about her; similar *hyperbole appears for writers or heroes whose memories would be preserved in epics by or about them.

14:10-11. Betrayal by a *disciple would shame the teacher, and would be seen as an especially heinous violation of trust. Judas could easily find contacts for the chief priests, although they would not have been accessible to him had his mission been less in line with their plans. His mercenary motives would have appeared as vile to ancient readers as they do to us, and they contrast with the behavior of the unnamed woman of 14:1-9.

14:12-26

The New Passover and the Betrayer

14:12. By this period the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which immediately followed Passover, had been extended in popular parlance to include the Passover itself. Representatives from each family would have the priests slaughter a lamb for them in the temple, then return with it to feed the whole family that night.

14:13. Many commentators point out that water jars (as opposed to wineskins) were nearly always carried by women (often the matron of the home); a man carrying one would therefore be noticeable. Well-to-do households (as probably here), which could afford servants, had them carry the water. Running water was a great luxury, and in many cities, servants were sent to the public fountains to bring rainwater.

14:14-16. Unless the house was unusually large (some were), the upper room would provide an intimate environment for just a few disciples (say, the Twelve; not many more). Nevertheless, anyone with a two-story house, the second story containing a “large” upper room, would be considered well-to-do. This family presumably resided in the area of Jerusalem known as the Upper City, near the temple, rather than the poorer Lower City, downwind of Jerusalem’s sewage. Because the Passover had to be eaten within Jerusalem’s walls, most homes would be crowded with guests; but the accommodations for Jesus’ last meal with his disciples would be quite adequate.

14:17. The Passover was to be eaten at night. April’s sundown in Jerusalem came by 6 p.m., so the meal could have started then. Table fellowship was intimate at the feast; one or two families normally shared the meal, but here Jesus and his closest disciples make up the family unit.

14:18-20. Dipping bowls were particularly used at Passover; the dish here is probably Passover’s dish of bitter herbs. That someone “dipping in the bowl” with a person would betray that person would have horrified ancient readers, who saw hospitality and the sharing of table fellowship as an intimate, covenantal bond (cf. Ps 41:9, cited in Jn 13:18). (In one extreme example in a Greek epic, two warriors on opposing sides of a battle, learning that one’s father had hosted the other’s for dinner, decided to avoid fighting each other.) Some scholars have also suggested that someone dipping “with” Jesus could mean that the person was denying Jesus’ superior rank, because some Jewish groups required the leader to act (hence to dip) first (see the *Dead Sea Scrolls; cf. Sirach 31:18), and many ancient banquets seated people by rank. This interpretation would be likeliest if Judas reclined near Jesus, on the same couch (cf. Jn 13:26).

14:21. Most of Judaism acknowledged both God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. “Better that the person never have been born” was a frequent lament or pronouncement of judgment. Various biblical (Job 3:3-26; Jer 20:14-18), early Jewish and Greek lamentations spoke of never having been born alive being preferable to selected worse fates.

14:22. The head of the household customarily gave thanks for the bread and wine before any meal, but special blessings were said over bread and wine at the Passover meal (though probably not in quite the same form as became standard later). Jewish people broke rather than cut their bread. We should not understand “This is my body” literally (in *Aramaic the phrasing would be ambiguous: “is” or “represents” would not be distinguished), just as we do not take literally the

standard Jewish interpretation spoken over the Passover bread: “This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate when they came from Egypt.” No one assumed that the bread they were eating was 1300 years old, or had been digested by the ancestors; rather, they reenacted those events and felt that they participated in them.

14:23. Four cups of red wine came to be used in the Passover meal; if this custom was practiced as early as Jesus’ day, this cup may be the fourth, which followed the blessing of the bread. (Other scholars have suggested that the third cup is in view. By the end of the first century the four cups seem to have been both Jewish and Greco-Roman practice at feasts.) Each person did not have an individual cup; they customarily passed around one cup.

14:24. Covenants were ratified by the blood of sacrifice, and Jesus’ mention of the “blood of the covenant” evokes Exodus 24:8. God had redeemed his people from Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb; “on behalf of the many” probably alludes to Isaiah 53 (see comment on 10:45). Passover ritual interpreted the cup but did not interpret it as blood, because Jewish *law and custom were revolted by the idea of drinking any creature’s blood—especially human blood.

14:25. Vows of abstinence were common in Palestinian Judaism: “I will not eat any such and such until this happens,” or “I vow that I will not use this until that happens.” Jesus apparently vows not to drink wine again until the *kingdom comes, and he perhaps abstains from the fourth cup. Jewish tradition commonly portrayed the time of the kingdom as a banquet (developing the image from Is 25:6), when the Bible had promised an unending supply of wine (Amos 9:13). Jewish blessings over the wine called it “the fruit of the vine.”

14:26. After the meal and lengthy discussion about the Passover, it was customary to sing psalms from the Hallel, which consisted of Psalms 113–118. (Music was common fare at many ancient banquets.) Walking from a home in the Upper City to the Mount of Olives presumably took fifteen minutes or longer.

14:27-31

Other Betrayers Predicted

14:27. Here Jesus cites Zechariah 13:7, which is not clearly messianic; Jesus may refer to the principle it reports: a flock is scattered without the shepherd to guide them. (The Dead Sea Scrolls do, however, apply this text to the future

time.)

14:28. Jewish people in this period were not expecting a *resurrection of a given person distinct from the resurrection of the whole nation*. Further, they certainly would not have expected a migration to Galilee to follow it: God's people would gather in Jerusalem in the time of the end (cf. Joel 2:32). These expectations may be why the disciples appear to ignore this part of Jesus' statement.

14:29-31. Ancient sources typically regarded the rooster as a reliable reporter of the advent of dawn (e.g., the second-century A.D. Roman writer *Apuleius in *Metamorphoses* 2.26; *3 Maccabees 5:23; Babylonian Talmud *Berakot* 60b), but commentators report that in Palestine nocturnal crowings are familiar to the night watchmen beginning at 12:30 a.m.; the second was about 1:30 a.m. Roosters crow periodically through the night. People sound asleep at those times may have been more familiar with the crowing at dawn because they were readier to awaken then. In either case the point is that the denial is imminent.

14:32-42

Watchmen Asleep

14:32-34. Jesus and his *disciples may have arrived at Gethsemane by 10 or 11 p.m. (which was late in that culture). It was customary to stay awake late on Passover night and to speak of God's redemption. The disciples should have been able to stay awake to keep watch; they had probably stayed up late on nearly every other Passover of their lives.

14:35-36. "Abba" is the *Aramaic word for "Papa," a term of great intimacy and affectionate respect. It was typically the first word a child would utter, but adults could use it for their fathers as well, and students sometimes used it of their teachers. Perhaps because it implied such intimacy, Jewish people never used it of God (though they did call him a heavenly father) except in a very rare *parable by a charismatic teacher (as reported in later sources). On the cup of judgment, see comment on 10:38; for a prayer for God to protect one's life cf., e.g., Psalm 116:3-4, 13-15.

14:37. People often stayed awake late on Passover to discuss God's redemption, but on this particular Passover the disciples slept! Teachers and leaders often reproved those who slept at inappropriate times; most dangerous,

however, were sentries who failed to keep watch (cf. also servants in 13:34-36).

14:38. “Temptation” here is “testing”; given the common Jewish religious uses of the word (as in a common Jewish evening prayer), Jesus is probably saying: “lest you fall prey to the testing you are about to face.” The contrast between “spirit” and “body” is not meant in the later *Gnostic or Neo-Platonic sense (in which the soul is good and the body is evil); rather that though one may mean well on impulse (14:31; cf. the use of “spirit” in many cases in Proverbs, e.g., 16:32; 25:28), the body is susceptible to exhaustion.

14:39-42. Jesus’ use of “sinners” (v. 41) to refer to the men dispatched by representatives of the Sanhedrin is strong language, especially in view of the way most people would use the word (2:16).

14:43-52

The Betrayal

14:43. Because they had been sent by prominent men of Jerusalem, the band that comes to arrest Jesus probably belongs to the temple guard. This guard is known to have possessed the weapons mentioned here (swords and clubs); clubs were said to have characterized the corrupt priestly aristocracy in charge of the temple, as well as being useful in controlling rioters. Based on some second-century sources, some argue that clubs were not supposed to be carried on holy days, including the Passover festival.

These men come prepared for armed resistance from one they suppose is a messianic revolutionary—because they had interpreted Jesus’ act in the temple in terms of the cultural categories of their day, rather than in terms of the rest of his teaching (14:48).

14:44-46. A light kiss on the lips was a sign of special affection among family members and close friends. Teachers could kiss disciples as a special sign of favor or approval, and disciples could kiss teachers to show honor and affection for them. Thus Judas’s kiss is a special act of hypocrisy (cf. Prov 27:6).

Initially the band would not expect the disciples to know the specific object of their approach. Although there may have been light from a new moon, this band believed they needed Judas to lead them in person to the appropriate spot; had they searched for Jesus only on the basis of general directions, their search would have become evident and given Jesus time to escape. The kiss is necessary because darkness made it harder to recognize Jesus; under normal

conditions the guards could have recognized him (he had been teaching in the temple).

14:47. Being well-to-do, *high priests had ample servants. Although the object of the expedition was only to arrest Jesus, had the sword struck again many of the disciples would likely have been killed in the ensuing conflict. In antiquity authorities sometimes settled for executing a movement's leader if they thought this action sufficient to destroy the movement, but any resistance would be met with force.

14:48-49. Subversives (e.g., the later assassins who slew Jewish aristocrats under cover of the crowds in the temple) did their acts secretly or so as to avoid capture; by contrast, Jesus' alleged subversion had been public and unconcealed. An arrest in the temple would have been politically disadvantageous and possibly aroused a riot (see comment on 14:1-2).

14:50. In antiquity, the loyalty of one's followers normally brought one honor; their abandonment brought one shame.

14:51-52. At night, one might have expected the disciple to have an outer garment as well as the linen cloth, and he is probably already chilly (cf. 14:54). (Although one could sleep naked inside one's home in Palestine in April, Jerusalem's higher elevation makes 14:54 a likely indication that it was a cool night; Passover pilgrims who camped outdoors had coverings.) Others in antiquity left behind cloaks when fleeing. Except for some Jews overwhelmed by Greek culture and considered apostates, Jewish people generally abhorred nakedness. The point is that the man is in a hurry to escape.

14:53-65

The Sanhedrin's Miscarriage of Justice

This trial breaks a number of Jewish legal principles, if later documents correctly indicate the state of Jewish *law in this period. Mark probably knew most of these rules, and many of his hearers probably suspected them, since these principles of ethics were widely honored. Elites, however, did not always feel bound by such principles.

One might ask how Jesus' earliest followers knew what happened in a closed meeting of the *Sanhedrin. Even in the most private meetings of assemblies, however, leaks were common, especially when sympathizers had associates who were present (cf. 15:43); one may provide examples both from the Roman

Senate and from Jerusalem's Sanhedrin. (Moreover, from a Christian perspective, the disciples later had access to the report of a major participant: Jesus.)

14:53. "Leading priests," "elders" and "*scribes" were all represented in Israel's chief Sanhedrin, the ruling religious court of Israel. A Sanhedrin was a senate, or municipal assembly; Judea's chief assembly was in Jerusalem. Later tradition claims that the full Sanhedrin, with seventy-one members, normally met in the assembly hall in the temple called the Chamber of Hewn Stone, where they sat in a semicircle with the *high priest in the center. The number may have been simply an average, and* Josephus suggests that they met quite close to the temple, but not in it. In this case, many members of the Sanhedrin (of whom perhaps half would have been necessary for a quorum) hold a secret night meeting without advance notice in the high priest's home (14:54), although they are investigating what they will claim is a capital offense.

By the more careful legal principles of later rabbis and most general legal principles of antiquity, the meeting that Mark describes would have been illegal on all these counts: a secret meeting, held at night, and in a private home. The leaders would have probably explained it as merely a preliminary inquiry before a real investigation (cf. Lk 22:66). The lack of advance notice could have been excused because it is during a feast and all necessary officials are present; but because Jewish law forbade trials on the sabbath, they were probably also forbidden on feast days (though executions were not). The officials who gather, probably predominantly *Sadducees (note the prominent role of the aristocratic priests in 14:55), seem more concerned with convicting Jesus quickly than with legal technicalities.

14:54. Peter's trespassing on private property—that of the high priest himself—required serious commitment from a Galilean fisherman. The guards could be the priest's night watchmen, but presumably they would immediately recognize that Peter does not belong there. They could also be members of the temple guard, waiting to see the results of the trial inside. They may have planned to stay up late for Passover anyway, though under better circumstances.

14:55-56. Despite the high priest's certainty of Jesus' subversiveness, at least some members of the council, perhaps scribes, follow the virtuous Jewish tradition of diligent cross-examination of witnesses. But once these witnesses had contradicted one another, all understandings of Jewish law unanimously demanded that they be declared false and the case be rejected as contrived; under Jewish law, in a capital case, false witnesses were to be put to death (see Deut

19:16-21 and the Dead Sea Scrolls). Even though Rome had not given the Sanhedrin jurisdiction to execute false witnesses, the Sanhedrin should have at least disciplined them. That the case continues simply underlines the corruption of those in control (other ancient Jewish sources, from the *rabbis to the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, also complain of the corruption of the priestly aristocrats; Josephus reports concrete examples of it).

14:57-59. Many Jewish people expected that God would establish a new, purified temple at the time he established the *kingdom. Outsiders had naturally misinterpreted Jesus' teaching about a new temple and warning about the old temple's destruction as the threat of a mad, messianic revolutionary. But the witnesses still fail the cross-examination.

14:60-61. Jesus' refusal to answer fits the ancient Jewish model of a martyr showing contempt to a corrupt judge. At least according to later rabbinic practice, the high priest could not legally force Jesus to convict himself out of his own mouth, but the testimony of other witnesses is so far not working; if the later rabbinic practice was valued by many teachers in Jesus' day, the priestly aristocracy might choose to simply not observe it. The high priest finally asks whether Jesus thinks of himself as a *messiah—hence, to the high priest's mind, as a revolutionary.

"The Blessed One" was a common paraphrase for "God." "*Son of God" (see glossary) was an unusual phrase for a high priest to use, but not an impossible one (the Dead Sea Scrolls interpret 2 Sam 7:14 as messianic). Although Mark could have put the high priest's question in his own words (a common technique in writing at that time), the high priest had probably heard that Jesus had adopted the title for himself, possibly in a messianic sense (12:6).

14:62. Jesus' statement is a claim to be not only a mortal messiah but the cosmic ruler of Daniel 7:13-14, the embodiment of Israel's call, who would come in glory and reign forever. (The seating may allude to Ps 110:1.)

14:63. Tearing clothes was a sign of mourning or *repentance, and was required if one heard the sacred name blasphemed. Jesus would not be deemed guilty under later rabbinic procedure; unless Jesus mentions the sacred Hebrew name of God or summons them to what would be presumed to be idolatry (e.g., by calling himself God, which he does not at this point), he is not technically guilty of blasphemy (here not even by the broader popular sense; cf. 2:5-7). A Jewish court would have been more likely to have pronounced him insane; how could this arrested upstart teacher from Galilee think that he would come in the clouds of heaven? Again, elites (throughout the Roman empire) were not always

interested in legal technicalities.

14:64. Under Jewish law, the high priest is not permitted to judge the case alone; he has to solicit the council's vote (if later recorded rules were already in effect, which might not be the case, this vote would begin with the youngest and conclude with the high priest, lest anyone feel intimidated by their elders). Although they cannot have genuinely believed that Jesus has committed blasphemy according to its technical Jewish definition, they have an important reason to deal with him quickly: he poses a clear threat to the temple establishment (11:15-18), and as a messianic claimant he threatens the whole Roman power structure that they, the Jewish aristocracy, represent.

14:65. Unlike public flogging, the behavior represented here—spitting on, blindfolding, striking and taunting a prisoner—was, of course, against Jewish law. While they ridicule Jesus as a false prophet, Peter fulfills Jesus' *prophecy concerning him (14:66-72); Jesus thus passes an important test for true prophets (Deut 18:22).

14:66-72

Peter's Denials

14:66-69. Leading slaves in the most powerful aristocratic households exercised more power and status than did the average free person. Female slaves did not normally wield such power, but her life might still well be more comfortable than that of average citizens. Although the high priest undoubtedly had many servants, similar cases from antiquity show that the slave girl would have recognized that Peter was not from the high priest's household. Peter would also be clothed differently from the guards. As a servant in an aristocratic household near the temple, this woman had perhaps been at the temple and could have gotten a good look at Jesus' disciples in the temple courts. Peter's withdrawal from the court to the vestibule perhaps anticipates the need to escape.

14:70. Galilean accents differed from Judean accents, certainly in *Aramaic and presumably (as is probably the case here) in Greek. The high priest's servants and temple guard would have lived in Jerusalem and regarded themselves as Judeans. Regional accents were hard to conceal (cf. Judg 12:6).

14:71. The "curses" Peter utters are not vulgar words; rather, he vows that he does not know the man, invoking curses on himself if he is lying. The temple hierarchy is interested in eliminating the ringleader; followers would be viewed

as a threat only if they continued to follow—as Peter had thus far.

14:72. For most people in the ancient Mediterranean world, a rooster’s crowing marked daybreak. Some scholars have suggested that this reference is to an earlier Palestinian rooster crowing between 12:30 and 2:30 a.m.

15:1-15

Pilate and the King

15:1. The night trial having been illegal, the officials reconvene somewhere around the first light (about 4:30 a.m.) or dawn (about 5:30 a.m.) to quickly make their conclusion official. Local elites could try cases and accuse people before the Roman governor, but only the governor could order executions. (This was partly to guarantee that local elites did not remove Rome’s supporters behind Rome’s back.) Roman officials like *Pilate would meet with clients and members of the public from dawn till about noon, so they must have Jesus ready for Pilate very early; their office would give them priority over others wishing to see him. Pilate lived in Caesarea, on the Judean coast, but during the Passover stayed in Herod the Great’s old palace in Jerusalem; the Roman governor needed to be in Jerusalem to forestall troubles at Passover.

15:2-4. Claiming to be the Jewish king, the *Messiah, would lead to a charge of sedition and treason against the emperor, especially under the paranoid emperor Tiberius. The only offense for which the Jewish leaders could automatically execute any transgressor was profanation of the temple; to them, Jesus’ act in the temple might appear to have at least approached that, but the leaders know that his claim to messiahship would threaten Pilate more. Pilate had not been particularly cooperative with these leaders in the past, and they need to have a strong case for him now.

15:5. Jewish accounts of martyrs testify frequently concerning *Gentile judges’ astonishment that the martyrs refuse to cooperate* (e.g., 2 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees). Roman law did not interpret silence as an admission of guilt, but a defendant who persistently refused to answer could be convicted by default.

15:6-10. Roman governors might take into account precedent but were free to decide cases as they thought best. Releasing a prisoner at the feast is one local custom on which the surviving historical records are silent, but it fits the culture of the time (e.g., a governor in Egypt in A.D. 85 handed someone over to “the multitudes”). Unlike Jesus, Barabbas is a violent revolutionary; but so far as we

know he did not claim to be a king or boast such a large following. Jesus' accusers painted him as a revolutionary, but Pilate apparently regards Jesus as both more popular and less harmful than the revolutionary Barabbas. If the people ask for Jesus, Pilate can release Jesus without offending the local political leaders (on his prior conflicts with them, see comment on 15:15).

15:11. Ancient writers often criticized the fickleness of crowds. Historically, most of the crowds gathered here are Judeans who do not know Jesus well, in contrast to the Galilean pilgrims who did (probably the bulk of his supporters in 11:9-10).

15:12-15. A severe flogging normally preceded crucifixion, but it was often administered along the way or even after the condemned was fastened to the cross. The condemned would be stripped and often tied to a post; soldiers would use "flagella," leather whips with iron or bone woven into their thongs, that left skin hanging from the back in bloody strips. Crucifixion was considered the most agonizing and degrading form of criminal execution known in antiquity. It was meant to be death by slow torture; although a victim could die faster from shock due to blood loss, they could spend a few days dying of dehydration or perhaps asphyxiation. Hanging naked before crowds, unable to hold back one's bodily waste or swat flies from wounds, was also meant to humiliate the victim.

When Pilate became governor, he immediately enraged Jerusalem by bringing the imperial standards into the city; more recently, he had built an aqueduct with funds from the temple treasury. His insensitivity had only provoked Jewish hostility, and he had apparently become less eager to clash with the local officials. Local charges against a governor, if believed, could cause him to be recalled, and public order often trumped justice for individuals. Although Pilate remained politically secure until the demise of his possible *patron in Rome, Sejanus, in October of A.D. 31, he must have learned to cooperate with the local elite, for he survived in office for several more years, until A.D. 36. (At that time, according to *Josephus, local complaints did bring his recall.)

15:16-20

Hailing the King

15:16. The Praetorium was Herod the Great's enormous palace, which Roman governors used when they came to Jerusalem.

15:17. Purple was always expensive (see Acts 16:14), but more significantly

here, purple robes and garlands of leaves marked the Greek vassal princes. The soldiers may have had to improvise from a scarlet Roman cloak.

Many scholars think that the crown of thorns, perhaps from the branches of the thorny acanthus shrub or from the date palm (which would look more like a crown), may have been meant to turn mainly outward rather than painfully inward; thus the crown would have mimicked the wreaths worn by *Hellenistic rulers. Because the wreath was twisted, however, some thorns or spikes must have scraped inward, drawing blood from Jesus' scalp. Only the highest king would wear an actual crown instead of a wreath, so they are portraying Jesus as a vassal prince.

15:18. The Roman emperor was greeted with "Hail . . ." Thus the Roman soldiers (probably Syrian auxiliaries) mock Jesus ("King of the Jews") here; they would have had little respect for a Jewish king even had they believed Jesus was one. On other reported occasions *Gentiles dressed people up to mock Jewish kings or abused prisoners physically and with mockery.

15:19-20. One paid homage to a king (including Caesar) by falling on one's knees. The reed might be on hand for military floggings.

15:21-32

The Crucified King

15:21. Cyrene was in what is now Libya in North Africa and included a large Jewish community. "Simon" was a common name among Jews (its resemblance to the patriarch Simeon made it popular). Devout Jewish pilgrims from throughout the Mediterranean world (and presumably a few God-fearers) came to Jerusalem during Passover. Roman soldiers could impress anyone into service to carry things for them. Because it is a feast and work is forbidden, Simon is not coming from "the field" (literally) as a worker; perhaps he is late for the festival, only now arriving from Cyrene or from where he is residing temporarily in the countryside.

15:22. The site of the crucifixion might have been named "Place of the Skull" because so many deaths occurred there, or from the shape of the hill left from surrounding quarried rock. (Nevertheless, the purported site of Calvary proposed by Charles Gordon around 1884, which then had the shape of a skull, acquired those contours long after Jesus' day. In contrast to the traditional site, "Gordon's Calvary" has no claim to reliability.)

15:23. It is said that pious women of Jerusalem normally prepared a solution like this one and offered it to those being executed to dull their pain (cf. Prov 31:6-7); Jesus chooses to endure the full force of the agony of crucifixion. Many scholars suggest that the myrrh had narcotic effects; others demur, but at the very least, the alcohol in the wine could help deaden sensitivity to pain.

15:24. A person being executed would be stripped naked; nakedness was particularly shameful in the East and for Jews. Roman soldiers could normally retain the executed criminal's final belongings. Casting lots was a frequent method of making decisions (see comment on Acts 1:26). Often a unit of four men would be dispatched to oversee a crucifixion (although more are possible in this case, since multiple prisoners are executed here).

15:25. The third hour began shortly after 8:30 a.m. and ran till shortly after 9:30 a.m. (The exact time of hours would vary according to the time of sunrise from which they were reckoned, hence according to the season of year.)

15:26. A soldier would sometimes carry in front of or alongside the prisoner a tablet announcing the charge (the *titulus*) for which one was being executed. Occasionally it could then be posted above the head of the person being crucified, if they were executed on the sort of cross whose vertical beam extended above the horizontal one. The claim to be a king would be sufficient to incur Roman wrath (see comment on 15:2); ironically, however, Jesus is called not a false royal claimant but “King of the Jews,” perhaps reflecting an anti-Jewish sentiment of Pilate or his agents.

15:27. The term for “bandits” here (NIV; ESV; NRSV, cf. “robbers,” NASB) is the same one Josephus used for revolutionaries. Thus these two men may be former colleagues of Barabbas, originally meant to be executed with him that day. Authorities often liked to conduct executions at busy festivals, to provide maximum warning value against potential transgressors.

15:29-32. Some people observing a crucifixion cursed those being crucified; for the temple charge (15:29), see comment on 14:57-59. Many ancient writers used irony, including narrative irony, and Mark is no exception, reporting unintended truth in the words of Jesus' enemies (v. 31).

15:33-41

The Death of the King

15:33. The “sixth hour” began before noon, the “ninth hour” before 3 p.m. Jesus

dies around the time of the normal evening offering in the temple. Stories were told of catastrophes occurring at the deaths of pious *rabbis, especially those whose intercession had been vital to the world; but the biggest point of these signs is that judgment is imminent. Darkness had signified judgment in the past (Ex 10:21-23) and would in the future (Is 13:10; Ezek 32:7; Joel 2:2, 10, 31; 3:15; Amos 5:18; Zech 14:6). In Amos 8:9, darkness falls at noon; cf. Deut 28:29.

15:34. Jesus' cry is an *Aramaic quotation of Psalm 22:1, which was sometimes recited at this time of day in prayer but receives special significance when Jesus prays it. For biblically literate ancient hearers, the first line could evoke this entire psalm of the righteous sufferer—and its hope of divine vindication. (Jesus probably quoted the psalm in Hebrew, as in Matthew, though cf. Aramaic prayer in Mk 14:36; Mark uses the Aramaic form probably because the saying was transmitted in an Aramaic milieu. "Eli" could be mistaken for "Elijah" much more easily than "Eloi"; cf. 15:35-36.)

15:35-36. Not only was Elijah expected to come at the end (Mal 4:5), but some circles (attested in later rabbinic sources) believed that God sent Elijah like an angel to help or rescue famous teachers.

15:37. Scholars have often argued that crucifixion generally killed by asphyxiation: one became too weary to keep pulling one's frame up on the crossbeam, the diaphragm was increasingly strained, and eventually one became unable to breathe. But other scholars have recently argued that most victims would die of blood loss (if they were nailed to the cross) or dehydration first. In any case, death typically took a few days—much longer than the few hours Jesus suffered. Perhaps he died quickly due to the severity of the precrucifixion scourging.

15:38. Jewish people told stories of disasters occurring at the deaths of prominent rabbis. Scholars debate whether the temple's inner or outer veil is meant, but Mark would probably think of the inner veil. The holy of holies, which the priest could enter only once a year, was the ultimate symbol of God's dwelling place. God's rending the veil could symbolize the departure of God's presence from the temple (cf. Ezek 9:3; 10:4; 11:23) and/or broadened access to God apart from the temple. Thus he was now available apart from the temple system and the old temple order stood judged.

15:39. Roman officials or officers often delegated missions like this execution to centurions, who would take a small detachment of soldiers. Because Romans viewed the reigning emperor as a son of the deified Augustus, the

centurion might be recognizing Jesus not only as “king of the Jews” (15:26) but also as a rival to even the emperor. But a non-Jew might use a phrase like “son of God” also with reference to a pious philosopher or, more commonly, a hero whose father was a deity. In Mark’s Gospel, of course, “*Son of God” means much more than that (14:61). Whatever the specific nuance intended, however, Mark’s irony (cf. 15:29-32) is plain enough: only a Gentile is explicitly impressed by Jesus’ death.

15:40. The women followers were much less likely to be indicted than male followers, but they were still courageous to show up at the crucifixion. The epithet of James, “the Less” (NASB, KJV), is better translated “the younger” (NIV, GNT, NRSV), as the usage of the word in the ancient *papyri indicates. Mary is from Magdala; it has been identified with Tarichea, where many fishermen seem to have worked.

15:41. By the standards of the religiously strict, it could have been scandalous for women (especially married women) to travel with an entourage of male disciples (apparently usually without their wives; the case of families making pilgrimage to Jerusalem would be different); apart from members of the aristocracy, conservative married Palestinian Jewish women were expected to limit their public activity, keep their heads covered and fulfill their domestic duties. A number of women in antiquity did function as benefactors and *patrons* (*sponsors*), *though less frequently than men. Adversaries often cited women supporters against one’s movement; some had criticized Pharisees for this practice; this case might appear even more potentially scandalous, since these women traveled with Jesus. In this one verse Mark hints at an aspect of Jesus’ ministry that challenges the conventional social order, especially if these women “followed” as disciples, which they presumably did (see comment on Lk 10:39; the common use of “follow” in the Gospels).*

15:42-47

The Burial of the King

15:42. The sabbath would begin at sundown, within several hours of Jesus’ death. It was not lawful to prepare the body for burial on the sabbath (see comment on Mt 27:57-58 for what was permitted). One could anoint, wash and wrap the bodies with shrouds even on the sabbath, but more thorough burial preparations would have to wait.

15:43. That the Sanhedrin included pious members like Joseph, and not just the sort who appeared in the trial *narrative (as pious as even they may have supposed themselves)*, fits the known diversity within even the Jewish aristocracy of the period. While a range of ancient Jewish sources complain about corrupt aristocratic priests, the reports of Josephus reveal that Jerusalem's aristocracy was divided on many points. Because he awaited the future kingdom, Joseph was probably not a *Sadducee, unlike many of his colleagues in the Sanhedrin. He valued his people's hope more than Roman rule.

15:44. Crucifixion often took several days to kill a person unless hurried along (cf. Jn 19:31-32).

15:45. That excavated tombs include few crucifixion victims suggests that the bodies were not generally made available for burial—a horror to Jewish sensitivities (Deut 21:22-23). Presumably if Pilate were accommodating local interests in the execution, however, he would also accommodate them regarding burial. One exception found in a wealthy family tomb suggests that then, as now, those with wealth and social power had extra influence, which they could use for good or ill. Still, Joseph's request was courageous; identifying with one executed for treason could appear treasonous, and the wealthy were sometimes targeted with charges so leaders could execute them and seize their property.

15:46-47. If Jesus died by 3 p.m., Joseph must have bought the linen quickly, just before sundown (about 6 p.m.) when the sabbath began. Linen shrouds were customary for burial; tombs cut from virgin rock were the best. Large disk-shaped stones could be rolled in a groove over the mouth of a tomb, obstructing entry without the difficult removal of the stone. After a body had been prepared for burial it would be left to decompose for one year; then the eldest son or other closest family member would return, gather the bones for burial in a box and deposit them in a slot on the tomb wall.

16:1-8

The Women at the Tomb

Having predicted the *resurrection appearances (14:28), the Gospel of Mark would be complete with or without 16:9-20; Mark does not need to narrate them. Many ancient documents were content simply to predict and foreshadow events certain to come after the *narrative itself had closed (e.g., the *Iliad*, perhaps the most popular book in Greek antiquity, foreshadows Achilles' death and Troy's

fall without narrating them). Such suspension was a literary and *rhetorical technique in this period. Some books (e.g., the Jewish historiographic work known as *Pseudo-Philo*) and speeches and essays (such as some of Plutarch's) also end abruptly. Scholars debate whether Mark ended here deliberately and, if so, why he did so. Mark may have wished to end just short of the resurrection appearances themselves because his persecuted readers were still sharing in Jesus' cross but needed to be reminded of the foolishness of their present doubts of their ultimate triumph.

16:1. Bodies were normally anointed with oil (then rinsed with water) before burial, but because Jesus had died on Friday just a few hours before the sabbath began (at sundown, around 6 p.m.), this anointing had been postponed (they could not buy spices then; 16:1). Men were allowed to dress only men for burial, but women could dress men or women. Spices may not have been used for everyone but were often used for the bodies of special persons (e.g., Herod). They reduced the immediate stench of rapid decomposition in the normally hot Mediterranean days. After one day and two nights, the women could expect that the body would already stink. But Jerusalem is over two thousand feet above sea level and is cool enough in April that in a sealed tomb the body should have still been approachable.

16:2. The time is around 5:30 a.m.; it was customary to arise at dawn. They bought spices from merchants (16:1) before coming to the tomb, either in the morning or (perhaps more likely) on Saturday evening after sundown. Light was insufficient to reach the tomb before Sunday morning.

16:3-4. The disk-shaped stone rolled in a groove across the entrance to a tomb, and several strong men might be needed to roll it back (comparable to many other tombs here). After the conclusion of the initial mourning period, tombs were normally opened only for the secondary burial of bones a year later and for subsequently deceased family members to be buried there.

16:5. In Jewish literature, angels are normally garbed in white. These women need not have initially assumed that this figure is an angel; the priests in the temple and some others also wore white.

16:6-8. Ancient writers often valued irony. Throughout Mark, people spread news that they were supposed to keep quiet; here, when commanded finally to spread the word, people keep quiet. If the original Gospel of Mark ends here, as is likely, it ends as suddenly as it began, and its final note is one of irony. Many other ancient works (including many treatises and dramas) also had sudden endings.

16:9-20

The Commission (An Appendix)

The manuscript tradition and style suggest that these verses were probably an early addition (not original) to the Gospel of Mark, although a few scholars (such as William Farmer) have argued the case that they are Markan. In any case, most of the content of these verses is found elsewhere in the Gospels, and the traditions seem to be fairly early.

16:9-11. The witness of a woman was deemed much less reliable than that of men, as both *Josephus and the rabbis* attest (Roman law concurred). Given this view and the fact that Judaism was not expecting an individual resurrection of the *Messiah*, *it is not surprising that the* disciples do not believe Mary Magdalene.

16:12-14. According to Jewish tradition, supernatural beings like angels, *Satan and Elijah were capable of disguising themselves in different forms (a feature also applicable to some figures in Greek mythology). The resurrected Jesus apparently shares this trait.

16:15-18. Among the signs of the messianic era, Isaiah predicted that the sick would be healed and that mute tongues would speak (Is 35:5-6; the idea of tongues could refer to the sort in Acts 2:4 and 1 Cor 14, however), and that God's people would be witnesses for him (Is 43:10). The powers here attributed to believers are the sort that characterize many of the *Old Testament prophets (cf. this theme in Acts).

16:19-20. Both Jewish and Greek readers could relate to the idea of an ascension of a great hero to heaven (like Heracles or, in postbiblical Jewish tradition, Moses); the closest and best-known idea would likely be Elijah. For Jesus to sit at God's right hand, however, goes beyond this idea—it means that Jesus reigns as God's agent (Ps 110:1; cf. Mk 12:36).

Luke

INTRODUCTION

Authorship. Luke mentions “we” in a way peripheral to the action in passages in Acts 16 and 20–28; contrary to some scholarly constructs, “we” in historical literature almost always meant that the author was present on the occasions specified. Early tradition, attested 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 Luke-Acts. Although the case for Luke’s use of medical language has been exaggerated, the presence of educated language is consistent with the tradition of Lukan authorship.

Date, Purpose. Many views exist. See the introduction to Acts; some of the specific emphases of Luke-Acts are clearer in Acts than in the Gospel. Luke and Acts together made up a single two-volume work. Details of apologetic in Acts also suggests for Luke’s second volume a date within a decade or two of the events depicted (probably no later than the 70s).

Setting. Luke writes for hearers in the Greek-speaking northern Mediterranean, probably Aegean, world. At least some of his audience is well-to-do and literarily sophisticated, and possibly desires 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 Greco-Roman biography, Luke’s Gospel is the first volume of a two-volume work, Luke-Acts, which is in many ways closer to a Greco-Roman history than a biography. Multivolume histories sometimes included a volume about a particular individual, hence a biographic volume within a larger history. Luke-Acts thus combines biography and historical monograph. 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. Although those who wish to date Acts very late seek to separate it from Luke's Gospel, most scholars recognize that the two volumes have a strong narrative unity and were meant ideally to be read together (see Acts 1:1).

Commentaries. Useful commentaries include I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); François Bovon, *Luke*, 3 vols., Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002–2013); John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012); F. W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1988); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), and Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990). Besides general works mentioned in the introduction to Matthew, Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) is helpful on the background of much of Luke (especially Lk 15). Useful monographs include, among many others, Diane G. Chen, *God as Father in Luke-Acts* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006). Some chapters concerning introductory questions in my *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–) cite some other relevant sources.

1:1-4

The Literary Preface

In Luke's day the more sophisticated writers would often introduce their books with a piece of stylish prose written in more classical style. (Those with literary pretensions generally imitated the Greek of a much earlier period than was commonly spoken.) Luke's introduction here is excellent 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. "Events fulfilled among us" was a natural topic for histories.

Writers compiling a work sometimes 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 what most scholars call "Q" (any material that Matthew and Luke share in common that is not in Mark). 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. Elsewhere in antiquity, disciples of teachers viewed communicating accurately their teachers’ sayings as a central part of their mission; the school would continue to propagate the ideas of the founder. Why should anyone suppose that Jesus’ disciples would be less accurate than all other disciples? Historians normally consulted key eyewitnesses, many of whom remained alive and even in leadership during the period when the Gospel’s sources were being written. Ancients often trained their memories in ways that could put modern intellectuals to shame. Orators could recite speeches hours in length; one exceptional orator even claimed to recall samples of scores of practice speeches offered by classmates decades before. Such memory was not the exclusive domain of the educated; uneducated oral storytellers could recite full works like Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from memory. To object to all such examples because this one is Greek, that one is late, and so forth, is to dismiss all extant evidence in favor of pure speculation. We should expect the material to have been preserved. Because Luke writes while eyewitnesses are still alive, and because they were accorded a place of prominence in the early *church, we may be confident 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). The subject matter specified here (“things fulfilled among us”) is appropriate for a historical preface. Luke had opportunity to acquire “thorough knowledge” of the subject during his travels with Paul hinted at in Acts (in ancient historical sources, “we” nearly always meant that the author was present). These travels included up to two years in Judea (Acts 21:17-18; 27:1).

Appeals to common knowledge were frequent in ancient *rhetoric, and Luke here appeals to Theophilus’s knowledge of the subject, which Luke merely

confirms. That is, the bulk of Luke's story reflects what was already widely known in the early Christian movement. Books would often open with a dedication to the wealthy *patron who sponsored the writing project. (Luke-Acts is not just a private work; Luke's Gospel is within three percent of the length of Acts, both fitting a standard size of scroll for publication.) One could also dedicate a work to a person of status that one hoped would feel honored and therefore promote the work.

Theophilus, the name of the sponsor, was a common Jewish name. (Were it a symbolic name we could translate "lover of God," but we know of no symbolic names in ancient dedications.) "Most excellent" could literally mark him as a member of a high class in Roman society (the equestrian order), although Luke might use the title only as a courtesy. A 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, GNT) 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 (see 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 Avot 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 hearer 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 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 4:5-6; cf. Sirach 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. Mic 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, but narrated with double signs; Sirach 48:12) 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 proves 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 names 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. On such judgments for disobedience see, e.g., Genesis 19:11; on temporary speechlessness due to a shocking revelation, see Daniel 10:15; but see especially the silencing of a prophet until a sign was fulfilled in Ezekiel 24:27; 33:22.

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 might have worked a small farm or done 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. Because it was common for writers to include implicit or explicit comparisons between major figures in their works, some charts may be helpful. More parallels among figures appear later in Luke-Acts, but I start in table 1 with some obvious ones at the beginning of Luke's work (borrowed from my Acts commentary).

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; the early, highest estimates are sixteen hundred to two thousand inhabitants, with more recent, lower estimates of about five hundred. (One question is naturally how far into the countryside would still count as Nazareth.) On Gabriel, see comment on 1:19.

Table 1. Early Parallels in Luke

Zechariah in Luke 1:12-20	Mary in Luke 1:26-38
---------------------------	----------------------

Zechariah in Luke 1:12-20	Mary in Luke 1:29-2:32
Luke 1:12: the vision's recipient is troubled	Luke 1:29: the vision's recipient is troubled
1:13: do not be afraid	1:30: do not be afraid
1:13: reason for miracle	1:30: reason for miracle
1:13: child's name (John)	1:31: child's name (Jesus)
1:15: child will be great	1:32: child will be great
1:15: filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb	1:35: conceived through the Holy Spirit
1:16-17: mission	1:32-33: mission
1:18: question	1:34: question
1:19-20: proof or explanation	1:35-37: proof or explanation
1:20: Zechariah muted for unbelief	1:38, 45: Mary praised for faith
1:80: child grows	2:40, 52: child grows

Table 1 is adapted from Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–2014), 1:557.

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 (see comment on 13:34).

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 1:37, 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 probably found others, perhaps 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. (Indeed, while occasionally suggesting that the fetus's gender could be changed by prayer up until birth, some later rabbinic tradition also affirmed 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 one (here Jesus) indirectly through directly blessing

another, 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.) The psalmist often speaks of "my soul"; to "glorify" the Lord is to praise him (Ps 34:2-3). 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).

Table 2 shows some possible echoes of Hannah's song (borrowed from the introduction to my Acts commentary).

Table 2. Echoes of Hannah's Song

1 Samuel 2:1–10	Luke 1:46–55
God exalts lowly (2:1, 4-5, 8)	God exalts lowly (1:48, 52-53)
I rejoice in your salvation (2:1)	I have rejoiced in God my savior (1:47)
No one holy like the Lord (2:2)	Holy is his name (1:49)
Celebrating the humble exalted and the proud brought down (2:3-9)	Celebrating the humble exalted and the proud brought down (1:51-53)
Poor vs. rich (2:7-8)	Rich empty-handed (1:53)
Hungry vs. full (2:5)	Filled the hungry (1:53)
Poor displacing nobles (<i>dynaston</i> , 2:8)	Brought down rulers (<i>dynastas</i> , 1:52) [same term]
Shift from personal deliverance to God's anointed king (2:10)	Shift from personal deliverance to Israel's deliverance (1:50)

Table 2 is adapted from Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–2014), 1:557.

1:48. Ancient Mediterranean culture emphasized honor and reputation, even after death. 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. Sirach 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 (and esp. v. 36) 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 (or, in later rabbinic tradition, babies were born circumcised).*

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. Some later Jewish tradition even suggests that guests may have

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 Romans named infants eight or nine days after birth (for girls and boys, respectively), so it is very possible that many Jewish people this early named boys at their circumcision, as this text and later sources suggest. Zechariah's muteness may have delayed the normal naming, but cf. 2:21.

1:60-62. Children were often named for grandfathers and sometimes for fathers. The father rather than the mother had ultimate say in the naming. Indeed, in Roman (but not 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 could be a wooden board coated with wax; one would inscribe the message on the wax surface. Priests could be educated.

1:64-66. Prophetic speechlessness and the restoration of speech once the *prophecy had been fulfilled are found also in Ezekiel 24:27; 29:21; 33:22.

1:67-80

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., Ps 41:13; 72:18; 1 Chron 16:36; 2 Chron 6:4) 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 (see, e.g., the Greek translation of Ex 3:16; 13:19; Ezek 34:11). The use of "redeem" here

compares this new event to when God saved his people from Egypt (cf. the cognate verb in Ex 6:6; 15:13; Deut 7:8); 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 (also 2 Sam 22:3; cf. the linking of “horn” and “salvation” in Hannah’s song in 1 Sam 2:1). Thus the Davidic *Messiah would be their deliverer (cf. Ps 132:17). David often was called God’s servant (e.g., 2 Sam 3:18; 7:5, 8, 26).

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. Verse 71, for example, reflects Psalm 106:10 (God saving them from the hand of those who hated them), which in context applies to God redeeming his people from Egypt. “Holy covenant” (1:72) might evoke Daniel 11:28, 30 (though it is also a natural expression); God often would “remember” the covenant with the patriarchs (Ex 2:24; 6:5; Lev 26:42, 45; Ps 105:8-9), with Israel (Ps 106:45; 111:5; Ezek 16:60) or others (Gen 9:15-16). The “oath” God swore to Abraham evokes a range of texts (e.g., Gen 26:3; 50:24; Ex 6:8; 32:13; Deut 9:5; 29:13; 30:20; 1 Chron 16:16; Ps 105:9), especially Genesis 22:16-18 (including triumph over enemies and blessing of nations).

1:76. “Prepare his way” alludes to Isaiah 40:3 (predicting the herald of a new exodus) and probably also Malachi 3:1 (probably connected with Elijah in 4:5); cf. Luke 3:4-6; 7:27.

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), in the context of Elijah preparing the way (Mal 4:5-6). 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 Luke 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), and that context probably informs the reading of the virgin birth in Luke and Matthew (cf. Is 7:14; comment in Mt 1:23).

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 plausible if his aged parents died before he reached maturity (the *Essenes reportedly adopted children and trained them from age ten on). John's later public ministry differed from their private withdrawal, however.

Ancient writers sometimes compared characters; Luke compares John here with Jesus in 2:40, 52. Such comparisons did not always denigrate the inferior person in the comparison; sometimes they chose a great person to illustrate that the one with whom he or she was compared was even greater. Luke repeatedly illustrates that Jesus is greater than John.

2:1-7

Journey to Bethlehem

Tax censuses became irregular during the late Republic, but Augustus revived them. Governors administered them in their provinces (at first every five years, and then every twelve). By A.D. 6 wide-scale censuses were taken every fourteen years. 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 by provincial governors, so local governments probably did not implement Caesar's decree in all regions simultaneously.

2:2. Scholars often 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 perhaps Luke's "*first census under Quirinius*."

Some commentators have suggested that Luke blended the two events (the well-known with the obscure) 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 period, so Joseph and many other settlers in Galilee may have hailed from Judea. Joseph's legal residence is apparently still Bethlehem, where he had been raised. Bethlehem was just under six miles (nine kilometers) south of Jerusalem (perhaps one reason David chose Jerusalem to begin with), hence easily reached after one traveled south to Jerusalem.

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 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 this would apply only if she owned immovable property. Joseph may simply wish to avoid leaving her alone this late in her pregnancy, especially if the circumstances of her pregnancy may have 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). Some advised using them for forty or (more often) sixty days; others advised removing them as soon as the baby's limbs were firm. Midwives normally assisted at birth; especially because this was Mary's first child, it is likely (though not explicit in 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 in the area were reportedly 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 story could have been adapted to fit a few *Gentile stories about deities born in caves, but its earliness lends some weight to its reliability.) The manger was a feeding trough for animals; sometimes these may have been built into the floor. The word traditionally translated "inn" probably means something more like "home" or "guest room"; whether because other relatives may have also been returning home for the census or for other reasons, 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. In any case, this *narrative would have challenged the values of many religious people, who despised shepherds (the earlier examples of Moses and David notwithstanding); shepherds' work kept them from participation in the religious activities of their communities. More clearly, elites throughout the empire usually viewed contemporary shepherds negatively. Pasturing of flocks at night indicates that this was a warmer season, not winter (when they would graze more in the day); Christians may have later adopted December 25 as a time to celebrate Christmas in part to coopt a pagan Roman festival scheduled shortly before 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. They celebrated his birthday (pagans publicly celebrated deities' birthdays) and hailed him "*Savior" and "Lord." But Jesus' birth in a lowly manger distinguishes the true king from the Roman emperor. For the "Lord Christ," see **Psalms of Solomon* 17:32 (a pre-Christian Jewish work). "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. Jesus' birth "to you" may evoke Isaiah 9:6.

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 by modern standards (although it was much larger than Nazareth).

2:19-20. Mary kept these matters in her mind as Jacob had his son 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 cannot occur deeper in the temple than the Court of Women, since Mary is present. God's future intervention for Israel was described as "consolation" or "comfort" (cf., e.g., Is 49:13; 51:3; 52:9; 66:13). Early Judaism often associated the "*Holy Spirit*" with prophecy.

2:27-32. Simeon's praise reflects Old Testament piety such as Genesis 46:30, and (in Lk 2:32) prophecies like Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6. For being willing to die once one has seen good, see Genesis 46:30; Tobit 11:9; for living to see God's salvation, see Psalm 91:16. For seeing God's salvation more generally, see Exodus 14:13; 2 Chronicles 20:17; Isaiah 52:10; cf. Luke 3:6.

2:33-35. Prophecies in Jewish and Greco-Roman tradition were often obscure, easier understood in hindsight than at the moment they were given. Simeon's words may allude to the stumbling stone of Isaiah 8:14-15 and the anticipated *resurrection. The "sword" reflects either Mary suffering over Jesus' pain or (as in the later part of the verse) 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 Greco-Roman culture often viewed widows who never remarried as pious and faithful. One famous widow in Jewish tradition, Judith, 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 eighty-four (taking eighty-four 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 about 105 also. But the number may refer to her age; or Luke might mean her age but retain ambiguity to allow an allusion to Judith. Scripture promised the redemption of God's people (Is 52:3; Jer 31:11).

2:39-40. See comment on 1:80 and the allusion to Samuel.

2:41-52

The Boy in the Temple

Where such information was available, 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 16:16), 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 about 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 as early as 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. (Indeed, Josephus even speaks of entire towns traveling for the feasts.) 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, so the other villagers were probably home by the time the parents found Jesus (2:46). Estimates of Jerusalem's population vary widely; it may have been in the range of seventy to eighty thousand, making Jesus difficult to

find without help.

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. Students might begin advanced training in their mid-teens; the teachers recognize Jesus as a prodigy.

2:48-51. Mothers were responsible for children at an earlier age, but the father would be responsible for the child's education, certainly by this age. Early Judaism regarded the commandment to honor one's father and mother 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, but especially 1 Sam 2:26.

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, when possible, both in Greco-Roman 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 as sole emperor from A.D. 14 to 37 but shared some power with Augustus from A.D. 13; 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. Presumably Pilate was installed with the approval of Sejanus, the praetorian prefect who influenced most of Tiberius's decisions at that point; although attested in an inscription and featuring prominently in Josephus and Philo, Pilate proved of little interest to Rome's own historians except once—for his execution of Jesus. Philip of Trachonitis was son of Herod the Great and was married to Herodias's daughter Salome (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.189; 18.137); he died in Tiberius's twentieth year (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.106). Itureans were a pastoral tribe known

for raiding others and initially difficult to control. Lysanias ruled Abilene (named for its leading town, Abila) but his territory, along with that of Philip, was later transferred to Agrippa (*Jewish Antiquities* 19.275; 20.138). 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 highlight more of Isaiah 40, possibly to conclude with seeing God’s salvation (cf. Lk 2:30) and probably also to include “all flesh/humanity” (cf. Acts 2:17, where Luke may look ahead to the welcoming of Gentiles).

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.” (In a context where people valued their ancestry, as in 3:8, the image of parent-murder would be all the more relevant.) Serpents would flee a burning field.

3:8-9. Jewish people often 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, but the metaphor of people like stones appears in a range of sources. John could be making 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 (though some had a nicer garment for special occasions). Peasants in Palestine may have been somewhat better off, but in any case, anyone with two tunics had more than necessary for life. “What shall we do?” occurs throughout Luke-Acts 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. In rural Egypt, where we have the fullest evidence, they were known to even beat old ladies to discover where tax fugitives were; on occasion, an entire village would

even relocate to escape tax collectors.

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 the cohorts in Caesarea and the one in Jerusalem. Some may have traveled to hear (or investigate) John’s preaching. (The frequency of Roman soldiers’ illegal concubinage with native women indicates that soldiers did not all 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. Winnowing was familiar to all Palestinian Jews, especially to the farmers: they would throw harvested wheat into the air, and the wind would separate the heavier grain from the lighter chaff. The chaff was useless for consumption and was normally burned. Some other writers also described the day of judgment as a harvest or the wicked as chaff (Is 17:13; Jer 13:24; 15:7; etc.). Because the same Greek (and Hebrew) word can mean both “spirit” and “wind,” the picture of wind and fire carries over from 3:16. That the fire is “unquenchable” points beyond the momentary burning of chaff to something far more horrible (Is 66:24).

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 political meddling, 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 (Aretas IV), was particularly angry about the affair, and also found ethnic allies in Herod’s subject territory of Perea. Herod may thus have viewed John’s preaching in that region (Jn 3:23) as especially damaging.

In ancient Israel prophets normally enjoyed an immunity from persecution

that was virtually unparalleled elsewhere in the ancient Near East (prophets of other nations rarely denounced living kings; at most they suggested more funds for their temples). The ancient world did treat the abuse of heralds as treachery worthy of death, and God's prophets were his messengers (usually using the messenger formula "Thus says"). 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

Some Jewish tradition stressed that God communicated in this era by voices from heaven; many 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. Opened heavens could accompany heavenly revelations (see Ezek 1:1). See further comment on Mark 1:9-11.

3:23-38

Jesus' Ancestry

Greco-Roman biographers often included lists of ancestors, especially illustrious ancestors, when this was possible. Like Greco-Roman 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 (given the preference for clan endogamy, both could derive from the house of David; both genealogies, however, attribute the line to "Joseph"); (2) one (probably Matthew, or his source) 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 (cf. Num 4:3-47 et passim). 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 hearers viewed the devil as a literal, personal being.)

The devil here appeals to contemporary models of power (such as magician or earthly *messiah) to define Jesus' sonship; Jesus appeals to Scripture. 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; the starting context in Deuteronomy addressed God's people led by him and tested in the wilderness for forty periods of time (Deut 8:2). 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. On fasting, see further comment on Acts 13:2-3.

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. The context of Deuteronomy 8:3 involves God's "son" Israel depending on God for provision (Deut 8:3-5).

4:5-7. Most of early Judaism understood that the devil ruled the present age of human rebellion, but that ultimately God remained sovereign. The world did not technically belong to the devil (Dan 4:32), who owned human hearts and societies only as a usurper (acting through powers subordinate to God, e.g., Dan 10:13). 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. It belongs to the broader context of Jesus' earlier quotation (Deut 8:3).

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 to make God prove himself.

4:12. In contrast to the devil, Jesus approaches biblical texts with a greater sensitivity to their context. Continuing his citations from Deuteronomy, 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 and Eve* 17:2-3, though of uncertain date).

4:14-30

Preaching in His Hometown Synagogue

Luke, who follows the order of his sources quite meticulously (perhaps according to the pattern of biography he is using), departs from that order here (cf. Mk 6:1-6), because this section becomes programmatic for his *gospel. (Cf. Peter's sermon in Acts 2, which analogously functions as programmatic 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. Insofar as first-century Jewish teachers may have been like second- and third-century rabbis, they officially welcomed debate, examining all views from the Scriptures. Nevertheless, most people also 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 as few as five hundred inhabitants, already knew Jesus and

would be less open to thinking about him in new ways.

4:16. Literacy varied from one place to another in antiquity, but many estimate that on average only ten percent of the population could read and write on any significant level. The percentage was higher in some urban areas, but reading knowledge of the Torah may have also been more available in Jewish Palestine. Many *Gentiles remarked how diligently the Jewish people taught their traditions in the *synagogues and to their children; they called them a “nation of philosophers.” (In contrast to most cultures today, a minimum of other material competed with it, making knowledge of Torah the primary area of expertise, and a briefer cultural “canon” than the Greeks enjoyed.) More would be able to recite lines of Torah from memory than to read and understand it, but Jesus here is able to read and expound. The people would have known that Jesus was devout and skilled in Hebrew from his previous readings in his hometown synagogue. In Jewish Palestine, respected teachers usually sat while expounding Scripture (Mt 5:1) but stood while reading it (although some reversed this custom).

4:17. Scholars debate when regular lectionary readings for the Law began in synagogues, but in this period readers were probably free to make their own selection from the prophets; still later, readers in the Prophets were even allowed to “skip” passages. The synagogue attendant (*chazan*—v. 20) may have chosen which book to read (different books of the *Old Testament were on different scrolls; Isaiah was so large that it required one large scroll by itself). “Opening” the book meant unrolling the Hebrew scroll from right to left to the desired 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 (cf. esp. Lev 25:10); 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 (speaking of judgment).

4:20. According to the most common Palestinian Jewish custom, respected teachers normally sat to expound Scripture. The synagogue attendant was presumably 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); we need not assume something so

formal in small Nazareth. 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) will surprise Jesus’ hearers; the text Jesus reads is supposed to be fulfilled in the messianic era, and the inhabitants of Nazareth recognized neither a *Messiah nor a 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 suggested by 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 God’s end-time activity had arrived in Jesus’ own ministry.

4:23-24. The tradition that Israel rejected its own prophets was strong in Judaism, which amplified the fewer reports of martyrdoms already in Scripture (e.g., Jer 26:23). Jeremiah was persecuted even 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 (a helpful foretaste for Luke’s second volume, Acts) is that non-Jews were the ones to accept two of the major signs prophets of the Old Testament (implicitly illustrating the principle in Luke 4:24). Sidon and Syria were among the particularly despised areas. The context of Naaman’s cure (2 Kings 5) also indicates that many lepers in Israel were not cured (2 Kings 7:3; these lepers were in Israelite Samaria; cf. Luke 17:16). Jesus’ point: Nazareth will not receive him, but non-Jews will. Elijah and Elisha are apt analogies for Jesus’ ministry, which included raising the dead and multiplying food (similar to what Elijah did for the widow of Zarephath) and healing lepers.

4:28-29. Under Roman rule, a mob could not legally execute capital punishment in Jewish Palestine; Jewish law, moreover, required trial and conviction before execution. The crowd is thus unusually angry—especially to attempt this execution on the sabbath (v. 16). Nazareth is situated on top a hill

and, like many ancient cities it was set in the hill country, with plenty of jagged rocks and cliffs nearby. Somewhat later sources suggest that stoning ideally should begin 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; some think that the demon tries to ward off Jesus' power in this way. (Magic also depended on its secrets not being divulged.) If the demon is trying to intimidate Jesus by threatening to subdue him in this way ("I know who you are" was used to subdue spiritual powers in some magical texts), as some scholars have suggested—his ploy does not work.

4:35-37. Among prominent methods ancient exorcists used to expel demons were the following: (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—especially aged parents—was common.

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). Laying on hands had a rich symbolism in Jewish tradition (e.g., Gen 48:13-14; Num 27:23; Deut 34:9; 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. Many 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. The lake of Gennesaret is the lake of Galilee (locally called the "Sea" of Galilee). Non-Galileans (like Luke or Pliny) call it a "lake"; it was most often people of this region who called it Gennesaret (Josephus, *Jewish War* 3.463). Nets would collect things other than edible fish, thus requiring cleaning. Edible fish in the inland "Sea" of Galilee today include varieties of carp; *Josephus says that the lake of Galilee held several kinds of fish.

5:3. The shore of the lake would function 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 casting net (see comment on Mt 4:18) or possibly a dragnet (see comment on Mt 13:47-50, where a precise term for a dragnet is used) at night, which should have caught them many more fish than Jesus' instructions here. Some said that fish were most easily caught before sunrise (Pliny, *Natural History* 9.23.56, 58). Sources suggest that fish would stay deep during the day to avoid the sun, hence were more easily caught at night in the lake of Galilee; they would be sold in the morning (ahead of competitors).

5:6. Ancient fishermen sometimes told stories of marvelous catches of fish; more importantly, 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; both—Num 11:31-32). The circular cast net, for use in shallow water, was about fifteen feet wide, tightly meshed, and had lead sinkers. The dragnet (Mt 13:47-48) was dragged between two boats that moved further apart, sweeping up fish in their path. Broken nets could ruin fishermen, unless they secured (often borrowed) money to repair them.

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; Acts 9:4).

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 might simply transform their vocation as fishermen, as God made Moses and David "shepherds" of his people.

5:11. Even if they had a bad night (5:5), fishermen made a better income than most Galileans (most of whom were peasants), so leaving their job is an act of radical commitment that they would expect to adversely affect them economically. Commercial fishermen tended to be better off than rural peasants, and were considered strong and inured to the sun.

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 were apparently much more common in Jerusalem and Judea; thus probably more of the Galileans belonged to the other group Luke mentions, the teachers of the *law* (cf. Mk 2:6). *Larger 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 (indeed, in one play by Aristophanes such an action might have caved in a Greek roof). (The Roman atrium in fact had an opening in the ceiling, though Luke, who mentions tiles, probably does not envision that.) The paralytic's "bed" or "stretcher" would have been the mat on which he always lay.

5:20-21. Most Jews allowed that some of God's representatives could speak

on God's behalf, but they recognized that only God could forgive sins. Technically and by the narrowest definition preserved in later rabbinic sources, "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 would be mistaken in interpreting Jesus' words as blasphemy, even by their own rules. They presumably employ the term more loosely, believing that Jesus dishonored God by usurping a divine role.

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. Given the location of Capernaum, some think that Levi is a customs official for Herod Antipas. Whatever kind of tax collector he was, he probably had a good income and was not likely to get his job back once he left it, 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, and Levi probably would feel honored to have a prominent rabbi in his house. 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. The colleagues would be offended if not invited.

5:30. The *Pharisees (and the teachers belonging to their movement) 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. Religious people also expected edifying*

conversation. Because the Pharisees here attack only Jesus' table fellowship, we may infer that Jesus and his own disciples conduct themselves properly otherwise (e.g., they would not get drunk), whether or not all of Levi's other guests are doing the same.

5:31-39

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 could become no longer appropriate (2 Kings 18:4; Jer 3:16).

5:31-33. Although the Old Testament commanded many more feasts than fasts, fasting had become a widespread Jewish practice; Pharisees often fasted twice a week, at least during the dry season. 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 involved 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., Sirach 9:10; rabbinic sources). 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 some religious teachers opposed minor cures on the sabbath, “stretching out one’s hand” was not considered work, and no one could complain if God answered prayer on the sabbath. *Pharisees differed among themselves as to the propriety of “minor cures” 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 (at most, with corporal punishment in a *synagogue). Capital punishment (Ex 31:14; 35:2) was thought appropriate only for those who willfully rejected the sabbath. Jesus’ opponents go far beyond conventional Pharisaic 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 the holy and 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. God was near the lowly and broken but far from the proud (Ps 138:6), and showed special mercy to the poor (Ps 113:7-8; 140:12; Prov 14:31; 21:13; Is 1:17; 58:6-7; Zech 7:10). 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, Greco-Roman 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 neither it nor Jewish sages commanded love of enemies (although many taught nonretaliation and insisted on leaving vengeance to God).

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 backhanded blow on the right cheek was the most grievous insult in the ancient Near East, punishable under law. Its purpose was not to shatter teeth but to insult, to challenge honor; a *disciple is not to jealously guard one's honor (or perhaps to care what the insulter thinks). 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. Deprivation of both could leave one naked, a shameful state; thus here Jesus refers, probably 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, with its high work ethic, 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 positive and especially its negative form ("Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you"; cf. Tobit 4:15; *Philo; *Letter of

Aristeas 207), 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 ran high (in an extreme case, as high as forty-eight 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, some suggest that "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 God's blessings toward the generous (e.g., Deut 15:10; Prov 19:17; 22:9; 28:8, 27).

True and False Teachers

6:39. Others also used this image of leading 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. The principle was well known (e.g., Seneca, *Epistles to Lucilius* 87.25). 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. Later rabbis told a very similar *parable, but whereas there the foundation was the Torah, here it is Jesus' words.

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. The passage may simply involve a deep foundation on the bedrock, however.

7:1-10

A Pagan's Amazing Faith

7:1-2. The nearest Roman legion was stationed in Syria, but many auxiliaries, mostly recruited from Syria, were also stationed at Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast, with some in the Fortress Antonia in Jerusalem. They were

not bound to their camps at all times, however, and after retirement some probably settled at various places 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. An inexpensive slave might cost a third of a soldier’s pay for a year, but centurions were paid far more.

7:3-5. Non-Jews who feared God and donated substantial sums to the Jewish community were well respected. Those requesting help often sought someone respected by the benefactor to intercede on the requester’s behalf. (This centurion may have also been able to intercede for their town with higher Roman officials if necessary.) Ancient Mediterranean culture stressed reciprocity; the elders now intercede on his behalf. Centurions’ salaries were roughly sixteen to seventeen times those of their troops (perhaps thirty to sixty times for the highest ranking centurions), but for this centurion to have built the local *synagogue might nevertheless represent years of savings. 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), presumably because this Gentile home is not defiled by idolatry.

7:7. During their twenty or so years of service in the Roman army, soldiers were not permitted to marry. Many or most had “unofficial” local concubines; these unofficial marriages were often ratified after a soldier completed his term of service. But centurions, who could be moved around more frequently, could be less likely than ordinary soldiers to have such relationships; they sometimes 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 the back of a funeral procession when it passed by. For a widow's only son to die before she did was considered extremely tragic; it also left her dependent on public charity for support unless she had other means or relatives of means.

7:13. According to custom the bereaved mother would walk in front of the bier; Jesus, approaching from the front rather than behind, meets her first. Cf. 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 be viewed as contracting corpse-uncleanness, the severest form of ritual impurity in Judaism (Num 19:11-20). 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 (1 Kings 17:23; 2 Kings 4:36), 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. The language of a prophet "among" his people (Lk 7:16) is an OT idiom (Num 12:6; Deut 13:1; 18:15, 18; Ezek 2:5).

7:18-23

Encouraging John

7:18-20. Ancient writers sometimes repeated a message twice (when the messengers heard it and when they delivered it). Some plausibly suggest that John is troubled that Jesus exposes himself to potential ritual uncleanness (e.g., with *Gentiles and corpses) for the sake of healings. More likely, 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, including royal courts. Now imprisoned by Herod Antipas, John is no court prophet who simply tells powerful people what they want to hear. Antipas employed a reed (7:24) as an emblem on his coins a few years earlier (up until A.D. 26).

7:27. By fulfilling Mal 3:1, 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. *In rhetoric and elsewhere, comparisons could demean the lesser figure, but often did not do so; sometimes speakers chose the lesser figure for comparison precisely because it was great, thereby amplifying all the more the greater figure. 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 questioned 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 a more *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 (and sometimes with sorcery, hence a capital charge). “Glutton and drunkard” (v. 34) was a capital charge (Deut 21:20), hence a serious accusation.

7:35. Jewish tradition often personified Wisdom, 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 Sinful Woman

Jesus violated social taboos to reach out to those marginalized not only culturally (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 an occasional 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. Because this woman is a known “sinner” some think that she is a prostitute (surely a Jewish one—cf. **Psalms of Solomon* 2:11—though many prostitutes in Palestine were non-Jews); given ancient stereotypes of women’s sins (she is presumably not a tax collector), at least she might be a woman with a reputation for being morally loose. Whatever the case, given associations of these ideas, when assigned to women, with particular behaviors, the Pharisee might suppose her to be seeking something disreputable. If the *Pharisee is well-to-do, he might have a servant as a porter to check visitors at the door; but the pious also sometimes opened their homes for the poor. In any case, 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” (7:37), they might assign special connotations to it, rendering Jesus’ acceptance of the gift offensive. 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 reclined on his left arm, facing the host. His feet would have pointed 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; a woman with her hair exposed to public view often would be considered promiscuous, at least by those with more conservative cultural values. That this woman wipes Jesus’ feet with her hair would thus indicate not only her humility but also her marginal religious and social 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 many Jewish teachers believed that prophets ceased after the *Old Testament period.

7:40. “I have something to say” sometimes introduces blunt or harsh words in Middle Eastern idiom.

7:41-42. Gratitude was an emphatic obligation in Mediterranean antiquity. 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, commonly shown to respected teachers and others. Jesus faces the woman finally in verse 44; cf. comment on 7:38. Failing to provide such basic courtesies could appear to other guests as an affront, but guests rarely publicly confronted hosts no matter how inadequate the hospitality, for such public humiliation could invite enmity. Yet Jesus humiliates his host who had privately despised the grateful woman.

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. (Some estimate that men outnumbered them more than ten to one, because men had more of the economic resources; yet a tenth remained a large number.) But for these women to travel with the group would have been viewed as scandalous, at least by Jesus' detractors. Apart from some small Greek philosophic schools, 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 might still talk. While a small number of philosophers had women disciples, many criticized this practice; we know of no other women disciples among Jewish teachers in this period. "Herod" here (8:3) is Herod Antipas.

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. The "road" (NASB) is probably a "path" (NRSV), i.e., a foot path through the field.

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

8:9. 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.

8:10. Greek teachers like *Plato* would leave some points obscure to keep them from outsiders; Jewish teachers would sometimes do the same (such as later rabbis' mystical teachings about creation or God's throne). 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 majority of people worked the land. The tenant farmers who made up a large portion of the Roman Empire were also common in rural Galilee. Both Jewish and Greek sources, familiar with agrarian society, often use seeds in illustrations; Jewish sources could apply it to God's word.

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. Others also observed that those who had something would obtain more.

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 with nonkin to take precedence even over family ties could prove offensive culturally (except for *Gentile converts). (One could treat a teacher as a father, and some even allowed according him greater respect, but not in the sort of radical ways taught by Jesus, as in 9:59-60.)

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. Luke's audience would recognize the area more easily by the better-known Gerasa.

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 be thought to appeal to these *demons.

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

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

8:30-31. A legion had a nominal six thousand (in practice, often five thousand) troops. Although the number might be hyperbolic, this man is clearly hosting a large number of demons. According to Jewish traditions, many demons were imprisoned in the atmosphere, but they could also be imprisoned, as here, under the earth (in the "abyss"). Some sources from this period treat the abyss as a genuine geographic location (*1 *Enoch* 18:11-12; 83:4); the *Septuagint applies it to the "depths," perhaps of the waters (Prov 3:20; 8:24).

8:32. Only *Gentiles or nonobservant Jews considered “apostates” raised pigs, which Jewish readers would consider among the most unclean animals and thus better 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. Some Jewish traditions taught that demons could die, so some ancient hearers might assume that the demons had been destroyed with their hosts. Perhaps more relevantly, in other Jewish traditions demons could be imprisoned in bodies of water; many hearers would thus have thought of them as at least disabled.

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. Perhaps because his *messiahship would be misunderstood*, Jesus kept it a secret in predominantly Jewish areas (see the introduction to Mark). In the predominantly non-Jewish Decapolis, however, where people would wrongly perceive him as a magician, Jesus 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 usually the chief officials in *synagogues* (though especially in the Diaspora this was also often an honorary title for large donors) 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 far less status than 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. In a culture in which adult women who were not wealthy virtually needed to marry, she was almost certainly unmarried at this point (if she had ever been married), since it violated the law for a man to sleep with her in this condition. Just as Jewish interpreters linked texts by a common phrase, 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. Conservative teachers avoided touching women altogether (other than their wives), 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 the sages 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. Many Jewish teachers held that once an event had occurred, it was too late to pray for its reversal. For example, later 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. At least two or three professional mourners (two flute-players and a mourning woman) 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. Delegating authority was intelligible in antiquity. According to Jewish custom, for example, 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 (but did not often travel); (2) homeless urban Greek philosophers called Cynics; (3) most relevantly, some prophets, like Elijah and John the Baptist.* They are to be totally committed to their mission, not tied down with worldly concerns. Cynics used the "bag" for

begging, presumably here prohibited.

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

9:5-6. “Shaking the dust off” may mean treating these Jewish cities as if they are unclean, pagan cities, no defiling dust of which a particularly 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, however, 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. Bethsaida was probably associated with fishing, and was located on the northern shore of the Lake of Galilee; some scholars suggest two sites with this name, but the matter is disputed. In any case, the *narrative seems to suggest that Jesus took the crowds beyond Bethsaida itself. The Galilean countryside was full of villages, but Jesus had withdrawn his followers some distance from the nearest villages. Even most larger towns would have under three thousand inhabitants; feeding the crowd in the villages would have been difficult (9:12). The known Bethsaida was ethnically mixed and not far from the region of the Decapolis. If they were further in largely *Gentile territory, hospitality would be even harder to find.

9:13. It would normally have taken far more than two hundred days of an average person’s wages (around seven months of hard labor) to feed the great multitude that had assembled, even if we assumed that only five thousand

persons were present.

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. 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. A prayer like the common one attested by the second century, “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, who have brought bread from the earth” may have already been common. (Later sources indicate that people also gave thanks less formally after a meal, but it is not clear whether this practice was this early.) 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 referring 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. “Come after” was often the language of discipleship, since disciples followed their teachers; here disciples follow to the cross, reminding themselves each day that their lives are forfeit.

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 expected the kingdom to come without suffering (perhaps, as some believed, by a supernatural, costless triumph)—at least for Messiah’s followers.

9:27. Most Jewish people prayed daily for the establishment of God’s kingdom. The future glory of the preceding verses is anticipated by way of a revelation of the glory they would experience in 9:32-35.

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 comment above).

9:29. Jewish literature often described angels and other heavenly beings as being clothed in white. Some suggest that Luke omits Mark’s “transfigured” because of the pagan connotations this term could have for his audience (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), some suggest that it might also represent a wordplay allusion here 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. Israelites annually built tabernacles,

or booths, so Peter knew how to build one.

9:34-36. Cf. the cloud of God's presence, especially on Mount Sinai (Ex 24:15-16). In this context, "hear him" might 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. *Disciples were expected to learn from their teacher's example. 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, often invoking higher spirits, or by using smelly roots. 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). Most Jews did not expect the *Messiah's death.

9:46-48. Status was a preeminent concern in ancient society; children had none. But in Jewish custom messengers bore the full authorization of the one they represented (see comment on 9:1-2), so Jesus' agents 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 often gave signals of plot movement. “Setting one’s face” normally implied resolute determination, such as a prophet would display (cf. Ezek 21:2; in Ezekiel the language normally implies a hostile position, but the idiom need not always imply that).

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. The extant version of the Samaritan Pentateuch specifies the proper site of worship as Mount Gerizim. Samaritans later tried to defile the Jerusalem temple (avenging a Jewish king having destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim in the second century B.C.). 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. Jesus uses the model of Elijah elsewhere even in this context (e.g., Lk 9:61-62), but not in this respect.

9:55-56. Ancient audiences (even those that hated Samaritans) did appreciate those who exercised their power with mercy. Ancient Jewish hearers could view Jesus’ merciful restraint as pious (1 Sam 11:13; 2 Sam 19:22), even if 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 mostly 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. Others note that in some Semitic languages, "wait until I bury my father" is a way of asking for delay until one may complete one's filial obligations, even if the father is not yet dead.

Even on these interpretations, however, Jesus' demand is significant; while not highlighting urgency the way that 9:61-62 would, it would still underline the *priority* of following Jesus. One of an eldest son's most important responsibilities was his father's burial. Jesus' demand that the son place Jesus above this responsibility could thus sound subversive: 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. Some sages might demand greater honor than parents in principle, but neglecting a father's burial in practice would make this son a reproach in his village, perhaps for the rest of his life.

9:61-62. One needed to keep one's eyes on the path of the plow to keep its furrow from becoming crooked. The handheld 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” might suggest that Luke views them as *apostles similar to the Twelve (see comment on 9:1-2; cf. 1 Cor 15:5-7), though even in Acts Luke usually restricts the noun to the Twelve.

10:2. A *rabbi* of the late first to early second century made a statement similar 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 of higher rank. (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 (an implicit prayer to God on the addressee’s behalf) meant to communicate peace and well-being, though it was here conditional (cf. Prov 26:2). 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 (cf. 10:12).

10:12. Both the biblical prophets and subsequent Jewish tradition set forth Sodom as the epitome of sinfulness (e.g., Is 13:19; Jer 50:40; Zeph 2:9),

sometimes applying the image to Israel (e.g., Deut 32:32; Is 1:9; 3:9; Jer 23:14; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46; Amos 4:11). 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") might suggest that something different is in view here (although it could draw on the same image): 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; in this context, cf. Lk 10:15.)

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). Occasionally some associated serpents with Satan, demons or magic; they provide a natural metaphor for danger (cf. a real snake in Acts 28:3-4).

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' words here could have sounded offensive to people like the *scribes, who had worked hard to study the *law. The theme of God exalting the lowly is, however, common in the Old Testament prophets.

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 Testament 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. As this *law-expert* would know, students normally sat to listen to teachers, but might stand to ask a question or (normally only for non-students) to issue a challenge. 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 sort of answers sometimes given by Jewish teachers (and by Jesus; see Mk 12:29-31). Rabbis often linked texts using a common word (here "you shall love" in Deut 6:5 and Lev 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 (Lev 18:5; Deut 4:1, 40; 8:1; 16:20; 30:6, 16-20), 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 to drive home a *parable’s application 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. Jesus’ story forces his hearers to identify with a solitary merchant or a *Samaritan, though some might want to side with the priest or Levite. 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 steep, seventeen-mile road and would especially attack a person traveling alone. Many people did not have extra clothes, which were thus a valuable item to steal. But though clothes were a valuable commodity, completely stripping him treated him like a corpse on a battlefield. Ancient sources commonly use the expression “half-dead”; one in this condition could appear to be dead (e.g., Callimachus, *Hymn* 6.59; *Livy, *Books from the Foundation of the City* 23.15.8; 40.4.15; *Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 6; Quintus Curtius Rufus, *History of Alexander* 4.8.8).

10:31. Many wealthy priestly families lived in Jericho. 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 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 on contracting impurity. The task might be 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 (e.g., 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. In some later rabbinic parables, an Israelite might perform a pious duty that a priest and Levite had failed to perform, but the third character here would instead shock Jesus’ hearers. 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 strike at the heart of Jewish patriotism, which his contemporaries justified religiously.

10:34. 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. A donkey might have seated both men, unless (as is very possible for a donkey-owner) the Samaritan was a merchant with many wares. The Samaritan instead leads the donkey, taking the inferior (even servile) position to help the Israelite. The possible allusion to 2 Chron 28:15 and its context would remind Jesus' most biblically literate hearers of a common bond uniting two different kingdoms in the land.

10:35. "I will repay" was a standard formula guaranteeing a debt. Because inns were known for immorality and innkeepers often mistrusted, his promise to pay more offered the innkeeper further incentive to tend to the wounded man.

10:36-37. Although the legal expert is reluctant to simply confess, "the Samaritan," Jesus has forced him to answer his own question offered in 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 agent of Jesus' message is more critical than that of homemaker and hostess, valuable as the latter may remain.

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. Homemaking and hosting skills assigned to women in her culture gave her a way to serve Jesus.

10:39. People normally sat on chairs or, at banquets, reclined on couches; but disciples sat at the feet of their teachers (see Luke's other use of the expression in Acts 22:3). Women could listen to Torah teaching in *synagogues and occasionally one might listen to a rabbi's lectures, but they were not disciples sitting in the dust at sages' feet. 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. The most advanced level of disciples included training to become rabbis; we know of no women who filled this role in antiquity. (The case closest to a known exception was a learned rabbi's daughter

who had married another learned rabbi in the second century; but most rabbis rejected her opinions outside of domestic law.)

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 in later times, when prayers became more standardized, 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 (one dare not even interrupt one's own; cf., e.g., Mishnah *Avot* 3:7; Tosefta *Berakhot* 3:20); 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 most of 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 (cf. Jer 34:16; Ezek 13:19; 20:14; Amos 2:7).

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 often sleep on mats on the floor of the usual one-room dwelling. People who could afford them had beds (one of the most basic pieces of furniture), and those with more resources might even have canopies to protect from insects such as mosquitoes; but even most of those who had beds may have filled them with multiple persons. The door being closed might allude to it being bolted; unbolting the heavy bar that was often laid through rings attached to the door was a bother and would make noise that would awaken them. In real life, however, it should have been unthinkable for the man inside to refuse the request that affected the village’s reputation.

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 insistence of some “holy men” in prayer in Jewish tradition;). 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 either (see 11:8) because of boldness or because the honor of God is inseparably connected with the honor of his servant, the knocker.

11:11-12. Fish was a basic staple around the Lake of Galilee.

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 a special end-time community* (Dead Sea Scrolls). Thus the promise of verse 13 would have surprised the hearers; given common beliefs about the Spirit in ancient Judaism (based on the *Old Testament) often emphasized in Luke-Acts, this was essentially a promise that God would make them like prophets, anointed

spokespersons for God.

11:14-26

Who Is Satan's Real Vassal?

11:14-16. Ancient exorcists typically sought to remove *demons by fumigation or 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-zebub” 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 pre-Christian work **Jubilees* called him Beliar or Mastema; the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, *Belial*; later rabbis often called him Sammael; 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. They achieved limited success for a few individuals, not the massive results Jesus was achieving.

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, somewhere 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 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 thus 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 Greco-Roman 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. Thus no one could say, "My group had no opportunity to repent." Here Jesus appeals to pagans who converted. Ancient Sheba was probably in south Arabia and/or the horn of Africa. Jewish people in this period probably thought of the "Queen of the South," the queen of Sheba, as the queen of "Ethiopia" (the Greek title for Africa south of Egypt), which was considered the southernmost part of the world (cf. Acts 8:27). Josephus thought that she ruled Egypt and Ethiopia (*Jewish Antiquities* 8.159, 165, 175).

11:33. Most Palestinian homes did not have "cellars," but Luke is relating the image to his audience; many Greek homes did have them (cf. 6:48). Sizeable 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 common in the *Diaspora but 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, held by *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 person, the heart.

11:41. The *Aramaic word for “cleanse” (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 Matthew'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 and hence were subject to tithing. Jesus may thus address a hyperbolic, superscrupulous Pharisee.

11:43. Pharisees were considered quite meticulous in their observance of the law, people were seated by social rank in public places, including *synagogues, and those regarded as superior in their knowledge of the law were hailed especially respectfully in the marketplaces. Custom dictated the character of greetings, so that people of higher status were greeted first.

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 look religious on the outside but

spread impurity.

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"; speakers sometimes linked those they accused with the misdeeds of their ancestors, pointing out that this was what one expected. 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; 2 Sam 21:1; Is 1:4; etc.).

11:49-51. Jewish sources often personify God's wisdom. Many Jewish people 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 filled multiple scrolls, but ancients generally thought of their arrangement differently than in our English Bibles today. Thus Zechariah could be the last martyr (2 Chron 24:20-22), while (as in our Bibles) Abel was the first (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

Sound Speech and the Day of Judgment

Some Jewish sages focused on the end time. 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 the Jewish authors *Philo and *Josephus*, 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 four to five thousand people, but because it was not in the countryside, any anti-Roman rhetoric would have been more quickly an issue.) The odds of Roman interference at this point are small, 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 (or do antisocial activities that would not be known). 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 hearers would understand "the one who has authority to cast into hell" as God, the judge, whose power the wise are respectfully to "fear" (e.g., Prov 1:7).

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 that 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 might apply to a denial of Jesus (in the face of danger) 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 prophetic inspiration and empowerment; 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. Inheritance disputes were extremely prominent in *Gentile courts, where wills would determine inheritance*. Jewish law should have been less complicated: the eldest son was supposed to receive double what any of the other sons would receive (Deut 21:17). The proportion of inheritance in a Jewish setting was thus fixed (though particular items may be in dispute), 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 (probably clear; cf. 12:13); 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 countercultural as Jesus' here.

12:16-18. Archaeologists have found large grain silos on farms owned by wealthy absentee landowners, such as at 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 one 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., Sirach 11:18-19; Syriac Menander's *Sentences* 368-76; *Pseudo-Phocylides* 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., Prov 13:22; 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).

12:21. Jesus does not state that the sin is how the man gained his income but simply that he hoarded it rather than giving generously; the same emphasis appears in Proverbs.

12:22-34

The Unimportance of Possessions

12:22-23. Jesus reasons back to basics: one's basic needs relate to survival. Some philosophers taught that people should seek only these basic needs, although most philosophers felt that people could acquire possessions as long as they did not go out of their way to seek them. The *Cynics, however, owned

nothing; and among Palestinian Jews, the *Essenes shared all their possessions communally. Jesus nowhere prohibits possessions, but he teaches priorities that challenge his followers' lifestyles; whereas people and their needs matter, possessions beyond one's needs are worthless.

12:24-28. Jewish (and Greek) wisdom teachers often illustrated their points from nature. Solomon's splendor, during what was undoubtedly the wealthiest period materially in Israel's history, was impressive by all human standards (1 Kings 10:5). A cubit is a measure of length; if Jesus applies it to longevity, as some think, such clever wording was sometimes used to hold people's attention.

12:29-30. A Jewish hearer would not wish to be worse than the "nations," the godless *Gentiles. The Jewish people believed that God was their (not the Gentiles') father.

12:31-32. Here Jesus may use a Jewish "how much more" argument (if God gives you the *kingdom, how much more will he also supply all other needs).

12:33-34. One should invest in *eternal life rather than in possessions; see comment on Matthew 6:19-21.

12:35-40

Ready for His Coming

In context (12:22-34), this passage suggests that only those who travel lightly will be prepared. Although most of Jesus' Jewish contemporaries longed and prayed for the time of future redemption, on average they also seem to have been more preoccupied with daily needs than with extraordinary preparation for the future judgment (exceptions were the *Essenes*, apocalyptic visionaries and followers of messianic figures and revolutionaries).

12:35. Like military watchmen or others who stay prepared when others sleep, Jesus' followers must be dressed and ready for action (Ex 12:11). Keeping lamps lit would literally mean having a ready supply of oil and staying awake so they could draw on this supply; this is a figure for preparedness (cf. Mt 25:3-10). Keeping loins girded (so the Greek here) means keeping ready for action (cf. Ex 12:11; 2 Kings 4:29; 9:1), since one could not easily run with the folds of one's long robe impeding.

12:36. Well-to-do householders often had a special slave or slaves in charge of keeping the door; these slave-porters would keep unwanted persons out but admit members of the household. If Jewish banquets resembled Greek and

Roman banquets, the feasting itself could last well into the night. Although he might not remain for the full seven days of the feast, it would be unusual for a well-to-do householder to return from a distant banquet (as opposed to one in the same city) in the night. Robbers made night travel more dangerous, though the danger was reduced by a large entourage. (In large urban areas, travel alone at night was dangerous even within one's city, although that might not be relevant to Jesus' primary audience here.)

12:37. Although a few philosophers argued that slaves were the moral equals of their masters, and one well-to-do Roman is known to have eaten on the same level as his freed slaves, masters' serving slaves was unheard of. (The exception among Romans for the festival of Saturnalia was a deliberate inversion of normal reality.) Such an image would offend the well-to-do but would be a powerful symbol of how Jesus would treat those who remained faithful to the end.

12:38. Here the passage follows a Jewish division of night into three watches; contrast the division for Roman guard duty in Mark 13:35.

12:39. The term translated "broken into" can mean literally "dug through"; walls were often built of dried mud and thus one could dig through them, although it would be quicker to simply break in the door. More well-to-do homes could use stone instead. Israelite *law considered thieves breaking in at night the most dangerous.

12:40. Many Jewish thinkers viewed the time of the *Messiah's coming as in God's hands alone (though some believed that Israel's *repentance could hasten it).

12:41-48

For Ministers Too

Leaders in the *church must recognize that they are appointed only to serve their fellow servants, the rest of the church.

12:41. *Disciples often sought clarification from their teachers by asking questions.

12:42. Many well-to-do householders had a hired person or slave called a "steward," a sort of business manager who managed the estate. Such a high-level slave (as is in view here; 12:43) could be in charge of rations to the other servants.

12:43-44. Upward mobility existed among household servants; indeed, many such servants outranked free peasants in terms of real power or status, and even earned more money (which they could later use to buy their freedom). (In the most powerful households in the empire, the highest-level slaves and *freedpersons sometimes wielded more power than most aristocrats, though such power is not in direct view here.)

12:45. High-status slaves often wielded more power than did most free persons; nevertheless, slaveholders would be enraged by abuses. Absentee landowners and householders were not infrequent, especially if they owned other estates at a great distance. In other stories of the period, absentee kings, landowners or husbands posed temptations to those remaining behind. Drunkenness was despised, even more when slaves became drunk at the master's expense. A slave who abused the other slaves was viewed as mistreating his master's property (see comment on 12:47-48); in some cases, slaves were also objects of a master's personal concern.

12:46. *The Gentile punishment of "cutting in pieces" is attested elsewhere, especially in an earlier period; Luke's hearers, who would view themselves as more civilized, would no doubt find this detail horrifying. Taken literally, the subsequent banishment with unbelievers could mean that he was deprived of decent burial (reserved for the worst crimes; see comment on Rev 11:8; sometimes the pieces of dismembered corpses were also scattered for further punishment). In the parable, however, it especially points to the Jewish doctrine of hell (Gehinnom; see "*Gehenna" in the glossary) for idolaters and other transgressors.*

12:47-48. Some ancient laws treated slaves as persons; other laws treated them as property. Although masters were allowed to beat slaves (as they also generally beat their children), it was in their economic interests not to do so often or severely. A major flogging (12:47), execution and disfigurement of the corpse (12:46) reflect the severity of the crime; a master legally had the power of life and death over his slaves. Floggings often preceded executions in general. The parable indicates that greater knowledge brings greater responsibility (see Lev 26:18; Amos 3:1-2).

12:49-53

Bringer of Division

Jesus' ethics and mission differ so radically from those of the world that division is inevitable.

12:49. The fire probably refers to the impending end-time judgment. Fire in the Old Testament could symbolize the end-time judgment and purging; cf. comment on 3:16.

12:50. Jesus' impending “*baptism” may refer to undergoing the baptism of fire (12:49; judgment—3:16; cf. also comment on Mk 10:38).

12:51-53. Given the great emphasis on family harmony in Judaism, Jesus' words here would strike the hearers strongly (cf. Mic 7:6). Extended family lived in the same household more frequently than today, although not everyone would have had in-laws present.

12:54-59

Signs of the Times

12:54. In Palestine, a cloud from the west would be coming from the Mediterranean Sea and thus would be full of rain.

12:55. In much of the Mediterranean world, a wind from the south would bring hot air from the Sahara Desert. In Palestine, it came especially from the Arabian desert to the southeast, but the immediate south of Judea was also hot desert.

12:56-57. Such weather predictors (12:54-55) were obvious; Jesus says that the truth of his message is equally obvious. Speakers sometimes *rhetorically challenged their hearers to decide the matter (12:57).

12:58-59. Here Jesus refers to the ancient practice of debt imprisonment (cf. debt slavery in the *Old Testament, e.g., Lev 25:39-41; Amos 2:6). In debt imprisonment, one without access to means would have to depend on friends to come up with the needed funds; one would not be released unless they did so. The term for “officer” here can apply to a constable overseeing a debtors' prison. (This may be a contextualization for Greek readers of a more general term as in Mt 5:25.)

13:1-9

Repent or Perish

13:1-5. As in many cultures today, so in much ancient Jewish thought, when

something bad happened to someone, people wondered what the person had done wrong. Stories of atrocities traveled quickly, and often grew as they spread. *Pilate's cruelty here fits the sort of conflicts he had with the Jewish community; his known brutality (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.60-62); the presence of Galilean pilgrims at the holy days celebrated in Jerusalem; and the governor's practice of coming to feasts to maintain order. The "tower in Siloam" may have been on Jerusalem's city wall above the pool of Siloam; some suggest that it may have been associated with Pilate's construction of an improved water-supply system for the city. The feast may have been Passover, when non-priests offered their animals.

13:6. *Parables often includes stories about plants and animals (though only relatively rarely in Jewish parables did they speak, as in many Greek fables). Palestinian vineyards often contained fruit trees in addition to vines.

13:7. That some fig trees did not bear fruit in a given year did not mean that they would never do so (cf. comment on Mk 11:12-14), and fig trees do not always bear fruit even within their first four or five years. In this parable the vineyard worker asks the master to wait till the fourth year to make sure it was a worthless tree (cf. Is 65:8). According to rabbinic interpretation of Leviticus 19:23, fruit from newly planted trees was forbidden for three years (though the Jewish tradition may have applied more strictly to olives than to figs). In later Jewish teaching, God examined Israel's sins once a year to decide their future for the coming year; but it is not clear if Jesus alludes to such an idea here. The space it takes up could be used for vines.

13:8. The vineyard worker answers to the owner, perhaps as his servant, yet intercedes on behalf of the fig tree. Digging around a tree and putting manure around it to fertilize it were common procedures, but fig trees usually did not need manure; the worker does all he can to try to save the tree. Jewish teachers debated whether Israel's *repentance could change the set time of the end, but they agreed that God could suspend his judgment if he saw repentance.

13:10-17

Healing on the Sabbath

13:10. Visiting teachers were commonly asked to speak in *synagogues on the sabbath.

13:11-12. Ancient medical writers used words like "loose" to describe the

removal of curvature of the spine and related ailments. The term was also used of freeing people from a *demon's grip.

13:13-14. The synagogue leader's argument sounds logical: work is forbidden on the sabbath, but that still leaves six days a week for healings. The problem with the argument is that biblical sabbath *laws did not restrict *God's* activity, and the only physical work Jesus performs on this sick woman is to lay his hands on her (though some *Pharisees considered this work). Even Pharisaic rules officially forbade only healing by a physician; they debated the propriety of prayer for the sick on the sabbath. But we do not know if Pharisees were present on this occasion anyway; most of the estimated six thousand seem to have lived in Judea.

13:15-16. Here again Jesus uses the common Jewish "how much more" (*qal vahomer*) argument: if one could release an animal from a bond for its own good on the sabbath (one of the few kinds of tying and loosing permitted then), how much more could one release a "daughter of Abraham" (i.e., an Israelite) from her satanic bonds?

13:17. Arguments by analogy were accepted in Jewish legal debate; Jesus has skillfully outmaneuvered his opponents. Both Greek and later rabbinic controversy *narratives typically culminated in the wise protagonist's response that silenced his opponents, so Jesus' triumph would be obvious to Luke's readers.

13:18-30

The Nature of the Kingdom

13:18. "To what shall we compare?" was a common rabbinic way to introduce a *parable to illustrate a point.

13:19. Everyone regarded the mustard seed as very small; indeed, something smaller would be hard to see easily. It nevertheless yielded a shrub the size of a small tree (around the Sea of Galilee, it can reach a height of eight to ten feet, though rarely more than five, if interpreters have the correct plant in view), with room for small birds to perch in it (borrowing the language of Daniel 4:12, the splendor of a mortal ruler's kingdom). According to second-century Palestinian teachers the mustard seed was not sown in gardens (cf. Mt 13:31); but outside Palestine (where Luke's hearers lived) it could be.

13:20-21. Leaven, or yeast, would be mixed with flour throughout the

dough. The point of both parables (13:18-21) is that the mighty *kingdom everyone expects could issue from apparently obscure beginnings—like Jesus and the *disciples.

13:22-24. The image of “the two ways” was common in Jewish (and other ancient) literature; some texts also stressed that the majority of people would follow the way to destruction (see, from the late first or early second century, *4 *Ezra* 7:3-16, 60-61; 8:1-3). Other Jewish groups besides Christians, like the *Essenes, also believed that they were the only saved group. But many mainstream Jews apparently believed that nearly all Israel would be saved in the time to come (cf. Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 10:1).

13:25. It was an essential social rule to greet by name or title those persons one knew. To deny knowledge of where they were from would be to deny knowing them and was a form of repudiation.

13:26-27. Table fellowship created a social bond; hospitality bound its recipient to friendship (cf. comment on 14:1). In this parable the fugitives from destruction try to remind the owner of the house who they are, but he reiterates that he does not know them, and therefore they will not enter his house. The final line is Psalm 6:8 (cf. 119:115; 139:19), where the workers of iniquity are the psalmist’s own persecutors, against whom the Lord takes vengeance to vindicate the psalmist.

13:28. Most Jewish people assumed that God had prepared the kingdom for Israel; they expected to participate in it with the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and the prophets (see on 13:22-24).

13:29-30. Here Jesus could refer to the gathering of the Jews dispersed outside Palestine, but in the context of Luke-Acts (and the parallel in Mt 8:11-12) the point is much more shocking: *Gentiles will participate in the kingdom, reclining (the posture used for feasts) at the messianic banquet, from which many of the people who expected to be there would be excluded. The four directions were used together to mean “everywhere.”

13:31-35

Lament of the Rejected Lover

13:31. Herod Antipas had considerably more authority in Galilee than the priestly aristocracy did in Jerusalem; he had executed John and could do the same with Jesus. If, however, Jesus leaves Antipas’s jurisdiction (as the well-

meaning *Pharisees here warn him to do), he will be safe.

13:32. Calling someone a “fox” in antiquity would not necessarily imply that the person is sly (although that was one possibility); instead, it could portray the person as worthless, slanderous, treacherous or (quite often) cunning, but often in an unprincipled manner. Thus Jesus here does not offer Herod a backhanded compliment (cf. Ezek 13:4). Moreover, foxes were predators and scavengers (Neh 4:3; Song 2:15; Lam 5:18), hence could prey on hens (Lk 13:34) when they had the opportunity. Ancient stories feature their cunning and their activity as predators more than any strength; though ancient stories regularly portray them as predators, they sometimes emphasize that they (and even wolves) are inferior in power to lions, the most powerful predators.

13:33. In the *Old Testament some prophets were martyred, and Jewish tradition applied this fate to many other prophets as well. Jesus plays on this tradition; in several days he will enter the city that had murdered the most prophets (i.e., he is leaving Antipas’s jurisdiction but will die soon, with or without Herod’s help). That Jerusalem was prophets’ only place of martyrdom was hyperbolic, but it was naturally the center of persecution in ancient Judah. Putting it so starkly, however, would shock many Jewish listeners, because most Jews except the Essenes considered Jerusalem the center of Jewish piety.

13:34. Jewish tradition claimed that Jewish people were under God’s wings, and when a Jewish person converted a Gentile, he or she “brought the Gentile under the wings of God’s presence.” The Old Testament also portrays God as an eagle hovering over its offspring (Deut 32:11; cf. Ex 19:4) and protecting Israel under his wings (Ps 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4), and similarly terrifying Israel’s foes (Jer 49:22). This is but one image of God’s love for his people. Jesus here applies this divine role and image to himself.

13:35. The desolation of the “house” probably refers to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 (cf. Lk 21). The quotation is from Psalm 118:26, which was sung during this season at the Passover and which the crowds will sing to Jesus at his entry into Jerusalem (19:38).

14:1-6

Healing on the Sabbath

14:1. Eating bread together was supposed to be an occasion for intimate fellowship; treachery or less than friendly motives among those sharing a meal

would repulse ancient readers. This feeling would be magnified at a sabbath meal, to which many Jewish people considered it particularly virtuous to invite a prominent teacher.

14:2. Dropsy (edema) causes the body to swell from excess fluids, as ancient medical texts commonly mention. Because the man with dropsy here is in front of Jesus and not on the room's periphery, he might be an invited guest.

14:3-6. Jewish legal experts debated proper sabbath *laws among themselves; if one side was silenced and unable to reply, they would be presumed wrong or at best too ignorant of the law to defend their position.* Essenes did not permit rescuing an animal on the sabbath, but *Pharisees did. Jesus argues by analogy with a principle on which his opponents agreed, and extrapolates by a "how much more" argument; cf. 13:15-16.

14:7-14

Instructions to Guests and Hosts

14:7. Well-known teachers customarily lectured or participated in dialogues at banquets. Ancient writers sometimes arranged literary discussions as monologues or dialogues in the setting of such banquets; these writings were called *symposia*.

Social status was important in antiquity and was made obvious by the seating of dinner guests at banquets. This status was especially a problem in well-to-do Greco-Roman circles (see comment on 1 Cor 11:21), but seating by rank is well attested in Palestinian Jewish society, including in the *Dead Sea Scrolls.

14:8-10. Jesus states a principle directly from Proverbs 25:6-7—to which the guests were not paying much attention—that is repeated in other ancient Jewish texts. Yet as in Roman circles, no one of socially inferior status would be arbitrarily invited forward; one would be advanced only if one had sat in too low a position.

14:11. Here Jesus repeats a standard *Old Testament promise, applied especially to the day of judgment (cf. Is 2:12; Ezek 17:24; 21:26; cf. also comment on Lk 1:52-53).

14:12. Not to invite people of one's own social status would offend them; but Jesus says that the other's need, not one's own social standing, must determine the giving of gifts. The Old Testament forbade charging interest on a loan and so profiting by one's neighbor; but Jesus' principle here excludes

looking for any repayment at all; cf. 6:34-35.

14:13. Well-to-do persons in the Greco-Roman world usually invited people of somewhat lower social status in return for receiving honor, but these invitees would still be relatively respectable, not absolute dependents or beggars, as those who were unable to walk or were blind would be in that society, or peasants (although many Jewish teachers might regard inviting beggars and peasants as an act of piety). Those unable to walk or who were blind were not permitted on the premises of the probably *Essene community at *Qumran, but this was for ritual reasons.

14:14. Judaism taught that the righteous would ultimately be rewarded at the *resurrection of the dead; here Jesus applies this truth to distribution of resources. That God repaid those who helped the poor was already taught in the Old Testament (Prov 19:17).

14:15-24

The Ultimate Banquet

Those one would have expected to attend God's banquet had turned him down; thus he has every right to invite the outcasts of society whose presence would offend the powerful.

14:15. Texts reflecting Jewish expectation (as early as Is 25:6-9) often portrayed the *kingdom of God as a banquet.

14:16. The man in the *parable would have invited well-to-do persons; though not of higher status and wealth than himself, he would invite peers and those less well-to-do but still respectable.

14:17. Invitations were often R.S.V.P.; thus these invited guests had already confirmed that they were coming.

14:18. One would think that this man would have examined the land beforehand, even if he had bought it through an agent. (Indeed, legal contracts often specified that the buyer had examined the property and found it satisfactory; e.g., P.Oxy. 1707.13-15.) The buyer may have been legally obligated to go to complete the purchase; deals were also sometimes made contingent on a later inspection. But like the excuses that follow, this late notice would be heard as a weak excuse that would serve as a grievous insult to the dignity of the host, who had prepared the feast at much expense.

14:19. A buyer could test oxen before buying them. Indeed, only a fool

would buy an animal without examining it (cf. *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 47.16). Having even a total of five yoke of oxen would mean that this man had much land to plow; he must be a wealthy landowner in his own right. It would therefore be inconceivable that he had no one working for him.

14:20. The rudeness escalates: the first man objected, “I need to go,” but asked to be excused; the second, “I go,” but also asked to be excused; this man does not even ask to be excused! This man’s excuse is a valid one for not going to war during the first year of marriage (Deut 20:7; 24:5; cf. 1 Maccabees 3:56), but it is not valid for skipping a feast one had promised to attend, even though women (including his new wife) were sometimes not invited to such dinners (and would have often been in a separate banquet hall if they were). Banquets generally lasted into the night. Wedding feasts (which this feast probably is; cf. Mt 22:2) were planned far in advance, and the man should have known not to schedule two events at the same time.

14:21-22. Banquets were meant to bring the host honor, but the corporate insult of 14:18-20 instead dishonored him. He can recoup at least some honor (and keep the meat from spoiling) only by getting at least some guests. Poor people rarely entered the walled, well-to-do part of a city; bringing in beggars from off the street was unheard of (see comment on 14:13). (The Dead Sea Scrolls exclude the maimed and blind from the future messianic banquet.) The host’s behavior will not be socially respectable to his own class, but it will give him honor at least with someone. “Lanes” here may represent the narrow walkways between the residences of the poor.

14:23-24. Because the poor would feel unworthy to come, the slave must compel them. A higher-ranking slave in a wealthy household might be of higher status than poor free persons.

14:25-35

The Cost of Following Jesus

The demand that all Jesus’ *disciples value the needy above respectability (14:7-24) deprives them of the right to remain socially respectable; to count the cost of following Jesus, one dare not value family approval (14:26) or any possessions (14:33) above God’s call heard through the world’s need.

14:25-26. “Hate” could function as a hyperbolic, Semitic way of saying “love less” (Mt 10:37), but this point hardly diminishes the offensiveness of this

saying in a society where honor of parents was considered virtually the highest obligation and one's family was usually one's greatest joy. Teachers regularly demanded great respect and affection, but in Jewish tradition only God openly demanded such wholesale devotion as Jesus claims here (Deut 6:4-5).

14:27. A condemned criminal would "carry the cross" (i.e., the horizontal beam of the cross) out to the site of the upright stake where he would be crucified, usually amid a jeering mob. No one would choose this fate for oneself, but Jesus calls true disciples to choose it and thus to hate their own lives by comparison with their devotion to him (14:26).

14:28-30. Wealthy people displayed their power by magnificent private buildings or by supporting public buildings. Failing to finish, however, would convince others that the donors' supposed wealth was merely pretense. Several years earlier (A.D. 27) a poorly built amphitheater had collapsed, with an estimated fifty thousand casualties. The failings of inadequate or half-finished structures were well known. The crucial point here, however, is the builder's shame in a society obsessed with honor.

14:31-32. Occasionally those with smaller forces defeated those with larger ones, but it was normally wiser to sue for peace (cf. Prov 20:18; 24:6). Galilee's tetrarch Herod Antipas had recently (A.D. 29) lost a war with a neighboring Roman vassal, so the image of foolhardy war should be meaningful to Jesus' hearers. Jesus' point (as in 14:28-30) is that one must recognize the cost when one enlists as a disciple of Jesus (cf. Prov 20:18; 24:6).

14:33. The *Essenes devoted all their property to the community; some radical Greek philosophers espoused the same kind of teaching. But the rest of early Judaism and, even more, Greco-Roman society in general rejected such fanaticism; Judaism stressed giving to charity but not divestiture of possessions. Jesus' disciples did not become propertyless but shared all that they had (Acts 2:44-45; cf. comment on 12:12). Nevertheless, Jesus would sound like one of the radical teachers, because he claims that anyone who values possessions more than people—and so holds onto them rather than meeting known needs—is not being his disciple.

14:34-35. Salt was particularly used as a seasoning agent for taste. Some suggest that it was sometimes (probably not in Palestine) mixed in with manure to keep it fresh for use as fertilizer (slowing fermentation, although the salt itself would be counterproductive in fertilizing soil, unless one's purpose was to make ruined land incapable of producing; it might also be used for killing weeds). The point is that disciples who do not live like disciples are worth as much as unsalty

salt: nothing. (Such graphic demands *rhetorically commanded attention, but Jesus' desire for all to be transformed is clear in the context; see 15:1.)

15:1-2

Sinful Friends

15:1. *Tax gatherers and sinners were excluded from the religious community; cf. comment on 5:29-32. Proverbs (1:15; 13:20; 14:7) warns of the danger of spending time with sinners (cf. also Ps 1:1). But it is clear in this text that the moral influence is from Jesus to the sinners, not the reverse. Many religious Jews emphasized talking about the law whenever possible; no one could legitimately complain about Jesus, who here communicates God's message to his listeners during table fellowship (on lectures at meals, cf. comment on 14:7).*

15:2. *Pharisees and legal teachers did not consider it proper to eat with those excluded from the religious community; besides such dangers as eating untithed food, intimate table fellowship connoted acceptance. "Grumbling" could remind biblically knowledgeable ancient readers of Israel's unbelief and murmuring in the wilderness.

15:3-7

The Lost Sheep

Jesus addresses three *parables to his religious accusers (15:1-2), in effect turning the tables on them and demonstrating that they were not truly God's friends. Pharisees considered shepherds members of an unclean profession and thus would not readily identify with the protagonist of the story (but cf. 2:8-20).

15:3-4. One hundred was not an unusual size for a flock. Because shepherds often worked together (cf. e.g., 2:8) or with cowherds in the same area, this shepherd could probably leave his flock with his companions without endangering the flock. That they remain in the open pasture at night makes it likely that this is the warm season, not winter. Other Jewish teachers stressed God's forgiveness for the repentant, but did not stress God's seeking sinners out.

15:5. The easiest way to carry a lamb may have been across one's shoulders, with the legs crossed over one's chest (cf. God carrying his sheep in Ps 28:9; Is 40:11, but in the latter text God carries lambs at his breast).

15:6-7. "Heaven" was sometimes a surrogate title for God (15:18), but might

allude more broadly to heaven's watching inhabitants (cf. 15:10). The moral of the story is: As the shepherd's friends rejoice when he finds that which was lost, so do God's friends rejoice when he recovers what was lost to him. Thus Jesus' accusers, who resent his fellowship with sinners he seeks to restore, may not really be God's friends (15:1-2).

15:8-10

The Lost Coin

The relative value of the lost item increases in each parable: one out of one hundred, one out of ten and finally (15:11) one out of two. Pharisees were generally unimpressed with the moral character of women and, though valuing care for the poor, mostly came from an educated class different from people with just ten coins. They would not readily identify with the protagonist of this story (contrast Luke's approach in 24:1-11).

15:8. The ten silver coins are most likely the woman's dowry—the only money she brings into the marriage that is technically hers even if the marriage is dissolved. That she has only ten coins (worth about ten days of a worker's wages) suggests that her father's family is not well-to-do; she would presumably have married into a household roughly equally poor (marriage within one's economic bracket was preferred). Given Luke's emphasis on widows elsewhere and his lack of specification here, she is probably not envisioned specifically as a widow, but a widow with only ten coins would be in an even more desperate condition.

The lamp here is a small, handheld oil lamp, which emits little light but is more helpful than the small (if any) window that may be in her wall. The rough stone floors of poor homes had many crevices between the stones, into which coins and fragments of pottery fell so often that archaeologists can now use coins in those crevices to date when people lived in these homes. By sweeping with a broom she might hope to hear the coin rattle against the floor.

15:9-10. See comment on 15:6-7 for the moral. In Jewish tradition the angels in heaven generally took great interest in God's workings on earth; seven chief angels surrounded the throne, and among other angels each person was specifically assigned at least one guardian angel.

15:11-32

The Lost Son

15:11-12. To ask one's father for one's share of the inheritance early was unheard of in antiquity; in effect, one would thereby say, "Father, I wish you were already dead." Such a statement would not go over well even in the West today, and in a society stressing obedience to one's father it would be a serious act of rebellion for which the father could have beaten him or worse (cf. Ex 21:17; Deut 21:18-21). A not unusual response would have been for the father to disinherit the son! That the father grants the request means that most of the hearers will not identify with the father in this parable; from the start, they would think of him as stupidly lax to pamper such an immoral son. Presumably most hearers do not realize at the beginning that Jesus is depicting God's mercy toward them!

The Roman custom was to divide an estate equally unless a will gave more specific instructions. In the traditional Jewish practice, apart from gifts designated before the father's death, the eldest son was to receive a double portion (Deut 21:17); in this case, he would have received two-thirds of the inheritance (15:31) and the younger brother one-third.

15:13. Jewish *law did permit a father to determine which assets (especially land) would go to which sons before he died, but they could take possession only on the father's death: the father remained the manager and received the land's profits until then (cf. 15:22-23, 29). Thus this son could know what would be his but could not ethically (and perhaps legally) sell his assets; he does it anyway.

Many Palestinian Jews migrated, seeking fortune in less economically pressed areas. The younger son is presumably little older than eighteen (he was unmarried) and had an older brother. Moralists, both Jewish and *Gentile, considered squandering a father's hard-earned assets a terrible crime.

15:14. Famine was a common devastating feature of the ancient economy. (People often viewed famines as divine judgments, but because Jesus' story does not address the famine area as a whole, it does not apply this perspective to the story line.)

15:15. At this point, many of Jesus' hearers may be ready for the story to end (like a similar second-century Jewish story and a kind of moral lesson they might tell their children): the son gets what he deserves—he is reduced to the horrendous level of feeding the most unclean of animals. The son might well thus be cut off at this point from any nearby Jewish community and any financial charity it would otherwise offer him.

15:16. The “pods” here are the kind of carob pods fed raw to animals; people roasted and ate them, but subsisted on them only in time of famine. (Thus some Jewish teachers said Israel repented whenever they were driven to eating carob pods.) Given pigs’ proverbially unclean eating habits, the thought of eating pigs’ food would disgust Jesus’ hearers. That the young man is jealous of pigs’ fare also suggests that he is not receiving fair wages (cf. 15:17).

15:17. “Hired men” could be slaves rented for hire but are likelier free servants working for pay; either option suggests that his father is well-to-do.

15:18-19. Jewish people often used “heaven” as a respectful way of saying “God.” The son here returns simply out of hunger and the belief that his father may feed him as a servant, not because he is genuinely sorry that he disgraced his father. Given the magnitude of his sin and the squandering of one-third of his father’s life’s earnings, stricter hearers might regard his return as an act of incredible presumption rather than humility.

15:20. It was a breach of an elderly Jewish man’s dignity to run, though familial love could take priority over dignity after a long absence (cf. Tobit 11:9—mother and son). Given the normal garb, the father would have to pull up his skirt to run. Kissing was a conventional greeting for family members or intimate friends; normally it consisted of a light kiss on the lips (easily distinguishable from lovers’ passionate kisses).

15:21-22. The best robe in the house would belong to the father himself. The ring would probably be a family signet ring—hence would symbolize reinstatement to sonship in a well-to-do house. Slaves or impoverished workers often did not wear sandals, though (as here) they carried and tied a master’s sandals. The father is saying, “No, I won’t receive you back as a servant. I’ll receive you only as a son.”

15:23. The calf would be enough to feed the whole village; this would be a big party! Aristocratic families often invited the whole town to a banquet when a son attained adulthood (about thirteen years old) or a child married. If Jesus’ audience envisioned any particular occasion here for which the calf had been fattened, it might be the elder son’s impending wedding, or perhaps even the father’s expectation of the younger son’s return (though the text does not specify the particular occasion for which it was fattened).

15:24. Ancient writers sometimes bracketed off a section of their work by repeating a particular line; this bracketing off is called an *inclusio*. So far this parable has followed the course of the two that preceded it (15:3-10), but 15:24-32 are bracketed off to address the climactic issue: the elder brother represents

Jesus' religious accusers (15:2).

15:25-28. Dancing was used in both religious and nonreligious celebrations. That the elder brother is apparently the only person in the village (cf. 15:23) uninformed about the party bursts the bounds of plausibility in the real world (where the elder brother should himself have taken the lead at reconciling father and younger son). This touch of unrealism is necessary to graphically underline the older brother's isolation from the community (cf. 15:1-2). Publicly refusing to enter in the midst of a party makes an intrafamily dispute public news, dampening the celebration and, worse yet, shaming his father just as the younger brother had, in a culture where honor and shame were essential values. This is also a grievous insult to the father's dignity and could have warranted discipline or being disinherited (cf. 15:12). Instead of punishing him, however, the father comes out and humbles himself, giving up his honor to seek reconciliation with his son (cf. 15:20).

15:29. Failing to greet one's father with a title (e.g., "Father", "Sir"; contrast even 15:12) was a grievous insult to the father's dignity. This son emphasizes his "service"—even though the father wanted a son rather than a servant (15:19-22). In this context (15:1-2), the elder brother is a transparent analogy for the Pharisees, and the younger brother for the sinners with whom Jesus was eating. A kid (baby goat) offered much less meat than a fattened calf (15:30).

15:30-32. Religious Judaism in this period considered prostitution sinful; both Jewish and non-Jewish sources considered squandering property, especially someone else's (16:1), sinful.

Although hearers might not consider all the details of the *narrative's logic, within the narrative logic the elder brother's response is even worse than modern readers might assume. Because the inheritance had been divided, the elder brother was already assured of his share, effective on the father's death (15:12); he had nothing to lose economically by his brother's return, at least not in terms of obligation. The final response of the elder brother is never stated, providing the Pharisees with the opportunity to repent if they are willing.

16:1-13

The Unfaithful Steward

16:1. Many well-to-do landowners had managers to oversee their estates; these managers, or stewards, could be slaves or, as here (16:3-4), free persons.

Squandering another's possessions was considered a particularly despicable crime (cf. 15:13).

16:2-4. Although the master has dismissed this manager, the master gives him some time to get the accounts together before he leaves. The manager uses this time to procure favor for himself with others to whose houses he may join himself afterward. Ancients were very conscious of favors they owed; reciprocity was a matter of obligation. The manager uses the master's authority even though he can no longer legally exercise it.

Both digging and begging were considered undignified professions. Digging was usually performed by captive slaves or those who knew no other skills, and was viewed as the most difficult form of labor.

16:5. These tenants may owe the landowner fixed amounts of their crops. They were not required to pay the sum until harvest. Each of these debtors is wealthier than average in his own right, hence could use a manager in the future.

16:6-7. The measure of olive oil (100 baths, about 850 gallons) represented the yield of nearly 150 olive trees and was worth about 1,000 denarii, no small sum. The measure of wheat (100 cors, about 1,000 bushels) represented the yield of about 100 acres and was worth about 2,500 denarii. The percentages of debt forgiven differ, but roughly the same amount of money is forgiven in each of the sample transactions (about 500 denarii). These renters are all relatively well-to-do in their own right, and thus might make use of a manager themselves in the future.

In hard times, masters would sometimes forgive part of the debt, writing it off as a loss, in return for being considered benevolent.

16:8. All these changes of notes required only small marks on the papers, made by the clients themselves (not incriminating the manager's own, no longer authorized, hand); and if the projected income thereby appears less, it will be harder to recognize that the master's profits affected by the manager's embezzlements are really diminished.

More important, the manager has gained public favor for himself and for the master as a generous benefactor; if the master punishes the manager now, it would appear to the public that he were doing so because of the manager's benevolent act. The criminal manager could be jailed, but he wisely stakes everything on his master's honor as a generous man. Ancient stories often portray powerful persons as appreciating and rewarding cunning, even if it had been used against them ("wisely"—KJV—can mean "shrewdly"—NIV, NASB, etc.; cf. Ex 1:10). Some stories (undoubtedly popular among slaves) portray slaves

outwitting their masters; although this steward appears to be free (thus “begging” in 16:3), the story line may resemble one with which Jesus’ hearers would be familiar. “Children of light” appears in the *Dead Sea Scrolls for God’s special remnant, as opposed to the rest of the wicked world; here the “children of this age” echoes Jewish language for those who live for this age and lack hope for the world to come. There appears to be an implied “how much more” argument (a common ancient Jewish argument): if worldly people can think ahead regarding money, how much more should God’s people do so?

16:9-13. The moral of the story appears to be: Use possessions to serve people, rather than accommodating it for yourself, because you are only God’s managers of anything you have. “Mammon” (KJV) is an *Aramaic word for possessions or money.

16:14-18

The Radical Demands of the Law

16:14. Many *Pharisees may have belonged to the leisured class, but that description applied far more to the *Sadducees. Most Pharisees worked and praised the piety of giving. In this context, however, “lovers of money” refers to all who value money too much to give whatever of it they must to satisfy the human needs around them.

16:15. Jesus here cites a standard *Old Testament principle (1 Sam 16:7; Job 10:4), applicable especially to the practice of religion (Is 1:10-17; 58:1-14; Jer 6:13-14, 20; Hos 4:4-9, 19; 6:6; Amos 5:21-27).

16:16. Jewish people sometimes summarized the Bible as “the Law and the Prophets”; many of them believed that after the era of the prophets the prophetic voice had been muted until the messianic time. Thus John introduces the messianic era.

16:17. Later *rabbis told the story that when God changed Sarai’s name to Sarah, the *yod* (the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet) that was removed complained to God for generations till he reinserted it in Joshua’s name. Jewish teachers used such illustrations to make the point that the *law was sacred and one could not regard any part as too small to be worth keeping.

16:18. Jewish law permitted men the right of divorce for almost any reason, although many rabbis disapproved of divorcing on slight grounds. Jesus’ statement, however, declares that divorce is invalid in God’s sight, so that a

subsequent marriage is adulterous. Here Jesus articulates a stronger view of the marriage bond than anyone else we know of in antiquity, and his statement thus intensifies the law of Moses. Like most other statements of general principle in the ancient world (e.g., Prov 18:22 with Prov 11:22; 12:4; 21:9; or Prov 10:15; 13:8; 14:20 with 10:2, 11:4; or 14:24; 16:6 with 15:16; 16:8; 30:7-9; or 11:8; 12:13, 21 with principles such as 2 Tim 3:12), this one does not exclude exceptions (for the innocent party who had no say in the matter, cf. Mt 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor 7:15). Jesus' language is probably *hyperbole (see comment on Mt 5:32; 19:9; Mk 10:9); Jesus' purpose is to protect an innocent party from being divorced, not to punish the party who has been so betrayed. His statement addresses especially the wife because in the traditional custom in Jewish Palestine (in contrast to Roman custom) only the husband had full rights to divorce.

16:19-31

The Rich Man and the Poor Man

This story resembles a rabbinic story of uncertain date, except that there the rich man did a good deed and made it into the world to come; here he allows starvation while he lives in luxury, and thus inherits hell. Some details about the afterlife here are standard features of Jewish tradition; a few are simply necessary to make the story line work (acceptable practice in the telling of *parables).

16:19. Purple was an especially expensive form of apparel (cf. comment on Acts 16:14); the lifestyle Jesus describes here is one of ostentatious luxury. Although this man may have become rich by immoral means such as oppressing the poor (as people often did), one cannot simply assume this; the only crime Jesus attributes to him is that he let Lazarus starve to death when he could have prevented it.

16:20. On occasion, Jewish parables (including the rabbinic one mentioned at the beginning of this section) named a character or two. In normal stories, one would expect the rich man rather than the poor man to be named. "Lazarus" is a variant form of Eleazar.

16:21. Some wealthy people displayed extravagant consumption, careless about what was spilled from their tables. The crumbs here may be regular crumbs or pieces of bread used to sop up the table. Had Lazarus gotten to eat

them, these leftovers would still have been insufficient to sustain him. The dogs here appear to be the usual kind Palestinian Jews knew: scavengers, viewed as if they were rats or other unhealthy creatures (also in the *Old Testament, e.g., 1 Kings 14:11; 16:4; 21:24; 22:38). They were considered unclean, and their tongues would have stung his sores.

16:22-23. Jewish lore often speaks of the righteous being carried away by angels; Jesus spares his hearers the traditional corresponding image of the wicked being carried away by *demons. Every person, no matter how poor, was to receive a burial, and not to be buried was seen as terrible (e.g., 1 Kings 14:13). But Lazarus, having neither relatives nor charitable *patron, may not have received one (if we might infer from the contrasting statement about the rich man), whereas the rich man would have received great eulogies. True Israelites and especially martyrs were expected to share with Abraham in the world to come. The most honored seat in a banquet would be nearest the host, reclining in such a way that one's head was near his bosom.

The term "Hades" simply specifies the realm of the dead (like the Hebrew *sheol*), but the description of torment makes clear that the rich man is in hell. Greeks envisioned a neutral place of shadowy existence inhabited by most deceased people; a few particularly righteous went to a more blessed place, and a few particularly wicked were tormented in Tartarus. Jewish views were more likely to have a clearer divide, as here. Their views of the place of the wicked, *Gehenna, varied; the image of continuing torment here is among the harshest of views.

16:24-26. Jewish literature often portrayed hell as involving burning. The formerly rich man hopes for mercy because he is a descendant of Abraham (see comment on 3:8), but the judgment here is based on a future inversion of status. Jewish people expected an inversion of status, where the oppressed righteous (especially Israel) would be exalted above the oppressing wicked (especially the *Gentiles), and also believed that charitable persons would be greatly rewarded in the world to come. But this parable specifies only economic inversion, and its starkness would have been as offensive to most first-century hearers of means as it could be to many middle-class Western Christians today if they heard it in its original force.

16:27-31. If those who claimed to believe the Bible failed to live accordingly, even a *resurrection (Jesus points ahead to his own) would not persuade them. Jewish literature also emphasized the moral responsibility of all people to obey whatever measure of light they already had. Ancient writers

sometimes included foreshadowing, prefiguring later events; in verse 31 Jesus foreshadows future hostility despite his own resurrection.

17:1-4

Proper Relationships

17:1-2. Those who caused others to stumble (“to sin”—ESV, NLT) are as doomed as the rich man of the preceding parable; in contrast, *disciples should look out for one another’s good. “Stumble” was often used metaphorically to refer to sinning or falling away from the true faith. Millstones, used to grind wheat and olives, were extremely heavy, and the term here refers to the heavier kind of millstone turned by a donkey for the community mill, rather than the lighter kind a woman would use for household grinding. Jewish people considered barbaric the Roman punishment of drowning someone in a bag or with a heavy weight; the image is thus all the more dreadful.

17:3-4. Private reproof, *repentance with restitution, and forgiveness were standard doctrines of Jewish piety. Jewish teachers did question the genuineness of repentance if one planned to sin again, but like Jewish legal experts exploring legal principles, Jesus offers here a theoretical case: if a person does genuinely repent repeatedly, you must forgive that person.

17:5-10

The Faith of Servants

17:5-6. Ancient Jewish writers sometimes observed that the roots of the black mulberry (this tree’s usual identification) are spread out, which makes it a difficult tree to uproot. It is a strong tree that grows slowly but lives a long time. Mustard seeds were proverbially small.

17:7-10. Except during harvest, field work might end, and the afternoon meal begin, some time after 3 p.m. Most slaveholders had few slaves; thus the slaves did both fieldwork and food preparation. Masters regarded this work as their slaves’ duty, not an option. Nor was it considered honorable for masters to eat with their slaves, and it was virtually never done; even a master eating at the same table with his *freedpersons (former slaves) was rare and noteworthy. The point of the illustration seems to be: Faith grows as one uses it as a servant; its end is service, and it is never an end in itself.

17:11-19

A Samaritan's Gratitude

17:11-12. Leprosy was an unattractive skin disease (not limited to what is called leprosy today) for which the Bible had prescribed quarantine from the rest of society (Lev 13:45-46), although the Bible did not go so far as many Jewish teachers in blaming the disease on the leper's sin. Lepers were thus outcasts from the rest of society.

17:13. The lepers approach Jesus with humility, which was the proper *Old Testament way to approach God or one of his representatives for prayer.

17:14. 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.

17:15-19. On their own terms *Samaritans were quite pious, but Jewish people considered them irreligious, and religious Jews avoided intimate dealings with them (lepers, alienated from both societies, might ignore this barrier). This tension supplies most of the punch of the story. That a Samaritan would travel with Jewish lepers in the area between Samaria and Galilee (v. 11) also illustrates the extremity of lepers' outcast status: it erases other social distinctions. Ironically, Elisha had healed an outsider leper (Naaman the Aramean, 2 Kings 5) but not the lepers of the city of Samaria (2 Kings 7:3; Lk 4:27).

17:20-37

The Nature of the Impending Kingdom

17:20-21. Jewish teachers debated whether the *kingdom would come at a predetermined time known only to God, or when Israel repented. Although Jewish people acknowledged that God ruled in the present, most also longed for God's unchallenged rule, or kingdom, in the future. Jewish teachers disputed when the kingdom would come: either at a set time unknown to mortals, or whenever all Israel repented. By teaching that the kingdom as God's reign is somehow present, Jesus implies that something of the kingdom—such as the messianic king—is already among them.

17:22. Second-century *rabbis, probably using a wider idiom, sometimes spoke of a future messianic era called "the days of the Messiah." Some texts spoke of a period (sometimes forty years) when the *Messiah would lead Israel

in war against its enemies before the final end; others (more often), that the Messiah would come to reign for a period after those enemies were subdued.

17:23-24. The ultimate coming of the kingdom would not be ushered in by just an earthly war (as some thought) or by earthly messianic figures claiming followings (as many expected), but by a cosmic revelation to all the earth. (Various Jewish texts adopted either scenario.) “In his [Jesus’] day,” if original, may allude to the *Old Testament “day of the Lord,” the final time when God would judge the earth and bring about eternal justice (cf., e.g., Is 13:6, 9; Ezek 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31).

17:25. Cf. the context of Daniel 7:13-14 (the future *Son of Man*) *for suffering preceding glory (in Dan 7:21-22, referring to the saints)*.

17:26-27. Jewish literature often used Noah’s generation as a typical image of evil. None of the activities Jesus mentions here is evil (though Jewish teachers regarded some as necessary responses to the evil impulse); but those otherwise preoccupied are taken by surprise, living life oblivious to impending judgment.

17:28-30. Many Jewish texts used Sodom (Gen 19) as a typical image of evil (cf. comment on Lk 10:12) and often linked it with Noah’s generation (cf. comment on 17:26-27).

17:31. The flat rooftop was used for a variety of purposes. Because the stairs from the rooftop led down the outside wall of the house, not inside, one need not go inside when descending. This is an image of haste: of forgetting possessions, property and worldly concerns to get to the street and greet the returning king, or to flee impending doom.

17:32-33. When Lot’s wife looked back to her destroyed home in Sodom, it cost her her life, which she should have valued more than her possessions (Gen 19:15-16, 26).

17:34. The Greek language used masculine pronouns if any members of the group were male; thus the “two” likely refers to husband and wife (NIV, against NASB “two men”). Here Jesus undoubtedly refers to one being taken to judgment (as in an analogous second-century story about Israelites and Egyptians in bed during the last plague).

17:35. Part of the Palestinian Jewish woman’s work was grinding at a mill; she would often do this with another woman. These women could normally work together regardless of religious convictions. Provided that the unreligious woman was not violating Pharisaic rules, even the wife of a *Pharisee and the wife of a nontither (whom Pharisees despised) could grind together.

17:37. The *Son of Man’s coming would bring judgment as on Noah’s and

Lot's generations (17:26-30), leaving his enemies as food for vultures (Ezek 32:4-6; 39:17-20), which Jewish people considered a horrible fate (Deut 28:26; 1 Sam 17:44; Ps 79:2). Some commentators have suggested (though the reference seems less likely here) that the "eagles" here refer instead to the Roman standards, which could be represented thus. In A.D. 70 the Romans offered sacrifice to these standards on the site of the temple after they had destroyed it. The image of devouring vultures was, however, widespread.

18:1-8

God the Faithful Judge

18:1-5. Under *Old Testament* law, judges were to fear God (i.e., consider that he will judge those who break his law and mistreat others) and therefore defend the oppressed. Many ancient societies had severe legal penalties for unjust judges, though the judges often got away with their corruption (taking bribes and the like).

In the law, the widow was the ultimate example of the oppressed person, because she had no means of support (e.g., Ex 22:22-24; Ps 146:9; Is 1:17, 23; Jer 7:6-7). She certainly could not afford a bribe; in Jesus' *parable here the widow's opponent may threaten something like taking her land in payment for a debt (cf., e.g., 2 Kings 4:1). Although normally only men spoke in lawcourts and women needed advocates to plead cases for them, when women were so audacious as to speak there they generally commanded attention and sympathy.

18:6-7. This parable is a standard Jewish "how much more" (*qal vahomer*) argument: if an unjust judge who cared not for widows can dispense justice, how much more will the righteous judge of all the earth, who was known as the defender of widows and orphans, do so? In the context, God would administer his justice especially when Jesus came to judge the earth (17:22-37). The principle is familiar from the Old Testament: God is faithful to act on behalf of and to vindicate his people, by his acts in the present and especially his final day of judgment.

18:8. Many Jewish writers predicted great sufferings in the end time, on account of which many people would fall away from the truth; Jesus warns his own to persevere (17:22-37; 21:8-19, 34-36; 22:31-32, 40, 46).

18:9-14

The Pharisee and the Tax Gatherer

18:9-10. *Pharisees were considered the most pious people in regular Palestinian Jewish society (*Essenes were less involved in society; many lived in the wilderness); *tax gatherers were considered the most despicable, often regarded as traitors to their people. Pharisees did not want tax gatherers admitted as witnesses or given honorary offices.* To catch the impact of this parable today a traditional Christian might think of these characters as the most active deacon or Sunday-school teacher versus a drug dealer, gay activist or crooked politician.

18:11. Jewish people considered it pious to thank God for one's righteousness, rather than taking credit for it oneself. The first hearers of this parable would not think of the Pharisee as boastful, but rather as grateful to God for his piety.

18:12. Many of the most pious fasted—without water, despite the health hazard—two full days a week (Mondays and Thursdays); some believe this was only during the dry season. (Considering this pattern of fasting hypocritical, some early Christians insisted on fasting on Wednesday and Friday instead! —*Didache* 8.1). Pharisees were meticulous about tithing to the full extent one could infer from the *law (several different tithes, together constituting more than twenty percent of one's income). When they were not certain that the food they purchased had been tithed on, they would tithe it just in case. (Tithes involved a portion of agrarian produce.)

18:13. Standing with eyes and hands lifted to heaven was a common posture of prayer in antiquity (as well as in some other cultures). Beating one's breast was a sign of great mourning or grief, in this case in *repentance for sin (which in Jewish custom was expressed by mourning). The tax gatherer's prayer for mercy involves no deliberate act of restitution, and hence many of Jesus' contemporaries would judge it invalid.

18:14. Jesus' conclusion to the parable would shock the original hearers (cf. comment on 18:11); it fails to shock many Christians today only because they are so accustomed to the parable. On the future inversion of present roles, cf. 14:11 and 16:25.

18:15-17

The Kingdom Is for Children

Children were people of no social status, and the *disciples would not want the*

important time of their rabbi taken up with blessing them. But Jesus says that the kingdom belongs to those considered insignificant, those who do not approach it on the merits of their own status.

18:18-30

Sacrificing Wealth for the Kingdom

18:18. Some disciples asked their teachers questions like the one this ruler asks Jesus about *eternal life*. To “*inherit eternal life*” meant to share in the life of the coming world, the life of the kingdom of God.

18:19-20. Without denying that he himself is good, Jesus reminds the man of the standard Jewish conception of God’s goodness (others could be good, but no one compared with God); he then lists select commandments from the *Old Testament.

18:21. If only God is good, the man will have to admit he has broken some commandment; but the commandments Jesus lists were kept by most well-raised Jewish people.

18:22-23. Judaism stressed charity heavily, but other Jewish teachers did not normally require a prospective disciple to divest himself entirely of funds. A few teachers, especially some radical Greek teachers (Antisthenes, Zeno and Diogenes), made such demands on rich students to see if they would value true teaching above their wealth. A rich person would occasionally give up his goods, but rich prospective disciples usually disappointed such radical teachers, failing the test of discipleship and returning to their wealth.

18:24. Jesus turns the social order upside down. Often the well-to-do were hailed for their generosity (they had more to give), and the poor, being less educated in the *law, were thought less pious (although poverty itself was not necessarily seen as a sign of impiety, especially by the poor themselves). Many also believed the poor and oppressed to be pious, but many further believed that the rich were wealthy by virtue of God’s blessing.

18:25-27. Jesus’ saying here reflects a Jewish figure of speech for doing something impossible (a large animal going through a needle’s eye). The saying, a *hyperbole, uses the image of a literal needle (not a gate, as some have incorrectly thought).

18:28-30. Though not elite, most of Jesus’ disciples whose professions we know (such as fishermen and, especially, tax gatherers) had not been poor

(though the Gospels may be more interested in narrating the exceptional ones) but had abandoned their economic security to follow him. Their reward would be found in believers' sharing of possessions in this world (cf. Acts 2:44-45) and the life of the kingdom in the world to come.

18:31-34

Jesus' Impending Suffering

Standard Jewish messianic concepts did not accommodate a suffering *Messiah (most Jewish references to that idea are from the second century or later). Although Jesus saw this idea in the Scriptures (24:44-46), Jewish tradition's different way of reading the Bible (normally passages about suffering were not applied to the expected triumphant Messiah) makes it difficult for the disciples to fit their belief in Jesus as the Messiah with the plain words he speaks.

18:35-43

Healing a Blind Suppliant

18:35. Most blind and other disabled persons who could not engage in the traditional occupations of the day could secure their living only by begging, normally on a busy roadside. Jewish people considered helping them a righteous deed. Jericho was a prosperous town with a good climate and many wealthy priests living there. This blind man no doubt received ample support there, especially when pilgrims were passing by en route to the festival in Jerusalem.

18:36-38. That the blind man shouts "Son of David" means that he recognizes Jesus as the *Messiah. Jesus characterizes his insistent, obstinate (v. 39) plea for mercy as "faith" (v. 42).

18:39-42. Blind people were socially powerless, and Jesus' followers see his loud pleas as an intrusion, the way they had seen the children (18:15).

18:43. Other miracle stories in this period frequently ended with the response of the crowds, a response generally characterized—as one would expect after a miracle—by awe.

19:1-10

A Tax Gatherer's Repentance

19:1-2. Being a border city, Jericho had a customs station. Because it was also one of the wealthiest cities of Palestine, in the most fertile part of Judea and boasting a Herodian palace, the residence of many wealthy priestly families, other tax income would also be extensive. The “chief” *tax gatherer would be the one who contracted for sales and customs taxes and hired collectors under him. Given this role, Zacchaeus could have become rich without cheating; but it seems that he had cheated anyway (19:8).

19:3-4. For Zacchaeus to be “short” by ancient Mediterranean standards could mean that he was shorter than five feet tall. People often paid more attention to tall people (though Zaccheus by virtue of his office commanded attention). With its pleasant climate year-round, Jericho was especially noted for its palm trees but supported many other trees as well, including the well-known sycamore tree. The kind of “sycamore” tree described here is related to the fig tree and was easy to climb, with large limbs spreading from fairly low on the tree; it is not the North American sycamore or European-Asian sycamore maple. *Old Testament Jericho had many tightly packed houses, but the prosperous city of the New Testament period had spacious villas and parks, where one could more easily climb a tree than get on a rooftop.*

19:5. No matter how high their status, people did not normally invite themselves to someone else’s home. Pious Jews would also be loath to enter the home of a tax gatherer or to eat of his food (which Jesus’ language also implies); because someone unreligious enough to collect taxes would not be careful about tithing his foodstuffs, *Pharisees would not trust what he offered. Jewish people normally considered the ability to call the name of someone one had never met—as Jesus does here with Zacchaeus—to be the sort of thing that only a prophet could do. Because the journey to Jerusalem from Jericho was about seventeen miles uphill (nearly a day’s journey), Jesus may have preferred to let his disciples rest in a place with sufficient accommodations before continuing their journey.*

19:6-8. Zaccheus could not imprison someone on his own authority, but he could make false reports to produce that outcome; his office would thus have given him power to intimidate and secure his demands, if he wished to do so. Zacchaeus’s promise to make restitution recognizes that his white-collar crime is just as serious as other kinds of theft (Ex 22:1-4). His restitution goes beyond the lenient Pharisaic interpretation of the law, *which required fourfold or fivefold restitution only for stolen oxen and sheep, only if he slaughtered or sold it, and only if a sufficient number of people witnessed the act. Moreover, Judaism*

traditionally thought of restitution to receive forgiveness, but here it responds to grace instead of invites it. In ancient accounts of discipleship, a radical response with possessions was a certain sign of newly acquired devotion to the teacher.

19:9-10. Many Jewish people believed that salvation belonged to almost all Israelites by virtue of their descent from Abraham, except for those who excluded themselves by heinous crimes. In Ezekiel 34:6 and 11, God took over the mission of seeking out the lost sheep because the leaders of his people had failed (less directly relevant, cf. also Wisdom of Solomon 6:16).

19:11-27

Making Use of the Delay

19:11. New Testament Jericho is about seventeen miles from Jerusalem and about a mile south of the site of Old Testament Jericho.

If Jesus was the *Messiah*, *proclaiming the kingdom* and saying things like salvation was “today” (19:9), Jewish hearers would naturally expect the kingdom right away (17:20; Acts 1:6). The most common expectation of the kingdom would include the subjugation of Rome and other *Gentiles.

19:12. The image Jesus uses here would be familiar: both Herod the Great (40 B.C.) and his son Archelaus (4 B.C.) had to go to Rome to receive their “kingdom,” i.e., the right to rule Judea.

19:13. Each of the slaves was given a mina, the equivalent of about one hundred days’ wages, which they would probably entrust to the moneychangers. Because of exorbitant interest rates in the Greco-Roman world (on one unusual occasion a lender charged a desperate city roughly fifty percent interest) and because only a few people had significant capital, those doing business could quickly multiply their investments.

19:14. What this verse describes happened to Herod’s son Archelaus, who was not at all popular with the people. An embassy of fifty representatives of the people went to Rome to oppose him. Similarly, his father Herod the Great had to fight till 37 B.C. before his kingdom (already officially granted him by the Romans) was securely under his control. Even under more direct Roman rule, complaints to Rome about actions of Roman officials could still cause them trouble, but only if Rome was persuaded.

19:15-19. It was not unusual for investors to make returns such as those these servants report; nor was it unusual for rulers to reward profitable servants

who proved their administrative skills. Rome allowed its client kings to appoint their own local officials.

19:20. Not only was this servant's failure to invest the money contrary to the king's orders and common sense (19:13); he even failed to protect the money, as giving it to moneychangers, storing it in a temple treasury or even keeping it in a strongbox might have done. Wrapping money in a perishable handkerchief was considered one of the most irresponsible ways to take care of money and suggests that the servant was stupid or treasonous (cf. v. 14), or (most likely) both.

19:21. Objecting that the master "takes out what he does not supply" means that he took money that he had not deposited, perhaps misappropriating funds.

19:22-26. Knowing that the master liked to make money that he had not deposited, the slave should have understood that the master would certainly want good interest from a deposit. Judging one by one's own words (19:22) was considered appropriate (e.g., 1 Kings 20:40).

19:27. Eastern kings coming to power often disposed of enemies in this manner; Herod the Great had taken some ruthless measures to quell opposition and bring peace, and his son Archelaus likewise brutally retaliated against those who had opposed him.

19:28-40

The Royal Entrance

19:28-29. Messengers were normally sent two by two. When Jesus' group reaches the Mount of Olives, they are just outside Jerusalem.

19:30-34. Readers might interpret Jesus' (as king) borrowing the animal in terms of Romans or royal emissaries temporarily impressing (demanding the service of) an animal. The donkey's owners probably see it as part of the hospitality to visitors to the feast, or perhaps as the honor of helping a famous *rabbi on his way.

In antiquity the vast majority of people, including Christians, were poor; knowing that their Lord Jesus had to borrow his royal mount probably would have encouraged them.

19:35. Officials used donkeys for civil, not military, processions (1 Kings 1:38). Thus this text is not a triumphal entry in the sense of Roman triumphal processions; it is Jerusalem's reception of a meek and peaceful king. Jesus

chooses to define his kingship in terms of Zechariah 9:9, not the commonly expected role of warrior *Messiah.

19:36-37. Festal pilgrims were often welcomed with shouts of joy, but 19:37-40 suggests that a greater recognition was taking place here.

19:38. With the addition of “the king,” the first part of the people’s cry is taken from Psalm 118:26. The Hallel, composed of Psalms 113–118, was sung regularly during Passover season and would be fresh on everyone’s mind; later generations applied these psalms to the future redemption for which they hoped. Jesus will cite the psalm messianically in Luke 20:17.

19:39-40. “Stones” could mean any stones (3:8), but they may refer to the stones of the temple (see 19:44; 20:17).

19:41-44

Jerusalem’s Doom

19:41-42. Like Jeremiah or another prophet weeping for his people (e.g., Jer 6:26; 8:18–9:3; Lam 1:1-4), Jesus cries out a lament over his people.

19:43. “The days will come” was a common phrase used by *Old Testament prophets (e.g., 1 Sam 2:31; 2 Kings 20:17; Jer 31:31). The Romans besieged and destroyed Jerusalem in the war of A.D. 66–70, roughly forty years after Jesus spoke these words.

19:44. Here Jesus uses standard prophetic *hyperbole; the city was destroyed in A.D. 70 but not completely leveled. Further leveling (including the filling of an entire valley) took place after the Bar Kochba revolt, which was finally suppressed in A.D. 135. The Old Testament spoke of God “visiting” (KJV, NASB, NRSV; cf. “coming to”—NIV) his people in acts of deliverance or judgment (e.g., Is 23:17); here the term refers to Jesus’ mission.

19:45-48

Transforming the Temple

See the more extensive comment on Mark 11:15-19.

19:45. Sellers were needed in the temple so foreign Jews could buy sacrifices to offer there. Psalms, prophets and Jewish teachers in Jesus’ day agreed that prayer and a pure heart counted for more than sacrifices but did not oppose sacrifices per se. Jesus presumably would oppose not sacrifices (cf. Acts

21:26) but an emphasis on ritual without the true relationship with God that he had demanded in his own teaching (cf. Lk 19:47). Even if he clears out the whole temple, however, the sellers will not stay out.

19:46. One text Jesus cites in part, Isaiah 56:7, refers to the future restored temple when even pious *Gentiles would come to worship in the temple; but instead the temple has become like the “robbers’ den” of Jeremiah 7:11. Jeremiah called it that because Israel thought the temple was a refuge from divine judgment despite the people’s sins; injustice was taking place in the land, but the people did not expect judgment because of their ritual piety (Jer 7:1-15).

19:47. Other teachers also taught in the temple courts. The Jewish aristocracy who controlled the temple had vested interests in keeping down would-be *Messiahs (usually revolutionaries) and anyone who challenged the temple. Defiling the sacred inner courts of the temple was the one offense for which the Romans permitted the Jewish authorities to execute an automatic death penalty. Although Jesus’ action in the outer court would not actually qualify as defiling the sacred precincts, it must have enraged the authorities and served as a direct challenge to their power there.

19:48. These leaders had official authority, but they lacked the measure of popularity with the common people in Jewish Palestine that the Pharisees and Jesus possessed.

20:1-8

On Whose Authority?

20:1-2. People lectured in temples, which were public places. Verbal challenges in public staked the honor of both challenger and challenged on the outcome. The powerful priestly aristocracy who ran the temple exercised their own authority over it; they would know that Jesus has not received the authority from themselves or from the Romans. They would not accept any other human authorization as legitimate, nor regard other humans as divinely authorized; they presumably believed that God had authorized them rather than someone else to be in charge of the religious aspects of the temple. They would regard Jesus as a serious troublemaker from Galilee, dangerous (yet to be handled gently) because he was a populist demagogue. Elites in antiquity complained about demagogues who swayed the masses instead of appealing to aristocratic sentiments like “honorable” people should.

20:3-4. Jesus' question about John the Baptist concerns the principle of agency: in Jewish *law, an authorized agent acted on behalf of the sender, backed by the sender's full authority. "Heaven" was a Jewish circumlocution for God.

20:5-8. The temple authorities, who had to please the Romans on the one hand and the populace on the other, were already accustomed to considering the political consequences of their statements.

20:9-18

Judgment on Evil Leaders

Jesus still addresses those who fancy themselves rulers of Israel, reminding them that they are merely custodians appointed by God over his vineyard (like the shepherds over God's flock of Jer 23 and Ezek 34).

Wealthy landowners controlled much of the rural Roman Empire, including many rural parts of Galilee; tenant farmers worked their land. Landowners had great status, whereas tenant farmers had little; tenants were therefore normally quite respectful to the owners.

20:9. Absentee landlords were common.

20:10. Payments were rendered at harvest time. Some contracts specified that the tenants would pay the landowner a percentage of the harvest; other contracts called for a fixed amount.

20:11-12. Landowners always had power, socially and legally, to enforce their will on the tenants; a few even reportedly had hit squads to deal with troublesome tenants. Here the tenants act as if they are the ones with power, and they exploit it mercilessly (as opposed to the ancient ideal of a *benevolent* *patron or landowner). This description fits the Jewish tradition that Israel martyred many of the prophets God sent to it.

20:13. The expression "beloved son" emphasizes the father's great affection for the son, increasing pathos if he were lost (cf. Gen 22:2). In the light of 3:22, the "beloved son" clearly represents Jesus. Ancient hearers of the *parable would regard the landowner as abnormal; naively benevolent, he counted on a kindness in his tenants that their behavior had already disproved. Rich or poor, all hearers at this point would agree that the landowner was in the right, and that he was benevolent—indeed, strikingly, foolishly benevolent.

20:14-15. The tenants presume too much about the inheritance; although

they could have seized it under certain legal conditions, the owner could also stipulate—and after their misdeeds certainly would—that someone else inherit the vineyard; or representatives of the emperor could have seized it. If a dead body were left in a vineyard, it would render the harvested food impure if the food got wet (traditional Jewish interpretation of Lev 11:38).

20:16. Ancient hearers would wonder why the landowner had not come earlier and killed the tenants. The people's negative response is only because they know how Jesus is applying it—against their own leaders (v. 19).

20:17. Here Jesus cites Psalm 118:22-23, another text from the Hallel (the crowd referred to 118:25-26 in Lk 19:38). The building here is the temple (Ps 118:18-21, 25-27); as the cornerstone of a new temple, Jesus is a threat to the builders of the old one. (Herod used priests to construct the temple, but we need not press the analogy of “builders” so far.)

20:18. “Falling on” the cornerstone reflects Isaiah 8:14-15 (cf. 28:16); the stone falling on the offender reflects Daniel 2:34, 44, where God's *kingdom, portrayed as a rock, crushes its earthly challengers. Jesus here uses a standard Jewish practice of expounding one text (cf. Lk 20:17) by citing others sharing the same key word or concept, in this case, the divine stone.

20:19-26

Both Sides of the Coin

20:19-21. Here Jesus' opponents seek to force him to choose between revolution—which would get him in trouble with Rome—and accommodation to the Romans—which they suppose he opposes (because he opposed their leadership in the temple).

20:22. They pit the obligations of peace with Rome against the nationalistic, messianic fervor that they assume Jesus has generated; a disastrous tax revolt two decades earlier had shown where such fervor could lead. If he publicly takes the view characterized by those later called *Zealots (no king but God), he can be arrested; if he rejects that view (which he does), he may compromise his following (cf. 23:18-19).

20:23-26. Jewish Palestine circulated its own copper coins, which bore the name but not the image of the deified emperor. Nonetheless, foreign coins, which bore the emperor's image and mention of his divine status, were in common circulation in Palestine, where neither gold nor silver coins were

permitted to be struck. Revolutionaries in A.D. 6 had violently protested the use of such coins and incurred terrible Roman retaliation.

20:27-40

God of the Living

20:27. In ancient Palestinian Judaism the *Sadducees were especially notorious for not believing in resurrection*, and *rabbis who considered themselves successors of the Pharisees* classified Sadducees as heretics for this view.

20:28. The Sadducees' question to Jesus concerns the law of levirate marriage, practiced in many cultures both in antiquity and today. It provides economic and social protection to widows in societies where women cannot earn wages. Students of Jewish law *were still expounding this* Old Testament principle (Deut 25:5) in Jesus' day and afterward.

20:29-32. The Sadducees borrow the story line from the Jewish book of Tobit, where the jealous *demon Asmodeus killed righteous Sarah's first seven husbands (though they were not brothers).

20:33. Later *rabbinic literature is full of examples of the "mocking question" posed by pagans, apostates or heretics like the Sadducees.

20:34-36. Jewish people widely agreed that angels did not procreate (they did not need to replenish their numbers, because they did not die, and also because, in some other traditions, God regularly created new angels), nor did they normally eat or drink.

20:37-38. Against their Sadducean opponents the Pharisees commonly tried to prove the resurrection from the law of Moses; Jesus here does the same. He argues (using Ex 3:6; cf. 3:15-16; 4:5) that God would not claim to be the God of those who no longer exist; indeed, his faithfulness to his covenant demands that if he is their God after death, death is not the final word for them. One of the most common Jewish prayers of the period recites God's faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as a living reality for their own time (cf. also *4 Maccabees 7:19; 16:25).

20:39-40. Contemporary literature commonly reports hearers being overawed by a wise speaker's (usually the protagonist's) wisdom.

20:41-44

David's Lord

By definition, the Christ, or anointed one, was the royal descendant of David (Is 9:7; 11:1; Ps 2; 89; 132). But this view of *messiahship often lent itself to a revolutionary view of the *kingdom (see comment on 17:20-24) and was inadequate. The one who would reign in God's kingdom was David's "Lord" (Ps 110:1) not merely his descendant (cf. Ezek 34:24; 37:24); he would thus be greater than the resurrected David (cf. Is 9:6-7).

When Jewish teachers challenged their hearers to resolve apparent discrepancies in Scripture, they assumed that both texts were true (in this case, Jesus knows that he is both David's son and David's Lord) and were asking how to harmonize them. Jesus' opponents apparently have no answer, because other Jewish interpreters did not apply Psalm 110:1 to the Messiah (reacting against the Christian interpretation, some later Jewish interpreters even applied this text to Abraham).

20:45–21:4

The Powerful and the Weak

Some Jewish teachers were so concerned to prevent the exploitation of the poor that they criticized collectors of charity who asked for contributions from the poor. But then, as now, some individuals used their religion to exploit others.

20:45-46. Like their Greek counterparts, some Jewish teachers wore a special identifying garb, in this case a long, white linen robe, similar to those of priests and temple officials. People normally greeted teachers with titles of honor; marketplaces, which were full of people, would provide many opportunities for teachers to receive such recognition. Seating at banquets marked one's rank in society.

20:47. Widows had little means of support, were socially powerless and were to be protected under Jewish *law (see comment on 18:1-5). Jesus could mean that these teachers exploit widows' resources by seeking extensive tithes (which they could set at twenty to thirty percent, on top of the heavy land taxes levied by the government); or he could mean that they follow the letter of the law toward creditors in legal decisions, rather than showing mercy to the poor as the law also required.

These teachers may have lingered long in their individual prayers in the *synagogues*; here Jesus criticizes not the length of prayers but the motive for this length. Like the Old Testament prophets (e.g., Is 1:11-17; Amos 5:21-24), Jesus

sees social injustice and religious hypocrisy as inextricably linked. Both examples here reveal selfish hearts.

21:1-4. A later tradition claims that thirteen receptacles for gifts to the temple treasury were in the Court of Women, accessible to Israelite women as well as to men. Because of the annual temple tax on all Jewish adult males, the temple now sported ostentatious wealth (such as a golden vine; *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15.394-95), and its officials would probably waste this widow's money; but this powerless woman, presumably ignorant of that likelihood, acts in good faith and is the greatest giver in God's sight.

21:5-7

Introduction to the Discourse on the Future

Jesus draws much of the language of this discourse from the *Old Testament.

21:5. The Jerusalem temple was one of the most splendid structures of all antiquity and seemed strong and invincible (cf., e.g., **Letter of Aristeas* 100-101); cf. comment on Mark 13:1.

21:6. Other groups also expected the temple to be judged, but most Jews, regardless of their other differences, found in the temple a symbol of their Jewish unity and would have been appalled to think that God would allow it to be destroyed (as in Jer 7:4-15). Some stones in the retaining structure were left on others (e.g., one wall still stands; not in the temple proper), but this fact does not weaken the force of the prophetic *hyperbole: the temple was almost entirely demolished in A.D. 70—roughly forty years after Jesus predicted it (Lk 21:32).

21:7. Old Testament prophets often grouped events together by their topic rather than their chronological proximity, and Jesus in this discourse does the same. He addresses two separate questions: the time of the temple's destruction and the time of the end.

21:8-19

Imminent Sufferings

21:8. Various false messiahs and messianic-type leaders modeling themselves after Moses or Joshua arose in the first century; such figures drew significant Jewish followings in Palestine as late as Bar Kochba, whom Rabbi *Akiba* hailed as the Messiah after A.D. 130.

21:9-11. Ancient *prophecy teachers usually listed these sorts of events among the signs of the end; the end was often portrayed as preceded by great sufferings or a final war. (Jesus' list omits some other omens cited by his contemporaries, such as babies born with animal heads.) Jesus says that instead these events characterize normal life until the end.

21:12-15. Synagogues were the local places of public assembly and thus provided the natural place for hearings and public discipline. Sometimes discipline was administered in the form of flogging; under second-century rules, this meant thirteen harsh strokes on the breast and twenty-six on the back. Prisons were usually holding places until a trial rather than places of punishment; punishments included execution, enslavement, banishment, confiscation of property and so forth. "Kings" could refer just to Rome's vassal princes, but could also suggest that Parthian and other rulers from the East are also in view. People in the Roman Empire knew of other parts of the world as far apart as Iceland (probably), Tanzania, India and China; in the second century, some merchants from the Roman Empire traveled to what is now Vietnam. The proclamation and consequent persecution therefore may be widespread.

21:16. See Micah 7:5-7. In a culture with a heavy emphasis on family fidelity, betrayal by a family member would sound especially harsh (though such problems as court disputes over inheritances show that the ideal was not always achieved).

21:17-19. Here Jesus offers a promise of protection (cf. 1 Sam 14:45; 2 Sam 14:11). Because hundreds, probably thousands, of Christians had been publicly murdered under Nero in Rome in A.D. 64, probably less than two decades before Luke wrote, it is clear that this is hyperbolic, not an unqualified promise (9:23-24; 21:16). (With the majority of scholars I assume that Luke did not write before A.D. 64, although the case for this date is not conclusive.) This promise suggests either spiritual survival (12:4-5) or that God will often deliver physically, as in many cases in the *Old Testament (e.g., Dan 3:27).

21:20-24

The Fall of Jerusalem

21:20. Luke's language is less ambiguous than Mark's "abomination of desolation": the war with Rome began in A.D. 66, and soon Roman armies had marched through the rest of Palestine and surrounded Jerusalem, then laid siege

to it until it fell in A.D. 70. Those who tried to flee shortly after Jerusalem was surrounded found that it was too late; some who escaped the Jewish revolutionaries inside Jerusalem were cut open by Syrian recruits outside, who were looking for jewels they might have swallowed.

21:21. The mountains of Judea were the safest place to evade invading armies, as the people in Judea had often learned (e.g., David and the second-century B.C. Maccabean guerrillas). When people in the countryside saw approaching armies, they often fled to the safety of city walls; but Rome would not break its siege, and those trapped within Jerusalem's walls would be doomed (v. 24).

21:22. The prophets often spoke of judgment against Jerusalem. God would come in a day of vengeance (e.g., Is 34:8; 61:2; 63:4; Jer 46:10; 51:6) or days of vengeance (Hos 9:7), and in some cases the prophets spoke of God's vengeance against his own unfaithful people (e.g., Jer 5:9, 29; 9:9). Although the prophets usually pointed especially to the Babylonian captivity (about six centuries before Jesus), their principle of judgment and their demand for *repentance before ultimate restoration was still applicable.

21:23. The difficulties of bearing or nursing a child under these circumstances are obvious in any culture. The text may also indicate grief over the loss of the children (cf. *2 *Baruch* 10:13-15). The language of "great distress" echoes prophecies about tribulation that would precede Israel's final repentance (Dan 12:1). The *Old Testament repeatedly describes God's judgments in history as "wrath" (e.g., on Jerusalem—Lam 1:12), as well as his future wrath in the day of the Lord (e.g., Zeph 1:14-15).

21:24. All the inhabitants of Jerusalem died in the war (by famine, disease, burning, Jewish factional fighting or fighting with the Romans) or were enslaved in the year 70. Jerusalem was left in ruins; after the second destruction in A.D. 135, Jerusalem was rebuilt as a pagan city, with a pagan temple on the site where God's temple had been. "Times of the *Gentiles" presumably refers to the period of Jerusalem's or the Jewish people's subjugation under other nations; many Jewish people envisioned a succession of four evil empires (cf. Daniel 7), Rome being the final one, before the *kingdom of God would come and deliver them from evil.

21:25-38

Be Prepared

The destruction of Jerusalem constitutes the final, universally visible earthly sign before Jesus' return; after this sign, Christ's followers should be ready for his imminent return.

21:25-26. *Josephus and writers dependent on him spoke of portents in the heavens preceding the fall of Jerusalem. These portents were meant to give the wicked cause to fear (Is 19:16; Jer 4:9). This is the language of the end (how most Jewish people in this period understood Is 13:10; 34:4; cf. 24:23; Ezek 32:7-8). Some ancient Jewish literature used this cataclysmic language for historical events (the **Sibylline Oracles* use it for an earthquake; cf. Ps 18:6-19; Jer 4:20-28), but most reserved it for the end or transformation of the present world order and the establishing of God's eternal *kingdom.

21:27. Jesus sometimes describes the *Son of Man's coming in terms Jewish literature usually reserved for God (cf. Is 19:1). Here Jesus clearly alludes to Daniel 7:13-14, where "one like a son of man" (i.e., like a human being) receives the kingdom from God.

21:28. Unlike others, believers need not fear these heavenly signs (Jer 10:2); they merely signal that "redemption" is near. Jewish teachers sometimes debated whether the Jewish people could hasten the kingdom or whether it would come only in a time dictated by God. During the revolts against Rome, Jewish patriots declared the arrival of their "redemption," or liberation from Rome; but Jesus teaches that this redemption will come solely from heaven's intervention.

21:29-31. The signs Jesus lists show that the end is imminent, just as a fig tree's leaves show what season it is. (In winter the fig tree appeared more bare than other trees.)

21:32. The length of a generation varied but was often represented in the *Old Testament by forty years (in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, forty years represents the suffering of the final generation). Jesus speaks these words near A.D. 30; the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70.

21:33. Sometimes God made promises that he noted would endure even if heaven and earth passed away (Jer 31:35-37); God's words would not pass away (*Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* 11:5). Jesus thus speaks as God here.

21:34-36. "Strength to escape" (v. 36) could refer back to the escape of verse 21 or to enduring the persecutions of verses 12-19; "standing before the Son of Man" may mean persevering or being presented triumphant before him. For this use of "snare" or "trap" as judgment imagery, cf. perhaps Is 8:14; 24:17-18; Jer 48:43-44; 50:24; Ezek 12:13; 17:20.

21:37. As sundown approached, about 6 p.m. in April, fewer and fewer

people would be in the temple courts. Because thousands of pilgrims came to the Passover feast, many had to stay in surrounding villages at night. Although eating the Passover in Jerusalem, as was expected, Jesus lodged in Bethany (Mk 11:11-12), about three kilometers east of Jerusalem on the southeastern slopes of the Mount of Olives.

21:38. “Early in the morning” could mean as early as sunrise, which would be by 6 a.m. in Jerusalem in April.

22:1-13

Preparing the Passover

22:1. The Jewish Feast of Passover was technically followed immediately by the Feast of Unleavened Bread; but because pilgrims made one trip to Jerusalem to celebrate both of them, in popular parlance they had come to be described as a single entity (e.g., in *Josephus).

22:2-6. Jewish literature reports that the *high priests bullied those who opposed them; against some popular misconceptions, the Gospels are no more anti-Jewish for their reports of high-level corruption and abuses than are the ancient *rabbis*, Dead Sea Scrolls and Josephus who report the same sort of behavior by the priestly aristocracy. (Indeed, many scholars today believe that Josephus even mentions the Jewish aristocrats alongside the Romans as involved in Jesus’ execution; despite later Christian editing, much of *Jewish Antiquities* 18.63-64 is original.) The aristocratic priests who dominated Jerusalem’s municipal elite would certainly not tolerate someone who claims that God has directed him to attack their temple cult. But they have to be cautious due to Jesus’ popularity (22:2; cf. comment on 20:5-7).

22:7. See comment on 22:1.

22:8-9. Representatives from each family would have the priests slaughter a lamb for them in the temple, then return with it to feed the whole family that night after sundown.

22:10. Commentators note that water jars (as opposed to leather wineskins) were almost always carried by women; thus a man carrying one could be a noticeable sign. In well-to-do households (as apparently here), however, slaves would carry the water. Running water was a great luxury, and in many cities people would collect water at public fountains.

22:11-13. Anyone with a two-story home, the second of which contained a

“large” upper room (not merely a small dwelling), would be considered well-to-do. This family presumably resided in the Upper City of Jerusalem, near the temple, rather than the poorer Lower City, downwind of Jerusalem’s sewage. Because the Passover had to be eaten within Jerusalem’s walls, most homes would be crowded with guests; but the accommodations for Jesus’ last meal with his *disciples would be quite adequate.

22:14-23

Eating the Passover

Both the preparation for Passover and its eating are mixed with promises and foreshadowings of the betrayal, because the Passover here itself prefigures Jesus’ death. Following the *Old Testament prophets, Judaism looked for a new exodus when God would again deliver his people from bondage, although contemporary Judaism was looking for a new Moses—not a new lamb.

22:14. The Passover was to be eaten at night. April’s sundown in Jerusalem came by 6 p.m., so the meal should have started then. Table fellowship was intimate at the feast; one or two families normally shared the meal, but here Jesus and his closest disciples make up the family unit. Palestinian Jews in this period “sat” for most meals but “reclined” for feasts, like Passover.

22:15-16. Vows of abstinence (also 22:18) were common in Palestinian Judaism: “I will not eat any such and such until this happens,” or “I vow that I will not use this until that happens.” Jewish tradition often portrayed the time of the *kingdom as a banquet. It was customary to give thanks over the cup of wine at regular meals and also at Passover.

22:17-19. The head of the household customarily gave thanks for the bread and wine before any meal but said special blessings over bread and wine in the Passover meal. We should not understand “This is my body” literally, just as we do not take literally the standard Jewish interpretation spoken over the Passover bread: “This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate when they came from Egypt.” The thought instead is of a sort of memorial (as in Ex 12:14), but, as with the Passover, one in which one symbolically reenacted, hence participated in, the past act of redemption. Those who did not understand it in these terms would have imagined it as cannibalism, a custom that horrified most people in the Mediterranean world (cf. Jn 6:52); that misinterpretation later became a pagan accusation against Christians.

22:20. Covenants were ratified by the blood of sacrifice; “covenant in . . . blood” probably evokes Exodus 24:8, “the blood of the covenant.” Here, however, a “new covenant” is in view (see also 1 Cor 11:25), echoing Jeremiah 31:31. God had also redeemed his people from Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb. Passover ritual interpreted most elements of the meal and included blessings over the cup. But the ritual certainly did not interpret the cup as blood, because Jewish *law and custom were revolted by the idea of drinking any creature’s blood, especially human blood.

22:21. Ancient Jewish readers would view betrayal by one sharing a meal as particularly scandalous, because they saw hospitality and the sharing of table fellowship as an intimate bond, initiating a covenant of friendship, often lifelong.

22:22-23. Most people in ancient Judaism stressed both God’s sovereignty and human free will, which they saw as complementary. (Modern views that see them as contradictory are based more on Greek logic than on Jewish thought or the Bible.)

22:24-30

Exaltation of the Servants

22:24-25. Jewish people were well familiar with the *Gentile model of authority: ancient Near Eastern kings had long claimed to be gods and had ruled tyrannically; Greek rulers had adopted the same posture through much of the eastern Mediterranean. Jewish people would view the Roman emperor and his provincial agents (who often showed little concern for Jewish sensitivities) in much the same light. Rulers and others who doled out favors from the vantage point of power were called “benefactors”; the practice of benefaction was widely praised in Greek circles, appearing pervasively in public inscriptions. Jesus’ reminding the disciples that seeking power is a Gentile (i.e., pagan) practice is tantamount to telling them they should not be doing it.

22:26. In antiquity age often determined rank; the youngest had the least respect. Even a socially powerful slave remained subordinate to the master (applicable even to slaves who wielded more power than peasants and others who were socially inferior to their masters).

22:27. Slaves waited on masters at table. (Although servants are probably in view here, in households without servants the female members of the family prepared and served the food.) “Reclining” was the standard Greek posture for

eating, which Palestinian Jews adopted at feasts.

22:28-30. Jewish literature often portrayed the *kingdom as a future time when Israel would partake of a banquet prepared for them (cf. already Is 25:6, for all peoples); a standard Jewish expectation for that time was that the lost tribes of Israel would be restored. Those who “judged” Israel in the *Old Testament ruled it.

22:31-38

Preparing for the Betrayal

22:31-32. Wheat would be sifted to separate the genuine wheat from other items that had gotten mixed in with it; for the image, see Amos 9:9. For winnowing away the chaff, see comment on Matthew 3:12. The background for *Satan’s demand is presumably Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-6, where Satan tries to prosecute Job before the heavenly court (the Hebrew text has “the satan,” literally “the adversary,” i.e., the accuser).

22:33-34. Ancient sources typically regarded the rooster as a reliable reporter of the advent of dawn (attested by *Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2.26; *3 Maccabees 5:23; Babylonian Talmud *Berakhot* 60b). But commentators report that in Palestine nocturnal crowings are familiar to night watchmen beginning at 12:30 a.m.; the second was about 1:30 a.m.; roosters often crow during the night. In either case the point is that the denial is imminent.

22:35. See comment on 9:3.

22:36-38. By mentioning the “sword” here Jesus is not inviting revolution like the *Zealots and other revolutionaries did* (cf. Pseudo-Phocylides 32-34). Instead, Jesus calls for a temporary and symbolic act—two are sufficient (v. 38)—so he may be charged as a revolutionary and hence “reckoned among transgressors” in accordance with Isaiah 53:12. (On the messianic import of Is 53, see comment on Mt 12:15-18.) To be without one’s outer cloak at night would leave one cold; yet Jesus suggests that it is better than being unprepared for the conflict these disciples are about to face.

22:39-46

The Prepared and the Unprepared

22:39. The walk from the upper room to the Mount of Olives took at least fifteen

minutes.

22:40. They may have arrived at Gethsemane by 10 or 11 p.m. (which was normally considered late in the evening, because agriculture and business operated by daylight). Jewish people customarily stayed awake late on Passover night to speak of God's redemption. The *disciples should have been able to stay awake to keep watch; they had probably stayed up late on nearly every other Passover of their lives.

"Temptation" here means "testing"; given the common Jewish religious uses of the word, Jesus is saying: "lest you fall prey to the testing you are about to face."

22:41-42. On the "cup of judgment," see comment on Mark 10:39.

22:43-46. The disciples are to "stand watch" like porters (slaves in charge of the door) or sentries. Some ancient texts report the rare phenomenon of sweating blood; Luke's variant may intend this phenomenon (sometimes mentioned today in connection with extreme stress) or simply that Jesus' sweat is profuse and dripping the way blood would.

22:47-53

The Betrayal

22:47. Because they had been sent by prominent men of Jerusalem, the band that comes to arrest Jesus is probably the temple guard. This guard is known to have possessed the weapons mentioned here (swords and clubs); clubs were said (by later rabbis) to have characterized the corrupt priestly aristocracy, as well as being useful in controlling rioters.

22:48. A kiss was a sign of special affection among family members and close friends, or of a disciple's honor and affection for his teacher. Thus Judas's betrayal kiss is a special act of hypocrisy (cf. Prov 27:6).

22:49-50. Being well-to-do, *high priests had many servants. Although the servant mentioned here is probably not a Levite and is thus unable to minister in the temple anyway, some note that those who were missing appendages such as ears were barred from serving in the sanctuary. This attack on this servant would confirm the armed (22:47) expedition's suspicions that Jesus' followers are violent revolutionaries (22:36-38).

22:51. Many people associated leaders who were thought to be messiahs with popular revolt and the overthrow of the Gentile kingdoms that oppressed

Israel; a *Messiah who would heal his attackers was not part of anyone's messianic picture at the time.

22:52-53. Subversives (e.g., the later assassins who slew Jewish aristocrats under cover of the crowds in the temple) did their acts secretly or in a way that would avoid capture; Jesus' alleged subversion was public and unconcealed. Here it is Jesus' enemies, not Jesus, who acts under the cloak of darkness. Night was commonly associated with evil and crime; in popular superstition (later found in rabbinic teaching as well), night was the time when the *demons ruled and witchcraft operated.

22:54-62

Peter's Denials

22:54. This trial breaks a number of Jewish legal rules, if later documents correctly indicate the state of Jewish *law in this period*. Taking Jesus to the high priest's home at night breached ancient legal protocol (Jewish and Roman).

22:55. Peter's trespassing on the high priest's property (even an outer court) required serious commitment from a Galilean fisherman. Household watchman and temple guards wait to learn the results of the trial inside. They may have planned to stay up late for Passover anyway, as was the custom.

22:56-58. Slaves in aristocratic households exercised more power and status than the average free person. Although the high priest had many servants, the slave girl would recognize that Peter and the guards are not from the household; further, Peter was not dressed like one of the guards. As a servant in an aristocratic priestly household near the temple, she may have been at the temple, where she could have gotten a good look at Jesus' disciples in the temple courts.

22:59. Galilean accents differed from Judean accents, certainly in *Aramaic and presumably (as undoubtedly here) in Greek; Galileans were especially noted for mispronouncing guttural sounds. The high priest's servants and temple guard lived in Jerusalem and would see themselves as Judeans. Regional accents were difficult to hide (cf. Judg 12:6).

22:60-62. For most people in the ancient Mediterranean, a rooster's crowing marked daybreak. Some scholars have suggested that this crowing refers to an earlier Palestinian rooster crowing between 12:30 and 2:30 a.m.

22:63-71

The Decree of the Sanhedrin

22:63-65. Jewish *law (as preserved in the more Pharisaic tradition of the later rabbis) permitted public flogging of a condemned person; it did not permit the treatment described here—mocking and beating—certainly not before a person had been proved guilty in a trial. Jewish law meticulously guarded the rights of the accused and erred on the side of mercy in official decisions; thus the behavior described here would have revolted the *Pharisees and other pietists. Jesus' words could not even be construed as blasphemy by the strict definitions of later rabbis (possibly held by Pharisees in this period). Like most ancient elites, however, the priestly aristocracy would not feel bound to such rules.

22:66. By at least waiting till morning for an official hearing (as opposed to any informal interrogations that may have taken place earlier), those representatives of the Sanhedrin present maintained some semblance of legality in the proceedings; night trials were illegal and would not be respected even by honorable Roman governors.

“Leading priests,” “elders” and “*scribes” were three groups represented on the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious court of Israel. In later tradition the full Sanhedrin had seventy-one members, normally assembled in a meeting hall in the temple called the Chamber of Hewn Stone, where they sat in a semicircle with the high priest in the center. The number may have been simply an average, and Josephus, writing in the first century, suggests that they met quite close to the temple, but not in it. In any case, although the body acted as a whole, not all its members concurred (23:51); writers would often make a general statement about a group without listing explicit exceptions (cf. Jer 26:16, 24).

22:67-68. If extant reports of ancient Jewish law are accurate, the high priest could not legally force Jesus to convict himself out of his own mouth. Nevertheless, he asks whether Jesus thinks of himself as a *messiah—hence, to the high priest's mind, as a revolutionary. A prophet could speak the truth while doubting that his hearers would accept it (Jer 38:15).

22:69. Jesus' response is a claim to be not a merely mortal messiah but the cosmic ruler of Daniel 7:13-14. “Power” was sometimes used as a Jewish title for God; Luke simplifies the phrase for his Greek readers as “power of God.”

22:70-71. The religious authorities serve as their own witnesses that Jesus claims to be a subversive, a revolutionary (23:2). Although codified only later, the spirit of Jewish law resisted condemning a prisoner by his own admission, but Jesus' critics here treat Jesus' words not as admission of an offense, but as an

offense itself. Although they might construe Jesus' words as "blasphemy" for purposes of the court, they also seemed to confirm suspicions about Jesus politically—the issue in which Pilate would be interested (23:2).

23:1-12

Accusations Before Pilate and Herod

23:1. The visit to *Pilate would be early in the morning, because Roman officials met the public only from sunrise to before noon.

23:2. "King Messiah" became a standard title of the *Messiah in later* rabbis; "Messiah" meant simply "anointed one," but in popular parlance it was most often used for the king from David's line who would be associated with the restoration of the *kingdom to Israel.

Despite 20:22-25, the leaders interpret Jesus' messianic claim the only way they know how: according to the category of prophetic revolutionaries. Such revolutionaries had become common in their day; some leaders among them appeared to be potential messianic figures, a pattern that would climax in Bar Kochba, the purported messianic warrior who would lead his people to a bloody defeat in A.D. 132–135. Such political messiahs threatened the religious authorities' power and security and were especially troublesome to Rome. In addition to genuine revolutionaries, a number of prophets gathered followings, expecting God to intervene for Israel; but Rome regarded even predictions of an emperor's demise as treason. All such popular movements threatened the aristocratic priests' base of power and the nation's stability.

23:3-4. Pilate apparently understands Jesus' claim in a religious or philosophic rather than a political sense and therefore does not feel that it comes under Roman civil jurisdiction. Further, Pilate's relationship with the priestly aristocracy is known to have been strained. On Luke's theme of Roman authorities exonerating Christians, see the discussion of Luke's legal purpose in the introduction to Acts.

23:5. A Galilean had led the tax revolt of A.D. 6; Judeans also tended to view Galileans as inferior to themselves, although some of Galilee was urban and much of it was in touch with the larger Mediterranean culture, as Jerusalem was.

23:6-7. Herod Antipas would be in Jerusalem for the feast and was probably staying at the old Hasmonean (Maccabean) palace. Pilate had the authority to try Jesus if he had committed a crime in Pilate's area of jurisdiction; but sometimes

the right of extradition was allowed, and Antipas might thus be free to try Jesus for a crime committed in Galilee. By refusing jurisdiction, Pilate could take the matter off his own hands.

23:8-10. This Herod was the one who had murdered John; cf. comment on Mark 6:14-29. Many people wanted to see signs; in some popular stories (notably a later one in *Apuleius), their curiosity got them in trouble with sorcerers. Of the four Gospels, only Luke reports two hearings before the governor separated by one before a Herod; Acts reports two trials of Paul before procurators with a trial before another Herod, Agrippa II. Ancient Greco-Roman historians liked to point out parallels between related figures in history.

23:11. The “bright” or “elegant” (NIV, NRSV) robe may be a white one, characteristic of Jewish kings. This apparel would be an appropriate mockery from Antipas’s bodyguard.

23:12. Herod and Pilate had had plenty of opportunities to become alienated; for instance, Antipas had intervened in a matter concerning votive shields (reported in *Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 299-300); on another occasion Pilate had pilfered the temple treasury for funds for an aqueduct; even the event of Luke 13:1 could have been the provocation. Giving the ambitious Herod Antipas a sign of influence in Jerusalem would certainly create a “friendship,” which in upper classes often meant a political alliance.

23:13-25

Pilate and the Crowds

23:13-17. On the Lukan motif of Roman authorities exonerating Christians, see the introduction to Acts.

23:18-25. As a clearly violent revolutionary, Barabbas appeared to Pilate to be a greater danger than Jesus. Romans were known for their emphasis on justice, but Romans were also politicians concerned with crowd control: the emperor himself pacified the masses with shows in the arena and free grain, and public outcry had previously forced Pilate to withdraw the Roman standards from Jerusalem. For many Roman governors, efficiency in ruling provinces and keeping peace took precedence over individual justice; for instance, a Roman soldier who had burned a *law scroll was executed to pacify Jewish antagonism, not because the Romans cared about burning their religious book.

23:26-32

Road to the Cross

23:26. Condemned criminals normally bore their own crosses (i.e., the horizontal beam of the cross), but in this case someone else is drafted, perhaps due to the severe precrucifixion beating often administered, which the other Gospels report Jesus had received (cf. also Lk 18:33).

Cyrene was in what is now Libya in North Africa and included a large Jewish community; “Simon” is a Greek name often used by Jewish people (because it sounded like the patriarch Simeon). Devout Jewish pilgrims from throughout the Mediterranean world came to Jerusalem during Passover. Roman soldiers could impress anyone into service to carry things for them. Because it is a feast and work is forbidden, Simon is not coming from “the field” (literally) as a worker; perhaps he is late for the festival, only now arriving from Cyrene, or perhaps he has rejoined the day’s festivities from where he is residing temporarily in the countryside.

23:27. Authorities used executions as public warnings, and crowds generally went to view an execution. Later rabbinic tradition claims that the pious women of Jerusalem often went to mourn the executed, providing a narcotic drink to dull the victim’s pain. (Rulers sometimes forbade funerals and public mourning for condemned persons; but nationalistic Jews would sympathize with fellow Jews executed by the Romans for being revolutionaries.) In antiquity women usually expressed mourning more dramatically than men.

23:28. “Daughters of Jerusalem” designates Jerusalemite women (e.g., Song 1:5; 2:7; 3:5) but could also recall some judgment oracles (Is 3:16-17; 4:4). The admonition to “mourn for yourselves” was also a prophetic cry of judgment (Is 32:9-14; Joel 1:5).

23:29. Jesus’ statement is the sort of lament mothers would offer when their children died (*2 *Baruch* 10:13-15). *Josephus reports that some mothers were reduced to eating their children during the famine in Rome’s siege against Jerusalem, A.D. 66–70 (cf. Lev 26:29; Deut 28:53; 2 Kings 6:29).

23:30. The prophets had used the same image Jesus uses here as an image of awful judgment (cf. Hos 10:8; Is 2:10, 19-21). Jesus especially uses Hos 10:8, changing the wording only slightly.

23:31. Unlike a green one, a dry tree would easily catch fire. The point may be that Jesus is “green” wood, not really a revolutionary; how much greater would be the Roman judgment against the dry wood, the real revolutionaries? Or

that if they murdered the innocent, how much more would they destroy themselves (Jewish leaders fought one another as well as the Romans in 66–70)? Or the saying may simply mean that Jerusalem is becoming more ripe for judgment. Jesus may also allude back to the trees and Jerusalem’s fall in 21:24, 29-30, though this option seems less likely.

23:32. Authorities preferred to execute people on festivals, when the executions would warn the greatest number of people against rebellion. It was also less work for the soldiers if they could execute several convicts at once.

23:33-43

On the Cross

23:33. The site of the crucifixion might have been named “Place of the Skull” because so many deaths occurred there. The traditional “Calvary” (KJV) is from Latin *calvarius*, “skull.”

23:34. Despite the precedent of *Old Testament prayers for vengeance (e.g., 2 Chron 24:22; Ps 137:7-9; Jer 15:15; 17:18; 18:23; 20:12), Jesus prays that God will forgive his persecutors. Those who were executed were supposed to say, “May my death *atone for all my sins*”; *but Jesus confesses instead the sin of those who falsely convicted him, who under Old Testament law were liable for his penalty before God.* Ancient biographers often paralleled different figures, and Luke parallels with Jesus the first martyr of his second volume, Stephen (Acts 7:60). Roman custom awarded the soldiers the victim’s clothes. People in antiquity made many decisions by means of casting lots (see comment on Acts 1:26).

23:35. Ridicule was one of the sufferings inflicted on the naked man hanging on a cross. Ancient writers often liked irony; the double irony here is that Jesus does save others, and that the leaders utter lines like *Satan’s (4:3, 6-7, 9).

23:36. One might view the soldiers’ offer of “sour wine” or “wine vinegar” (NIV) as an act of mercy, because sour wine could act as a painkiller and was also often used as a remedy for thirst; but Luke declares that it is done only as part of their ridicule. That some is on hand is not surprising; soldiers and others used it because it quenched thirst better than water and was cheaper than normal wine.

23:37. The soldiers’ taunt may include a touch of *Gentile cynicism toward Judaism, which was widespread despite (or partly because of) Roman conversions to Judaism.

23:38. The condemned person or a member of the execution squad sometimes carried the charge (Latin *titulus*) to the site of execution.

23:39-41. Jesus' interaction with his fellow victim is Luke's ultimate example of Jesus receiving sinners and outcasts, although Luke (unlike Mark) has called them "evildoers" or "criminals" (NIV) without specifying that they were revolutionaries.

23:42. A request to "remember" the supplicant could mean to look out for them once one was able (cf. Gen 40:14). To "enter his kingdom" was to begin to reign; at the cross, only clear-sighted faith could recognize that this dying rabbi Jesus would genuinely reign as *Messiah, true king of the Jews.

23:43. Jewish literature typically contrasted "paradise" (the "garden of Eden") with "*Gehenna," or hell. Although Jewish texts disputed the location of paradise (e.g., in the third heaven; or on the perimeters of the circle of the earth—like a Greek view of the Elysian Fields), they often mentioned it as the abode of the righteous after death or after the *resurrection. Thus both Jesus and this condemned man would proceed directly to the abode of the righteous after death.

23:44-49

Jesus' Death

23:44. "All the earth" (KJV) means simply "the whole land" (NIV, NRSV; "the whole country" GNT cf. Mt 9:26). The "sixth hour" would come shortly before noon, the "ninth hour" shortly before 3 p.m.; crucifixions rarely ended so quickly. The latter time, when Jesus dies, is close to the time of the evening offering in the temple. Darkness was one of the plagues in Egypt (Ex 10:22) and occurs in the prophets as a judgment for the end time (often due to clouds of rain, locusts, smoke, etc.; Is 13:10; Ezek 30:3, 18; 32:7-8; Joel 2:2, 10, 31; 3:15; Amos 5:18; Zech 14:6). An eclipse (cf. 23:45) was considered particularly ominous, especially when it occurred at length and in the middle of the day (the sun was said to be at its peak at midday); cf. Amos 8:9.

23:45. The "veil" (KJV, NASB) or "curtain" (NIV, GNT, NRSV) is probably the one between the holy of holies—inhabited only by God, and where no mortal could enter except the *high priest once each year—and the sanctuary where the priests ministered (Ex 26:33). Some believe that the point of the veil's rending is that God provides access for all people into his presence; others argue that it is more likely that it indicates instead the departure of God from the temple, as in

Ezekiel 10–11.

23:46. This line from Psalm 31:5 is said to have often been recited at the period of the evening offering—about the time of Jesus’ death.

23:47. Whereas Mark has “*Son of God,” Luke emphasizes an implication of that claim: “innocent.” Roman pronouncements of innocence were important to Luke’s audience; see the introduction to Acts. Soldiers of the Roman army stationed in Palestine were auxiliaries mostly recruited from the eastern Mediterranean, especially from Syria. Although the centurion may be ethnically Syrian, however, for Luke’s hearers he would represent Rome.

23:48. Beating breasts was a characteristic sign of mourning (cf. 18:13; Jer 31:19; Nah 2:7), like other mourning activities such as tearing one’s hair and throwing dust on one’s head). Jewish women bystanders would offer this as the only public mourning these criminals could get, because none was normally permitted after the disposal of their bodies.

23:49. Family and friends would usually be present at an execution; probably only the male *disciples would be in danger as potential revolutionaries. No one stood too close to the cross, because that could obstruct the view; most crosses were lower to the ground than many modern pictures depict. To Palestinian Jews, the fact that these women accompanied Jesus’ group of disciples could have been scandalous.

23:50-56

Jesus’ Burial

23:50-51. Luke, whose readers are not clashing with Palestinian Jewish leaders (as are Matthew’s), is more apt to distinguish different elements within that leadership than is Matthew. In Jesus’ day, Judaism was quite diverse, because no one group could lay claim to all the power; but after A.D. 70, when much of the competition had been eliminated by the destruction of the temple (the *Sadducees’ power base) and the scattering of other groups, some other members of the Palestinian Jewish elite sought to consolidate their religious power.

23:52-53. Condemned criminals did not normally receive such honorable burials; but exceptions seem to have been made on the intercession of well-to-do family or friends, as the skeleton of a crucified man buried in another aristocratic Jewish tomb of this period testifies.

23:54-56. Because bodies decomposed rapidly, mourners were allowed to anoint, wash and wrap the body in its shrouds even on the sabbath. More elaborate arrangements that these loyal women *disciples wish to bestow on Jesus, however, might wait until the sabbath (sundown Friday evening to sundown Saturday evening) has passed.

24:1-12

The First Announcement

24:1. The sabbath ended at sundown Saturday evening; as soon as daylight breaks (by 6 a.m. at this time of year) these women head for the tomb. (In popular superstition, night was dangerous due to the predominance of *demons at that time, but the women probably do not travel at night because it would be too hard to find the tomb, which was outside the city walls on unfamiliar terrain.) Spices may not have been used for everyone but were often used for the bodies of special persons (e.g., Herod). They reduced the immediate stench of rapid decomposition in the normally hot Mediterranean days. After one day and two nights, the women could expect that the body would already stink. But Jerusalem is over two thousand feet above sea level and is cool enough in April that in a sealed tomb the body would have still been approachable.

24:2-3. The stone was probably a large, disk-shaped stone rolled along a groove in front of the tomb. That it had been rolled back could have suggested tampering or a tomb robbery, although nothing valuable had been buried with the body. More likely, just outside Jerusalem, it could suggest seizure by the authorities.

24:4-5. Angels often appeared as human beings in the *Old Testament (Josh 5:13) and also often appeared in radiant garments or bodies (cf. 2 Kings 6:17; Dan 10:5-6). The latter was especially the case in contemporary Jewish texts (i.e., in the expectations of the people to whom this revelation is being given).

24:6-12. Part of the reason for the *apostles' unbelief is that a resurrection of this nature contradicted their messianic expectations*; another reason may have been that many men considered the witness of women nearly worthless, because they regarded women as unstable and undependable. (These opinions appear, e.g., in *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.219 and Justinian, *Institutes* 2.10.6, as well as Mishnah *Yevamot* 15:1, 8-10; 16:7; *Ketubbot* 1:6-9; Tosefta *Yevamot* 14:10; *Sifra Vayyiquira Dibura Dehobah* pq. 7.45.1.1.)

24:13-35

The Emmaus Appearance

24:13. Sixty stadia was about seven miles. Apparently more than one place in Palestine was called Emmaus (1 Maccabees 3:57; 4:3; Josephus reports a different one). The exact site of Luke's Emmaus is no longer known.

24:14-17. Jewish travelers would not consider it unusual for a stranger, who is also a fellow Jew, to join their small company walking for some distance, especially if they assume him to be a Passover pilgrim on his way home. People normally conversed as they walked; later *rabbis favored discussion about the Torah. Jesus' feigning ignorance to ask a question does not mean that he does not know the answer (cf. Gen 3:9, 11; 4:9-10). On their lack of recognition, see comment on 24:31-35.

24:18. News spread quickly by word of mouth, and public executions at a feast would be widely discussed. No matter where a Greek-speaking pilgrim visiting Jerusalem for the feast was from, he or she would probably have heard something about these matters. (The description of Cleopas's surprise resembles, for example, astonished characters in ancient stories confronting people awakening from many years of sleep and unaware of recent events.) Unless he speaks with emotional *hyperbole, however (which is possible), Cleopas appears to suppose too much to presume that everyone would regard these events as the most obvious of the past several days.

24:19-21. Cleopas's words reflect the confusion all Jesus' followers must have felt: Jesus was a prophet, as in the *Old Testament, or maybe the *Messiah; but the religious leaders of the nation, who of all people should have embraced and followed him, had rejected him (like some prophets of old). In Galilee and outside Palestine, where the priestly aristocracy was not as directly known as in Judea, respect for the temple leadership no doubt ran higher.

24:22-24. See comment on 24:6-12.

24:25-27. If we may infer his subjects from the texts used elsewhere in Luke-Acts and in early Christianity, plus obviously messianic texts, Jesus surely includes references to Deuteronomy 18:15-18, Isaiah 9, 11 and 53; for suffering preceding exaltation, Isaiah 53:12 might be key. The implication, however, is that Jesus adduced principles applying to his messiahship from throughout the Old Testament. (Luke may supply samples of the intended references in some speeches in Acts; these could also include analogies with Old Testament savior figures, as in Acts 7, where some suffered before being exalted.) Later *rabbinic

literature regularly praised interpreters with deep insight into Scripture, such as that Jesus demonstrates here.

24:28. It is polite for Jesus to make as if he would go on, unless they invite him to stay with them; such behavior could also test a person's hospitality (Gen 19:2).

24:29. Hospitality demanded no less than the lodging these *disciples offer Jesus, especially because it is approaching sundown; night travel, particularly as one got farther from Jerusalem, would be dangerous due to robbers, and it would be difficult to see. Jewish people throughout the ancient world welcomed fellow Jews who were traveling to spend the night, and insistence was part of hospitality (e.g., Judg 19:5-9; 1 Sam 28:23).

24:30. It was also part of hospitality to offer bread to a guest, no matter how late in the evening (see comment on 11:5-6). After the long walk, these disciples would be hungry anyway, and all three are travelers. But by breaking and giving bread to them, Jesus takes the role usually held by the head of the household, which he had exercised among his disciples.

24:31-35. Greeks told stories of supernatural beings who could change shape or disguise themselves or others. More relevantly, in Jewish sources angels were sometimes said to come in disguises and reveal themselves only at the end of their mission (e.g., Raphael to Tobit and Tobias in the book of Tobit). But this was not the case with humans, including dead persons restored to earthly life in the Old Testament. Although one reason these disciples do not recognize Jesus may be that their eyes have been blinded (24:31; cf. 2 Kings 6:17), Jesus' subsequent disappearance also seems to indicate that he has a new kind of body, the sort of body promised the righteous in the future resurrection.

24:36-43

The Nature of Jesus' Resurrection

24:36-38. Because the *resurrection of all the dead had not yet occurred, the disciples think Jesus might be a "ghost" or some other spirit. On the popular level, some people held a belief in ghosts (cf. Mk 6:49) without considering that it contradicted the idea of afterlife in paradise or hell (*Gehenna) and the doctrine of the bodily resurrection. But Jesus assures them that he is not an example of a ghost but of the bodily resurrection.

24:39-40. Some victims were tied onto crosses; others were nailed on. The

nails would have been driven through the wrists (which could be called part of the hand). A nail through the ankles may not have been common (there does appear to be evidence from an excavated example), but there was nothing to have kept soldiers from doing it. Roman execution squads were left to their own ingenuity to devise various creative ways to torture their dying victims.

24:41-43. In most Jewish traditions, angels did not eat earthly food. Spirits had no need for food.

24:44-53

The Final Commission

24:44-46. See comment on 24:25-27. Although Scripture could be summarized by other divisions (e.g., the Law and the Prophets; 16:16), other Jewish writings mention the threefold division of the *Old Testament, as here. Jewish interpreters sometimes spoke of God “opening their eyes” to his truths, language with Old Testament precedent (Ps 119:18). Although the Gospels report Jesus’ disagreement with his contemporaries on many issues, every stratum of Gospel tradition reports his appeal to the Old Testament to define his mission. Although he may have disagreed with many of his contemporaries on Old Testament interpretation, he agrees with them concerning its authority. Luke does not elaborate Jesus’ teaching here, but probably alludes to what he believes was its content in some speeches in Acts (e.g., Acts 7:2-53; 13:16-47).

24:47-48. Isaiah spoke of Israel being witnesses to (or against) all the nations in the end time (43:10; 44:8), by means of the endowment of the *Spirit (42:1; 44:3). The Spirit (mentioned in the parallel passage in Acts 1:8) was especially associated with the ability to prophesy, to speak as God inspired a person to speak.

24:49. Jewish people sometimes spoke of being “clothed” with spiritual qualities (e.g., 1 Chron 12:18 [literally; Heb. and Gk. 12:19]; Sirach 17:3). Given the parallel with these verses in Acts 1:4-8, “power from on high” may echo Isaiah 32:15, where the Spirit is poured out “from on high.”

24:50. Priests lifted their hands to give the priestly benediction over the people (“May the Lord bless you, and keep you . . .”—Num 6:24-27).

24:51. See comment on the ascension in Acts 1:9-11.

24:52-53. Many of the temple courts were used for prayer. Ancient writers often framed literary units by starting and ending on the same point; Luke

frames his whole Gospel by starting and ending it in the temple.

John

INTRODUCTION

Authorship. For the purposes of interpretation, the specific author's name is less important than that the Gospel appeals to eyewitness testimony; there is wider agreement on the latter point than on the former. Early tradition is almost unanimous that "John" wrote the Fourth Gospel, although scholars debate which John. The Gospel itself claims to come from an eyewitness (19:35), whom the internal evidence suggests is the "beloved disciple," whose role most closely fits that of John, son of Zebedee, in the other Gospels. This perspective fits the respect that classicists often accord to external attestation, although it is a minority view among *New Testament scholars today*. (*One mediating solution has been the proposal that a Johannine "school" composed the Gospel using traditions that the beloved disciple had passed on to them; most famous teachers had disciples to pass on their teachings in such settings.*)

The two strongest objections to Johannine authorship of this Gospel today are its date and its differences from the other extant Gospels. The argument based on date objects that an original disciple of Jesus would have been in his eighties or nineties when the Gospel was written. This challenge is of limited weight, however; although most people did not live that long, mortality was highest in early childhood; typical disciples were in their teens; and we know of other ancient thinkers in their eighties with sharp memories and wit. That one of the Twelve (or another close disciple) should have survived into his nineties and would then be pressed to record his experience of Jesus is not implausible. The other objection, based on differences from Matthew, Mark and Luke, is more persuasive but would lose most of its force if John represents an independent tradition or witness to Jesus, writing in his own style and with his own interests (see the discussion of *genre). Flexibility in the ways ancient biographies were written allow John to pursue a distinctly different approach from Mark and those that followed him.

Although pseudonymous works existed in antiquity, they stated their purported author rather than implied him; unless we want to argue for the author's *implicit* pseudonymity (implying that he was one of Jesus' disciples),

the internal evidence supporting an eyewitness author should be allowed to stand. For this reason, the Fourth Gospel's claim to authorship by an eyewitness is significant. We would accept this claim in most other ancient biographies or histories.

Date. Tradition holds that the Gospel was written in the 90s of the first century; that it could not have been written much later than this date (against some nineteenth-century scholars' views) has been confirmed by a manuscript fragment of the Gospel dating to the early second century. A date in the 60s has also been proposed, but most scholars hold to the mid-90s, which best fits the setting described below and the probable setting of the book of Revelation, which stems from the same Christian circles as the Fourth Gospel.

Where John Was Written. Because John focuses (even more than Matthew) on the *Pharisees as opponents, it is plausible that his Gospel is written in Galilee or Syria, where conflicts with the Judean Pharisees would be most easily felt in the 90s of the first century.

Tradition strongly holds, however, that John lived in Ephesus in Asia Minor, although he had originally come from Palestine and probably maintained awareness of issues in Palestine through contacts there. In this case the material may have taken shape in retellings in Palestine before massive numbers of Palestinian Jews settled elsewhere (including Asia Minor) in the wake of the war of 66–73. Two of the seven *churches in the book of Revelation grapple with precisely the issues that his Gospel addresses: Smyrna (Rev 2:9-10) and Philadelphia (3:7-9). Smyrna became a center of Johannine tradition in the next generation and faced the sort of situation most scholars find in this Gospel.

Setting. Archaeological discoveries have demonstrated the appropriateness of the Fourth Gospel's traditions to a Palestinian Jewish milieu—that is, the place where both Jesus and the beloved disciple had lived. The Gospel applies these traditions to a new situation. The temple's destruction in A.D. 70 and the scattering of many Judeans afterward fit the emphasis on the new temple in John.

John also expresses concern for conflict with *synagogues (16:2; cf. 9:22; 12:42). After A.D. 70, the strength of many Jewish religious groups in Palestine was broken; the Pharisees began to take more leadership in religious matters. Jewish Christians may have provided their main competition, and many scholars argue that Judean leaders even added a line to a standard prayer that cursed sectarians, among whom they included the Jewish Christians. (Scholars are not, however, unanimous regarding the precise date and object of the curse.) John's

specialized concern with the Pharisees in his Gospel (other groups are mostly limited to his passion narrative) may suggest that their opposition is somehow related to the opponents his readers face in their own communities.

After the war of A.D. 70, many Jews in the Roman Empire wanted to distance themselves from sects emphasizing messiahs, the *kingdom and* prophecy. Some believers were made unwelcome by local synagogue authorities, treated as if their very Jewishness was held in question because they believed in Jesus as *Messiah and kingdom-bringer (cf. perhaps another response in Rev 2:9; 3:9, also addressing western Asia Minor). The Roman authorities were also suspicious of people who did not worship the emperor but were not Jewish (see the discussion of setting in the introduction to Revelation). John writes his Gospel to encourage these Jewish Christians that their faith in Jesus is genuinely Jewish and that it is their opponents who have misrepresented biblical Judaism.

Genre. For the *genre of Gospels in general, see the introduction to the Gospels. Although all four Gospels fall into the general ancient category of biography, that genre was broad enough to allow considerable differences of style. For instance, Luke writes like an ancient Greek historian; Matthew's heavy use of the *Old Testament shows his interest in interpreting such history. But John seems to be the most interpretive of all, as has been recognized since the early church fathers.

Jesus' discourses in this Gospel also require special comment. The style of Jesus' speaking in John differs from his words in the first three Gospels; it may be helpful to observe that ancient writers were trained to practice paraphrasing speeches in their own words. Some scholars have also argued that John applies Jesus' words to his readers' situation under the *Spirit's guidance; Jewish teachers and (more thoroughly) storytellers often developed different kinds of Old Testament *narratives by describing them in terms most relevant to their audience. Most of Jesus' discourses in John 3–12 are conflicts with the Jewish authorities and could bear some resemblances to the briefer rabbinic accounts of arguments with opponents. Others compare John's lengthy speeches to the interpretive speeches often found in ancient historiography. In any case, John remains a Gospel—an ancient biography of Jesus.

Message. One emphasis in the Fourth Gospel concerns God's *law and word. The Pharisees claimed that God's law supported their positions; but John emphasizes that Jesus himself is the Word (1:1-18) and the appointed messenger of the Father, and that to reject him is thus to reject the Father.

Another area of emphasis is the Spirit. The Pharisees did not believe that the

Spirit, which they associated especially with the ability to prophesy, was active in biblical ways in their own day; thus they did not claim to have the Spirit. In contrast, John encourages the believers to argue not only from the law but also from their possession of the Spirit. The Pharisees claimed to know the law through their interpretations and traditions; the Christians claimed to know God personally and therefore claimed to understand the law's point better than their opponents did.

One recurrent set of characters in the Gospel, identified with these opponents of Jesus, is "the Jews." Although Jesus and the disciples are clearly Jewish, John usually uses the term "Jews" in a negative sense for the Judean authorities in Jerusalem, whom he sometimes identifies (perhaps to update for the language of his own day) with "the Pharisees." Anti-Semites have sometimes abused the Gospel of John to deny Jesus' Jewishness, ignoring the situation in which John writes. But John often uses irony (a common ancient literary technique), and by calling the Judean authorities "Jews" he may ironically answer these authorities who say that the Jewish Christians were no longer faithful to Israel. He concedes the title to them, but everything else in his Gospel is meant to argue just the opposite: that the genuine heirs of Israel's ancestral faith are the Jewish Christians, even though they have been expelled from their Jewish communities.

John uses many images common in his culture, especially contrasts between light and darkness (common in the *Dead Sea Scrolls*), *above and below* (common in Jewish apocalyptic literature), and so on.

Commentaries. For background, some of the most useful commentaries are the multivolume commentaries by Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols., AB 29 and 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966–1970); Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003); and Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 3 vols. (New York: Herder & Herder/Seabury/Crossroad, 1968–1982); and the single-volume commentary on the Greek text by C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978). On a less technical level, useful works for background include, among others, Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Jo-Ann A. Brant, *John*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); Jey J. Kanagaraj, *John*, NCC (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013); on a mediating but still one-volume level, see George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2nd ed., WBC (Nashville: Nelson, 1999); Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).

Helpful specialized studies abound, e.g., Paul N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered*, LNTS 321 (New York: T & T Clark, 2006); Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); John Christopher Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community*, JSNTSup 61 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, Sheffield Academic Press, 1991).

1:1-18

The Word Becomes Flesh

The Greek term translated “word” was also used by many philosophers to mean “reason,” the force that structured the universe; *Philo combined this image with Jewish conceptions of the “word.” Although Greek conceptions undoubtedly did have some influence on how John’s hearers understood his phrase, they were not philosophically trained. (Statistically it is likely that most could not even read.) The most relevant background is background that all of them shared, at the very least from what they heard read in synagogues or churches each week: God’s “Word” was Scripture. The personification of this “Word” makes sense. The Old Testament had personified Wisdom (Prov 8), and ancient Judaism eventually identified personified Wisdom, the Word and the Law (the Torah), sometimes identifying them with each other (e.g., Sirach 24:1, 23; Baruch 3:28–4:1).*

By calling Jesus “the Word,” John calls him the embodiment of all God’s revelation in the Scriptures and thus encourages his Jewish Christian hearers, marginalized from some of their synagogues, that only those who accept Jesus truly honor the law fully (1:17). Jewish people considered Wisdom/Word divine yet distinct from God the Father, so it was the closest available term John had to describe Jesus; to communicate, we normally take the best available language and then adjust it as needed (e.g., the Greek and English words for “God” were applied to other deities before being applied to the true God).

1:1-2. Beginning like Genesis 1:1, John alludes to the Old Testament and Jewish picture of God creating through his preexistent wisdom or word. According to standard Jewish doctrine in his day, this wisdom existed before the rest of creation but was itself created. By declaring that the Word “was” in the beginning and especially by calling the Word “God” (v. 1; also the most likely reading of 1:18), John goes beyond the common Jewish conception to imply that

Jesus is not created (cf. Is 43:10-11).

1:3. Developing Old Testament ideas (e.g., Ps 33:6; Prov 8:30), Jewish teachers emphasized that God had created all things through his Wisdom/Word/Law and sustained them because the righteous practiced the law. (Some even pointed out that Gen 1 declared “And God said” ten times when he was creating, and this meant that God created all things with his Ten Commandments.) Ancient Jewish teachers would have agreed with verse 3. Influenced by Platonic thought, *Philo also believed that God created the world through his *logos* (“word”), which he viewed as a sort of pattern in God’s mind; but the background for creation through God’s word is already present in the Old Testament.

1:4. Developing Old Testament promises of long life in the land if Israel obeyed God (e.g., Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16; 8:1; 11:9), Jewish teachers emphasized that the reward for obeying God’s word was *eternal life. John declares that this life had always been available through God’s word, which is the same word that he identifies (in 1:14) with Jesus. Jewish teachers called many things “light” (e.g., the righteous, the patriarchs, Israel, God), but this title was most commonly applied to God’s law (a figure also in the Old Testament, e.g., Ps 119:105).

1:5. That darkness did not “apprehend” the light may be a play on words (it could mean “understand” or “overcome” [NRSV]). Similarly, in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, the forces of light and darkness were engaged in mortal combat, but light was predestined to triumph.

1:6-8. “Witness” was traditionally a legal concept in the Greco-Roman world and in Jewish circles. Isaiah used it in relation to the end time, when the people God delivered would testify to the nations about him before his tribunal (43:10; 44:8). This image recurs throughout this Gospel; although people in this period used the term widely enough that it did not always retain legal connotations, many scholars envision a legal metaphor in this Gospel (in view of expulsions from the synagogue in 9:22; 12:42; 16:2; cf. comment on 14:16; 16:8). On John the Baptist himself, see 1:15.

1:9-10. Jewish people expected that the *Gentiles were unenlightened. A later Jewish tradition even declared that God had offered the law to all seventy nations at Mount Sinai but lamented that they had all chosen to reject his word; only Israel had accepted it. In the same way, the world of John’s day has failed to recognize God’s Word among them.

1:11. Here John breaks with the image in Jewish tradition, according to which Israel alone of all nations had received the law. Jewish people expected

that the faithful of Israel would likewise accept the revelation when God gave forth the law again in the end time (Is 2:3; Jer 31:31-34). (In most Jewish tradition, the law would, if changed at all, be more stringent in the world to come.) They realized, of course, that in many generations even Israel disobeyed God.

1:12-13. The emphasis is thus not on ethnic descent (v. 11) but on spiritual rebirth; see comment on 3:3, 5 for details on how ancient Judaism might hear the language of rebirth. Jewish tradition applied the title “children of God” to Israel (cf. Ex 4:22; Deut 32:19-20).

Table 3. Parallels Between Exodus 33–34 and John 1:14-18

Exodus 33–34	John 1:14-18
The revelation of God's word, the Torah	The revelation of God's Word, Jesus
God dwelt among his people in the tabernacle (33:10); Moses pleaded that God would continue to dwell with them (33:14-16)	The Word “tabernacled” (literally, in 1:14) among people
Moses beheld God's glory	The disciples beheld Jesus' glory (1:14)
The glory was full of grace and truth (34:6)	The glory was full of grace and truth (1:14)
The law was given through Moses	The law was given through Moses (1:17)
No one could see all of God's glory (33:20)	No one could see all of God's glory (1:18a), but it is fully revealed in Jesus (1:18b)

1:14. Neither Greek philosophers nor Jewish teachers could conceive of the Word becoming flesh. Since the time of *Plato, Greek philosophers had emphasized that the ideal was what was invisible and eternal; most Jews so heavily emphasized that a human being could not become a god that they never considered that God might become human.

That John had in mind one particular passage, which addresses God giving the law to Israel, is confirmed by the accumulation of multiple allusions. When God revealed his glory to Moses in Exodus 33–34, he revealed not just dramatic splendor but his *character* (Ex 33:19). Particularly relevant here, his glory was “abounding in covenant love and covenant faithfulness” (Ex 34:6), which could also be translated “full of *grace and truth.” Like Moses of old (see 2 Cor 3:6–18), the *disciples saw God’s glory, now revealed in Jesus. As the Gospel unfolds, Jesus’ glory is revealed in his signs (e.g., Jn 2:11) but especially in the cross, his ultimate act of love and the ultimate expression of God’s heart for people (12:23–33). The Jewish people were expecting God to reveal his glory in something like a cosmic spectacle of fireworks; but for the first coming, Jesus reveals the same side of God’s character that was emphasized to Moses: his covenant love.

“Dwelt” (KJV, NASB) here is literally “tabernacled,” which means that as God tabernacled with his people in the wilderness, so had the Word tabernacled among his people in Jesus. In Jewish literature Wisdom also appeared on earth and “lived among” people (Baruch 3:37–38), although there was no thought of Wisdom becoming human.

1:15. Scholars have suggested that some people may have thought too highly of John the Baptist, a mere prophet, at the expense of Jesus the *Messiah (cf. Acts 19:3–5); such a situation would invite the writer to put John in his place. Others see John as merely the prototypical witness here, modeling the Gospel’s larger theme. In any case, in the Fourth Gospel, John always defers to Jesus, as a proper prophet should.

1:16–17. Grace and truth were clearly present in the law (Ex 34:6), but Moses could not witness their fulness because he could see only part of God’s glory (Ex 33:20–23). Their ultimate expression would come in the Word/law enfleshed.

1:18. Even Moses could see only part of God’s glory (Ex 33:20), but in the person of Jesus God’s whole heart is fleshed out for the world to see. “In the Father’s bosom” (KJV, NASB; cf. “side”—ESV) means that Jesus was in the position of greatest possible intimacy (cf. Jn 13:23; cf. “in closest relationship with the Father,” NIV; “near to the Father’s heart,” NLT). Jewish people often viewed personified Wisdom as the image of God (Wisdom of Solomon 7:26), so that seeing Wisdom was seeing God (see Jn 14:9). Ancient writers often framed a *narrative by beginning and ending it with the same phrase or statement; this framing device is called *inclusio*. In John 1:1 and (according to the most likely

reading of the text) 1:18, John calls Jesus “God.”

1:19-28

John’s Witness to the Jewish Leaders

1:19. Although a few priests were *Pharisees in Jesus’ day, there was generally little cooperation between them, and the Pharisees (1:24) certainly had never had power to send priests on missions from Jerusalem. A minority belonged to the ruling aristocracy, but a larger number of the members of the ruling elite were *Sadducees. By the time John writes, however, the Pharisees probably represent Palestinian Christians’ main opposition. It was within the tradition of Jewish writing John follows to update the language, the way preachers often do today to bring home the point of the text. John thus focuses on the Pharisaic element of Jesus’ opposition.

1:20-21. Elijah had been caught up to heaven alive, and Jewish people anticipated his return, which was predicted in Malachi 4:5. (The later *rabbis thought of him as a master of Jewish *law who would sometimes show up to settle rabbinic disputes or be sent on angelic errands to deliver rabbis in trouble. They expected him to settle legal issues when he returned; others expected him to perform great miracles or to introduce the Messiah.) “The Prophet” undoubtedly means the promised prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15-18).

1:22-23. Applying Isaiah 40:3 to himself means that he is the herald of a new exodus, announcing that God is about to redeem his people from captivity, as he had in the days of Moses. This theme appears in many of the *Old Testament prophets and was part of Jewish expectation in Jesus’ day. Indeed, would-be prophetic leaders usually gained followings in the “wilderness.” *Qumran sectarians, who (according to the most common view) lived in the wilderness, applied the verse to their own mission.

1:24-25. Of the many kinds of ceremonial washings in Jesus’ day, the most significant once-for-all kind of washing was *proselyte *baptism*. Gentiles were usually baptized when they converted to Judaism; this was widely known and is even mentioned by the Greek philosopher *Epictetus*. *By reporting that John asks Jews to be baptized in an act of conversion, the Gospel writers suggest that John treats Jews as if they are pagans, which was unheard-of (see comment on 3:3-5). The Fourth Gospel often contrasts water rituals and the Spirit (3:5; see comment on 4:7-26).*

1:26. John probably employs the common ancient technique of irony: that they do not “know” the coming one speaks ill of them spiritually (1:10, 33-34).

1:27. Slaves carried their master’s sandals (the one servile activity that was too demeaning for rabbis’ *disciples to duplicate); John claims that he is not worthy to be even Christ’s slave. Prophets were often called God’s servants in the Old Testament (e.g., 2 Kings 18:12; 19:34; 20:6; 24:2; Jer 35:15; 44:4).

1:28. “Beyond the Jordan” means Perea, one of the territories controlled by Herod Antipas. Because *Josephus tells us that John was later imprisoned in the fortress Machaerus in the same region (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.116-119), it makes sense that this is where he ministers and is later arrested.

1:29-34

John’s Witness to His Disciples

1:29. John’s saying probably alludes to the Passover lamb (19:36), likely with the *Old Testament image of sacrificial lambs blended in. (By this period, Passover lambs seem to be viewed as sacrificial; cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3.248, 294; 11.110; *Jewish War* 6.423.) John may also allude to Isaiah 53:7, 11. “Taking up” sin might allude to the scapegoat (Lev 16:21-22), but it also suits a sacrificial lamb.

1:30-31. The whole purpose of John’s *baptism is to “prepare the way” (cf. v. 23). To “come after” a person sometimes meant to be his *disciple, so some scholars propose that Jesus actually followed John for a time, as well as being baptized by him; others interpret “come after” in this passage only chronologically.

1:32. The dove might evoke, if anything in particular, God’s promise of a new era (Gen 8:10-12).

1:33-34. In Old Testament *prophecy, God pours out his own *Spirit (Is 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 39:29; Joel 2:28-29), a role here assumed by Jesus. Most Jewish groups believed that the Spirit was not as active in prophetic inspiration as in the Old Testament period. The emerging rabbinic movement and many of their allies, who linked the Spirit almost exclusively with prophecy, emphasized that the direct prophetic endowments of the Spirit had ceased when the last Old Testament prophets (Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi) died. Many others believed that prophecy continued, yet without major prophets; some, like the Qumran sectarians, believed that the Spirit worked among them as the end-time

remnant of Israel. For many of John's hearers, a claim that the Spirit is being restored would be a claim that the messianic era is at hand. In the Old Testament, the Spirit often was said to come "on" people temporarily rather than explicitly remaining (e.g., Judg 11:29; 2 Chron 20:14).

1:35-39

John's Disciples Follow Jesus

1:35-37. See comment on 1:29. Teachers normally trained *disciples, who then went out to teach others. To recommend disciples to a greater teacher was rare, required great humility and denoted confidence in the other teacher's superiority. Conflict sometimes arose between disciples of rival teachers, though we do have reports of exceptional cases where a teacher, very impressed with another sage, referred his students to him.

1:38-39. Asking such indirect questions (they want to come home with him) was characteristic of ancient politeness and hospitality. The "tenth hour" by usual reckonings would be about 4 p.m., possibly too late in the afternoon to walk a long way home before dark and thus implying that a hospitable person would invite them to spend the night. (By another system of time reckoning, unlikely here, the "tenth hour" could mean 10 a.m.; this system fits 19:14 better but not 4:6.) Rabbis also could lecture disciples while traveling.

1:40-51

The Disciples Witness Too

Like John the Baptist, the disciples learn that the best witness is simply to introduce people to Jesus and let him do the rest.

1:40-41. Given close kinship ties, the testimony of a brother would count significantly. Of the four Gospels, only John uses the Hebrew or *Aramaic* title, Messiah, although he also translates it into Greek because that is the language of his Jewish readers. (Outside Palestine, most Jews in the Roman Empire spoke Greek.)

1:42. "Cephas" is Aramaic and "Peter" Greek for "rock." Nicknames were common, and *rabbis sometimes gave characterizing nicknames to their disciples. In the* Old Testament, God often changed names to describe some new characteristic of a person (Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Joshua; as a negative

declaration, see Jer 20:3).

Greeks and Romans would attribute supernatural knowledge (like knowing the name of a person one had never met, as Jesus does here) to miracle workers (usually magicians); Jewish people would attribute it to prophets or prophetically endowed teachers; but see especially comment on 2:24-25 for John's emphasis.

1:43. Some radical Greek teachers were said to have called disciples to follow them (e.g., Socrates reportedly called Xenophon), but normally ancient students or their parents chose their own teachers. As often in Matthew and John, "following" could mean "becoming a disciple," because disciples could show respect to masters of Torah (*law) by walking behind them. In the Fourth Gospel, however, this term also has greater significance (see 10:4).

1:44. Bethsaida's name suggests its association with the fishing industry; the town was not well known outside Galilee. Its name was apparently changed to Julia in A.D. 30 (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.28), but the Gospels retain its name from the time of Jesus' ministry. Mark says that Simon and Andrew were from Capernaum (1:21, 29; 2:1), and excavations confirm that many early Christians thought that Peter's home was there. It is not unlikely that as fishermen in a fishing cooperative with James and John (Mk 1:19) they took their boats back and forth between Capernaum and Bethsaida; perhaps the latter had a regional market or the family had moved from the latter to the former.

1:45. By the one predicted in "the Law and the Prophets" (a common Jewish designation for the Old Testament), Philip no doubt means the Messiah (e.g., Deut 18:15-18; Is 9; 11; 53).

1:46. Some suggest local village rivalry as a factor in Nathanael's question. Nazareth seems to have been a very traditional, orthodox town; priests later considered it ritually clean enough to move there. But Nazareth was relatively small and obscure; some early estimates of the population are about sixteen hundred to two thousand inhabitants, with some more recent estimates even below five hundred within the village itself. (Then again, many Galilean villages probably had fewer than three hundred residents.) Yet people often expected important figures to hail from important places, and Nazareth was no Jerusalem (or Bethlehem). It lay about four miles from the large city of Sepphoris, which rivaled Tiberias (6:23) for its urban Greek character in Jewish Galilee.

1:47. Jesus here makes a wordplay on the Old Testament Jacob, or "Israel," who *was* a man of guile (Gen 27:35; 31:26); see Jn 1:51.

1:48-49. Teachers often taught disciples under trees, which were popular for this and a wide variety of other purposes because of their shade (too many

purposes for us to be certain what Nathanael was doing under the tree). But Jesus' knowing *which* tree Nathanael had sat under is a demonstration of genuine supernatural knowledge (cf. Susanna 54, 58). On this knowledge, see comments on 1:42 and 2:24-25.

1:50-51. The opening of the heavens indicated a major revelation (e.g., Ezek 1:1). Jesus' words allude to Genesis 28:12: Jesus is the new way between heaven and earth (Jacob's ladder) on whom angels ascend and descend; like Jacob of old, this "genuine Israelite" Nathanael (Jn 1:47) would receive this new revelation.

2:1-11

Jesus' First Sign

Jesus values the groom's honor above the demands of ritual purity.

2:1. "Third day" here does not refer to the third day of the week, because virgins were married on the fourth day (Wednesday) and widows on the fifth; nor does it seem to fit the count of days in 1:29, 35, 43. Presumably it simply means (as it normally did) "the third day after the event just narrated" (counting the days inclusively, so that it was the day after the next day). But ancient writers often bracketed off segments of their work by starting and ending on the same note (a practice called *inclusio*); thus John may use this designation to point toward 2:19 and link this story (2:1-11) with the prediction of Jesus' death and *resurrection (see on 2:4).

"Cana" may be Kefar Kanna (over three miles from Nazareth), but most scholars prefer Khirbet Kana (over eight miles from Nazareth). Either site would be a long walk, close enough to Nazareth to explain how the host knows Jesus' family.

2:2. Weddings ideally lasted seven days, and hosts invited as many people as possible, especially distinguished guests like prominent teachers. Many guests would come for only part of the time, however, making the requisite resources harder to predict.

2:3. To run out of wine at a wedding was a social faux pas that could become the subject of this village's jests for years; the host was responsible to provide his guests with adequate wine even if the feast lasted seven days.

Women were often closer to where the wine and food were prepared; thus Mary learns of the shortage of wine before word reaches Jesus and the other

men. Her words may be a polite Middle Eastern way of implying that he should do something; guests were to help defray the expense of the wedding with their gifts, and it seems that their friend needs some extra gifts now.

2:4. “Woman” was a respectful address (like “Ma’am”) but hardly a customary address for one’s mother. Jesus’ statement here establishes further polite distance (though “What have I to do with you” is usually a harsh, not a polite, expression in biblical language). One’s “hour” could refer to the time of one’s death. Because Jesus’ “hour” in John refers especially to the cross, here Jesus is saying, “Once I begin doing miracles, I begin the road to the cross.”

2:5. Like many *Old Testament seekers of God who would not take no for an answer (Gen 32:26-30; Ex 33:12–34:9; 1 Kings 18:36-37; 2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6, 9; 4:14-28), Mary acts in confidence that Jesus will hear her entreaty. Ancient Jewish readers, who told stories of miracle workers who insisted that God would send rain, would read Mary’s action as demonstrating strong faith. Her words may evoke Pharaoh’s similar words concerning Joseph, a God-empowered provider (Gen 41:55).

2:6. The description of the stone jars indicates that they contained enough water to fill a Jewish immersion pool used for ceremonial purification. Although *Pharisees forbade storing such water in jars* (and Essenes and *Sadducees also avoided this), some Jews were probably less strict. Jewish people also poured water over their hands to purify them, but such large jars would not have been suitable for direct pouring, though water could be drawn from them. In any case, these large jars were being reserved for ritual purposes. To employ waterpots set aside for purification for non-ritual purposes violated custom; Jesus here values the host’s honor above ritual purity customs. Stone jars were common because they were less likely to contract ritual uncleanness than those made of other substances.

2:7. The jars were consecrated for sacred use; Jesus shows more concern for his friend’s wedding than for contemporary ritual.

2:8. “Master of the banquet” was a position of honor (Sirach 32:1-2); one of his primary duties was to regulate the distribution of wine to prevent excess that would (especially in a Jewish context) ruin the party. At least in Greek banquets, guests sometimes elected this person; at other times the host would select him or he would be chosen by lot. His role included presiding over the entertainment and controlling the level of dilution for the wine; thus some observers might have held him partly responsible for the host’s running out of wine prematurely.

2:9-10. Soon after the grape vintage, all wine would contain some alcohol

(neither refrigeration nor hermetic sealing existed). But the alcohol level of the wine was not increased artificially (distillation was not in use); rather, the wine was watered down, with (on average) two to three parts water to one part wine. Sometimes at Greek parties drunkenness was induced through less dilution or the addition of herbal toxins, but Jewish teachers disapproved of such practices; that drunkenness is part of the celebration at Cana is unlikely. Yet it normally made sense to serve the better wine first because, drunk or not, guests' senses would become more dulled as the seven days of banqueting proceeded.

2:11. God had often manifested his glory by doing signs (Ex 16:7; Num 14:22; for glory, cf. comment on Jn 1:14). Moses' first public sign was turning water into blood (Ex 7:20; cf. Rev 8:8); Jesus' first sign is turning water into wine.

2:12-25

The Raising of a New Temple

Especially in the devastating wake of the temple's recent destruction (A.D. 70), Jesus' earlier warnings about the old temple and announcement of a new one would prove very relevant for John's hearers.

2:12-13. Pious Jews who could attend the Passover in Jerusalem customarily did so; unlike Jewish people in distant lands, Galileans could make the pilgrimage regularly. Galileans went "up" to Jerusalem (because of Jerusalem's higher elevation).

2:14. The sheep and doves (and, to a lesser extent, the cattle; cf. Lev 1:3-9; 4:2-21; 8:2; 22:21) were necessary for the people's sacrifices; moneychangers were needed to standardize foreign and Galilean currencies into coinage useful to the sellers of the sacrificial animals.

2:15-16. Jesus insists on a different priority for activity in the temple; cf. perhaps Malachi 3:1-6.

2:17. The *disciples recall Psalm 69:9, a psalm of a righteous sufferer. Psalm 69:21 speaks of vinegar being given him to drink (cf. Jn 19:29). In the context of John, Jesus' zeal "consumes" him by bringing about his death for the world (cf. 6:51).

2:18. Some Jews expected prophetic leaders to validate their authority with signs. (Some for example claimed to be able to part the Jordan or make the walls of Jerusalem collapse, like a new Moses or Joshua.)

2:19-20. Many groups in Judaism expected a new or transformed temple. But the old temple was one of the most magnificent buildings in antiquity, the symbol to which the rest of Judaism looked. To most Jews, and especially to the aristocracy who controlled Jerusalem's temple, speaking of the temple's demise sounded like opposing God. Herod the Great began work on the temple in 20–19 B.C., and work continued until A.D. 64; its forty-sixth year mentioned here places Jesus' words in A.D. 27.

2:21-22. A prophetic word was often understood only in retrospect (e.g., 2 Kings 9:36-37; the Delphic oracle's words to Croesus). Many Jewish interpreters (attested especially in the *Dead Sea Scrolls) interpreted Scripture in this way.

2:23-25. Miracle workers were often thought to know some hearts, but only God, who was called "searcher of hearts," was thought to know the hearts of all people.

3:1-8

Conversion as Birth from Above

Jesus explains to Nicodemus that religious knowledge and ethnicity are not a sufficient basis for a relationship with God; one must be born into his family by the *Spirit. John often contrasts water rituals and the Spirit (3:5; see comment on 4:7-26).

3:1. A wealthy and prominent Nicodemus (Nakdimon ben Gorion) is known in Jerusalem in this period, though we do not know whether John means the same one. As a highly educated "ruler" or leader in the Jewish community, John's Nicodemus was surely well-to-do.

3:2. One might come by night to avoid being seen, or because Jewish teachers who worked during the day could study only at night (cf. Ps 119:148; the latter was undoubtedly not the case with Nicodemus, who would not need to work—v. 1). But John includes the detail because it serves the theme of light and darkness (1:4-5; 11:10; 13:30) that brackets this *narrative (3:19-21).

3:3-4. Jesus speaks literally of being born "from above," which means "from God" ("above," like "heaven," was a Jewish circumlocution, or roundabout expression, for God). One could also construe the phrase as meaning "reborn," which Nicodemus takes literally. (Ancient writers, including those of the *Old - Testament—as in the Hebrew text of Jer 1:11-12; Mic 1:10-15—often used plays on words, and John includes quite a few other puns; they also sometimes

used other characters as less intelligent foils for a narrative's main spokesperson.) Most evidence for Greek traditions about individual rebirth come from a later period, possibly formulated in light of Christianity, but some Jewish analogies probably lack direct Christian influence. Because Jewish teachers spoke of *Gentile converts to Judaism as starting life anew like "newborn children" (just as adopted sons under Roman law relinquished all legal status in their former family when they became part of a new one), Nicodemus should have understood that Jesus meant conversion; but it never occurs to him that someone Jewish would need to convert to the true faith of Israel. The idea of a transforming conversion reflects texts such as Ezekiel 36:26 (evoked in this passage of John), although such ideas may appear elsewhere (e.g., 1 Sam 10:6; Wisdom of Solomon 7:27; 8:17).

3:5. Converts to Judaism were said to become "as newborn children"; their conversion included immersion in water to remove Gentile impurity. "Born of water" thus could clarify for Nicodemus that "born from above" means conversion, not a second physical birth.

The Greek wording of 3:5 can mean either "water and the Spirit" or "water, that is, the Spirit." Ezekiel 36:24-27 used water symbolically for the cleansing of the Spirit (cf. especially the *Dead Sea Scrolls), so here Jesus could mean "converted by the Spirit" (cf. 7:37-39)—a *spiritual proselyte* baptism. Whereas Jewish teachers generally spoke of converts to Judaism as "newborn" only in the sense that they were legally severed from old relationships, an actual rebirth by the Spirit would produce a new heart (Ezek 36:26).

3:6-7. The "spirit" that is born from God's Spirit may reflect the "new spirit" of Ezekiel 36:26. Everyone understood that like begets like.

3:8. The term for "Spirit" also meant "wind" in both Greek and Hebrew. (Although Jesus probably spoke especially *Aramaic in Galilee, a high-status teacher in Jerusalem might be equally comfortable with Greek.) One could translate "sound of the wind" as "voice of the Spirit" (for plays on words, see comment on 3:3-4). The wind is unpredictable and uncontrollable (see Eccles 8:8; cf. Eccles 1:6, 8, 14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9). The Spirit, associated with water in Ezekiel 36, was symbolized as wind in the next chapter, Ezekiel 37; some Jewish interpreters linked this image with Genesis 2:7 (cf. Jn 20:22).

3:9-21

The Revealer from Above

Jesus as incarnate Wisdom (see comment on 1:1-18) is the only one fully qualified to reveal God and reconcile the world to him.

3:9-10. Nicodemus's denseness makes him a foil for Jesus the revealer. For this theme in some ancient literature, see the discussion of Mark's message in the introduction to Mark.

3:11-12. "Earthly things" might be the analogies of water and wind used earlier in the passage. Only an eyewitness of heaven, such as the Father and the Son, could fully testify about heaven. Wisdom of Solomon 9:16 notes that people can scarcely guess about earthly matters, and thus asks how people could guess about heavenly ones.

3:13. In the context of John's allusion to Wisdom of Solomon 9:16 (in Jn 3:11-12), the next verse may be relevant: no one could learn God's ways without wisdom and the *Spirit sent from above (Wisdom of Solomon 9:17). Jewish literature provides other parallels to John 3:11-13, but the closest are Jewish texts that speak of divine Wisdom coming down from God, seeking to reveal the ways of heaven (God) to people (cf., e.g., Baruch 3:29; Wisdom of Solomon 9:10; God's powerful "word" descending to slay Egypt's firstborn in Wisdom of Solomon 18:15). Jesus might also imply a contrast with Jewish mystics who sought to ascend to heaven, and with the Jewish tradition that Moses ascended not only Mount Sinai but up into heaven to receive God's *law. Now Wisdom/Word/Law itself—one greater than Moses—has come down from heaven in the flesh (see comment on 1:14-18).

3:14-15. "Lifting up" is another play on words (3:3-4): Jesus returns to heaven by way of the cross, "lifted up" like the serpent Moses lifted up to bring healing (Num 21:4-9; for "lifting up," see comment on Jn 12:32-33). "Lifting up" had long been a play on both exaltation and execution (Gen 40:20-22); here the language evokes Isaiah 52:13, where God's servant would be lifted up (and the *Septuagint adds, "glorified"), a passage immediately preceding Isaiah 53. The serpent passage in Numbers (Num 21:8-9) directly precedes a passage about God's gift of a well in the wilderness (Num 21:16-18), relevant for John's following chapter (Jn 4:6, 14). Ancient Egyptians used images of snakes as magical protection against snakebites; this cursed the snakes. In Wisdom of Solomon 16:6, this bronze serpent symbolized salvation. Moses set the serpent on a standard, which the Septuagint renders with the same word that translates "sign" (*semeion*), making Jesus' death a sign (cf. Jn 2:18-19). *Midrashically, some Jewish interpreters could have linked this bronze serpent with Moses' rod that became a serpent (Ex 4:3; 7:9-10, 15), hence a "sign" (Ex 7:9). Those who*

saw the serpent in Numbers 21 would “live” (21:8-9); later Jewish interpreters sometimes applied biblical promises of life to eternal life, and in John, those who see Jesus live forever (cf. Jn 6:40; 14:19).

3:16-18. God “gave” his Son by him being lifted up like the serpent (see comment on 3:14-15). The term often translated “so” means not “how much” but “in this way”; the tenses of the Greek verbs reinforce the sense: “This is how God loved the world: he gave his son.” Some translations’ “only begotten” is literally “special, beloved”; Jewish literature sometimes applied it to Isaac, to emphasize the greatness of Abraham’s sacrifice in offering him up. Eternal life is literally the “life of the world to come” (from Dan 12:2); John’s present tense (“have”) indicates that those who trust Jesus begin to experience that life already in the present time.

Despite ancient Jewish literature’s mention of God’s love for humanity and its emphasis on God’s special love for Israel, nothing compares with this sacrifice, especially not for “the world,” which in John normally means those not yet following God’s will. The *Old Testament* also emphasizes God’s immeasurable love (e.g., Ex 34:6-7; Deut 7:7-8; Judg 10:16; Is 63:9; Hos 11:1-4, 8-11; cf. Is 16:11; Jer 48:36). Jewish people expected full salvation and judgment in the day of judgment; like eternal life, however (just noted), John recognizes these events taking place also in the present (3:17-18), because the promised Messiah has already come.

3:19-21. Ancient texts (especially the *Dead Sea Scrolls) often contrast light and darkness as good and evil in the same way John does here. Everyone would have understood John’s point. Bracketing off a narrative by starting and ending on the same point (3:2) was an ancient literary device.

3:22-36

The Witness and the Son

3:22-23. On John’s *baptism, see comment on Mark 1:4-5. Jews who practiced initiatory baptisms of other Jews could be viewed as sectarian. Away from the Jordan River, water was not plentiful, so in their itinerant ministry Jesus’ disciples (4:2) probably do not baptize everywhere, although ceremonial immersion pools were widespread in Palestine. Many scholars think that Aenon was near modern Ainun; although it lacks water today, many springs remain in the area. Although this reconstruction is not certain, if it is correct it is

interesting that Aenon lay near Shechem, the center of Samaritan habitation in Jesus' day, so that John the Baptist is already ministering in an area near where Jesus will be ministering in chapter 4.

3:24. There is a possible echo of Jer 37:4. John was imprisoned and executed in Herod Antipas's strong and well-known fortress Machaerus. This was located in Perea, across the Jordan (i.e., not in Judea or Galilee proper), where much of John's ministry occurred (1:28; 3:26; 10:40).

3:25-26. On Jewish ceremonial purification, cf. 2:6 and 11:55. This theme runs through the Gospel: ceremonial washing (2:6), *proselyte baptism (3:5), perhaps Jacob's well (chap. 4) and the healing waters of Bethesda (chap. 5), Siloam's water for the Feast of Tabernacles (7:37-38; 9:7) and perhaps 13:5-11 and 19:34. Disciples of rival teachers often competed, but John is not competing with Jesus.

3:27-28. "Heaven" was a fairly common Jewish circumlocution for God. In Jewish custom, one person who represents another acts on his sender's authority but must adhere to the constraints of his mission; the real authority always stems from the sender; for being sent ahead, cf. perhaps Malachi 3:1. Such customs might help make the point more intelligible for John's hearers.

3:29-30. Weddings epitomized joy (e.g., *3 Maccabees 4:6). The "friend of the bridegroom" refers to the Jewish custom of the *shoshbin*, who was much like the best man in weddings today. Like other friends, this leading friend of the bridegroom might offer speeches of encouragement at the wedding; he might also be a witness for the wedding, contribute to it financially, possess the evidence of the bride's virginity, and so forth. (To illustrate the way that Jewish traditions valued both this role and weddings in general: later *rabbis claimed that God was the *shoshbin* for Adam's wedding.) The most significant emphasis of Jewish weddings was joy.

3:31. One who originates from heaven, as opposed to others who were from earth, most naturally applies in Jewish texts to divine Wisdom (see comment on 1:1-18).

3:32-33. Prominent individuals had distinctive marks on their signet rings, which they would press into hot wax seals on the outside of documents to attest that they were witnesses to the execution of the document. Merchants could use seals to attest a container's contents. Rulers could also share their seals with the highest officials who would act in their name (cf. Gen 41:42).

3:34. Because many thought that the *Spirit had been quenched in Israel till the future restoration of Israel, and many thought that only a few had merited the

Spirit, to say that someone had unlimited access to the Spirit (whether Jesus has unlimited access as giver or receiver here is debated) indicates that he is greater than any person who had ever lived.

3:35-36. Again, the language of the Father authorizing the Son and judging the world by their response to him portrays the Son more highly than any mere human was viewed in Jewish literature; cf. 3:31. Again, language that John's Jewish contemporaries often applied to the future judgment is applied also to the present here (see comment on 3:16-18).

4:1-6

Jesus Travels Through Samaria

Jesus' positive reception by *Samaritans* contrasts with his reception in Jerusalem (2:13–3:9). In John 4:1-42, Jesus crosses strict cultural boundaries separating culturally distinct peoples, genders and moral status, pointing to the new and ultimate unity in the Spirit. Some features of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman evoke earlier well scenes (Gen 24; 29; Ex 2), but to a different effect.

Samaritans worshiped Israel's God devoutly, practicing circumcision and the Sabbath. Nevertheless, insofar as our later sources can indicate, they accepted only the Pentateuch, regarding Israel's subsequent history as apostate. They claimed that the true site for worship was Mount Gerizim (edited even into their version of the Ten Commandments), rejecting the Jerusalem temple. Like Jews, they looked for an end-time restorer; thus one prophetic figure promised to restore sacred vessels left by Moses at Mount Gerizim (before *Pilate butchered them*). *Greek culture and language heavily affected Samaria, although Greek need not have been the first language of Samaritan villagers. (The Gentile Greek city Sebaste, in the midst of Samaria, probably exerted an influence; cf. Acts 8:5.)*

4:1-2. On Jesus' *baptism, see comment on 3:22-23. Although ceremonial washings were common in Judaism, those who practiced initiatory baptisms (those that initiated people into a particular Jewish group) were viewed by other Jews as sectarian.

4:3-4. The "necessity" of the Samaritan route may have been spiritual rather than geographic. One could travel around Samaria (east through Perea), but many pilgrims to and from the feasts in Jerusalem took the shorter route straight

through Samaria (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.118; *Jewish War* 2.232); the quickest route, it yielded a three-day journey (*Josephus, *Life* 269). But if Jesus was near John (3:22-23) and the latter was in the Jordan valley (3:23), Samaria might even be a geographic detour, since Jesus could have traveled north near Bethshan. Since Jesus ends up staying awhile (Jn 4:40), the Father's plan rather than haste probably motivates his need to pass through Samaria. Samaritans and Jews worshiped the same God and both used the *law of Moses (although the Samaritans made a few changes in it). But they despised one another's places of worship and had remained hostile toward one another for centuries.

4:5. Some identify "Sychar" here with Shechem (closest to Jacob's well), or perhaps more often with modern 'Askar (about 1.5 km northeast of the well).

4:6. The site of Jacob's well is still known; it is within view of Mount Gerizim, which was holy to the Samaritans (based on Deut 11:29; 27:12). This site begins a *narrative that emphasizes holy geography (especially 4:20). Although this concept is foreign to most modern Western readers, ancient people were widely attracted to special "holy sites"—which Jesus here supersedes.

The "sixth hour" normally means noon; thus Jesus and the *disciples had been journeying for perhaps six hours. (According to a much less likely system of time reckoning here, "sixth hour" would mean 6 p.m.—cf. 19:14—in which case Jesus and his disciples would be ready to settle down for the night and lodge there—4:40.) Weary travelers sometimes would sit, including at wells; most relevant here is Ex 2:15 (which in Jewish tradition Josephus claims occurred at noon). Because noon was particularly hot, most people sought shade and often rested during that time. The local women, who often would come in groups to draw water, would not come in the midday heat of this hour; people throughout the ancient Mediterranean world avoided being out in the midday heat except when no alternative was available. This woman, however, had to do so, because she had to come alone (for her reasons, see comment on 4:7).

4:7-26

A Gift for a Samaritan Sinner

In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' gift of the *Spirit supersedes the ritual waters of John the Baptist (1:26, 33), ceremonial purification (2:6), *proselyte* baptism (3:5) and the Feast of Tabernacles (7:37-39; 9:7); note discussion of background on each of these passages. It also apparently supersedes water having other religious

symbolism associated with holy sites, such as healing sanctuaries (5:2-8) and Jacob's well (4:7-26). For John's readers, who have the Spirit but lack many of the rituals of their opponents, these contrasts would constitute an encouragement.

4:7. That this *Samaritan woman comes to the well alone rather than in the company of other women (and at the hottest hour of the day, when she would not run into them) probably indicates that the rest of the women of Sychar did not like her, in this case because of her marital history (cf. comment on 4:18). Although many Jewish teachers warned against talking much with women in general, they would have especially avoided Samaritan women, who, they declared, were unclean from birth. Other ancient accounts show that sometimes even asking water of a woman could be interpreted as flirting with her; this might be especially the case if she had come alone at an unusual time. Jesus breaks various conventions of his culture here. In addition, Isaac (through his agent, Gen 24:17), Jacob (Gen 29:10) and Moses (Ex 2:16-21) met their wives at wells; such precedent created the sort of potential ambiguity at this well that religious people wished to avoid.

4:8. Rabbis sometimes sent *disciples to procure supplies. Many *Pharisees considered many of the foods of the Samaritans unclean.

4:9. John provides cultural background in this verse. Although his summary statement might contain an element of *hyperbole, the animosity between Jews and Samaritans was well known; on rare occasions it even led to bloodshed requiring Roman intervention. Judeans usually regarded Samaritans more favorably than Gentiles, but views varied and tended to be negative. The woman first confronts this encounter in ethnic/cultural terms: under Jewish *law, even her water vessel (the same term as in 2:6) was considered unclean for Jewish drinking. Ironically, in John's Gospel only non-Jews recognize Jesus' Jewishness (here and 18:33-35).

4:10. "Living water" simply meant "fresh" or "flowing" as opposed to stagnant or well water (cf. the *Septuagint and Hebrew text of Lev 14:6, 51; Num 19:17; Zech 14:8), but given John's propensity for double meanings (see 3:5), here the term may also mean "water of life." Cf. Jer 17:13.

Some scholars have pointed out that the *rabbis spoke of Torah, the law, as God's gift and as living water. But John uses the symbolism differently to refer to the Spirit (7:37-39). The background here is God as provider of the source of genuine life (Is 12:3; Jer 2:13).

4:11. Jesus has no jar to lower into the well; moreover, even with a jar he

could not get “living” (i.e., fresh or flowing) water from a well (see comment on 4:10). Although we cannot know the well’s depth in the first century, in modern times it is about a hundred feet (around thirty meters) deep.

4:12. Her saying “our father Jacob” is an affront to the Jewish teaching that the Jewish people were children of Jacob, whereas the Samaritans had much Gentile blood. The one who is greater than Jacob (for this theme cf. also 8:53) does not argue the point with her; it is peripheral to the issue he wishes to drive home.

4:13-14. Cf. Sirach 24:21 (where Wisdom promises that whoever drinks from her will thirst for more of her). If Jesus alludes at all to Moses’ well in Numbers 21:16-18, it may or may not be coincidental that that passage immediately follows the account of the serpent (Num 21:4-9) mentioned in John 3:14.

4:15. The images of water and wells were often used symbolically in antiquity; like many other characters in John, however, she takes Jesus literally when he is speaking figuratively. Nonwealthy rural women usually went to nearby water sources to draw water; they could let down their pitcher or other vessel into a spring, and sometimes would carry it back on their head.

4:16-17. In view of the ambiguity of the situation (see comment on 4:7), her statement, “I have no husband,” could mean “I am available.” While wells were common places of conversation, they also could serve as places for finding spouses, most notably in some well-known biblical accounts (Gen 24; 29; Ex 2). Although she obviously came to the well alone, this Jewish man converses with her (against custom; Jn 4:27) and might be thought to ask a leading question. Jesus removes the ambiguity, which stems from his refusal to observe customs that reflected ethnic and gender prejudice, not from flirtation.

4:18. Jesus clarifies her ambiguous statement: she had been married five times and is not married to the man with whom she now lives. If she were repeatedly widowed, people might well think something was wrong with her (cf. Gen 38:11; Tobit 6:14-15). A more common situation would be that she had been divorced most or all of these times; in this case, most ancient readers would (rightly or wrongly) believe there was something wrong with her. (Carrying a vessel, she was not wealthy enough to have initiated the divorces.) Samaritans were no less pious and strict than Jews, and she was apparently ostracized from the Samaritan religious community—which would have been nearly coextensive with the whole Samaritan community (see comment on 4:6-7).

4:19. That she came to the well alone might lead a visitor to suspect that she

had a negative reputation; only a prophet, however, could supply details. Prophets were considered capable of sometimes knowing others' thoughts (see comment on 1:42). Although this frequent designation for Jesus is inadequate (4:44; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17), it at least moves the conversation beyond 4:17. Yet Samaritans apparently rejected the biblical prophets between Moses and the end-time restorer. The Samaritans awaited not just any prophet, but the greatest prophet, one like Moses (Deut 18:15-18); see John 4:25. If Jesus is a prophet, then Jews are right and Samaritans are wrong, leading to the question of 4:20.

4:20. Mount Gerizim, the Samaritans' holy site equivalent to Judaism's Jerusalem, was in full view of Jacob's well. For Jews, the Jerusalem temple was the holiest site on earth. The Samaritan Pentateuch, by contrast, specified Gerizim as the proper site for worship. The woman undoubtedly uses the past tense for "worship" because of her continuing consciousness of Jews' and Samaritans' ethnic separation: roughly two centuries earlier, in 128 B.C., a Jewish king had obliterated the Samaritan temple on that mountain, and it had remained in ruins ever since. Samaritans mocked the Jewish holy site and once, under cover of night, even sought to defile the Jerusalem temple. Jews similarly ridiculed Mount Gerizim and even built many of their *synagogues so worshipers could face Jerusalem. Samaritans were unwelcome in Jerusalem's temple, so if the Jews are right (4:19), there is no hope for her.

4:21. "A time is coming" was common prophetic language (1 Sam 2:31; 2 Kings 20:17; Jer 31:31). Ancient peoples valued "holy sites."

4:22. Jesus is not neutral; he accepts the correctness of the Jewish position, although he does not allow that to remain as an ultimate barrier to ethnic reconciliation (4:23). In a Gospel probably at least partly addressing Jewish Christians rejected by their synagogues (see the introduction), this point is significant.

4:23-24. When he speaks of "worship in Spirit and truth," Jesus may have in view the common identification of the *Spirit with prophetic inspiration and empowerment in ancient Judaism, as well as* Old Testament passages about charismatic, prophetic worship (especially 1 Sam 10:5; 1 Chron 25:1-6). Given the common belief that the prophetic Spirit was no longer fully active, Jesus' words would strike ancient ears forcefully. The future hour (4:21) is present as well as future; Jesus makes the character of the future world available to his *disciples in their present lives (see comment on 3:16). For oppressed Jews and Samaritans longing for the future promise, this was also a striking statement.

4:25-26. Later Samaritan documents explain the Samaritan concept of a

*messiah: the *Taheb*, or restorer, was a prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15-18). Some evidence suggests that the Taheb's role included teaching.

4:27-42

Reaping Among the Samaritans

4:27. Traditional Jewish piety warned men not to talk much with women (some later *rabbis added, even with one's own wife!), both because of temptation and (especially in later sources) even because uninformed observers might suspect misconduct. Traditional Greek and Roman culture also considered it inappropriate for a wife to talk with men in unguarded settings; although Roman culture had been shifting, much of the rural Mediterranean world (probably including most of Galilee and Samaria) maintained more conservative traditions. That the disciples are amazed yet trust their teacher enough not to ask about this situation is a sign of their respect for him, an attitude considered appropriate for faithful disciples. (A few later Jewish traditions report rabbis who disintegrated disrespectful disciples into heaps of ashes with their eyes, but such stories are meant only to illustrate the general principle that one ought not to challenge one's teacher!)

4:28-30. Like other ancient cultures (e.g., Roman law), most Jewish people did not have much regard for the witness of a woman (see later rabbis but especially Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.219). The witness of a sinner, meanwhile, would be worthless; the situation was probably the same among the Samaritans. Nevertheless, she witnesses the way Philip had (1:46). That she is distracted from her original purpose for coming to the well (4:28) likely suggests that Jesus' water has replaced the water of Jacob's well for her. Someone who knew Rebekah came to meet the man who met her at the well and to invite him to stay (Gen 24:28-32; cf. 29:13; Ex 2:20).

4:31-33. Ancient teachers sometimes used food as a metaphor for spiritual food (see comment on 6:32). In the *Old Testament, this metaphor sometimes related to one's calling (Jer 15:16; cf. Ezek 3:1-3).

4:34. The figurative use of food imagery was intelligible in Jesus' milieu (e.g., Sirach 24:19-21), including for one's calling (cf. Jer 15:16; Ezek 3:1-3). Jewish teachers regarded God's work in one sense as finished (his creative work—Gen 2:2) but in another sense continuing (his work of sustaining his creation; see comment on 5:17). Jesus refers here to a work that climaxes all God's work:

Jesus completes the Father's work on the cross (19:30; cf. 17:4).

4:35. "Lifting up one's eyes" (KJV, NASB) was a common Old Testament expression for "looking" (e.g., Gen 13:10; 18:2; 24:63-64), although it became rarer in later Hebrew. The main wheat harvest ran from mid-April through the end of May; the barley harvest, which made fields "white" (literally, as in KJV, NASB; cf. "ripe"—NIV, NRSV) was in March. In Palestine, the gap between sowing and reaping was normally four to five months. Some scholars think that Jesus here cites a Jewish proverb that refers to four months between planting and harvesting.

4:36-38. In this context, Jesus and the Samaritan woman sow, and the *disciples see the harvest (v. 39). Verse 37 seems to adapt a popular proverb based on ideas such as Ecclesiastes 2:18—changing an image of sorrow to one of joy.

4:39-42. The effectiveness of her testimony in this culture is surprising; see comment on 4:28-30. The Samaritans now believe because they meet Jesus (as in 1:46-49), but the woman's relationship to her community also changes through her having become his first witness there.

Mediterranean culture, especially in largely rural areas like Palestine, emphasized the virtue of hospitality. Nevertheless, Jews and Samaritans did not typically extend this act to each other. For Jesus to lodge there, eating Samaritan food and teaching Samaritans (v. 40) would disturb traditional Jewish sensitivities, perhaps like defying segregation in the United States during the 1950s, apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s, or ethnic or cultural segregation found in many other societies. The Jesus of the Gospels is more concerned with people than with custom (cf. 2:6-9).

4:43-54

Faith and Healing in Galilee

4:43-45. See comment on Mark 6:4; but here the "home country" is apparently Judea (cf. Jn 1:11).

4:46. For Cana see 2:1. Capernaum was close to a full day's walk from there. "Royal official" (NASB, NIV) probably means that this man is one of Herod Antipas's court officials, although Herod's official title was tetrarch rather than king; some of the Herodian rulers' officers were even *Gentiles (though John would probably mention it if that were the case here). Many of these lived in

Tiberias, some ten miles (about fifteen kilometers) from Capernaum (see comment on 6:23), but this one may reside in Capernaum. Jesus, who is never mentioned as entering Tiberias (or Sepphoris, the other major city in Galilee), was extremely unfavorable toward Antipas (Lk 13:32; 23:9; for reasons, cf. Mk 6:17-29); this man who comes to Jesus may have been a wealthy aristocrat, probably much influenced by Greco-Roman culture and probably not respected by stricter Jewish standards.

4:47-49. “Come down” (v. 49 NRSV) is relevant because Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee, was lower in elevation than Cana. The *Old Testament condemned unbelief in the face of signs (Ex 4:9; Num 14:11); John’s Gospel articulates an even higher ideal. On Jesus’ rebuff and a suppliant’s insistence, see comment on 2:4-5.

4:50-54. The journey from Capernaum to the likeliest site of Cana is less than twenty miles, an average day’s walk in antiquity, but if evening intervened the official would have stopped en route to spend the night before proceeding. Long-distance miracles were rare by Old Testament, other Jewish and Greco-Roman standards; people generally believed prophets and Greek magicians more easily if they were present in person. The rare stories of long-distance miracles suggested to ancient readers that these miracle workers had extraordinary power. For Jesus, the only prerequisite for such miracles is seekers’ faith in his power.

5:1-9a

Healing at Bethesda

Healing shrines were common throughout the ancient world, especially for the worship of Asclepius and other popular deities renowned for healing powers. Most of these shrines required the supplicants to purify themselves at the adjoining fountain or other source of water. This passage portrays Jesus as greater than such healing sanctuaries of his day. More critically, this chapter reveals Jesus as the Father’s agent (see “*apostle” in the glossary), hence able to perform divine acts even on the Sabbath. Contrasting characters was a common *rhetorical and literary device in antiquity, probably applied by John here.

Table 4. Parallels Between John 5:1-17 and 9:1-34

John 5:1-17	John 9:1-34
-------------	-------------

Unable to walk for 38 years (5:5)	Blind from birth (9:1)
Jesus, rather than a Jerusalem pool, brings healing (5:3-4, 7)	Jesus uses a Jerusalem pool to bring healing (9:7)
Do not keep sinning, lest you face something worse (5:14)	Neither this man nor his parents sinned to cause his condition (9:2)
The man reports Jesus to the authorities (5:15)	The man refuses to deny Jesus to the authorities (9:24-34)
Jesus does the Father's works (5:17)	Jesus came to fulfill the Father's works (9:3-4)

5:1. John does not specify which Jewish feast is the occasion for Jesus' trip to Jerusalem, although some manuscripts have "the feast," which would probably imply the Feast of Tabernacles, as normally in Jewish tradition (not Passover). But the real issue for this narrative is that the day on which Jesus heals is a sabbath (5:9b).

5:2. Public baths were standard in Greco-Roman cities, and people congregated there. A *Qumran scroll attests the name of this pool, and archaeologists have discovered a pool in this location fitting precisely this description. Although scholars do not agree on the site of Bethesda (or its exact spelling), many favor a site under St. Anne's Monastery in Jerusalem, just north-northeast of the temple. The pools were quite large (like a football field) and roughly twenty feet deep. This site had two twin pools, surrounded by four porches, or porticoes, and one porch (a fifth one) down the middle separating the pools (perhaps separating genders). Although John writes after Jerusalem was destroyed in 70, his recollection of the site is accurate.

5:3. This site was later used as a pagan healing shrine; given the ancient tendency to reuse older shrines, the Jewish community in Jesus' day may well have viewed this pool as a place of healing. The temple authorities undoubtedly did not approve—after all, sacred pools at healing shrines characterized Greek cults like that of Asclepius—but popular religion often ignores religious contradictions that seem clearer to official religious leaders.

5:4. This verse may not be original (see notes in most translations) but was probably added early by a *scribe familiar with the tradition of healing at Bethesda; it explains the otherwise enigmatic verse 7.

5:5. The man had been sick there longer than many people in antiquity lived—for about as many years as Israel had wandered in the wilderness. Ancient reports of healings often specified how long the person had been sick to emphasize the greatness of the healer’s cure. Obviously nothing else, including this pool, had succeeded in restoring him.

5:6-9a. In 2:6 and 3:5, Jesus replaces the water of ceremonial purification; in 4:13-14, he replaces the “holy water” of a *Samaritan holy site. Here he, not the supposedly healing waters, restores the man.

5:9b-18

Betrayal on the Sabbath

Narratives often made points by contrasting characters; John contrasts the man healed in 5:1-9 with the man healed in 9:1-7. Local authorities may have been pressuring some of John’s hearers to follow the example of the former; John urges them to emulate the latter instead (a few decades later, a Roman governor was pressuring Christians to renounce their exclusive devotion to Christ, sparing their lives only if they revered the statue of the emperor and other deities).

5:9b-10. Biblical rules forbade work on the sabbath, even so much as gathering wood for a fire (Num 15:32-36). By Jesus’ day, Jewish *law explicitly forbade carrying things on the sabbath, viewing this as a form of work.

5:11-13. Many teachers also forbade minor cures—physicians’ cures not necessary to save a life—on the sabbath. That Jesus acts in God’s name with a miracle rather than a physician’s cure should make that discussion irrelevant; but law is often argued by analogy, and the particular authorities in this passage apparently reason that Jesus’ cure is just like a physician’s cure.

5:14. The man may have been in the temple for worship, possibly to give thanks for his healing (cf. Lev 14:10; Ps 56:12); but the temple dominated public space in Jerusalem. In the Bible sufferings were sometimes (not always—cf. 9:2-3; e.g., 2 Sam 4:4; 1 Kings 14:4; 2 Kings 13:14) judgment for sin (e.g., 1 Kings 13:4; 2 Kings 1:4; 2 Chron 16:12). Jesus warns of greater judgment here—probably the *resurrection for judgment (cf. 5:29).

5:15-16. This man apparently does just the opposite of the faithful healed man in 9:30-34, with whom John contrasts him. His behavior may resemble those who left the *churches of John’s readers and sided with their opponents, betraying them to persecution (see introduction to 1 John in this commentary).

5:17. Everyone recognized that God had continued to work since creation, sustaining the world even on the sabbath. Jesus reasons by analogy that what is right for God in sustaining his creation is also right for himself.

5:18. Jewish prayers often called God “Father,” as the Father of Israel; the issue here is that Jesus seems to treat his relationship to the Father in a special way (see e.g., Ex 4:22-23; Is 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:19). Because Jesus appears to usurp prerogatives solely attributed to God (5:17—the right to work on the sabbath), his hearers think that he thereby claims a position equal to that of God, a claim that naturally sounds blasphemous to them (cf. Is 14:14; Ezek 28:2). Second-century *rabbis accused many Jewish Christians of believing in two gods; some later rabbis even spoke of those who sought to make themselves independent of God as acting as if they were “equal” to God. Even Greeks, for whom the line between divine and mortal was often rather thin, regarded attempts to make oneself a deity as presumptuous. One could “annul” a biblical law by disregarding it, so they feel that Jesus is (literally) “destroying” the sabbath.

5:19-29

Jesus’ Relation to the Father

Jesus seeks to qualify their understanding of his relationship to the Father; far from usurping God’s honor (5:18), Jesus acts only on the Father’s authority and in conjunction with his will.

5:19. Jesus qualifies their understanding by applying another analogy: it was common wisdom that sons imitated their fathers. Far from claiming that his rank rivals the Father’s (as they have charged), Jesus here highlights his obedience to the Father (filial obedience was an important virtue in antiquity). But the offense remains in that Jesus claims to be God’s Son (and to watch the Father continually) in a unique way that does not include them.

Wordplays were common. God continued his creative work on the sabbath (see comment on 5:17); what Jesus “does” or “makes” (*poieo*) here is that he “makes a person” well on the sabbath (7:23), a possible allusion to the *Septuagint of Genesis 1:26-27, where God first “made a person.” In that passage, God made humanity “in *our* image”; Jesus might imply the joint work of the Father and the Son.

5:20. Some Jewish mystics claimed visions of God, but Jesus’ language goes

beyond this, implying continual experience of God. Fathers typically loved sons; God was said to love Israel (in context, of course, Jesus' claim is more special).

5:21-22. If Jesus shares the Father's initial and continuing work of creation (see comment on 1:3; 7:23), he could also share his future prerogative of raising the dead. Although some *Old Testament texts spoke of a king who would reign under God's authority (Dan 7:13-14; cf. Jn 5:27), raising and judging the dead was a divine prerogative reserved for God alone, as rehearsed daily in Jewish prayers ("God who raises the dead"). Some Jewish texts, perhaps following Greek models, delegate some judgment in the afterlife to an individual like Enoch or Abel or perhaps even the *Son of Man, but absolute judgment is a divine prerogative.

To his opponents, this would sound like ditheism (an offense with which some later rabbis charged early Christians). By claiming that the Father "gave" him this authority, Jesus claims to exercise delegated authority as the Father's agent (Judaism accepted the legal principle of agency; cf. "*apostle" in the glossary). The idea of the Son as the Father's agent runs throughout this section and disarms their objection in verse 18. (In trinitarian terms, Jesus is equally deity with the Father but distinct in person and submits to the Father.)

5:23. In the kin-centered ancient Mediterranean world, how one treated one member of a family reflected one's attitude toward the family as a whole. God sometimes gave others honor as his representatives (Ps 2:11-12; Is 60:1-2), but no one was ever to be honored to the same degree as God (Is 42:8; 48:11; cf. Ex 20:5). Jesus' hearers could easily construe Jesus' statement here as a claim to deity.

5:24-25. *Eternal life, the life of the world to come, was supposed to be available only when the dead would be raised; but Jesus provides new life already for those who trust in him.

5:26. Non-Palestinian Jewish texts held God to be the only one with life "of himself" ("uncreated," "self-begotten," etc.); as in some Greek writings, they described the supreme God as existing without any source outside himself. Although John can also use the phrase more generally in other contexts (6:53), this passage compares Jesus' prerogatives with those of the Father, suggesting that, as in *Diaspora Jewish sources, the term here refers to Jesus' uncreated eternality.

5:27. The Son of Man in Daniel 7:13-14 was to rule for God in the future *kingdom; ruling included executing judgment.

5:28-29. The Old Testament (Dan 12:2) and much of ancient Judaism taught

a *resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous, which would take place at the last day. (Some circles in ancient Judaism taught only a resurrection of the righteous; others taught that the wicked would be resurrected only temporarily for judgment and then destroyed; still others held that the wicked would be resurrected to eternal judgment. Others, such as *Sadducees and probably many Hellenized Diaspora Jews, denied a future resurrection.) The Old Testament and Judaism spoke of God judging people by their deeds. “Tombs” may evoke Is 26:19 in the Septuagint.

5:30-47

Jesus’ Witnesses

5:30. Jesus is thus a faithful *shaliakh*, or agent; Jewish *law taught that the man’s agent was as a man himself (backed by his full authority), to the extent that the agent faithfully represented him. Moses and the *Old Testament prophets were sometimes viewed as God’s agents.

5:31. Here Jesus cites the Old Testament principle, central to later Jewish law (both that of the rabbis and that of the *Dead Sea Scrolls), that two witnesses are necessary to prove a (capital) case (Deut 17:6; 19:15). Testimony was essential in ancient Jewish court cases.

5:32. Jewish teachers sometimes spoke of God in roundabout terms (here, “another”).

5:33-34. On John the Baptist as a witness, see comment on 1:6-8. Speakers in courts sometimes supplied evidence even while denying that it should be strictly necessary.

5:35. The hand-held oil lamps of the Herodian period were too small to give forth much light (they normally produced as much as a candle), and thus one would symbolize only a small reflection of “the light.” Some Jewish teachers referred to a great person, such as a patriarch or a great rabbi, as a “lamp” or light in the world.

5:36-37. The witness of the Father should be all that is necessary. Israel at Sinai supposedly saw his form and heard his voice (cf. Ex 19:9, 11; 24:10-11; Sirach 17:13; but cf. the qualification in Deut 4:12), and accepted his word through his agent Moses; Jesus says that his own generation rejects the fuller revelation of God sent to them (cf. Jn 1:11, 14-18). Greek-speaking Jews thought of Wisdom as God’s image (Wisdom of Solomon 7:26; so also *Philo of

Alexandria regarding the *logos*); see comment on John 1:1-18.

5:38. They claimed to have God's word in the law given at Sinai (cf. 5:37, 39), but missed the point.

5:39-40. Even *Gentiles recognized the Jewish people's zeal for their Scriptures, and various groups (including the people reflected in the *Dead Sea Scrolls) emphasized diligent searching of the Scriptures. Scripture said, "Do this and you will live," which Jewish teachers read as: "Do this and you will have life in the world to come." Thus they believed that one had eternal life through the Scriptures; but Jesus says that the Scriptures witness to him, hence to reject him is to disobey the Scriptures.

5:41-44. The Father's agent comes in the Father's name, not in his own; to reject a person's agent was to reject the authority of that person himself.

5:45-47. Moses witnesses to Jesus in his writings (the first five books of the Old Testament were attributed to him). Ancient Judaism viewed Moses as an intercessor for Israel (a view found in, e.g., *Josephus, rabbis, the **Testament of Moses*); but Jesus says that Moses will instead be their prosecutor. Jewish teachers regarded Moses as the central prophetic figure of their history, and even many pagans knew of Moses as Israel's lawgiver. Moses wrote of a prophet like himself (Deut 18:18), but in the larger context of John's Gospel, Jesus could refer here to Moses' experience of divine glory (see comment on 1:14-18).

6:1-15

A New Passover Meal

After speaking of Moses (5:45-47), Jesus goes on to perform a sign that might be expected of a new prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15): providing manna.

6:1. Although outsiders rightly called it a "lake," Galileans called it the "Sea" of Galilee.

6:2. Any means of possible healing in antiquity (such as hot springs and healing shrines) drew large followings. Wonderworkers seem to have been rarer in this period, but even fraudulent ones (such as the Alexander mentioned by *Lucian) or those who promised but later failed to deliver prophetic signs (such as some failed prophets mentioned in *Josephus) often drew large crowds.

6:3-4. If the events of chapter 5 took place at the Feast of Tabernacles (see comment on 5:1) and those of this text occur at Passover, and if this section of John is in chronological order, half a year has elapsed between these chapters.

The chronological recollection fits the depiction of grass in 6:10.

6:5-6. People (e.g., generals) sometimes tested others' understanding or resolve; some teachers also asked questions of their *disciples solely to test them.

6:7. The bread needed to feed the crowd would cost two hundred days' wages for a peasant or unskilled laborer; during food shortages (which such a multitude might create for surrounding villages) a day's wages might feed just one family. Although fishermen may have earned the same amount faster, it still represents a substantial sacrifice to the disciples' communal treasury (12:6; 13:29).

6:8-9. The "barley" loaves are reminiscent of 2 Kings 4:42-44, where Elisha multiplies such loaves. Philip's and Andrew's skepticism also mirrors that of one of Elisha's prophet disciples (2 Kings 4:43; cf. Num 11:21-22). (Some scholars also point to the presence of Elisha's assistant in 2 Kings 4:38, 41; the *LXX there uses the same word for "lad" as Andrew does here.) There too bread was left over, though Elisha fed just two hundred with twenty loaves. Bread was the most fundamental staple of the ancient Mediterranean diet; barley was cheaper than wheat, allowing for more loaves at the same price. Fish was a staple in Galilee, and sometimes was dried; most people could not regularly afford meat.

6:10. People often sat on chairs but "reclined" (so the Greek here) at banquets (like Passover). Grass would flourish especially in the spring, around Passover season (cf. 6:4); it would also make the ground more comfortable for sitting (the wilderness often lacked it). John numbers five thousand "men" (the Greek term here is gender-specific, and only men were usually numbered in antiquity); the whole crowd, including women and children, may have been as many as four times that number. In this case Jesus could be addressing a crowd nearly as large as the seating capacity of the theater for the citizen assembly of a major city like Ephesus, and at least four times the seating capacity of the theater in Sepphoris, a major Galilean city; to address such a crowd was no small feat.

6:11. The head of the Jewish household customarily gave thanks before (and, at least according to later attested custom, after) the meal. A later standard blessing is, "Blessed are You, Lord our God, who brings forth bread from the earth." Miracles of multiplying food appear in the *Old Testament (cf., e.g., 1 Kings 17:16; 19:8) and occasionally in extrabiblical Jewish tradition (cf. the oil in late traditions about the *Maccabees) and Greco-Roman texts; the primary background here is 2 Kings 4:42-44 (see comment on 6:8-9) and especially the manna of Exodus 16 (see comment on 6:31-33).

6:12. Possibly relevant is an ancient Roman custom that required hosts to provide sufficient food for some to be left over at the end of the meal; Jesus is the ultimate host. Certainly relevant is the analogous miracle in 2 Kings 4:44. Greco-Roman moralists and Jewish teachers abhorred waste; although the extra bread has been provided miraculously, its provision is not to be taken for granted and squandered.

6:13. The leftovers are considerably more than they started with; that they filled the maximum number of baskets they could carry underlines the enormity of the miracle.

6:14. “The Prophet” implies the prophet like Moses of Deuteronomy 18:15-18. In Moses’ day, God had miraculously provided bread from heaven, manna. At Passover season (Jn 6:4) hopes for deliverance ran even higher than usual, because the Jewish people rehearsed how God had delivered them from their oppressors by the hand of Moses.

6:15. Some other first-century leaders gathered large followings in the wilderness who believed that they could perform signs like Moses or Joshua and overthrow the Romans; see comment on 6:14. The crowds wanted a worker of earthly miracles and an earthly leader like Moses (some Jewish traditions—*Philo, the *rabbis, etc.—viewed Moses as a king; cf. Deut 33:4-5); but this was not Jesus’ mission (6:63). Perhaps threatened by the earthly emperor’s claims to authority (see the introduction to Revelation), John’s hearers may have taken warning from this passage. Privacy was difficult to find within Galilean villages, but would be easier on the mountain (6:3).

6:16-21

Lord of the Sea

In the context of John’s discussion of Jesus as the New Passover, new manna and one greater than Moses, Jesus’ miracle on the sea may have reminded his first hearers of Israel’s crossing the sea in the days of Moses.

6:16-19. Squalls were frequent on the lake and can keep even modern boats on shore. Given where they are traveling (from the northeast to northwest shores), they were probably most of the way across the lake; turning back is no longer an option. That they had not arrived yet indicates the difficulty of the wind (6:18). Fishing boats were equipped with oars; the sail would be counterproductive in this storm. In the *Old Testament, only God is said to walk

on the waves (see comment on 6:20).

6:20. “It is I” (v. 20) is literally “I am.” “It is I” is a legitimate way to translate the phrase, and no doubt how Jesus intends the disciples to understand it; but given the context of Jesus walking on water, the nuance of deity in “I am” (Ex 3:14; Is 41:4; 43:10, 13) is probably present. *Gentiles had some stories of miracleworkers walking on water, but these were not known to Palestinian Jewish tradition, echoed here. In the Old Testament, Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha all parted bodies of water, but only God trod upon the water (Job 9:8; cf. Ps 77:19, shortly before Ps 78:24, possibly used in Jn 6:31).

6:21. The boat being instantly at its destination has no exact Old Testament parallels, but the *Spirit had sometimes carried prophets from one place to another almost instantly (e.g., Ezek 8:3; 11:24—probably in a vision; cf. 1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16).

6:22-29

Proper Motives

6:22-23. A large, culturally Greek-oriented city on the lake of Galilee, Tiberias was named for the emperor Tiberius and built by Herod Antipas on the site of a graveyard. This site effectively kept the most religious Jews out of the city and allowed Herod to dole out favors to allies without interference from other powerful Jews. It does not appear in the *New Testament record apart from this mention and, like Sepphoris, the other large city of Galilee (also very Hellenized), does not seem to have been frequented by Jesus. People often had to cross the lake in small boats.

6:24. People could lease boats, and perhaps paid a fare for conveyance (though this is not clear). Capernaum was a shorter distance across the sea from their location than Tiberias was, and less than ten miles from Tiberias (relevant if the boat-owners of 6:23 wished to return there).

6:25-26. The appeal of free food is not hard to understand; thus, for example, emperors and others used it to pacify Rome or gain political support. The crowd wants to follow a prophet who will provide free food and political deliverance—another Moses. But they miss the central thrust of Jesus’ mission (cf. 6:15).

6:27-29. The dialogue between Jesus and the crowd plays on the term *work*; Judaism stressed righteous works, but Jesus singles out a particular work: faith in him (Jewish teachers praised Abraham’s “work” of faith in God, but Jesus’

demand is more specific). They then demand from Jesus a “work,” which now means a sign (v. 30), as it sometimes does in Jewish literature. The “seal” (v. 27) means that God has attested Jesus; cf. comment on 3:33.

6:30-59

Jesus as the New Manna

This passage fits ancient Jewish expectations for a *midrash or homily on Exodus 16:15 and Psalm 78:24, which Jesus quotes in John 6:31. Jesus paraphrases, explains and expounds in a manner characteristic of ancient Jewish teachers, yet his hearers fail to understand him. Ancient teachers sometimes made their lectures hard to understand to sort out genuine followers from the masses.

6:30-31. The crowd still wants him to act as the new Moses they expect—on an earthly, political level. Many Jewish people expected manna to be restored in the world to come. Moreover, God provided Israel bread in the wilderness not just once but daily; the crowd might reason that if Jesus is a prophet like Moses (6:14-15), he should provide bread more than once. Like other ancient writers, John was free to paraphrase his material in his own words; here the crowd cites Scripture as if they are rabbis in a debate, using Exodus 16:4, 15 and/or Psalm 78:24. John seems to know and use both Hebrew and Greek versions of these texts. The following discourse repeatedly paraphrases the text (as was common in ancient Jewish Scripture exposition).

6:32-33. Both Exodus 16:4, 15 and Psalm 78:24 attribute the bread to God (also Ps 78:19-20; Neh 9:15); correcting a misapplication was common in Jewish Scripture interpretation (e.g., “Do not understand the text as meaning X; instead it means Y”). (Some later rabbis attributed the manna to Moses’ merit, but they would have agreed that God gave it.) Jesus says, “Not Moses, but God really gave this bread.” His hearers would have to agree; that was technically how Moses had put it (Ex 16:4, 15; cf. Deut 8:3). Like many other interpreters of his day (see, e.g., the *Dead Sea Scrolls), Jesus is concerned to apply the biblical text to their present situation.

6:34. They hear him on a different level from the meaning he intends (cf. 3:4; 4:15), so he explains further. The ignorance of opponents or minor characters was often used as a foil to further a main argument throughout ancient literature (*Plato, rabbis, novels, etc.).

6:35-38. Jewish expositors had already often used manna as a symbol for spiritual food, God's *law, or Torah/Wisdom/Word. Ancient writers also often used water or drinking figuratively (including Jewish teachers using it for Torah or Wisdom). Sirach 24:19 portrays Wisdom as saying, "Come to me . . . and eat from my fruits"; in 24:21, Wisdom cries, "Those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more." Jesus here compares himself with divine Wisdom, but (in contrast to Sirach) emphasizes the satisfaction of those who eat and drink from him.

6:39-40. The dead would be raised to *eternal life "on the last day," the day of the Lord, when God would transform the world and inaugurate his eternal *kingdom*. In ancient rhetoric, the repetition of a point would make it sound more emphatic; repeating both the beginning and ending of a claim would underline it all the more. For divine vision (6:40) and transformation, see comment on 1 Jn 3:2.

6:41-43. In Exodus 16:2, Israelites grumbled before receiving manna, but here Jesus' hearers complain even after having eaten bread. The crowd continues to hear Jesus on the wrong level, even though he clearly refers to eternal life and not literal bread. For background on Jesus coming down from heaven in addition to manna, see comment on 3:13 (especially on Wisdom's descent; e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 9:10).

6:44. Most Jewish people believed in both human choice and God's sovereignty. For example, the fifth benediction of the Amida, a regularly prayed Jewish prayer, recognized that God granted *repentance*. "*Drawing*" may echo Septuagint language for God drawing his people to himself (Jer 31:3; cf. Hos 11:4).

6:45. Jewish expositors often explained a Torah text in view of a passage from the prophets. Jesus cites Isaiah 54:13, which is not far from another context offering drink to God's people (55:1) or from Isaiah 53, which John uses elsewhere (12:38).

6:46. On God's invisibility, even in part to Moses, see comment on 1:18.

6:47-51. Jesus contrasts the new and old manna in good midrashic style, like a good Jewish expositor. Most fundamentally, the manna in the wilderness conferred only temporary life, whereas Jesus confers eternal life. Virtually the entire wilderness generation perished in the wilderness (6:49) through disobedience, despite manna and the Torah.

6:52. Again Jesus' hearers interpret him too literally. Jewish people had many forbidden foods, but they and all the Greco-Roman world as well abhorred

cannibalism (which some abominable cults and some barbarians reportedly practiced occasionally). Many non-Christian Romans later misinterpreted Christian language about the Lord's Supper: "eating the body and blood of their Lord" sounded like cannibalism to outsiders and thus aroused more persecution against the *church. In a Passover context (6:4), however, Jesus is being identified figuratively as the Passover lamb (Ex 12:8); cf. also divine Wisdom in comment on John 6:35.

6:53. Eating the flesh of the Passover lamb was required (Ex 12:8); but drinking the blood of the lamb (or of any creature) was always forbidden (Lev 17:10-11), avoided even in meat (Gen 9:4). Perhaps some might have also recalled the expression "the blood of grapes," meaning wine (Gen 49:11), which was essential to the Passover meal. Moreover, both Sirach and *Philo speak of drinking divine Wisdom.

6:54-58. On the literal level (cannibalism and drinking blood) obeying Jesus' statement should have merited judgment, not salvation; thus they are confused. Some sages spoke in riddles, a practice for which Jesus is known (his *parables, etc.). Only those wise enough to continue with him would penetrate the meaning of his teaching.

6:59. Synagogues could function as community centers and were not limited to use on the Sabbath. Although most of the remains of the Capernaum *synagogue are from a later period, evidence remains that points to the first-century synagogue on which the later synagogue was built.

6:60-71

Perseverance and Apostasy

6:60-61. The *disciples' grumbling recalls how the Israelites treated Moses in the wilderness. "Stumbling" (NASB) was a common figure of speech for sinning or falling away.

6:62. Here Jesus may use a standard Jewish "how much more" argument: If you cannot receive the message of the cross, how much more difficult will it be for you to accept my *resurrection and return to the Father? For the impossibility of earthly things understanding heavenly things, see comment on 3:11-12.

6:63. Jesus provides here the interpretive key to what preceded: he is not speaking literally, as if they are to eat his literal flesh; he speaks of life through the *Spirit. Some Jewish interpreters were masters at figurative interpretation;

but his followers still fail to understand him (6:66).

6:64-65. On Jesus' knowledge, see comment on 2:23-25.

6:66. John portrays the departure of these disciples as apostasy, which Judaism regarded as one of the worst sins. The loyalty of disciples brought honor to teachers in antiquity; their abandonment led to dishonor.

6:67-71. Even among his closest followers, one is a betrayer. That even Jesus faced such betrayal would encourage John's readers, who had experienced some apostates in their own churches (see the discussion of setting in the introduction to 1 John). On the "Twelve," see comment on Mark 3:14-15. For "Iscaiot," see comment on Mark 3:16-19.

7:1-9

The Unbelief of Jesus' Brothers

7:1. In Jesus' day, Galilee and Judea were under separate jurisdictions (that of Antipas and the Roman governor, respectively), so that someone in trouble in one part of the country would be safer to remain in the other part. The Judean ruling class controlled many affairs in Judea and could refer capital cases to Pilate.

7:2. The Feast of Tabernacles was one of the three most important festivals of the Jewish year and was celebrated for eight days in Jerusalem. Jewish pilgrims from throughout the Roman and Parthian world would gather. The men would live in booths (made of branches and the like) constructed on rooftops or elsewhere, commemorating God's faithfulness to his people when they lived in booths in the wilderness (women and children were not required to live in the booths). This feast was known for its joyous celebration.

7:3-4. From the standpoint of general ancient political theory, the advice of Jesus' brothers is correct; they may not know the specific matter of the Jerusalem authorities' opposition. Most teachers taught in public places. Moralists praised as virtuous frank or open speech (v. 4), whereas secret acts were deemed deceitful. But cf. John 6:30.

7:5. Brothers were normally among one's closest allies; kin ties were very important, and intrafamily conflicts were considered particularly tragic.

7:6-9. Pious Jewish men who lived as near as Galilee were supposed to go to the feast. It would be normal for Jesus to travel with his extended family (*Josephus spoke of whole towns going). The issue is not that he will not go, but

that he will only go “secretly” at first, so as not to hasten the appropriate time of his execution (cf. 7:6 with 2:4). Although Jesus’ “not yet” prevents his statement from qualifying as deception per se, Scripture’s general demand for truth was qualified in particular cases, most often for saving life (e.g., Ex 1:19; 1 Sam 16:2-3; 2 Kings 8:10).

7:10-36

Divided Opinions

7:10. Festal pilgrims typically traveled in groups (Josephus even speaks of entire towns going). Because of Jerusalem’s elevation, pilgrims would “go up” to it. Greco-Roman biographers often liked to describe their subjects’ appearances, flattering or not. That none of the Gospels does so suggests that Jesus’ appearance may have been average enough to allow him to pass unnoticed in a crowd: probably curly black hair, light brown skin, perhaps a little over five feet in height—unlike the Aryan pictures of him that circulate in some Western churches. (He could be taller; some suggest an average height closer to five foot seven. The *Shroud of Turin*, which is purported to be Jesus’ burial cloth, makes him taller, in the epic Hebrew tradition—1 Sam 9:2. But scholars debate its authenticity.) Although Diaspora Jewish men, like Greek and Roman men, were normally clean-shaven, coins portray Palestinian Jewish captives in this period with full beards and hair down to their shoulders. Nevertheless, most Judeans had not seen Jesus at close range, so while Jesus’ appearance was probably not strikingly distinctive, we cannot be certain about the details.

7:11-13. In contrast to some later stereotypes, ancient Jewish views were very diverse on a number of issues. “One who leads astray the multitude” (NASB) or “one who deceives the people” (NIV, NRSV) was a serious charge, applied to those who led other Jews to idolatry or apostasy. Deuteronomy prescribes death as the penalty (13:5, 12-18), and some *rabbis even felt that such persons should be given no chance to repent, lest they be able to secure forgiveness though their followers had perished. Some Jewish sources as early as the second century charged Jesus with this crime.

7:14. Teaching was often done in public places, including in the temple courts. Some popular teachers drew large crowds there.

7:15. Most children in the Greco-Roman world could not afford even a primary education. But many Palestinian Jewish children, except perhaps from

the poorest homes (which a carpenter's family usually was not), would learn how to recite and probably often how to read the Bible, though most probably could not write. The issue here is not whether Jesus is literate or can recite Torah, but that he has never formally studied Scripture with an advanced teacher, yet he expounds as well as any of the scholars without depending on earlier scholars' opinions.

7:16-17. Some Jewish sages agreed that willingness to obey preceded genuine understanding. Learning by doing was a standard part of Jewish education, which included imitating one's teacher. (Sometimes this may have been taken too far. In a probably fictitious story, one *disciple was said to have hidden under his rabbi's bed to learn the proper way to perform the marriage act.)

7:18-19. Prophets were to be God's agents (see "*apostle*" in the glossary). *False prophets were technically to be executed; but the prophet like Moses was to be followed (Deut 18:9-22). To seek to kill a true prophet obviously contravened the law.*

7:20. Demoniacs were often thought to act insanely; in this case the crowd thinks Jesus is paranoid. But even this charge could imply the suspicion that he is a false prophet (7:12): false prophets were sometimes thought to channel spirits (indeed, many pagan magicians claimed such spirit-guides). The penalty for false prophets was death (Ex 22:18; Deut 18:10), so it is ironic that they would accuse him of having a *demon while denying any intention to kill him. Josephus tells of one true prophetic figure in this period (he does not quite label him a "prophet") who was regarded as insane and demon possessed; the Gospels suggest that some viewed another this way (John the Baptist—Mt 11:18).

7:21-23. Jesus asks the crowd to reason consistently (sound and fair judgment was paramount in Jewish teaching): why is it wrong for him to heal supernaturally on the sabbath, when circumcision (which wounds) is permitted on the sabbath? A later first-century rabbi argued similarly: circumcising on the eighth day (involving a single member) takes precedence over the sabbath, so saving a whole life (which involves all one's members) also does so. Some practices at the festivals (such as killing the Passover lamb and waving the lulab, i.e., palm branch, at the Feast of Tabernacles) were likewise held to take precedence over the sabbath. Jesus employs a "how much more" argument, frequent in the Gospels and in Jewish teaching more generally.

7:24. Many thinkers, including many *Pharisees, would have agreed with Jesus' admonition here.

7:25-26. When a speaker was troublesome but popular, the less brutal ancient authorities sometimes discreetly waited for the best opportunity to deal with him rather than acting immediately.

7:27. Some scholars have pointed to a tradition (attested mostly but not exclusively in later sources) that the *Messiah would be hidden for a time before he appeared, and thus no one would know where he was from (cf. the irony in 9:29). Later sources compare him with Moses.

7:28-29. Jesus declares that where he is “from” is obvious: he is “sent from” the Father. This expression means that he is a commissioned agent, an authorized representative, of the Father (see “apostle” in the glossary).

7:30. The idea of an appointed (or fated) hour of death was fairly common in ancient Mediterranean sources, so the present claim would be intelligible to a wide audience.

7:31. In most Jewish traditions, the Messiah was not a miracle worker, except to the extent that the works of a new Moses figure would validate his prophetic claim to lead the people.

7:32. The aristocratic priests were dominant in Jerusalem’s leadership; some aristocratic Pharisees (though probably a much smaller number in Jesus’ day) also belonged to the coalition, though they did not dominate it. In Jesus’ day the Pharisees as a *movement* had no authority to arrest anyone, although the chief priests did; John might update the language for readers of his own day. Most scholars believe that the main Palestinian opposition that Jewish Christians faced in the decades after A.D. 70 came from Pharisees. The officers are the Levitical temple guards.

7:33-36. Sages sometimes spoke in riddles, inviting those who were wise to understand their teaching. John again employs the motif of misinterpretation: if the Jewish authorities misinterpret Jesus so badly, how can they claim to understand the Scriptures rightly? “Greeks” refers to Hellenized *Gentiles, perhaps descended from Greek and Macedonian settlers; “dispersion” (NASB) refers to Jewish people scattered among them. Jesus’ hearers apparently suspect that he will use the foreign Jews as a base of operation for reaching the Gentiles to whom they seek to be witnesses (a situation that ironically occurred, according to the book of Acts).

7:37-39

Rivers of Water

7:37. The “last day” of the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2) probably refers to the eighth day. For at least the first seven days of the feast, priests marched in procession from the Pool of Siloam to the temple and poured out water at the base of the altar. Pilgrims to the feast watched this ritual, which Jews throughout the Roman world thus knew about; it was even commemorated on souvenir jars they could take home with them. “Come to me” may echo the summons of Wisdom to come eat and drink of her (Sirach 24:19, 21).

7:38. Scripture reading at this feast is at least as old as Nehemiah 8:1-18; early Jewish tradition suggests that the readings on this last day of the festival (7:37) included the one passage in the Prophets that emphasized this feast, Zechariah 14, which was interpreted in conjunction with Ezekiel 47. Together these texts taught that rivers of living water would flow forth from Jerusalem or the temple, bringing life to all the earth. Jewish teachers often depicted the temple as the navel, or belly, of the world—that is, the center of the world (the way that Greeks viewed Delphi), so one might view the waters as proceeding from this belly or center. The water-drawing ceremony (7:37) (originally meant to secure rain) pointed toward this hope.

Because the water of verse 38 flows to and not from the believer (v. 39), 7:37-38 may be punctuated to read: “If anyone thirsts, let this one come to me; and let whoever believes in me drink. As the Scripture says . . . ” (The original manuscripts had no punctuation.) Verse 38 may thus declare that Jesus fulfills the Scriptures read at the feast, as the foundation stone of a new temple, the source of the water of life (cf. 19:34; Rev 22:1).

7:39. Most of Judaism did not believe that the *Spirit was prophetically active in their own time but Scripture promised the full outpouring of the Spirit in the messianic age or the world to come. Water often symbolized Torah (law) or wisdom in Jewish texts, but John follows *Old Testament precedent in using it for the Spirit* (Is 44:3; Joel 2:28; esp. Ezek 36:25-27).

7:40-52

The Division Deepens

7:40. “The Prophet” is the “prophet like Moses” (Deut 18:15, 18; see on 6:14-15). Although the connection is not explicit here, the hearers might have thought of the living water God provided in the wilderness in Moses’ day (Ex 17:1-7).

7:41-42. Like civic pride, regional prejudice was common in antiquity.

Contradicting what others had said in 7:27, some people cite the place where the Messiah was to originate, based on Micah 5:2; that the Messiah was of Davidic descent was unanimously held. Although John included no birth *narratives, the conjunction of Matthew, Luke and widespread Christian traditions known by the early second century (to pagans interrogated by Hadrian) suggests that John's hearers know that *Christ was born in Bethlehem. They would thus regard Jesus' opponents here as ignorant.

7:43-44. Public divisions were common in ancient Mediterranean society.

7:45-46. On the *Pharisees in Jesus and John's day, see comment on 7:32. Powerful and wise speech was highly regarded in antiquity; in that era, listening to public speakers was a form of entertainment as well as of learning (the former function has been largely replaced in affluent societies by television). The Levite temple guards would have heard many teachers in the temple, yet they are particularly impressed by this one. Rarely, but on occasion, elsewhere in antiquity armed men failed to arrest someone after hearing his discourses (an earlier case is mentioned by ancient Roman historians).

7:47. On the "misleader," see comment on 7:12.

7:48. The Pharisees are clearly mistaken here (cf. 3:1-2). John uses irony, a common ancient literary technique, to underscore his point: Jesus' opponents are closed-minded and dense. Aristocrats despised demagogues who appealed to the uneducated masses, and often tried to protect the masses from being deceived by them.

7:49. Trained *rabbis often looked down on the '*amme ha'arets*, "the people of the land," common people who did not even try to follow rabbinic interpretations of the *law. Many texts indicate the animosity between Pharisaic rabbis and '*amme ha'arets* (e.g., *Akiba contended that before becoming a rabbi he was one of the '*amme ha'arets* and wanted to beat up rabbis). On a lesser scale, analogous attitudes may sometimes be observed among educated elites today; but the rabbis reasonably believed that one could not live the law without knowing it, and they did not think that '*amme ha'arets*, who did not know rabbinic interpretations, knew it.

7:50-51. Although municipal elites may not have always acted fairly, Pharisees and some others could insist on following proper Jewish legal procedure: a defendant must be allowed to speak for oneself. Given the elite's attitude to those who do not know the law (7:49), John's irony (see comment on 7:48) is eloquent here: Nicodemus challenges them on a basic matter of legal procedure accepted by Moses (e.g., Deut 1:16; 19:16-17) and all Jewish

interpreters.

7:52. “Search and see” was a familiar phrase inviting a person to check the Scriptures. This response reflects regional prejudice rather than knowledge of the Scriptures (despite their attitude in 7:49): 2 Kings 14:25 demonstrates that they were mistaken. Later rabbis admitted that prophets arose from every tribe. Especially outside Sepphoris and Tiberias, Galileans (who were mostly rural) may have been more conservative than much of the Jerusalem elite, but Jerusalemites often perceived them as backward.

7:53–8:11

The Woman Taken in Adultery

Omitted by all the earliest manuscripts, this passage is generally agreed to be a later addition to the Fourth Gospel. Although it may be a true story, as many scholars think, it should not be read as part of the context in John.

7:53–8:1. For Jesus spending nights on the Mount of Olives, cf. 18:1-2; Luke 22:39; cf. also Mark 11:1, 11.

8:2. Most people rose about sunrise. Teachers often taught in the temple courts; cf. 7:14.

8:3. John, who deals only with “*Pharisees” and chief priests, nowhere mentions “*scribes*,” *who are more frequent in the other Gospels; scribes functioned as teachers of the law*. On adultery, see comment on 1 Thessalonians 4:4-6.

8:4-5. Scripture commanded the execution not only of the adulteress but also of the adulterer; if the woman was genuinely caught in the act, the adulterer had surely been identified as well. The law of Moses demanded the execution of this woman, but Rome had removed capital jurisdiction from Jewish courts, except for temple violations. Thus the Jewish leaders test whether Jesus will reject the law, compromising his patriotic Jewish following, or reject Roman rule, which will allow them to accuse him to the Romans. Pharisees and later *rabbis were quite scrupulous about the biblical requirement of witnesses (Deut 17:6; 19:15), so it was necessary to claim that they had caught her in the act. Since she was caught in the act, however, it seems suspicious that the man is not brought.

8:6-8. Roman judges wrote their sentences before reading them aloud. Some think that Jesus may have written an acquittal. God wrote the Ten Commandments with his finger (Ex 31:18; Deut 9:10); perhaps Jesus writes the

first line of the tenth commandment in the *Septuagint of Exodus 20: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.” This text might declare them all guilty of adultery (Mt 5:28). Jesus’ hearers, however, seem unaware of what he is writing; this proposal is thus at best speculation. (Some people also drew circles for ultimatums, but while the term here allows also for drawing figures, Jesus nowhere explains the writing.)

The witnesses were normally the first to throw the stones, but false witnesses were to pay the same penalty they had hoped to inflict on their victim (Deut 17:7; 19:19).

8:9-11. It was a commonplace of Jewish teaching that even the most pious had committed sins. God had the power to judge or forgive sins.

8:12-29

Accepting the Witness of the Light

In the likelihood that 8:1-11 is not part of the context, 8:12–10:21 still takes place on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2, 37).

8:12. Jewish literature was generous with the title “light of the world,” applying it to Israel, Jerusalem, the patriarchs, the *Messiah*, *God*, *famous rabbis* and the law (cf. 1:4-5); but always it refers to something of ultimate significance. One of the most spectacular celebrations of the Feast of Tabernacles was a torchlight ceremony with dancing in the temple’s court of women (commemorating the pillar of fire in the wilderness); this feast, along with Hanukkah (10:22), was thus known for splendid lighting (though John also uses the image in 12:46). That Jesus offers his light to the whole world, to all the nations, may suggest an allusion to Isaiah 42:6; 49:6. Walking in darkness (cf. Jn 9:4; 11:9) is a natural metaphor for stumbling (Is 59:10; Jer 13:16), falling from the right way (Jer 18:15; Mal 2:8) or being destroyed (Ps 27:2; Jer 20:11).

8:13-18. Ancients normally condemned public self-praise. The law of Moses required two witnesses to confirm any case (Deut 19:15; cf. 17:6), and subsequent Jewish interpretation made this requirement stricter; Jesus might employ the standard Jewish argument “how much more”: if the witness of two men is valid, how much more that of Father and Son? Perhaps relevant to 8:17: if later traditions are applicable to this period (which is not clear in this case), this was the season in which Jewish people especially contemplated judgment (during the closely associated New Year’s and Day of Atonement holy days).

Jews spoke of the law as “God’s law” or “our law”; rabbis presented only their pagan and heretical challengers as calling it “your law” (8:17). In John (who argues that Jesus fulfills the law), however, this expression is surely ironic: see the introduction on “the Jews.”

8:19-20. Their response is (v. 19): If he is a witness, he must appear in the court; and they complain that they have no access to the voice of God. Jesus’ reply is apparently: that is the problem. Treasuries were standard in ancient temples; the Jerusalem temple’s wealthy treasury (containing money, expensive garments, and other goods) was said to adjoin the Court of Women, where the lighting ceremony (8:12) and dancing took place throughout the nights of the festival. The treasury itself may have been used only for storage, but 8:20 can be read, “near the treasury.”

8:21-22. Many *Gentiles approved of suicide, but most Jews rejected it except under the most drastic circumstances (see comment on Acts 16:27). Although it is far from clear, it is possible that they think in terms of a deceased father; those who trafficked in ghosts would be viewed with hostility (Lev 20:27). In any case, they do not see Jesus as a particularly pious person here. Yet John’s irony is again at work: Jesus does return to the Father through his death on the cross.

8:23. The contrast between the realm above (God’s realm) and the realm below (where mortals lived) was common in Jewish *apocalyptic literature, but heavenly revealers in apocalypses were angels or very special heroes of the past (helping to prompt the question of 8:25). Jesus’ hearers cannot accept his implications, which depict Jesus more like divine Wisdom descended from heaven than like a boy who grew up in Nazareth (6:42; 7:41).

8:24-25. Dying in sin was a serious matter, for at death one’s final opportunity for *repentance had passed* (cf. Ezek 18:21-32). (*For this reason, Jewish teachers exhorted those being executed to confess their sins and expect their death to atone for their sins.*) Jesus agrees that one must repent but insists that genuine repentance must include faith in him. Although *ego eimi* can mean “I am he,” it can also refer to the divine name (Is 43:10, in Greek inviting them to believe that *ego eimi*; John builds toward the more explicit claim of 8:58).

8:26-27. That God was “true” was central to Jewish understanding of his character. According to Jewish law, an agent must accurately represent his sender, and to the extent that he did so was backed by his sender’s full authorization.

8:28-29. “Lifting up” (cf. 3:14; 12:32) is from the *Septuagint of Isaiah

52:13—the context of which early Christians applied to the crucifixion (Is 52:14–53:12).

8:30-47

Debating Parentage

8:30-31. Although Jesus' listeners initially believe, they are ready to kill him by the end of the passage (8:59; cf. Ex 4:31; 5:21). Just as *Gentile converts or converts to Jewish movements had to persevere as well as join, and teachers wanted their *disciples to continue in their teaching, so true followers of Jesus must persevere (on perseverance, see also Ezek 18:24-26). This report could also encourage John's circle of churches* (see introduction to 1 John).

8:32. The Greek concept of truth emphasized reality; the *Old Testament word translated “truth” had more to do with integrity or faithfulness to one's word or character. Jewish thought sometimes characterized God as the Truth, so Jesus' hearers should realize that he refers specifically to God's truth in the Jewish sense.

8:33. Jesus' hearers typically misunderstand him in a natural sense. Since freeborn ancients used slave status as an insult, they might object that they have never personally been slaves. Nevertheless, their reference to Abraham shows that they understand Jesus as referring to the Jewish people as a whole. Their response is surprising, since Jewish teachers generally acknowledged that their people had been subjected under the yoke of at least four kingdoms: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. But many expected God to ultimately break the yokes of the other nations (an extreme form of this belief led to the revolt of A.D. 66–70). They taught that the other nations were ruled by guardian angels and the stars, but that Israel was ruled by God alone.

8:34. Philosophers often used “free” to mean free from false ideas, passion or constraint; Judaism spoke of being free from sin.

8:35. Although slaves were considered part of a household and could be “inherited,” they were not permanent members; they could be sold, and often they were freed. Indeed, Old Testament *law mandated that Jewish slaves be freed in certain years. By contrast, barring disinheritance, a son was always part of a household (cf. Gen 21:10). Jesus may also make another allusion here: “house” (which here, as often, means “household,” “family” or “home”) might possibly include a wordplay with God's house, the temple (2:16); only the

“sons” will have a permanent share there (Ezek 46:16-17; cf. also Is 56:4-5).

8:36-37. In popular Jewish belief in some circles, descent from Abraham virtually guaranteed salvation except for the most wicked; Israel was chosen and destined for salvation in him. Judaism celebrated Abraham’s righteousness, a righteousness Jesus’ critics here did not imitate (8:40).

8:38-39. “Father” could mean “ancestor,” and on that level Abraham was their father (v. 37—although many would have had some Gentile converts in their ancestry). But metaphorically a father was someone whose ways one imitated, often a teacher, or whose nature one revealed, such as a spiritual progenitor.

8:40. Abraham was used as the ultimate model for Jewish piety (hospitality, faith, and his role as model *proselyte and maker of proselytes), and Jewish tradition celebrated his reception of God’s disguised messengers in Genesis 18. (Jewish teachers later even appealed to his merits as a basis for God’s favor.)

8:41. Insinuation was common in ancient *rhetorical conflicts. To suggest that someone had one father by law but another father by nature was to suggest that one’s mother was guilty of adultery. Recognizing this implication, the interlocutors insist on the purity of their descent: “children of Abraham” was equivalent in Jewish literature to “children of God” (cf., e.g., Ex 4:22), because God had adopted Abraham’s descendants. (Some scholars have also seen here an allusion to the later rabbinic charge against Jesus that his mother bore him to a Roman soldier rather than as a virgin, though this charge is not clear in this debate.)

8:42-45. Jesus’ interlocutors would not deny that the devil was the original murderer (cf. 8:37, 40) and denier of truth (cf. 8:32); Jewish tradition stressed that his lie had led to Adam’s death (cf. Gen 3). People could be called “children” figuratively of those they resembled or whose ways they imitated; for becoming children of God instead, see comment on 3:3, 5. Because Jesus’ interlocutors want to kill him and reject his truth, their behavior demonstrates who is their real father; the issue is not ethnic but spiritual. Commentators usually associate the devil’s initial murder with his deception of Eve into spiritual death or (perhaps less likely, since no deceiver is explicit) Cain’s murder of Abel. (In a much later Jewish tradition, the devil was Cain’s actual father.) In ancient forensic rhetoric a defendant often returned the accuser’s charges (cf. 7:20). The devil (see *Satan) as liar likely evokes the serpent’s deception of Eve; Jewish literature continued to emphasize his role as deceiver (as well as tempter).

8:46-47. In court, the accused typically demanded proof from their accusers. Ancient defense rhetoric showed that the accusation was morally not characteristic of the upright defendant; it also often shifted charges onto accusers, thereby also impugning their motives for bringing a case. But whereas defendants would sometimes “confess” to faults that were not indictable crimes, Jesus claims to be above reproach. Jewish teachers normally acknowledged that everyone sinned (a few excepted the patriarchs).

8:48-59

Greater Than Abraham

8:48. Although many Judeans looked down on Galileans, both would have been insulted to be compared with *Samaritans. Jesus’ hearers within the *narrative are probably unaware of his fraternizing with Samaritans (4:40), which would not play well to a Jerusalem audience. The basis for this charge might be similar theology: Samaritans insulted the temple and challenged the Jewish people’s exclusive heritage in Abraham (see comment on 4:12). It was customary in ancient rhetoric to return one’s accuser’s charges (Jesus associated them with the devil, and they associate him with a demon). Jews denied that Samaritans were pure descendants of Abraham (cf. 8:41). The charge of demon possession (also 10:20) challenges his prophetic credibility (see comment on 7:20). The discussion also reflects John’s irony: only the Samaritans (4:9) and *Pilate (18:35) recognize that Jesus is Jewish.*

8:49-50. According to Jewish *law, one who rejects a person’s appointed agent also insults and rejects the one who sent that agent.

8:51-53. They could have understood him spiritually or in terms of the *resurrection, since some Jewish sources do speak in such terms (e.g., 4 Maccabees 7:18-19); most Jewish people except the *Sadducees would have agreed that Abraham and the prophets were spiritually alive with God. They continue to understand him too literally, however. (Even in one Jewish story where Abraham did not want to die, God made special arrangements to persuade him to give in.)*

8:54-55. Ancients condemned public self-praise, but one could cite another’s endorsement. God would not share his glory with another deity (Is 42:8; 48:11). “He is our God” was the basic confession of the covenant in the *Old Testament (e.g., Ex 6:7; Lev 26:12; 1 Chron 17:22; Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:28). Yet those loyal

to the covenant—those who truly keep God’s law—were said in the Old Testament to “know” God (e.g., Jer 9:24; 31:31-34; Hos 2:20).

8:56. Jewish tradition emphasized that during his vision in Genesis 15:12-21 Abraham had been shown the future kingdoms that would oppress Israel and the messianic era beyond them. This experience links Abraham with Moses (see comment on 1:14-18) and Isaiah (cf. Jn 12:39-41) as among those who had seen God’s glory.

8:57-58. Although the main point is that Jesus is too young to have known Abraham, his interlocutors might also imply that he is too young for much authority; fifty was the minimum age for involvement in some kinds of public service (and maximum for some others, Num 8:25).

If Jesus merely wished to imply that he existed before Abraham, he should have said, “Before Abraham was, I was.” But “I am” was a title for God (Ex 3:14), which suggests that Jesus is claiming more than that he merely existed before Abraham. This title of God may have been fresh on the minds of Jesus’ hearers at the feast: later tradition says that during the Feast of Tabernacles, the priests uttered God’s words in Isaiah: “I am the Lord, I am he” (Is 43:10, 13; the *Septuagint of Is 43:10 has *ego eimi* “I am”). (Although we cannot be certain of this tradition’s date, it certainly does not derive from this Gospel.)

8:59. Jesus’ hearers do not miss his point in 8:58; they take his words as blasphemy (a mere claim to *messiahship was not considered blasphemous, although it could be offensive; they understood him to claim deity). Stoning was an expected punishment for blasphemy (Lev 24:16, 23), but God’s people had sometimes attempted it against God’s own agents (Ex 17:4; Num 14:10; cf. 1 Sam 30:6). The temple was constructed from massive stone blocks, not the sort of stones that people could throw; but in Jesus’ day construction was still going on, and mobs usually found objects to throw, as *Josephus* says Zealots later did in the temple and a crowd did in a *synagogue.

In the Greek tradition, deities sometimes made themselves or favorite mortals invisible. More relevant here, God had earlier hidden some of his servants for their safety (Jer 36:26); here Jesus hides himself. Jesus’ departure from the temple might symbolize that: the glory had departed (Ezek 10–11); the departure of God’s presence on account of Israel’s sin was a common theme in later Jewish texts.

9:1-12

Healing the Blind

Healing the Blind

9:1. The pool of Siloam (9:7), presumably not far from where this incident occurs, was also near the temple (which Jesus had just left, 8:59). Blind people could make a living only by public charity, and they could make it best near the temple, where many people passed and people would tend to think charitably (cf. Acts 3:2). The *disciples see this blind man as they are leaving the temple area (8:59).

9:2. Most people in antiquity, including Jewish teachers, believed that suffering, including blindness, was at least often associated with sin, though Jewish *law provided protection for a blind person. Jewish people acknowledged punishment for ancestral sin; many believed in prenatal activity; and some allowed even for prenatal sin.

9:3-5. Jesus uses commonplace images: no one (except night watchmen and shepherds) works in the dark (v. 4); because modern lighting was unavailable, that normal forms of work (and usually even battles) ceased at nightfall was common knowledge. On the light of the world, see comment on 8:12.

9:6. Spittle was sometimes associated with healing in pagan circles, so it would naturally represent an agent of healing in popular thought. But spittle was still more widely considered vulgar and disgusting, and its application would make the man uncomfortable if he knows what it is. Some find here an allusion to the creative act in Genesis 2:7 (cf. Jn 20:22).

9:7. Healing through washing appears in the account of Naaman in 2 Kings 5:10-14. It is not clear whether “Siloam” meant “sent,” but Greek teachers as well as Jewish teachers from *Philo to the *rabbis commonly made arguments based on wordplays, which were often based on fanciful etymologies.

This pool was inside Jerusalem’s walls in Jesus’ day, with large masonry and four porches. Although Siloam was used as a water supply and for baptizing converts to Judaism, it has more direct significance here. This was probably still the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2, 37; see comment on 7:53–8:11), and the water of Siloam was the sacred water used for this feast (see comment on 7:37-38). Here Jesus employs the ritual water (cf. 2:6; 3:5), but it works only because the man is “sent.”

9:8. Beggars in antiquity were often turned down and despised; Judaism emphasized charity, but the shame attached to begging normally deterred those who did not need to resort to it.

9:9-12. Those blind from birth (9:1) were not known to recover (9:32)—at least not without direct supernatural intervention.

9:13-23

Interrogating the Witnesses

The key word in 9:12-31 is “know”: everyone claims repeatedly what they know and do not know. The *Pharisees, who supposedly know the *law, turn out to know nothing; whereas the healed man, who knows only Jesus, has had an experience with God that his more scholarly interrogators cannot refute.

9:13. Local elders (or in some places, like *Essene communities, priests filled this role) served as judges in local communities before A.D. 70; but Pharisaic teachers gradually began to achieve much dominance in religious teaching in Palestine after 70. Writing in the 90s, John uses the language of his day to communicate the point to his readers, many of whom have faced opposition or expulsion from their own *synagogues (see comment on 9:24-34).

9:14-16. This is a natural Pharisaic response on the sabbath (5:9-12; see comment on Mk 2:23-3:6). The Pharisaic school of *Hillel allowed praying for the sick on the Sabbath; but the Pharisaic school of *Shammai was dominant in Jesus’ day. Most, however, would have viewed as a Sabbath violation making a clay poultice on the Sabbath (so long as the person was not in danger of dying). Kneading (dough, and by analogy clay) was one of thirty-nine classes of work forbidden on the sabbath. Pharisees were divided among themselves on many issues in Jesus’ day, and they had still not settled those issues by the end of the first century, when John was writing.

9:17. “Prophet” is an inadequate but positive title (cf. 4:19, 44; 6:14; 7:40). Some of the more academic circles in early Judaism were apparently more skeptical that prophets continued in their day, although popular circles were often open to them. “Prophets” could also be associated with unrest or criticism, and so were often problematic for Jerusalem’s institutional leaders.

9:18-21. The blind man could have remained under his parents’ roof at night and earned his keep by begging in the day, although this is not clear. But the reason the Jewish leaders ask his parents about his blindness is that they would know if he was born blind. Both Greek and Jewish courts of law could compel persons to witness against their will. “Of age” means any time past puberty. After about age thirteen a Jewish boy became responsible for his own keeping of the commandments (this point becomes explicit only in later rabbinic texts but was probably already implied in coming-of-age rituals in this period).

9:22-23. Pharisaic rules were scrupulous about cross-examining witnesses fairly and without prejudice; these interrogators thus violate Pharisaic ethical

teaching. Excommunication was one of the severest forms of discipline administered by a synagogue community and was apparently rare and thus very harsh in the time of Jesus. (The practice is also attested among other disciplines in the *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 6.24–7.25; cf. Ezra 10:8.)

9:24-34

Excommunicating a Disciple

Throughout this section, the interrogators ignore the basic rules of evidence and fairness that later *rabbis diligently emphasized. Most scholars today believe that John's hearers, or many of them, had faced the danger or reality of expulsion from their synagogues (16:2; cf. 12:42-43). The faithfulness of this man (in contrast to the betrayal of the man in 5:14-16) would encourage them to remain faithful too.

9:24. "Give glory to God" can invite praise, but in an interrogation setting it can invite confession of sin (cf. Josh 7:19; 1 Esdras 9:8), in this case perhaps for following a "misleader" (see comment on 7:12). Interrogations sometimes proceeded in a heavy-handed way to procure a desired outcome (e.g., *Gentiles sometimes tortured slaves until they confessed what was suspected). Greek literature often mocked the overconfident person wise in their own eyes.

9:25. In contrast to arrogant persons (cf. 9:24), philosophers (like Socrates) normally admitted their ignorance and pursued knowledge. Although the man's affirmation of ignorance may be sincere, it is possible to interpret the passage otherwise; sometimes people feigned ignorance *rhetorically.

9:26-27. Diligent cross-examination was important in Jewish *law (cf., e.g., Susanna 48-62; Mishnah Avot 1:9). Although most people accepted arguments from the experience of miracles, some rabbis whose opinions appear in later sources insisted that standard rabbinic interpretations of Scripture outweighed even visible miracles.

9:28. Both Philo and later rabbis spoke of being *disciples of Moses, suggesting that the idea was common. John's point, however, is that these interrogators are wrong (5:45).

9:29-30. Leaving someone anonymous was sometimes a way to denigrate their value. The interrogators confess that they do not know where Jesus is from. Some scholars note that the circumstances of birth of a person accused of leading people astray would sometimes be investigated to determine if the

misleader was an illegitimate child; if this point is in view here at all, the interrogators have failed to investigate the matter. More importantly, denying knowledge of where someone was from could repudiate or belittle them, demonstrating their lack of significance. Ironically, they undercut their own claims of knowledge (9:24); where Jesus is significantly from is “above” (8:23). Irony was a common literary technique in antiquity.

9:31. This view reflects good Jewish piety: everyone taught that God heard the pious but rejected the prayers of the ungodly (cf. Ps 34:15; Prov 15:8, 29; 21:27; 28:9). This is the major premise in the healed man’s argument.

9:32-33. The minor premise of the argument (9:31) is that an extraordinary miracle was done; the conclusion is that Jesus is a righteous man. Syllogism—the practice of demonstrating a conclusion from two accepted premises—was a common way of arguing a case in antiquity.

Blindness from birth was thought an especially difficult ailment to cure; in the rare instances when such extraordinary healings were claimed at a pagan healing shrine (e.g., a later-written report of empty eye sockets filled), they became a cause for much praise to the pagan god held responsible for them. But while extant Jewish tradition reports healings of blindness (Tobit 11:12-13), it does not report the healing of one born blind. (The man’s “never since the world’s beginning” is emphatic, and probably *rhetorical overstatement; there were a few claimed exceptions in the Gentile world of which he was probably unaware. But even if John’s audience knew and believed other claims of healing they would have excused the man’s *hyperbole.)

9:34. Later rabbis emphasized being humble and teachable; but despite the proper Jewish argument the man gave in 9:31-33, the authorities expel him on the premise that he was born in sin—which the reader knows to be false (9:2-3). How formal excommunications were in this period is unclear, but he is certainly expelled from participating in the local center of religious life (see comment on 9:22-23).

9:35-41

The Seeing and the Blind

9:35-38. The healed man responds like John’s probable Jewish Christian hearers: in faith, unlike their opponents. The title “*Son of Man” is potentially ambiguous, but as an object of faith presumably alludes to Daniel 7:13-14. The

man responds based on his experience of Jesus (see comment on 9:25-27).

9:39-41. Greek and especially Jewish tradition used “blindness” figuratively in a moral, intellectual or spiritual sense (e.g., Is 6:9-10; Jer 5:21); sometimes this was conjoined with physical blindness (e.g., the Greek seer Tiresias; the Israelite prophet Ahijah, 1 Kings 14:4). The reversal of physical and spiritual blindness is a motif in the prophets (e.g., Is 42:16-19); the religious authorities, who are sure they are not spiritually blind, are the blindest of all.

10:1-21

Shepherd, Sheep and Robbers

The original text of the Bible had no chapter breaks; this passage continues Jesus’ words to the *Pharisees in 9:41. It is based on* Old Testament images of God as the shepherd of Israel (Gen 48:15; 49:24; Ps 23:1; 28:9; 77:20; 78:72; Is 40:11; Ezek 34:11-31), of Israel as his flock (Ps 74:1; 78:52; 79:13; 100:3) and of abusive or unfaithful religious leaders as destroyers of his flock (Jer 23:1-2; Ezek 34). Faithful human shepherds (Jer 3:15) included Moses, David (2 Sam 5:2; Ps 78:71-72) and the Davidic *Messiah (Mic 5:4), but God appears most often as Israel’s chief shepherd. Although Moses and David were shepherds, urban people throughout the Roman Empire often looked down on shepherds as low-class and coarse. From the ancient Near East to Greek epic, however, shepherds were a common ancient figure for rulers.

In this context, the healed man who follows Jesus but is excluded from the *synagogue is one of Jesus’ sheep; Jesus is the divine shepherd of Israel; and those who excluded the man recall Israel’s unfaithful leaders condemned in the prophets. Thus, although these leaders seek to exclude the man from God’s people, God himself affirms that the man (and those like him) do belong to his people.

10:1-2. During the cool winter months, sheep were kept inside a pen at night; the pen often had a stone wall, which might have briers on top of it. (Winter was approaching at the time of this feast.) Ancient sources portray the pen as a protection from wolves (10:12) and other predators. Although in warmer parts of the Mediterranean sheep could ideally find pasture at any time of year, where this was not possible they might remain in the fold during winter (soon approaching, in view of 7:2 and 10:22).

One could build such pens at caves (1 Sam 24:3), a square on a hillside

surrounded by stone walls, an enclosed yard in front of a house, and anything from a roofed enclosure to a temporary shelter using thornbushes instead of rocks, depending on the circumstances. The door here may suggest formal walls, perhaps of stones. One observer of Middle Eastern shepherding, Kenneth Bailey, suggests that because the thief must “go up” to surmount the wall in 10:1, it may be like some modern village family courtyards, with walls more than two meters high. (“Go up” does not always require such an interpretation, however; cf., e.g., Gen 38:12; 41:2.) Various families may share a courtyard for this purpose; this might be distinct from the setting in 10:7-9 (see comment there).

When speaking technically, ancient law distinguished thieves from robbers: the former broke in, whereas the latter often lived in the wilderness and assaulted passersby. When linked figuratively, though, they can belong to the same semantic domain. Shepherds continually had to guard against losing sheep to either kind of enemy (or other predators, 10:12). People dreaded thieves and robbers, which were common (esp. at night) and could be harshly punished.

10:3-4. Sheep were considered among the most obedient of animals. In the Old Testament, Israel “heard God’s voice” when they obeyed the *law and his message through his prophets*. *Those who were truly his sheep—in covenant relationship with God—knew him (see comment on 10:14-15).* (*John’s readers hear him through the Spirit*, a practice that most of their contemporaries did not believe was possible in their own day; cf. 16:13-15.) Sheep could have names based on color, like “snowy” (white), or other characteristics. It is said that shepherds customarily knew each of their sheep by name. In the Old Testament, God called his special ones, his closest servants, “by name” (Ex 33:12, 17; cf. Is 43:1). (God knowing the names of all stars reveals his omniscience [Ps 147:4; Is 40:26]; likewise, he is able to know each person individually.) Flocks of various shepherds often mingled together, but shepherds could easily separate out their own sheep, for example to put them in or lead them from their pen, or lead sheep elsewhere. They could do this because the sheep knew their shepherd’s voice; it is said that some even trained sheep to respond to the signals of particular flute melodies.

10:5. Ancient sources do report (and modern experience confirms) sheep fleeing from strangers. In this context the strangers are the thieves and robbers (v. 1)—the Pharisees—who have sought to mislead the sheep (9:40-41). The synagogue leaders who expelled John’s Jewish Christian readers claim to be true shepherds, but when John’s audience hears this passage they will think of them quite differently.

10:6. Jesus' preceding figure fits Jewish definitions for a *parable*; indeed, in the Septuagint, the present term translates the same Hebrew term that is translated "parable" in the *Synoptic Gospels.

10:7-8. Although wolves (10:12) and other intruders were sometimes known to penetrate sheepfolds, often they feared to enter them, and even when ravenously hungry they sometimes assaulted the walls in vain. As opposed to the apparently walled enclosure in 10:1, some suggest that the sheep pen here might be a temporary enclosure topped with thorns, closer to pasture for seasonal grazing; lacking a separate door, it could depend on the shepherd to sleep across the gateway, a practice sometimes reported in modern times. Although shepherds in warmer regions could keep sheep in pasture areas all year (grazing in higher altitudes in summer and lower in winter), in cooler areas such as the Judean hills they spent part of the year in more formal pens and part of the year in the pastures, where temporary pens might be constructed. This explanation makes sense here (10:7, 9), but mixed metaphors were common and Jesus might simply alternate between shepherd and door images because he fulfills more than one role; like God in the Old Testament, he is Israel's shepherd, but he is also the way to the Father. On sheep not hearing strangers, see comment on 10:5.

10:9. For the door, see comment on 10:6-8. Sheep were led "in" and "out" (cf. shepherd leaders in Num 27:17; 2 Sam 5:2) of the sheepfold to and from pasture. Coming and going offered a Semitic expression for freedom of movement and together sometimes meant "all the time" (cf. Deut 28:6, 19; 2 Kgs 19:27; Ps 121:8). In at least some regions of the ancient Mediterranean world, shepherds led sheep to begin grazing around sunrise, led them to drinking around 10 a.m., led them to shade, where possible, during midday heat, and then drinking and then grazing again until evening. In the evening they returned to the fold, whether the temporary or permanent variety.

10:10-11. The thief (in the context, unfaithful leaders; cf. v. 5) acts for his own good, not that of the flock (hungry thieves might steal sheep to eat them); a shepherd risks his life to protect his flock from animals and thieves. Shepherds were known for intimate concern for their sheep, an image applicable to God (Ps 23:1; Ezek 34:2-6, 11-16). Pharisees considered shepherds members of an unclean profession, and aristocrats despised them as vulgar lower-class workers; thus Jesus' opponents would not readily identify with the protagonist of the story, but in Scripture God was Israel's chief shepherd (see the introduction to 10:1-18). Sheep were completely dependent on shepherds, who provided shelter and guidance and helped them when they gave birth or were sick or injured.

“Life” was short for “*eternal life,” the life of the world to come, in Jewish parlance; Jesus provides this relationship with himself in the present. See comment on 3:16.

10:12-13. A hired helper was not responsible for attacks from wild animals (cf. Ex 22:13) and worked for pay, not because the sheep were his own. Ancient sources sometimes complain about hirelings who did not protect the animals the way they should. Biblical prophets condemned religious leaders who let God’s sheep be scattered, not concerned with what concerns God (Jer 23:1; Ezek 34:6). Commonly ancient sources (including fables) contrasted sheep with wolves, regularly portraying wolves as predators of sheep. The image was used both literally and figuratively.

10:14-15. The Old Testament often described Israel’s covenant relationship with God as “knowing” him, which meant having an intimate and obedient relationship with him (e.g., Jer 31:34; Hos 6:6). The intimacy anticipated here appears to exceed even the intimacy that earlier biblical prophets had with God. See John 10:3-4 and 16:13-15. As a perfect reflection of God, Wisdom was expected to provide people intimacy with God like prophets (Wisdom of Solomon 7:26-27); probably more important, all of God’s people would “know” him in the time of the new covenant (Jer 31:33-34).

10:16-18. The image of gathering the folds together into one flock in Old Testament language meant gathering the dispersed sheep of Israel, scattered among the nations (cf. Ezek 37:21-24; Mic 2:12); the “one shepherd” in Ezek 37:24 is the Davidic king (cf. Ezek 34:23). The regathering of Israel in the end was one of the basic hopes of ancient Judaism, reflected in writings and prayers. But Jesus may include *Gentiles*; proselytes, or converts to Judaism, became part of God’s people.

10:19-21. The Jewish community again experiences schism over Jesus’ identity (cf. also 7:43; 9:16), as it was also experiencing in John’s day. On charges of demonization, see comment on 7:20.

10:22-42

In the Temple at Hanukkah

Jesus attends an extrabiblical festival in Jerusalem, commemorating Israel’s deliverance in the time of the *Maccabees. Ironically, Israel’s truest deliverer faces rejection from some of his people at this festival of national deliverance.

10:22. Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication, was not a required pilgrimage festival, but the eight-day celebration of lights in the temple was beautiful, and many pious Jews from nearby Galilee would come to Jerusalem. It was the next festival after those immediately connected to the Feast of Tabernacles (7:1-10:21).

10:23. The vast outer part of the temple had porches on all four sides; the Royal Porch, on the south, had four rows of pillars. Solomon's Porch was on the east side of the temple, with two rows of pillars (as on the west and north sides). The south portico was called Solomon's because people thought that its pre-Herodian masonry had survived from Solomon's temple (*Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.184-85; *Jewish Antiquities* 15.397-400; 20.221). Greek public buildings often included such porches, and they had long been a popular place for public lectures and discussions. Even as early as Hanukkah (10:22), it could be cool in Jerusalem in winter, so people would be especially inclined to walk under the colonnades, as here. (On avoiding travel in winter, see comment on Acts 27:9.)

10:24. See 8:25; cf. also the discussion of the theme of the messianic secret in the introduction to Mark. These Jews would have either misunderstood his claim or used it to charge him with sedition (cf. 18:29-35).

10:25-27. On hearing Jesus' voice, cf. comment on 10:3-4.

10:28-29. A shepherd who would protect his sheep against any thief or predator would have to be ready to pay a great price (10:12, 15), but this is the price of faithfulness (Jer 23:4). On no one snatching from his hand, compare also Psalm 95:7, where Israel is "the sheep of his hand"; this allusion would fit the mention of hearing Jesus' voice (10:27), since the same verse in the psalm exhorts his people to hear God's voice.

10:30. His hearers might think of the relation between Israel and God, but Jesus' wording about his unity with the Father is too explicit for that: instead he echoes the basic confession of Judaism that God is one (Deut 6:4). For Jesus to be one with the Father (albeit distinct from him) is tantamount to a claim to deity. (He has probably already applied earlier texts about God to himself in this context; see comment on 10:28-29.)

10:31-33. Cf. 5:18, 8:59; as in the other instances, Jesus' opponents understand his claim to deity, even if they do not catch all the ramifications. Hanukkah (10:22) celebrated deliverance from the wicked ruler Antiochus Epiphanes, who made himself to be God; John's hearers, however, know that the Father sent Jesus, rather than he exalting himself (1:14; 5:23, 36; 6:38). Jesus implicitly compares his good work with his opponents' attempt to stone him;

ancient defense *rhetoric often contrasted the honorable behavior of the accused with the shameful behavior of the accusers and sought to expose the accusers' own crimes. Ingratitude toward a benefactor was reprehensible, and direct enmity toward a benefactor even more so. The festival honored the Maccabees' good works; Jesus' opponents want to stone him for his (cf. Ex 17:4; Num 14:10; the term used here appears in 2 Sam 16:6, 13).

10:34. On “your law,” cf. 8:17. Some employed the term “*law” broadly to include all of Scripture, as here, where Jesus cites a psalm. Psalm 82:6 in context refers to powerful people, probably the kings of the earth viewed as God’s divine council; those kings considered themselves divine, but they would perish like mortals. In a Jewish tradition attested in second-century *rabbis, however, this verse was sometimes applied out of context to Israel as recipients of the divine law (God’s word at Sinai gave them immortality, but they lost it through disobedience), as Jesus may know. Or Jesus may simply be evading the issue by a further riddle, noting that he has not explicitly defined his words.

10:35-36. Jesus might respond with a standard Jewish “how much more” (*qal vahomer*) argument: if (as you read it) Israel was loosely called “gods,” how do you object to me saying that I am God’s Son, without even understanding my point? (Even more generally, a Jewish tradition protested that the wicked complain about righteous people calling God their Father; Wisdom of Solomon 2:16.)

Many commentators have argued that Jesus’ being “sanctified” or set apart to his mission (cf. also 17:17) may relate to the context of the Feast of Hanukkah, or “Dedication” (10:22). Hanukkah commemorated the consecration, rededication or setting apart (as again holy) of the Jerusalem temple in the time of the Maccabees in the second century B.C. For Jesus as the foundation of a new temple in John, see 2:21 and comment on 7:37-38; such an image would be particularly compelling after the traumatic destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.

10:37-38. Jewish tradition emphasized right motives but allowed that obeying a commandment from inadequate motives was better than not obeying at all.

10:39-42. “Beyond the Jordan” presumably means Perea, in Jesus’ day ruled, like Galilee, by Herod Antipas—and well outside the jurisdiction of the Jerusalem leaders.

Announcement of Lazarus's Sickness

Jesus' first sign in this Gospel is at a wedding; his climactic one, at (or more technically, after) a funeral. (In ancient sources, weddings and funerals typified the most joyful and most sorrowful occasions, respectively.) Less certainly, if Jesus' first sign (water turned to wine) evoked in reverse Moses' first plague (water turned to blood), his climactic sign (raising Lazarus) might evoke Moses' final plague (death, in that case of the firstborn).

11:1. Bethany was close to Jerusalem (v. 18); emphasizing Jesus' Galilean ministry, Mark omits this miracle and is followed by Matthew and Luke. "Mary" was the most common Jewish woman's name in the period; "Martha" is rarer, though attested; "Eleazar" is fairly common, sometimes in the Greek form, "Lazarus." (The three names even occur together, along with others, in a burial cave in Bethany, but we do not know if the names reflect the persons in John 11.)

11:2-5. Visiting and praying for the sick was a pious obligation in Judaism, but Jesus' reputation as a healer is undoubtedly the main reason for informing him of Lazarus's sickness. Informing him would serve as a polite request (cf. 2:3).

11:6. Given the urgent request for a miracle-worker, Jesus' delay may have seemed culturally offensive. Perhaps by the time Jesus receives news, however, and certainly before he could have reached Bethany, Lazarus was already dead (11:14, 17). Lazarus was in the tomb four days by the time Jesus arrived (11:17, 39), people buried corpses on the day of death, and it was only a day's journey each way, just over twenty miles. The journey to Bethany may have taken slightly longer than the journey from there, since it would be uphill (in the Judean hills, Bethany may have been nearly 2700 feet above sea level, whereas the Jordan plain, where Jesus was in 10:40, was roughly 1100 feet below it). For temporary rebuffs to test faith, cf. 2:4.

11:7-8. Although the Jerusalem priesthood was respected in Galilee, it wielded more power and influence in Judea; Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, did not tolerate direct interference in his territory. (In John's day, the Pharisaic establishment was also settled in Judea, where it presumably wielded more influence than in Galilee.)

11:9-10. On walking in darkness and stumbling, see comment on 8:12. Anyone who has walked on unlit paths on a dark night understands the metaphor, but even the language was familiar in first-century Palestine (in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, children of righteousness walk in the light but those ruled by

the evil one walk in darkness; 1QS 3.20-21).

11:11-16. Again the *disciples interpret Jesus too literally* (v. 12)—although “sleep” was a common metaphor for death in Jewish texts and throughout the ancient world (Greek myth even portrayed Sleep and Death as twin brothers). But even though they may not understand that Jesus’ death is the cost of giving Lazarus (and others) life, they are prepared to die with him (v. 16). Even though disciples loved their teachers, this is a rare expression of commitment in practice; in general, Jewish people emphasized only being prepared to die for God and his law.

11:17-37

Comforting the Mourners

11:17-19. The note of proximity (11:18) may heighten the element of danger (11:8), but also explains the presence of additional “Judeans” in 11:19. Visiting and consoling the bereaved in the days immediately following a close relative’s loss was an essential duty of Jewish piety. The neighbors would provide the first meal after the funeral. Lazarus would have been buried on the day of his death.

11:20. The first week of deep grief after a close relative’s burial would be spent mourning in one’s house, sitting on the floor, while others brought food and sympathy (considered an important element of piety). This custom, called *shivah* (for “seven” days), is continued in Jewish tradition and is very helpful for releasing grief. Mourners abstained from adornment for the next three weeks and from common pleasures for the next year. Because mourners would be present to console the family, Mary remains in the home while Martha slips out.

11:21-22. Prayers for comfort were standard, and this might be the import of verse 22. Conversely, Martha may be asking in verse 22 for her brother’s resuscitation, and verse 24 may test Jesus, pressing him further for the favor (2 Kings 4:16; cf. 4:28). Ancient Near Eastern peoples often sought favors from benefactors in such self-effacing ways, as opposed to the more direct modern Western approach (“Give me . . .”).

11:23-27. The common belief of Palestinian Judaism in this period was that the dead would be raised bodily at the end; indeed, *Pharisees considered those who denied this doctrine (specifically Sadducees)* to be damned for doing so. Apparently most Jews who affirmed future *resurrection also accepted an afterlife before the resurrection.

11:28. Martha informs Mary about Jesus' coming "secretly" perhaps for his safety, but perhaps also because someone needed to remain home to entertain the guests. According to custom, members of the family were supposed to remain home mourning for the first seven days (unless perhaps going to weep at the tomb, 11:31).

11:29-32. The time and consolation of an important religious teacher who had come a long distance would be especially meaningful, though local students and teachers of the *law joined in funeral processions when it was possible for them to do so. Supplicants fell at one's feet (11:32) to beg favors, but one could also fall before God in worship or prayer.

11:33-37. Unlike most individuals, Greek and Roman philosophers emphasized sobriety and remaining calm and untroubled by bereavement; Jewish tradition, by contrast, expressed grief emotionally. Most people regarded as praiseworthy a protagonist who shared others' grief; also, in the ancient Mediterranean world, women's tears were sometimes known to move men to special action. Jesus' "anger" (the normal sense of the term for him being "moved" in 11:33, 38) might be grief over people's unbelief (cf. Num 14:11; Mk 4:40).

11:38-44

Raising Lazarus

11:38. People were often buried in caves. Although some tombs were vertical shafts, as a cave this one probably had the body laying horizontally. The body would be left to decompose for one year, then its bones would be placed in an ossuary (bone box), which in turn would typically be slid into a slot on the wall. Stones (often disk-shaped) covered many tomb openings and would keep out animals, the elements and occasionally robbers.

11:39. The body would be wrapped and left lying on the floor in the tomb's antechamber; only after a year, when the flesh had fully decomposed, would family members return to collect the bones into a box, which they would then slide into a slot on the wall. After four days (11:17), decomposition was well under way, especially because it was probably no longer winter (11:55). Whatever spices they may have used to delay the stench (see comment on Mk 16:1) would no longer be sufficient. Some scholars note a later rabbinic tradition that the soul left the body only after three days; if the idea is this early, the fourth

day could emphasize the miracle's greatness.

11:40. Moses promised Israel that they would “see God’s glory” when God acted on their behalf (Ex 16:7, though in a context of their initial unbelief).

11:41-42. Lifting one’s face to heaven appears in some other ancient Jewish prayers (e.g., Ps 123:1; **Jubilees* 25:11). For the preliminary prayer, cf. 1 Kings 18:36.

11:43-44. The deceased would be wrapped in long cloth strips, often mentioned in ancient Jewish texts. This wrapping was thorough, binding the limbs to keep them straight and even the cheeks to keep the mouth shut; the facecloth may have been a yard square. John’s ancient audience would recognize that this tight wrapping would have made it hard enough for a living person to walk, not to mention a formerly dead person coming forth from the entrance to the tomb; this difficulty probably further underscores the miraculous nature of this event. Men could not wrap women’s corpses, but women could wrap both men and women, so Lazarus may have been wrapped by his sisters.

11:45-57

The Religious People Plot to Kill Jesus

11:45-46. On the *Pharisees here, see comment on 7:32. Most ancient miracle stories include acclamation but lack rejection, but *New Testament miracle stories often include the latter as well.

11:47-48. The Pharisees and chief priests call together literally a “Sanhedrin,” probably referring here to the supreme court of Israel or those of its representatives who are available. Their concern is a legitimate one validated by history: those perceived as political messiahs threatened their own power and Judea’s stability, inviting Roman intervention; the Romans accepted only one supreme king, Caesar. *Josephus testified to this concern of the priestly aristocracy, and one reason Joseph Caiaphas maintained his office longer than any other *high priest of the first century (A.D. 18–36) was that he kept the peace for the Romans. But this is another touch of John’s irony (a common ancient literary device): this was their view, not that of the Romans (18:38; 19:12); and although they handed Jesus over to the governor for execution, the Romans ultimately did take away their temple and nation, in A.D. 70, anyway.

Josephus shows that Jewish aristocrats (not unlike Roman ones) plotted to remove those they considered dangerous. Sometimes sympathizers leaked this

information to those being plotted against. Historically, we should expect that at least some of the Sanhedrin was involved in Jesus' execution: Romans normally depended on local accusers to bring cases to their attention, and would expect a hearing before the local elite first. Most scholars accept as authentic part of Josephus's comments about Jesus, sometimes including the remark that it was Jerusalem's aristocrats who influenced *Pilate to execute him (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.63-64).

11:49. Various ancient Jewish sources complain about frequent corruption in the first-century high priesthood. The high priesthood, like some Greek priesthods (e.g., at Eleusis), had originally been a lifelong office. It had never been reduced to an annual assignment, like most priesthods in Syria or Asia Minor, but John's "priest that year" may poke fun at how the Roman governor had power to change the *high priests, or at how the high priest's deposed relative could still meddle so much in these affairs (18:13); or he may simply mean (with probably the majority of commentators) "high priest in the particular year of which we speak," because officials' terms were used to date events.

The high priest presided over the Sanhedrin. To have a high priest inform his colleagues, "You do not know anything," is the epitome of John's irony.

11:50. Whether one should be sacrificed to protect the many (if, say, the Romans demanded an innocent person be handed over) was an issue of debate in early Judaism, but never in terms of actual murder (11:53). Josephus claimed that King Agrippa II urged his people to forego vengeance concerning injustice for the sake of peace; but Jewish teachers in the rabbinic tradition said not to betray a single Israelite to rape or death even if the result would be the rape or execution of all. The chief priests here think in terms of expediency (a common Greek ground for moral and *rhetorical debate). Many of the chief priests helped control their people to keep peace with the Romans (to whom they also owed their own local political power).

11:51. Here the high priest means one thing on the level of his own hearers, but his words have another meaning that would be more obvious to John's readers: others (both Greeks and Jews) also believed that those appointed as God's representatives could sometimes speak God's truth without meaning to do so. Some Jewish traditions seem to associate *prophecy with the priesthood.

11:52-53. Jewish people expected the gathering of their dispersed people (God's children) in the end time. (John may reapply this spiritually; 1:12.)

11:54-55. The temple courts had countless pools for ritual purification; on this point, cf. also 2:6 and 3:25. Those coming from a great distance, especially

in the *Diaspora, wanted to arrive early to ensure that they were pure for the festival; those with corpse impurity would need to arrive at least a week early.

11:56-57. Those speaking presumably could not believe someone as pious a religious teacher as Jesus is popularly supposed to be would not show up for one of the great pilgrimage festivals required by the *law, especially when he had to come only from Galilee.

12:1-11

Mary's Gratitude, and Dying to Live

For more details, see comment on Mark 14:1-11. Three kilometers east of Jerusalem, Bethany was one of those villages near Jerusalem where Passover pilgrims could spend the night with hosts. Even six days before the festival, Jerusalem would be filling with pilgrims (esp. those needing purification and those from the *Diaspora, who could not calculate the exact timing of arrival but needed to avoid arriving late). Given 18:28 and 19:14, this meal may be Saturday evening after sundown (hence allowing Martha to serve). Just possibly this could portray Jesus as entering Jerusalem (12:12) when the Passover lambs were set aside (Ex 12:3, 6), but this interpretation is not clear.

12:1-2. One typically “sat” at normal meals; one “reclined” on couches at special meals like feasts or banquets. Unless the Gospel writers simply adopt Greek language for the meals consistently (Greeks normally reclined), Jesus was invited to many banquets—this one probably in his honor. Early traveling teachers were often invited to lecture at meals in return for free meals and lodging. In that culture, women often served at table.

12:3. The Roman “pound” (NASB) or “pint” (NIV) may have been roughly 324 grams, about twelve ounces. A flask would normally contain not more than an ounce, so Mary is tremendously extravagant here. Actual “myrrh” could take the form of either powder or liquid, perfume or ointment; its manufacturers derived it from resin from a sort of short balsam tree in the horn of eastern Africa and southern Arabia. John, however, employs the Greek term here more generically, the specific aromatic substance being spikenard, a very expensive fragrant oil from a plant in the mountains in northern India.

It was common to anoint the heads of important guests, but for their feet a host normally would simply provide water. Expending such expensive perfume on feet was shocking; she treats even Jesus’ feet as worthier than a normal head.

(Given the following context, Mary may have thought of a royal anointing.) Further, religious Jews resented married women who uncovered their heads and exposed their hair to men's gazes; because Mary's brother and sister but not her husband are mentioned, she may well have been unmarried (thus young, widowed, divorced, or—rare as this was for women—adult yet never married); but acting thus toward a famous (albeit single) *rabbi might still raise some pious eyebrows. In any case, normally only servants (see comment on 1:27) would even touch the master's feet with their hands, much less their hair.

12:4-5. Because such ointment would have been so expensive, scholars often think that it was a family heirloom. In any case, it represented nearly a year's wages for an average worker and would be reserved for only a dramatically special occasion.

12:6. Some rabbis delegated their school's financial concerns to their *disciples; some other groups, like the *Essenes and some Greek philosophers, held property in common. Only those whose virtue was most trusted were permitted to keep group funds (cf. 13:29); thus Judas's treachery is all the more scandalous.

12:7. Kings (cf. 12:13-15) were anointed, but so were corpses; fragrant spices could be added to help cover the initial odor of decomposition. On anointing corpses, see comment on Mark 16:1; they were first anointed to clean them and then washed with water. This was an important act on Mary's part; those executed as criminals may have sometimes been denied anointing before burial (though not Jesus; see 19:39).

12:8. Jesus' reply alludes to Deuteronomy 15:11, which urges generosity to the poor, who will always be in the land; the context promises that God will bless his people if they care for the poor. Jesus thus does not play down giving to the poor but emphasizes his impending death; he must be his followers' first commitment.

12:9-11. The religious leaders decide to have Lazarus killed. John's irony: those who receive life by Jesus' death must die because of it; witnesses get martyred. Irony was a common ancient literary device.

12:12-22

The World Follows

12:12-13. Branches were also waved to celebrate triumphs or in homage to

rulers (cf. 1 Maccabees 13:51; 2 Maccabees 10:7). Large palm branches were used at the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall (cf. Lev 23:23, 40), often brought from lower-elevation Jericho; some pilgrims constructed temporary shelters for Passover (*Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.213, 217), for which they could have brought such branches; or local branches could be used. The branches described here are small enough for the colt to walk on. Palm branches, which had been one of the nationalistic symbols of Judea since the days of the *Maccabees, were consistently used to celebrate military victories and probably stirred some political messianic hopes among the people. (Carrying branches was also part of the worship at the feast depicted in Ps 118:27.)

Pilgrims to the feast were typically welcomed by crowds already there, so it is unlikely that the whole crowd recognized the significance of Jesus' entry. Nevertheless, Jesus was well-known, especially among the Galileans who had come to the festival. In view of the crowd's acclamation in 12:13, the image that may have come most readily to the minds of John's ancient hearers is probably that of a royal entrance procession. Hopes for the restoration of the Davidic *kingdom also ran high at this time of year. "Hosanna" means "Please save!" Although the expression could be appropriate for imploring a king for deliverance (cf. the Hebrew of 2 Sam 14:4; 2 Kings 6:26), it could also address God, which is how it functions in Psalm 118:25. This Hebrew term and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" come from Psalm 118:25-26. Psalms 113-118, called the Hallel, were regularly sung at Passover season, so these words would have been fresh in everyone's minds.

12:14-16. One expected military heroes to ride horses or be drawn in chariots; Jesus came as a meek, nonmilitary official would, following Zechariah 9:9. (Later rabbis also took Zech 9:9 as messianic, due to the mention of the king.)

12:17-19. Again employing irony (a literary technique common in antiquity, as it is today), John lets the *Pharisees denounce themselves: "You do nothing profitable!" Their complaint that the world has begun to follow Jesus leads into 12:20.

12:20. Although some suggest that these "Greeks" are Jews who live in the Greek East, they are probably ethnic or cultural Greeks (the normal sense of the term), God-fearers not yet fully converted to Judaism who nevertheless would come to worship at Jerusalem (cf. Acts 8:27). Many of the attending "Greeks" could be from the region, including the Decapolis and larger Syria. Jews and Greeks were known for their mutual hostility in Palestine, nearby Syria and

Egypt.

12:21-22. Philip is one of the only disciples of Jesus with a Greek name. Until A.D. 34 (i.e., after these events), Philip's town of Bethsaida belonged to the tetrarchy of Philip rather than that of Herod Antipas; the town would have had contact with the predominantly *Gentile Decapolis. The cities of the Decapolis were culturally Greek. The announcement of verse 21 prompts Jesus' knowledge that his hour has arrived (v. 23); his mission has begun to touch the whole "world."

12:23-34

Jesus' Death Approaches

12:23-26. On "the hour" see 2:4; on "glory" see 1:14. "Glorified," like "lifted up" (v. 32), refers back to the *Septuagint of Isaiah 52:13, which prefaces the death of the suffering servant (Is 53), whom early Christians recognized as Jesus. For most people in the Roman empire, crucifixion, where one was hanged naked to die slowly in front of crowds, was the most shameful form of death; but for John, it reflects Jesus' glory.

Grain images were naturally common in antiquity. Technically (from a botanical standpoint), an embryo is already growing in a seed of wheat when it falls; it usually breaks through the seed coating after two days in moist soil. The text uses the image in a way more directly intelligible, however, for Jesus' and John's audiences. As in 12:25, some others also recognized that losing one's life in this world preserves it for the greater reward of *eternal life (*1 *Enoch* 108:10; *2 *Baruch* 51:15-16).

12:27. Ancient philosophers and biographers often praised those who were not troubled in the face of death (in contrast to the Gospels).

12:28. Prayers for the glory of God's name were common (see comment on Mt 6:9). Jewish tradition often discussed voices from heaven, which were frequently regarded as a substitute for *prophecy. (See comment on Mk 1:11 for more detail.)

12:29-30. In ancient Jewish stories, God often answered prayers by sending angels, which may have seemed less dramatic to some of his hearers than a voice from heaven. (On the persistent misunderstanding of the crowds, see comment on 3:9-10.) Thunder sometimes appears in theophanies, and God's voice sometimes sounded like thunder (2 Sam 22:14; Job 37:2, 5; 40:9; Ps 18:13; 29:3-

7; also in several Sibylline oracles). (Greeks also associated thunder with the chief deity, in their case, Zeus.)

12:31. God is the ruler of the world in nearly all Jewish texts, but these texts also speak of fallen angels ruling much of the world under his decree and recognize that the prince of the evil angels (i.e., *Satan, also called Sammael, etc.*) ruled most of the peoples in the world except Israel (or, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, all but the remnant). John would agree that God has always been ultimately sovereign over all; but here he speaks of Satan's dominion in human affairs and of the present defeat of demonic spiritual forces, which Judaism expected only in the time of the *kingdom.

12:32-33. The "lifting up" (also 3:14; 8:28) alludes to Isaiah 52:13 and refers to being lifted up on the cross. This fits the allusion to Isaiah 52:13 in "glorified" (see comment on 12:23-27) as well. Ancients (e.g., *Cicero) spoke of people being "lifted up" on a cross, and sometimes ancients played on the expression: lifting up could refer to hanging or to exaltation (Gen 40:20-22; Gentile writers).

12:34. The *Old Testament predicted that the Messiah's rule would be eternal* (Is 9:6-7; cf. 2 Sam 7:16); so also the *Son of Man's* (Dan 7:14). (*Especially in the time of John and later, some Jewish teachers moved away from identifying the Son of Man with the Messiah; no less a rabbi than Akiba was reproved by his colleagues for supposing that the Son of Man, like God, would receive his own throne.*)

12:35-50

Belief and Unbelief

12:35-36. The Dead Sea Scrolls also contrast light (symbolizing good) and darkness (symbolizing evil), calling the righteous "children of light" and their opponents "children of darkness." The former "walk in the light" and the latter "walk in darkness." Jesus' hearers would easily understand his language.

12:37-38. Isaiah 53:1 is from the same passage to which "glorified" and "lifted up" refer (Is 52:13; see comment on 12:32). The point is: Israel's very unbelief in the servant-Messiah fulfills Scripture.

12:39-40. On the text (Is 6:10), see comment on Mark 4:12. At points the quotation follows the Hebrew as opposed to the Septuagint translation into Greek. John omits Isaiah's "deaf" image, probably to focus on the blindness image that recalls his own discussion in 9:39-41.

12:41. Isaiah 6:1-5 refers clearly to Isaiah seeing a vision of God, the Lord of hosts, in his glory when he received this message, but John explains that this manifestation of God was the Son, Jesus (v. 41), also seen by Abraham (8:56) and Moses (see comment on 1:14-18). The Septuagint of both Isaiah 6:1 and 52:13 speak of “glory” or being “glorified”; the former text applies to God and the latter to God’s “servant.” Both texts also speak of being “lifted up” or “exalted,” as does Isaiah 57:15 (referring to God). Ancient Jewish *midrash, which interpreted texts based on shared key terms, could have treated the servant as divine (though for theological reasons probably only the Jewish Christians would have done so).

12:42. Because John selects details most applicable to his own day, it appears that not even all the *synagogue leaders of his time are of one mind about believers in Jesus. Those who are not hostile to the Jewish Christians, however, seem to remain publicly silent on the issue. The admission that even some of their opponents recognize the truth would encourage John’s audience in their situation (see comment on 9:22).

12:43. The Greek word translated “glory” (NRSV) or “praise” (NIV, KJV) can also be translated “reputation” or “honor” but contrasts here with Jesus’ glorification (12:23). Ancient moralists sometimes condemned those who sought much glory; but achieving honor and status and avoiding shame were central obsessions, especially in urban masculine culture.

12:44-45. Many scholars believe that 12:44-50 recapitulates a number of major themes in the Gospel. Ancient writers often summarized or recapitulated their argument at the end of a work or of a section. Jewish literature portrayed personified, preexistent divine Wisdom as the image of God (Wis 7:26); others, like Moses, could reflect his glory, but Jesus is the glory Moses and others saw (12:41, 46; cf. 1:18 and comment on 1:14-18).

12:46. On the “light,” see comment on 8:12; on the contrast of light and darkness as a common image for God’s *kingdom versus that of his opponents, see comment on 12:35-36.

12:47. Judaism believed that God’s *law was the standard by which he would judge his people at the end time; Jesus thus presents his words as equivalent to those of God.

12:48-49. One was to receive an agent or ambassador with the honor due his sender. An agent or ambassador was also expected to represent his sender accurately.

12:50. For life in God’s word, see comment on 1:4. Rabbis sometimes

explained that keeping even the smallest of God's commandments warranted eternal life (by which they meant life in the world to come), whereas disobeying even the smallest forfeited that life. Jesus describes his personal commission from the Father similarly.

13:1-11

Footwashing

John intertwines foreshadowings of the betrayal and cross with the footwashing. Jesus follows Mary's example of servanthood (12:3).

13:1-2. Before the banquet, diners would normally wash a hand, eat appetizers, and then recline (13:12) and wash both hands for the main meal. (Because they reclined and had only one hand free, those preparing the food sliced it before the meal.) Meals could be accompanied by music, lectures, other entertainment, or deep discussion; Jesus here provides a teaching session.

13:3-5. The couches would be arranged around tables containing the food, with the upper part of each person's body facing the food and their feet away from the table. Jesus would go to the outside of this circle to wash each person's feet. A wealthy home might recline three or four people on each of three large couches; whether couches were available here (or mats, or cloaks), the arrangement may be similar. The person would lean on the left elbow, leaving the right hand free to reach food on the table.

After travelers had come a long distance, the host was to provide water for their feet as a sign of hospitality, as exemplified by Abraham (Gen 18:4). Yet loosing sandals and personally washing someone else's feet was considered servile, most commonly the work of a servant or of servile or submissive persons (cf. 1 Sam 25:41). Travelers' sandals need not be covered in dung, as some scholars have suggested (although in Rome people were known to occasionally empty chamber pots from their windows, sometimes to the misfortune of passersby below). Side roads were very dusty; the main streets of Jerusalem, however, would have been kept clear of human waste, especially in the Upper City, where Jesus likely ate this Passover meal historically. (Finding an upper room sufficiently large to host all the *disciples would have been more difficult in the poorer Lower City.) In any case, travelers and people walking in the streets normally washed their feet when entering a home. Jesus' removing his outer garments to serve them would also appear as a sign of great humility

before them.

By so serving, Jesus prefigures his death as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 on behalf of the many. Jesus' milieu celebrated honor and feared shame. Unlike most elite men in Greco-Roman society, Judaism valued humility; but like other societies, it also upheld societal roles. Jesus overturns even positions of social status. Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi (about A.D. 220) was said to be so humble that he would do anything for others—except relinquish his superior position; seating according to rank was crucial. Jesus goes beyond even this.

Ancient evidence suggests that Jesus may have poured water over the feet into a basin. Sometimes one would pour cold water into the basin first, and then hot water. Possibly Jesus uses a basin used for handwashing before the meal.

13:6-8. Jesus' act violates cultural status boundaries so thoroughly (see comment on 13:3-5) that Peter finds it unthinkable.

13:9-11. The "bath" here may allude to ceremonial washing that Jesus and the disciples had undergone before the feast (11:55), but Jesus applies it in a spiritual sense. This figurative sense of cleansing was common enough that the disciples should have been able to understand his meaning. John's repetition of Jesus' statement of 13:10 in different words in 13:11 is not surprising; ancient writers valued variation and few people expected casual quotations to follow exact wording (cf. also Lk 24:46-49 with Acts 1:4-8; Gen 39:17-19; 1 Sam 15:3, 18).

13:12-20

The Meaning of Footwashing

13:12-14. *Disciples normally served their teachers, after the model of Elisha serving Elijah and Joshua serving Moses. One expression of service, however, was not required even of disciples: dealing with the teacher's feet; Jesus goes beyond the service expected even for disciples. Although people often sat on chairs, they normally "reclined" (as here) for banquets (like Passover).

13:15. Disciples were expected to learn by imitating their teachers.

13:16. Some slaves were prominent when compared with free peasants, but any authority slaves exercised was derived from their masters, and slaves were always subordinate to their masters. An agent was always subordinate to his sender, his authority limited to the extent of his authorization.

13:17. The literary form of "beatitude" was common in the *Old Testament*

and early Judaism. Judaism also emphasized that one should not only know but also obey God's law.

13:18. Here Jesus cites Psalm 41:9, a psalm of a righteous sufferer; lifting up one's heel to another was an act of disdain (cf. Mk 6:11). Betrayal by a friend sometimes happened, but was counted the most heinous form of betrayal. To eat at table with another formed a permanent covenant of peace (sometimes ideally extending even to descendants), so to betray one's host at a meal was especially treacherous. (To give one example of the covenant bond: two warriors about to engage each other in battle relinquished the fight after learning that one's father had hosted the other's at table a generation earlier.)

13:19. Jesus' wording here evokes Is 43:9-10, where God announced the future in advance (cf. Is 41:26; 44:7, 11; 48:3-7) so that his people might know that he alone was God.

13:20. In ancient cultures, one responded to agents, ambassadors or other representatives according to one's feelings toward the person who authorized them.

13:21-30

The Betrayer's Mission

13:21-22. Betrayal by one's own *disciple would be a cause of embarrassment and reproach in the ancient system of honor and shame. Greek philosophers stressed remaining always tranquil and untroubled in spirit, but not everyone in antiquity shared this value. Although the Fourth Gospel stresses Jesus' deity, it also stresses and frequently illustrates his humanity (1:14). In the Old Testament God's passionate feelings also frequently surface (e.g., Judg 10:16; Is 63:9-10; Jer 2:30-32; 9:1-3; Hos 11:8).*

13:23. Men would recline (on couches, where available) at feasts. (According to traditional Greek custom often observed in the eastern Mediterranean, women would not dine in the same room with a gathering of men outside their family; this custom was changing in some areas, however. Passover was a more family-oriented setting.) Each person, facing to the right, would recline behind the person to his right, but with the head further forward on the couch; thus the beloved disciple could lean his head back and be even with Jesus' chest. (They would lean on the left elbow with the right arm free. They could not easily, then, cut up their own food; it would come presliced at the

banquet, and they could normally eat with their fingers.) This beloved disciple (presumably John) has one of the most honored positions at the feast, perhaps implicitly contrasting him with Peter in 13:24. (Ancients did not always compare only good and bad, but, as in this case and in 20:4-8, sometimes good and better.) Given verse 26, Judas may have the position to Jesus' left. If so, Jesus offers Judas one final expression of love; the position to the left of the host was often the most honored position in a banquet.

13:24-27. For the host to dip a piece of bread in the common bowl (on Passover, the bowl may have contained *charoset*, a sweet mixture, and bitter herbs) and hand it to someone was normally a sign of honor to the person who received it. Jesus is in complete control here (cf. Mk 14:20).

13:28-30. Some pietists would do a charitable work before Passover to secure God's favor. It would not have been customary to go outside on Passover night (Ex 12:22), and the bazaars would have been closed then, but in John's *narrative (unlike Matthew, Mark and Luke) Passover apparently begins the following day (18:28; see comment there). (Many interpreters believe that John also thinks on a symbolic level here; cf. 3:19-21.) A group's treasurer (see on 12:6) being a thief could generate scandal, though Judas is about to commit an even more heinous betrayal.

13:31-35

Glory and Love Defined

The context of these verses is betrayal and Jesus' death.

13:31-32. On glorification, see comments on 1:14 and 12:23-27.

13:33. Teachers sometimes called their disciples "children" (cf. 1 Jn 2:1), and disciples called teachers "my father" (cf. Mt 23:9). Jewish literature included "testaments" of dying or departing famous heroes of the past giving important teachings to their children, to be read by future generations. Others have simply compared the more general form of farewell discourses; because Jesus is leaving, it is natural for him to provide final instructions to his disciples, whether or not John consciously follows the testamentary form here.

13:34-35. The *Old Testament had commanded love (Lev 19:18); what makes Jesus' commandment new is the new standard and example: "as I have loved you"—in the context, to the point of laying down one's life for others. Jewish ethics emphasized learning by imitation, including imitating God's good

character. Disciples were expected to learn by following the examples of their teachers. (In antiquity, love for one's own group did not need to imply that one not love those outside it.)

13:36–14:1

Following to the Cross?

13:36-37. Although Peter is sure that he will follow Jesus to the death, he does not understand that death is precisely where Jesus is going (14:5). For the misunderstanding motif, see, for example, 3:4; for background on it, see the introduction to Mark. Teachers often lectured in response to questions.

13:38. The first night cock crowing in Jerusalem occurred by about 12:30 a.m., according to some reports (others place it later), though only night watchmen were normally awake to hear it (most people went to sleep at sundown, except on special nights like Passover). Other crowings also occurred during the night. That the rooster crowed to mark the advent of dawn is more widely reported in ancient sources because this was the cock crowing most people knew. In either case the point is that Peter's denial will follow almost immediately after his promise not to deny Jesus.

14:1. "Your" is plural, and thus Jesus addresses all the *disciples*; in the Old Testament God often told his servants not to fear. But to pair faith in Jesus with faith in God would sound blasphemous to most ancient Jewish hearers (although they could have found a less offensive way to interpret the phrase; see Ex 14:31; 2 Chron 20:20).

14:2-7

Where Jesus Is Going, Enigmatic Version

As the chapter proceeds, it becomes evident that the coming again specifically in view in verse 3 includes Jesus' coming after the *resurrection to give the Spirit* (v. 18); but this point is not immediately clear at the beginning (v. 5).

14:2. The "Father's house" could evoke the Father's household (8:35) or the temple (2:16), where God would forever dwell with his people (Ezek 43:7, 9; 48:35); in any case, it designates the place of his presence. (A small number of early Jewish texts also speak of future homes for the righteous in God's presence; e.g., versions of *1 Enoch 91:13.) The "dwelling places" (NASB, NRSV)

might allude to “rooms” (NIV, GNT) in the new temple, where only undefiled ministers would have a place (Ezek 44:9-16; cf. 48:11). Whatever the particular background of the image (perhaps simply an ordinary house), John presumably understands this language figuratively for being in Christ, where God’s presence dwells (2:21); the only other place in the *New Testament where this term for “dwelling places” or “rooms” occurs is in 14:23, where it refers to the believer as God’s dwelling place (cf. also the verb “dwell”—15:4-7; see further the comment on 14:6-7).

14:3-4. In this context, John probably means not the Second Coming but Christ’s return after the resurrection to bestow the Spirit (14:16-18). In Jewish teaching, both the resurrection of the dead (which Jesus inaugurated) and bestowal of the Spirit indicate the arrival of the new age of the *kingdom. Jesus explains where he is going and how they will come to be there in 14:6-7.

14:5. *Disciples asked their *rabbis questions to clarify the teaching. Four questions were also asked in the extant household Passover celebration, but they differed from the questions here and the shared number may be mere coincidence (13:36-37; 14:5, 8, 22).

14:6-7. Jewish sources contrast the way of righteousness (wisdom, truth, etc.) and the way of falsehood (evil, etc.); Scripture and true Wisdom informed people of the righteous way. Some think the “way” might also echo Isaiah’s way back to the new Jerusalem through the wilderness (cf. 1:23). In this case the background is less critical than the force of the image, however. Jesus answers Thomas’s question thus: The Father is where I am going, and I am how you will get there.

“Truth” characterized God’s nature (e.g., Ex 34:6; Is 65:16) and later came to be even a Jewish title for God; it is uncertain if it was in use this early. The primary significance of the statement, however, is that Jesus is the embodiment of the truth, God’s covenant faithfulness (1:17), which was embodied in God’s “word” in the *Old Testament (17:17; Ps 119:142, 151). Just as Judaism affirmed that there was only one God and thus one right way (his *law*, *either in the short version supposedly given to the Gentiles or the full version given to Israel*), Jesus here affirms that he is the only way to the only God.

14:8-17

Revealing the Father Clearly

14:8. John may wish his readers, most of whom were more immersed in the Bible than most modern readers, to think of Exodus 33:18, where Moses asked to see God's glory; see comments on 1:18 and 14:21-22. Philip might thus request a theophany.

14:9-10. Various Jewish sources portrayed divine Wisdom (see comment on 1:1-18) as the image of God. In the context of an allusion to Ex 33:18 in Jn 14:8, Jesus is the glory that Moses saw (see comment on 1:14-18). The *Old Testament sometimes spoke of God's Spirit inspiring or anointing the prophets for his work; Jesus' words here go beyond that idea.

14:11. God had earlier granted signs to invite faith (e.g., Ex 4:4-9; 19:9; Num 14:11).

14:12-14. Here scholars debate whether "works" (KJV, NASB, NRSV) refers to righteous deeds, as often in Judaism (e.g., 8:39), or to miraculous works such as Jesus performed (5:17; 10:32), or to both. (The works are probably quantitatively greater because Christ's work is multiplied through *all* his followers.) In this context Jesus' words are an invitation to radical faith: Jewish tradition allowed that some very pious teachers could receive from God almost anything they asked because of their intimate relationship with him, but never applied this possibility to the majority even of the pious. *Magic had no emphasis on relationship with the power addressed and sought only to manipulate forces for the manipulator's ends (contrast 14:15). A broad invitation to confident faith such as appears in this passage was not common in antiquity. (Cf. 2 Kings 2:9.)

Ancient Judaism used "name" in so many overlapping senses that the context tells us more here than the background. In the Old Testament "name" often meant reputation or renown, and when God acted "on account of his name" it was to defend his honor. "In the name of God" could mean as his representative acting on his behalf (Ex 5:23; Deut 18:19-22; Jer 14:14-15), according to his command (Deut 18:5, 7), by his help (Ps 118:10-11; Prov 18:10) or using his name in a miraculous act (2 Kings 2:24). (When rabbis passed on traditions "in the name of" other rabbis it simply means that they were citing their sources, their basis of authority for the tradition.) In prayer, calling on a deity's name simply meant addressing him (1 Kings 18:24-26, 32; 2 Kings 5:11; Ps 9:2; 18:49). In the Old Testament and later Judaism "Name" could also simply be a polite and roundabout way of saying "God" without uttering his name.

In this context "name" might mean something like: those who seek his honor and speak accurately for him, who are genuinely his authorized representatives.

Nothing could be further from the pagan magical use of names that sought to manipulate spiritual forces for one's own ends.

14:15. Here Jesus evokes another Old Testament idea, with Jesus filling the role of God: those who love God keep his commands (e.g., Ex 20:6; Deut 5:10, 29; 6:5; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3-4; 19:9; 30:6, 14). In Ezekiel 36:27, the gift of the *Spirit enables one to keep the commandments (Jn 14:16).

14:16. The background for calling the Spirit “advocate” (NIV; NLT) or “Helper” (NASB, ESV) is debated; some suggest a courtroom image: one sense of the term is “advocate,” “defending attorney”; see comment on 16:8-11. Much more generally, it can mean “intercessor” or even simply “helper.” In Jewish depictions of God's heavenly court, angels and divine attributes could serve as accusers or advocates, but *Satan is the primary prosecutor, and God (or his favored attribute of mercy, or Michael) defends Israel. Here the Spirit is “another” advocate like Jesus (cf. 9:35-41, where Jesus defends the man put out of the *synagogue and accuses his accusers); Judaism was also familiar with the idea of a “successor” who carries on a predecessor's work. Although Judaism normally viewed the Spirit as an aspect of God rather than as a person, this passage goes beyond that perspective (cf. Rom 8:26).

14:17. The Spirit of truth guides God's people in the way of truth—into fuller revelation of Jesus, who is the truth (14:6; 16:13). The *Dead Sea Scrolls contrast the spirit of truth with the spirit of error (cf. 1 Jn 4:6). The Old Testament sometimes (rarely) spoke of the Spirit of God dwelling in or filling some servants of God (e.g., Ex 31:3; 35:31; Num 27:18; probably Gen 41:38; Dan 4:8-9; cf. also several early Jewish texts); this was promised for all God's people in the future (Ezek 36:27).

14:18-31

Jesus' Coming and Revealing

14:18-20. “Orphan” language (v. 18) sometimes extended figuratively to other forms of bereavement. In the *Old Testament, “orphans” (NASB, NIV) were powerless and needed a legal defender. The context here refers to Jesus' coming to them and leaving his presence in them by the *Spirit (20:19-23). For background on the Spirit dwelling in people, see comment on 14:17.

14:21-22. *Apocalypses and other Jewish sources sometimes spoke of mysteries revealed to special persons. Israel believed (rightly) that God had*

given them a special revelation in the law that the nations did not have. The language of “manifesting” (KJV) or “revealing” (NRSV, GNT) himself to them probably recalls God’s revealing himself to Moses on Mount Sinai (see comment on 1:14).

14:23-24. Jewish teachers spoke of God’s presence residing in a special way among those who studied his law, and especially in the temple; Jesus speaks of God’s presence residing in each believer continually as something like an individual temple for his presence. That God dwelt in his temple and among his people was standard Old Testament teaching (cf. Ex 25:8; Lev 26:11-12; Ezek 37:27-28); that his laws were written in the hearts of his faithful and that his Spirit moved among his prophets were also taught in the Old Testament. But Jesus broadens and personalizes this perspective in a manner unparalleled in extant ancient literature. The *Dead Sea Scrolls speak of the Spirit being active among the remnant of God’s people, but this activity is not nearly as extensive as the prophetic and charismatic activity found in the New Testament. Instead, the fulfilment is more like Ezekiel 36:27, where God’s Spirit dwells in all his people.

14:25-26. Some of the functions Jesus lists here for the Spirit were attributed in Judaism to divine Wisdom (e.g., Wis 7:21; 8:7; 12:2), which was associated with God’s Spirit as well as his law in some popular, pre-Christian Jewish writings (cf. also Neh 9:20; Ps 143:10). In a Jewish context, “teaching” could include elaborating and expounding; rote memorization was also an important part of ancient learning.

14:27. Jewish teachers highly extolled peace (especially in terms of relationships with others). Many philosophers and some rabbis, such as *Hillel (according to later tradition), also valued tranquility and/or peace. The Roman empire promised peace in its propaganda but was usually at war.

14:28-31. For verse 29, see comment on 13:19; for verse 30, see comment on 12:31; for “love” and “commandments” in verse 31, see comment on 14:15. Jesus’ obedience to the Father includes his mission to the cross in 14:31, where perhaps he also summons his followers to participate in that call (“let us go”). Thus the world could know Jesus’ true identity (12:32-33; 17:21).

15:1-8

Dwelling in the Vine

The word “abide” (KJV, NASB, NRSV), “remain” (NIV, GNT) or “dwell” (15:4-10) is the verb form of “dwelling place” (see comment on 14:2, 23). In the *Old Testament God had promised to dwell with his obedient covenant people always* (Ex 25:8; 29:45; Lev 26:11-12; Ezek 37:27-28; 43:9). *The Old Testament and Jewish literature sometimes portrayed Israel as a vineyard* (e.g., Is 5:7; Jer 12:10), or less frequently as a vine (e.g., Ps 80:8; Ezek 19:10; Hos 10:1). *Nevertheless, the image of organic union elaborated here goes beyond most available analogies* (though see comment about the Spirit at 14:17).

15:1. As just noted, the Old Testament and Jewish literature sometimes portrayed Israel as a vineyard (e.g., Is 5:7), or less frequently as a vine (e.g., Ps 80:8; Hos 10:1), and God as the vinegrower (Is 5:1-3). A celebrated golden vine in the temple may have symbolized Israel’s power, and Jesus may here portray the *disciples as the remnant of Israel (see comment on 15:16). Also relevant in light of John’s depiction of Jesus in 1:1-18, Wisdom could be portrayed as a fruit-bearing vine (Sirach 24:17), inviting others to come to her, eat and drink, and obey (24:19-22). But Wisdom is compared with various trees (24:13-17) and invites hearers to eat her fruit, not bear it (24:19-21). Again, therefore, the image of union in this passage is more organic than in the most closely analogous texts. The most basic point of the imagery is the obvious dependence of branches on the vine for their continued life.

Vineyards were pervasive in the Mediterranean world, including in Judea and (where most scholars locate John’s audience) in Asia Minor. Small farmers, including most Galileans, had vines along with fig and olive trees.

15:2-3. The three common domestic fruit “trees” were the fig, olive and vine, and of these, the olive and vine (esp. the latter) required most attention. Those tending vines (and some kinds of trees) would cut away useless branches lest they wastefully sap the strength of the plant; in the long run, this diverted more strength into the branches that would genuinely bear fruit. The weaker the vine, the more harshly one pruned it, reducing short-term fruit but ensuring a greater measure of fruit the following year. Farmers pruned in two different ways: they pruned fruitful branches to make them more fruitful, and (as in 15:6) they removed unfruitful branches entirely.

In the spring in Italy, farmers would tie vines to their supports (trees or, more often, wooden posts) and offer an initial trimming; further pruning of tendrils could occur during summer and as late as October. Some advised pruning only when the vine was strong enough to bear it, with the strongest pruning just after the fall vintage. In Palestine, fruitless branches were removed especially during

winter.

Here is another of John's plays on words (see comment on 3:3): the term he uses for "prunes" normally means "cleanses," reflecting a motif in John (e.g., 2:6; 13:10). Although the term applied to ritual purity, both Greek and Jewish sources also applied it to inward purification of the heart. The Old Testament prophets often called on Israel to "bear fruit" for God (e.g., Is 27:6; Hos 14:4-8); in an agrarian culture, one might depict God's *law as bearing fruit in the righteous (*4 Ezra 3:20).

15:4-8. Dead, fruitless branches of vines are obviously of no use for carpentry; their only possible value is for fuel. Jewish teachers believed that God had awful punishments in store for apostates, because those who had known the truth and then rejected it had no excuse (cf. 15:22-24; for burning, see "*Gehenna" in the glossary). Although it may be coincidence based on common customs, the destruction of vine branches appears in an image of judgment in Isaiah 18:5.

15:9-17

Abiding in Love

15:9-11. Keeping the commandments (here epitomized as love) was supposed to bring joy (Ps 19:8 and often in later Jewish teachings).

15:12-13. Dying for others was considered heroic in Greco-Roman stories, and friendship to the death (dying with or, better when feasible, for a friend) was considered a high moral value (see comment on 15:14-15). But Jewish ethics did not usually share this general Greek emphasis, although it emphasized dying for the *law if need be. Rabbi Akiba (*within a few decades of John*) pragmatically argued that one's own life took precedence over another's. Although it is unlikely that Jesus is directly influenced by the Greek view of friendship, John's Diaspora audience probably would have been familiar with it and so would have appreciated his point.

15:14-15. There were different kinds and levels of friendship in antiquity, and Greco-Roman writers often commented on the topic. Friendship could involve political or military alliances and was often pursued in self-interest; kings or lesser *patrons who supported dependents called* clients were (especially in Roman circles) said to be engaging in "friendship"; *Pharisees also met in circles of "friends."* The traditional Greek concept of friendship emphasized

equality among companions, and some philosophical schools like the Epicureans especially emphasized such friendship. Patron-client friendships were unequal, a socially greater supporting a lesser; thus friendship need not involve equality of rank.

The main ideals of friendship in ancient literature included loyalty (sometimes to the death), equality and mutual sharing of all possessions (cf. 16:14-15), and an intimacy in which a friend could share everything in confidence. Jesus especially emphasizes the last point in 15:15, where he distinguishes a friend from a servant, who might also be loyal but would not share intimate secrets. Jewish writers like *Philo emphasized friendship with God, sometimes even contrasting it with servanthood, as here.

The *Old Testament called two people friends of God: Abraham (2 Chron 20:7; Is 41:8) and Moses (Ex 33:11). Jewish tradition amplified on the friendship and intimacy of both of them with God. If an Old Testament allusion is in view here, it may be to Moses (see comment on 14:8). In another familiar source, Wisdom made people friends of God and prophets (Wisdom of Solomon 7:27). If this text emphasizes Jesus' sharing his heart with his followers, the context communicates the character of his heart: love.

15:16-17. Jewish teachers emphasized repeatedly that Israel was chosen and commissioned by God (initially in Abraham [Neh 9:7], the secondary possible allusion in v. 15, though the emphasis on Israel's chosenness is more pervasive than this); see comment on 15:1. Although Jesus, like most Jewish teachers, welcomed most listeners, he chose his own core *disciples. This language evokes OT texts about God choosing his people (Ps 135:4), normally not because of their own merit (Deut 7:6-7; cf. 9:5); this was a special privilege (Deut 14:2). (Sometimes God is also said to choose individuals or groups within Israel for tasks, e.g., Ex 35:30; Deut 18:5; 21:5; 1 Sam 10:24; 1 Chron 15:2; 28:10; 29:1; 2 Chron 29:11.) It can give the disciples confidence in their fruitfulness (Judas left the group in 13:30). On asking "in the name," see comment on 14:12-14.

15:18–16:4

The World's Hatred

Ancient writers often liked to lay comparisons and contrasts side by side. After emphasizing unity, love and friendship in 15:1-17, Jesus turns here to the

world's hatred.

15:18-20. Given the sort of political alliances characteristic of Mediterranean urban life, friendship with someone (15:13-15) entailed also sharing common enemies. Jewish people often believed that the *Gentile nations hated them because they were chosen and sent by God and suffered on his account. They would resent Jesus' grouping most of them with "the world," but other persecuted minority sects in Judaism (like the *Essenes at Qumran*) also included the majority of Israel, whom they regarded as apostate, as among the world, their enemies.

15:21. Jewish people spoke of suffering (even martyrdom) for the sake of God's name (e.g., Ps 44:22); Jesus here speaks thus of his own name (cf. Mt 5:11; Mk 13:13). When Israel kept covenant with God, they were said to "know" him; in their disobedience, they did not "know" him (e.g., Is 1:3; Jer 2:8; 4:22; 5:4; Hos 5:4).

15:22-24. Judaism taught that greater knowledge brought greater responsibility; thus in one line of tradition, the nations were accountable to keep only seven commandments, whereas Israel, who had received the *law, had 613 commandments. Jesus also teaches that revelation increases moral responsibility (elsewhere, e.g., Lk 12:41-46).

15:25. Here Jesus quotes from a lament of a righteous sufferer (Ps 69:4; cf. 35:19; 109:3), which Jesus elsewhere applied to his sufferings (cf. Jn 2:17). On "their law" see 8:17 and 10:34.

15:26. On the forensic work of the *Spirit as advocate, see 14:16; here he is not only advocate but witness.

15:27. The believers are also witnesses for Jesus before the court of the world (cf. 16:2) and God's tribunal. The Jewish people viewed the *Holy Spirit especially as the Spirit of prophecy* (usually in the *Old Testament and even more often in later Jewish literature*); *God would thus empower the disciples to speak as prophets*. (This promise also fits the idea that God's people would be anointed by the Spirit to witness God's truth against the nations before God's final tribunal; cf. Is 42:1; 43:10-12; 44:3, 8-9.)

16:1. Advance warning was helpful; cf. comment on 13:19.

16:2-4. Even in the *Diaspora*, synagogues could enforce discipline on members violating Jewish laws. Capital jurisdiction, however, belonged to Rome; any other killing was a lynching not approved by the Roman state. In the context of discussing witness, Jesus warned that his followers would face trouble in synagogues as elsewhere (see Mk 13:9-11), but this point may have special

relevance for John's audience. Most scholars believe that Christians in John's day were being expelled from some local synagogues, perhaps under the influence of Palestinian Pharisaic propaganda (see the introduction to John and comments on 9:34 and 12:42). Hostile Jewish non-Christians in Asia Minor do not appear to have killed Christians directly (in violation of Roman law); but some nevertheless may have participated in getting followers of Jesus killed (in later Smyrna, cf. *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17.2; 18.1, although scholars do not accept the entire story as accurate). By betraying Jewish Christians to the Roman authorities and claiming that Christians were non-Jewish, they left Christians with no legal exemption from worshiping the emperor and difficulty explaining how they remained loyal to the empire. Worried that Christians were a messianic and *apocalyptic movement that could get them in trouble with Rome, many synagogue leaders may have thought their betrayal of Christians would protect the rest of their community (cf. 11:50). Persecutors could believe that they acted for God (cf. Is 66:5), perhaps by following Phinehas' model of zeal (Ps 106:30-31; 1 Maccabees 2:24-26, 54). Ancient thinkers sometimes pointed out that, before God or the bar of history, it was the unjust court rather than the victim that was on trial.

16:5-15

The Spirit's Witness

The *Spirit testifies of Jesus to the world (16:8-11, duplicating the earthly witness of Jesus) and to Jesus' followers (16:13-15). The opponents of John's readers did not claim to have the Spirit or to hear the Spirit speaking to their hearts as he had spoken to the prophets (many may have claimed to feel close to God but did not claim to hear him directly, in contrast to Christians and some apocalyptic visionaries). John encourages his readers that their intimate, personal relationship with God in the Spirit distinguishes them from their opponents.

16:5-7. The Advocate (see comment 14:16) comes to the believers, which implies that his ministry to the world (16:8-11) is through them (cf. Neh 9:30). This idea fits the common *Old Testament and later Jewish perspective on God's Spirit as the Spirit of prophecy*. Because the Spirit's activity in 16:8-11 matches that of Jesus earlier in the Gospel (e.g., 3:17-21; 8:46), the Spirit may mediate Jesus' presence through believers' preaching of him (the "Word"; cf. 1:1-18) in a way to some degree analogous to how early Judaism could envision the Spirit

or Torah mediating God's presence (see, e.g., comment on Mt 18:20).

16:8-11. As was common in ancient arrangement of material, 16:8 introduces three points then developed in 16:9-11. Here the believers' Advocate may become a "prosecutor" of the world, as sometimes in the Old Testament (Jer 50:34; 51:36; Lam 3:58-66; cf. Ps 43:1; 50:8). Many Jewish people believed that God would make Israel prevail over the nations before his tribunal in the day of judgment; for John, the judgment has already begun (3:18-19). Roman courts had no public prosecutors and depended on an interested party to bring charges, although trained *rhetoricians then debated on behalf of those who could afford them. The Spirit here brings charges against the world before God's heavenly court (see Mt 5:22), as a witness against them (see Jn 15:26).

Verses 9-11 probably mean that the world's unbelief constituted their sin; *Christ being the heavenly Advocate (1 Jn 2:1) constituted the believers' righteousness; and the judging of the world's ruler (see comment on 12:31) spelled the judgment of the world. Thus for John it is not Jesus and his people (chaps. 18-19) but the world that is now on trial. One may also compare a common motif in the Old Testament prophets: the covenant lawsuit where God summons his people to account for breach of the covenant.

16:12-13. The Psalms speak of God leading his people in truth, in his way of faithfulness (Ps 25:5; 43:3; cf. 5:8); in John, this language implies a fuller revelation of Jesus' character (14:6). Intimate friends shared confidences (see comment on 15:15). The Spirit will thus relate to the *disciples as Jesus has (15:15), so that believers' relationship with Jesus in John's day (and in subsequent generations) should be no less intimate than relationships with him were before the cross.

16:14-15. This intimacy (v. 13) may evoke a sharing of possessions that characterized ideal friendship in antiquity (see comment on 15:15); some applied this principle even to "friendship" with the gods. The specific sense of the sharing language in this context, however, is that God shares his heart with all his people, as he once shared his word with his prophets (Gen 18:17; Amos 3:7; cf. again God's Wisdom in Wisdom of Solomon 7:26-27).

16:16-33

Seeing Jesus Again

After his *resurrection, Jesus would return to the disciples to impart life (14:18-

19), and through the gift of his *Spirit he would remain with them forever (20:19-23).

16:16-22. Women suffered and, as in many parts of the world even today, often died in childbirth. The prophets commonly used birth pangs as an image of suffering, often stemming from judgment (Is 13:8; 21:3; 42:14; Jer 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 30:6; 49:22-24; 50:43; Mic 4:9-10; cf. Ps 48:6). In some *Old Testament texts, these pangs signified what Jesus' contemporaries would understand as the birth pangs of a new, messianic era (Is 26:17-19; 66:7-10; Mic 5:1-4; cf. Is 9:6; 53:12-54:1; 62:5; Hos 13:13-14). Labor pains, resurrection and "a little while" appear in Isaiah 26:16-21; in Isaiah 66:8-14, after Zion travails to birth the restored people of God (66:8), God's people "see" and "are glad" (66:14; cf. Jn 16:22).

Early Judaism sometimes came to apply these birth pangs specifically to the final period of suffering before the end of the age, which would be followed by the resurrection of the dead (cf. *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QHa 11.8-11*; *1 Enoch* 62:4; *rabbis). Jesus' resurrection inaugurates a new age, so that the life of the coming world is now available to the disciples in the present (see comment on 3:16).

16:23-24. See comment on 14:12-14, especially on the use of the "name" in prayer.

16:25-28. Following the Old Testament wisdom tradition, Jewish teachers often used proverbs and riddles, as Jesus does throughout this Gospel. Although the disciples are not ready for the full understanding of the new relationship with God that Jesus describes (16:12), he is getting them ready.

16:29-30. In the context of the Fourth Gospel, that Jesus knows their question before they ask reveals his special insight; see comments on 1:42 and 2:24-25.

16:31-32. The scattering of sheep may refer to Zechariah 13:7 (cf. Mt 26:31). The Old Testament often reports that God's flock was scattered for want of a devoted shepherd (e.g., 1 Kings 22:17; Ezek 34:5-6, 12, 21; Zech 11:16; cf. Is 53:6; Jer 23:1; 50:17), as one would expect with flocks (e.g., Ps 119:176; 1 Maccabees 12:53).

16:33. Early Christians recognized that final victory would come, as Jewish prophets and teachers said, when the *Messiah comes in the future; but they also recognized that the Messiah had already come and therefore had inaugurated triumph in the midst of present (eschatologically expected) tribulation.

Jesus Reviews His Mission

Jesus here reveals his unique relationship with the Father, sharing his glory; see comment on divine Wisdom in 1:1-18. From 12:23-33 it is clear that Jesus returns to this full glory only by way of the cross, even though for most people crucifixion epitomized shame rather than honor and glory. Many note that prayers and blessings are common in testaments (final instructions of a departing sage or hero in Jewish literature). Concluding sections frequently recapitulate major themes covered; many themes in Jesus' teachings in this Gospel recur here.

17:1. Lifting one's eyes to heaven was a common posture of prayer (cf. perhaps Ps 121:1; 123:1). "Glory" here has a double sense, another instance of wordplay; see comments on 1:14 and 12:23-27. Moses reflected God's glory in Exodus 33-34, but Jesus is to be "glorified" in the same sense as the Father, with his preexistent glory (17:5).

17:2. The *Old Testament also often used "flesh" (KJV) in the sense of humanity ("people"—NIV; "mankind"—NASB). Only at the end, in the final *kingdom, did God promise to delegate his authority to a particular ruler (Is 9:6-7; Dan 7:13-14); this background suggests that Jesus' death and *resurrection represent no mere temporal event but the climactic inbreaking of a new world.

17:3. On knowing God, see 10:4-5. Not knowing good and evil (Gen 2:9; 3:22), but knowing God was life (cf. Ezek 37:14). Other Jewish texts written in Greek also identified knowing God with *eternal life (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 15:3); here one must have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

17:4-5. On finishing the work, see 4:34 and 19:30. Moses reflected God's glory (Ex 34:29), but Jesus, who shares the Father's preexistent glory, is greater than Moses here (cf. Jn 1:14-18). The Old Testament declared that God would not give his glory to another (Is 42:8; 48:11); Jesus' sharing the Father's glory in this sense is a claim that he is divine. Judaism did have an analogy with which to compare Jesus' divine claim here: God's Wisdom reflects his glory (Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-29). John's Jewish Christian readers may have understood Jesus' identity in analogous (albeit superior) terms (see comment on 1:1-18).

17:6-19

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

This passage addresses the inevitable conflict between Jesus' followers and the world. Jesus' followers here assume the role assigned to Israel in most extant Jewish portrayals of the end times and that assigned to the remnant (the children of light) in sectarian texts such as the *Dead Sea Scrolls; they constituted the whole number of the righteous and as such were a persecuted minority within society.

17:6. In the *Old Testament Moses announced God's name (Ex 3:13, 15); more importantly, when God revealed his name, he revealed his character and attributes (Ex 33:19; 34:5, 14; for the future, see Is 52:6).

God's name also meant his honor or reputation. To "hallow" or "sanctify" God's name was to demonstrate its holiness, its sacredness. In contemporary Jewish teaching, righteous deeds hallowed God's name, and wicked ones dishonored it; the *kiddush hashem*, or sanctifying of God's name, was one of the most fundamental principles of Jewish ethics preserved in later rabbinic sources. Most Jewish people prayed for the future time when God would sanctify his name throughout the earth (see comment on Mt 6:9).

17:7-11. Although the comparison would be inadequate, some ancient hearers may have thought of how Moses received God's words and passed them on to Israel, who alone of the nations received his *law*; *on Jesus and Moses, see comment on 1:14-18 (esp. 1:17). The ideas of Jesus' being glorified among the disciples and the use of God's name (17:11) may also expound Jewish traditions related to Moses in the book of Exodus. On unity, see comment on 17:20-26.*

17:12. Some suggest that the fulfilled Scripture here might allude to Psalm 41:9, cited in John 13:18: the verb for "lost" appears often for the wicked in the Psalms. Jewish teaching recognized that God dealt more severely with apostates than with those who were born pagans, because apostates had known the truth but turned away from it. "Son of perdition" (NASB) or "of destruction" reflects a Semitic idiom essentially meaning, "one who would be destroyed." The passage may play on the related terms for "lost" and "destruction."

17:13-15. Jewish texts often speak of God guarding or protecting his people.

17:16-19. The Old Testament and Jewish tradition emphasized Israel's separation from and often hatred by the world. God had "sanctified," that is, "consecrated" or "set apart," Israel for himself as holy, especially by giving them his commandments (e.g., Lev. 11:44-45). (Today Jewish people still often celebrate this sanctification by the commandments in the blessing over the lighting of sabbath candles.)

God's word in Scripture was truth (Ps 119:142, 160). If God had sanctified

his people, or set them apart among the nations by giving them the law, how much more are followers of Jesus set apart by his coming as the Word made flesh (see comment on 1:1-18); Jesus treats his disciples here as the true remnant of Israel, that is, the saved covenant community within Israel. (Throughout most of the Old Testament, only part of Israel in any given generation followed God; in some times, like those of Joshua and David, the remnant was large; in other times, like Moses' generation or that of Elijah, it was small.) Other Jewish groups, notably the *Essenes who likely authored the Dead Sea Scrolls, also felt that the rest of their nation had gone astray and that they were the true remnant; the theme appears in the Old Testament prophets (cf. Is 10:20-22; Joel 2:32; Amos 9:8-12). Whereas some of the Essenes sought to separate physically from the rest of Israel, however (cf. Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 5.18; 9.8-9; CD 13.14-15), believers in Jesus remained in contact with the world despite being different from it (Jn 17:14-16).

17:20-26

Jesus Prays for Future Disciples

The unity of Father and Son models the unity to be experienced by their people in whom they dwell. Israel emphasized that their God was “one” (Deut 6:4) and recognized the importance of this factor in their own solidarity among the nations, in a world hostile to them. This passage stresses a similar idea but in a manner more related to the idea of God's personal indwelling introduced in chapter 14 (see especially comment on 14:23-24). God is glorified among his people (though he shares it with no one in the fullest sense) in Isaiah 44:23; 46:13; 49:3; 55:5; 60:1-2; God also sanctified his dwelling places with the glory of his presence (Ex 29:43).

The emphasis on unity would also speak to John's readers, who are troubled by opposition from the *synagogue and perhaps from secessionists from their own ranks (see introduction to 1 John); it is also likely that ethnic or cultural unity—perhaps among John's (emigrant?) Galilean and Asian constituencies (see the introduction to John)—is partly in view (10:16; 11:52; 12:20-23); John clearly emphasizes ethnic reconciliation in *Christ in chapter 4 (the Samaritans)*. At any rate, followers of Jesus constitute a small minority in a hostile world and need each other to survive as much as other minorities normally do. On concern for coming generations compare, e.g., Psalm 78:3-7. Division was a pervasive

problem in antiquity, and both philosophers and (especially often) orators challenged cities to seek unity among themselves. Jewish people celebrated God's special love for Israel; the magnitude of God's love for Jesus' followers here is evident in the comparison with the Father's special love for the Son, a Son whose death he allowed to save the others (3:16-17).

18:1-11

The Betrayer Arrives

Biographies usually conclude with an account of the protagonist's death, developing it particularly if the death was very significant. Jewish people and some *Gentiles celebrated martyr stories*. The *passion* narratives draw on such elements but form something distinctive. Greeks also had apotheosis stories about mortals transformed to deities, usually at their death; in John, however, Jesus is returning to the glory he had with the Father before the world (cf. Wisdom returning home in *1 *Enoch* 42:2).

Contrary to detractors, how Jesus is treated in the account fits what we know of the treatment of dissent in antiquity. Apart from outright threats (like armed bands in the wilderness), Rome depended on local aristocracies in the provinces to arrest and accuse troublemakers, though Rome itself inflicted the death penalty (18:31). A generation after the scene depicted here, one Joshua son of Hananiah cried out judgment against the temple; the chief priests had him arrested and handed over to the governor. After refusing to respond to the governor's interrogation, Joshua was flogged, *Josephus says, until his bones showed (*Jewish War* 6.301-5). Because they considered that prophet insane and because he had no followers, he was then released—in contrast to Jesus, who had a movement and was viewed as a greater potential political threat. The priestly aristocracy were determined to maintain control at all costs, including by suppressing freedom of speech. The current Sanhedrin consisted especially of immediate descendants of Herod's political appointees, and other Jews (from Josephus to the *Dead Sea Scrolls* to the Pharisees) criticized a number of *high priests in this era as corrupt and sometimes brutal.

18:1-2. “Kidron Valley” is literally the “winter-swollen-brook Kidron”: this brook flowed only in the rainy season—winter—so crossing it in April would not involve even getting wet. It had a long history (2 Sam 15:23), and the site is still identifiable. Jesus and his *disciples had met there other times; cf. Luke

22:39. Gardens were sometimes walled enclosures.

18:3. Romans and others typically depended on local informers, a role that Judas fills here. Many scholars have noted that this military contingent is described in a manner much like Roman cohorts (so NASB). Nevertheless, the same language was equally used of Jewish units, and this unit is probably the Levite temple guard. (Roman troops would not be used for a routine police action like this one, would not be lent to the chief priests, and Romans would not have taken Jesus to the house of Annas—18:13—whom they had deposed.)

A full cohort in the Roman sense could have involved six hundred soldiers, but a detachment from the cohort is all that John need mean here. Both the temple police and Romans carried torches (two kinds are mentioned here) at night, although only a few need have carried them. The moon would be nearly full at Passover.

18:4-6. “I am” can mean “I am he (whom you seek),” but it can also allude to Exodus 3:14, translated literally. A Jewish tradition, purportedly pre-Christian (attributed to the early *Diaspora Jewish writer Artapanus), said that when Moses pronounced the name of his God, Pharaoh fell backward. (If Jesus’ hearers had thought he was pronouncing the divine name, they might have also fallen back in fear, because magicians were said to try to cast spells in that name.) During some kinds of religious experience in many cultures, including Christian religious experiences historically (including during the Great Awakenings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), people have sometimes been overwhelmed and fallen to the ground (cf. also, e.g., 1 Sam 19:24; Ezek 1:28; Dan 10:9).

18:7-9. That Jesus’ word (17:12) should be fulfilled just as Scripture suggests his divine rank and mission. Although some Jewish writers allowed that *prophecy continued in their own time, they rarely accorded such revelations the same status as Scripture. Where no massive or violent threat existed, Romans and their allies often preferred to detain a ringleader rather than all the followers, if it was believed that the movement could not survive without its leader anyway.

18:10. As slave of the high priest, Malchus would be a powerful person with much authority; it is possible (though by no means certain) that Malchus was helping to lead the expedition. On the possible symbolic effect of his disfigurement, see comment on Mark 14:47.

18:11. Greeks might think of Socrates’ cup of hemlock, but more relevant for Jesus’ (and John’s) Jewish context, the cup often functioned as a symbol of

judgment in the prophets (see comment on Mk 10:39).

18:12-27

At the House of Annas

18:12. The officer mentioned here is literally applied to tribunes of cohorts (in principle about six hundred strong); but see comment on 18:3; comment on Acts 4:1.

18:13-14. Annas was *high priest from A.D. 6–15, when the Romans deposed him. According to Jewish *law, the high priest was entitled to rule for life; thus some Jews no doubt considered the Roman deposition of Annas invalid, and he continued to command great respect. He was father-in-law of Caiaphas, and all five of Annas's sons became highest priests at some point; he retained enormous influence until his death in A.D. 35. He was wealthy and powerful, but later Jewish literature (written by successors of those he opposed) does not speak well of him. The high priesthood had been the most powerful office in Jewish Palestine until the Roman period.

Capital cases were to be heard by a plurality of judges (according to later tradition, a minimum of twenty-three). No individual could legally act as judge in a capital case, but this law did not stop Annas from exercising his political power and privately interrogating Jesus. Perhaps he would have excused himself by a law that those tried by the supreme Sanhedrin for misleading the people first had to be tried by two lower courts. But that law may be Pharisaic and may be later than the first century, and it is doubtful that Annas is attempting to follow any law. The predominantly Sadducean priestly aristocracy would certainly not follow the Pharisees' rules: they had to please the Romans, not the Pharisees. Roman law, like the Pharisees, posed limits on judges' activity, but in the provinces politics trumped legal ethics when peace was at stake.

18:15-17. For more detail, see comment on Mark 14:66-69. Well-to-do homes had servants as doorkeepers, though these servants might do double-duty with other jobs; an extensive estate such as this one would have a full-time porter. Doorkeepers would determine (especially at night) whom to admit and would observe who entered and left the premises. Even once people entered, if they were unfamiliar they could be asked their identity. According to later rabbinic teaching, Jewish people were permitted to deny even their Jewishness, especially by evasion (cf. Mk 14:68), to save their lives. Direct denial that

allowed God's name to be reproached, however, was considered shameful. Peter probably lacks acquaintance with these specific rules, but they may illustrate his cultural setting, which did not always regard denial as severely as Jesus regards it.

18:18. The cold weather is not surprising for an April night in Jerusalem.

18:19. The changing of scene back and forth was a standard suspense-building technique in ancient literature; then, as today, it was good writing.

John does not claim that the "high priest" here is the official one Rome recognized (see 18:13, 24); like other *New Testament writers and Josephus*, John follows the common practice of labeling all prominent members of the priestly aristocracy "high priests." Later tradition suggests that those questioning a "misleader" (see comment on 7:12) would ask about disciples.

18:20. Secret teachings were sometimes considered subversive, but Jesus taught publicly. Although *rabbis offered particular special teachings only to small groups of disciples (e.g., teachings on creation and on God's throne-chariot)*, they had a tradition that one must teach the law openly, in contrast to false prophets, who taught "in secret." Appeals to public knowledge added rhetorical strength to one's argument.

18:21. According to much later forms of Jewish law, interrogators were not supposed to force the accused to try to convict himself. But if this law is in effect in Jesus' day, which is at best uncertain, the priestly aristocracy, upheld by Rome and acting on what they believe to be right for the people, does not concern itself with it. As throughout the empire, powerful people could even get away with judicial murder, and other people were well aware of this.

18:22-24. Striking a captive was certainly against Jewish law. This act shows how abusive and uninterested in any form of Jewish legality Annas is; his interest in the case is political, not legal. This also fits the picture of the high priests supplied by other minorities in Judaism who had conflicts with them (Pharisees and *Essenes). See comment on Mark 14:1, 43. Jesus may be indicating that he has not violated Exodus 22:28 (which forbade cursing authorities); cf. Acts 23:3-5. Interrogating him further in a private home rather than in the Sanhedrin's meeting place on or near the temple mount violated ancient Mediterranean legal protocol. This may represent the early morning "official" meeting to produce the charge. People often cringed before the authorities; Jesus stands for truth.

18:25-27. For a disciple to repudiate a teacher was a great humiliation for the teacher. Ancient writers often contrasted characters; Peter's denial here contrasts

starkly with Jesus' courage (18:20-24). On the cock crowing, see comment on 13:38.

18:28-38a

Jesus Before Pilate

18:28. Roman officials began meeting the public (especially their *clients) at daybreak and finished by noon; "early" is no exaggeration, and here may mean about 6 a.m. Although visiting officials were often swamped with plaintiffs, the priestly aristocracy, who controlled Judea for the Romans, would be able to secure an audience with him on short notice. Clamoring before *Pilate in large numbers was usually effective, because a riot was the last thing he wanted. The "Praetorium" (NASB) here was Herod the Great's old "palace" (NIV), used by the Roman prefect when he came to Jerusalem from Caesarea during the feasts. (It was not, as some earlier commentators thought, the Fortress Antonia on the Temple Mount, where the usual Roman garrison was stationed.) He came precisely to ensure that order was maintained during the feasts, when Jerusalem was overcrowded and riots were most apt to break out.

That observant Jews (including the priestly aristocracy) would not enter this palace, lest they be defiled and thus unable to eat the Passover, fits Jewish practice. *Gentile residences were considered ritually impure, primarily because of the association with idolatry (which Pilate certainly practiced). (That priestly aristocrats cared about purity is clear archaeologically from the ritual baths common in their homes.) Their fidelity to purity regulations ironically highlights the corrupt leaders' failure to observe legal propriety in the context.

A possible conflict with the other Gospels at this point has led to considerable debate as to when the Passover described in the Gospel passion narratives occurred. According to Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus had already eaten the Passover with his disciples this night; whereas according to John, the priests plan to eat it the following night.

Of the many explanations for the apparent discrepancy, the two most prominent are probably these: (1) Several Jewish groups had different calendars and did not celebrate Passover on the same day. A dispute about when the month had begun (based on the appearance of the new moon) would also affect when the feast would be eaten. Some scholars have suggested that Jesus' disciples celebrated it a day early, thus without a lamb slaughtered in the temple. (2)

Either John or the other Gospels—probably John—is making a symbolic point (John stresses that Jesus is the Passover lamb; cf. 19:14, 36; 1 Cor 5:7). Later Jewish tradition also reports that Jesus was crucified on Passover, but this report could be based on the approximate time in earlier tradition. John’s language would not technically be incorrect in any case in the present verse, since many used “Passover” loosely for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which immediately followed; nevertheless, “eat the Passover” is a very odd way to speak of eating the bread during the rest of the feast (cf. also 13:1).

18:29. Precedent exists for a Roman official’s having to go outside to respect Jewish sensitivities (on the sensitivities, see comment on 18:28). Except in matters requiring military intervention, an official charge would be necessary before Pilate would be required to hear the case. Roman law had no public prosecutor in the modern sense and depended on private accusers to bring charges (although rhetoricians could be hired to debate a case, they were not supplied by the state). Accusers spoke first in a case.

18:30-31. Pilate regards the matter as one of religious law, hence to be tried in a Jewish court if the person claims to be Jewish and so submits to a Jewish court’s jurisdiction; this was Roman practice throughout the empire (also, e.g., Acts 18:14-15). Pilate is also known not to have been cooperative when dealing with Jewish religious matters; unless the situation got out of hand, he did not need to cooperate as long as his probable *patron Sejanus controlled the emperor Tiberius in Rome* (see comment on 19:12). Philo reports that Sejanus was anti-Jewish, and both Philo and Josephus portray Pilate as brutal. From Pilate’s initial attempt to bring idolatrous Roman standards into Jerusalem to his plundering of the temple treasury to build an aqueduct to issuing coins with the emperor’s image, Pilate had displayed insensitivity to Jewish concerns. Yet Pilate also belonged to a lower order of nobility than most governors, and was politically vulnerable apart from Sejanus’s patronage; ultimately he usually gave in to the demands of the Jewish aristocracy. Slowness to accept the chief priests’ recommendations might reflect spite for them rather than commitment to justice. Over time, though, he probably became more politically accommodating to the locals (thus he remained in office till A.D. 36, even though his political patron in Rome, Sejanus, was executed in 31.)

Pilate expected Jewish courts to judge all internal religious cases, but capital offenses required Roman verdicts, and apart from desecrating the temple only a political charge would suffice for that. Although scholars have debated the matter, Rome apparently did not permit Jewish courts to exercise the death

penalty, except in the case of a *Gentile intruding into an inner court of the temple. They could flog and probably decree a person worthy of death; but executions not authorized by the Romans were illegal. The Romans had to try all other capital offenses. (Some later rabbinic sources place the abolition of Jewish courts' right to execute the death penalty in A.D. 70 [other rabbis place it about A.D. 30], but this would have given Palestinian Jewish leaders a right not shared by most other local officials under Rome, a right we would therefore expect contemporary apologists for Judaism like Josephus to attest. Normally only governors and client rulers exercised the "right of the sword." The Sanhedrin's possession of it is not attested early, and later rabbis often idealized the earlier legal situation, even reading their own authority back into the pre-70 period. The right to execute violators of the temple was also permitted in the case of violators of other sacred shrines, like the sanctuary at Eleusis; but the right was rarely extended beyond this violation.)

18:32. They used not stoning but crucifixion for executing noncitizens charged with treason (thus fulfilling Jesus' word about being "lifted up"—12:32-33).

18:33-35. Pilate follows a Roman procedure called *cognitio*, an inquiry to determine what really happened. As prefect, he would make the final decision and answer to no one for it unless a complaint were sent to Rome; but he investigates the matter nonetheless.

The priests charge Jesus with claiming to be a king, which is a charge of *maiestas*, treason against the emperor. (Herod Antipas was later exiled for simply requesting the title, which an earlier emperor, Augustus, had granted Herod the Great.) This was an especially deadly charge under Tiberias, the current emperor. Some other Jewish "prophet"-leaders later invited Roman intervention.

18:36-38a. Jesus' nonresistance distinguishes him from true revolutionaries in Judea. The idea that Jesus' *kingdom is not based on military or political force is repeated throughout the Gospels, but most of Jesus' hearers never grasp that meaning in his words (after all, why call it a "kingdom" if it was nonpolitical?). Pilate hears the term "truth" and probably interprets Jesus in another sense: a philosopher or some other teacher. As an educated Roman, Pilate should have known that many philosophers portrayed themselves as ideal rulers (see comment on 1 Cor 4:8); although he probably had little attachment to philosophers himself, he would have viewed them as harmless. No one could be more nonrevolutionary in practice than a *Cynic* or Stoic philosopher, no matter

how antisocial Cynic teachings might be. “Truth” in *Old Testament and Jewish tradition was God’s covenant integrity; the concept would sound more abstract to many Gentiles.

18:38b–19:3

Pilate Meets the Masses

18:38b. Roman law prohibited treason, not wandering, antisocial philosophers. From Pilate’s Roman perspective, he had no reason to condemn Jesus.

18:39. Roman governors were not obligated to follow local (or other) customs, but out of political prudence often did so, especially at crowded festivals. Well-liked precedents like pardons were usually kept. Although unattested in extant Palestinian sources (as are many customs), the specific custom mentioned here is the sort of custom the Romans would have allowed. Roman law officially permitted two kinds of amnesty, the *indulgentia* (pardoning a condemned person) and—closer to what Pilate probably has in mind here—*abolitio* (acquitting a person before judgment). Romans and Greeks seem to have granted mass amnesty at some other regular feasts, and Romans occasionally acquitted prisoners in response to the cries of crowds.

18:40. The term translated “bandit” (NRSV, GNT) or “robber” (KJV, NASB) could mean what those titles usually imply, or, in light of Josephus’s usage, could imply that Barabbas is a revolutionary (cf. NIV), a point clear in Mark 15:7. (Some warn that it is difficult to distinguish between self-seeking bandits and those desiring only to terrorize foreigners.) In either case, Barabbas was the kind of person Rome *would* want to execute. Many ancient writers used irony. The irony here cuts deeply: the people preferred a real revolutionary to Jesus, who was denounced for treason as a would-be king but had no actual record of participation in insurrection. Judean leaders on other occasions used loud delegations to force governors to accept their demands.

19:1. Beatings were a regular punishment themselves, but flogging and scourging, much more severe, also accompanied death sentences. On other occasions governors had persons scourged as a warning although they did not regard them as genuine threats (cf. Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.304-5), or even handed over Roman soldiers for execution if needed to preserve public order (2.231).

In the provinces, soldiers normally administered this punishment. The person

being punished would be stripped naked, then stripped to a post for the beating. Jewish *law allowed only thirty-nine lashes with a calf-leather whip; Roman law allowed scourging till the soldier grew tired, and texts report that bones or entrails were sometimes bared. Romans beat free Romans with rods, soldiers with sticks, but slaves and probably despised non-Romans with whips whose leather thongs enclosed sharp pieces of metal or bone.

19:2. Soldiers played games like throwing knucklebones, coins or dice; the chance to play games with this prisoner would come as a welcome respite from their customary boredom in a foreign land. Adorning a prisoner as a king and beating him occurred on other occasions, even when the person was not claiming kingship. Common, coarse street mimes seem to have often included mock kings arrayed in mock splendor; the Jewish ruler Agrippa I was ridiculed in this manner in Alexandria. Non-Jewish soldiers, many drawn from Syria, were often anti-Jewish and happy to ridicule a Jewish “king.”

Greek vassal princes typically wore a purple chlamys—purple dye being the most expensive—and a wreath of gilded leaves. The “purple robe” that the soldiers put on Jesus may have been a faded scarlet lictor’s robe or an old rug. The crown of thorns, perhaps from the branches of the thorny acanthus shrub or from the date palm (the latter would have looked more realistic), may have been meant to turn mainly outward (mimicking the wreaths of *Hellenistic kings) rather than painfully inward; nevertheless, one could not have prevented some thorns from scraping inward, drawing blood from Jesus’ scalp. Only the highest king would wear an actual crown instead of a wreath, so they are portraying him as a vassal prince.

19:3. “Hail” is sarcasm derived from the customary salutation of the Roman emperor, “Ave (Hail), Caesar!” Normally in the eastern Mediterranean world one would kneel when offering such an acclamation. The abuse of prisoners (a practice not unknown today) was probably common and was sometimes public.

19:4-16

Politics over Justice

19:4. Not known to be unnecessarily cooperative with the local leaders, Pilate characteristically holds out giving in to them as long as possible. The governor’s investigation has yielded a verdict: not guilty (18:35-38a). Under normal circumstances, this verdict would stand.

19:5. The garb of a mock king, as in the case of the Alexandrian dressed up to ridicule Agrippa I (see comment on 19:2), portrays Jesus to the mob not as a true king but as a harmless fool. Irony and sarcasm were common in ancient sources; the title “man” may contrast ironically with their charge: “God’s Son” (19:7); it may be a mock royal acclamation, as in “Behold the king!” in 19:14 (contrast the opening acclamation of the Gospel—1:29). In another irony, it might be relevant that Pilate’s “Behold the man” recalls the opening words identifying Israel’s first king in 1 Sam 9:17.

19:6. Pilate’s challenge may be derisive: the Jewish authorities did not have the legal right to execute capital offenders, and if they had they would normally have stoned them rather than crucified them.

19:7. The *Old Testament called the *Messiah (and all David’s line)* the Son of God (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7; 89:27); in a more general sense, all Israel was called God’s child (Ex 4:22; Deut 8:3; Hos 11:1). But even falsely claiming to be the Messiah was not a capital offense in standard Jewish teaching, as long as one were not a false prophet advocating other gods. Political rather than theological considerations made such claims dangerous; *Roman* rather than biblical law made royal claims a capital offense. Even on their own terms, Jesus’ accusers are thus mistaken about the *law’s teaching about him (10:34-36); but John may intend more irony: he believed the Old Testament predicted that God’s Son would die (cf. Is 53).

19:8. Pilate hears the charge very differently. Although many wandering philosophers claimed to be sons of gods and were not taken seriously, some teachers were thought to actually possess divine wisdom or power, and Pilate might be cautious not to offend such a powerful being. They also knew stories of deities coming in disguise and judging those who rejected them. Some Romans were cynical about the gods, but most believed in them, and Pilate might be especially cautious, given the reputation of Jewish magicians for being among the best in antiquity.

19:9. In ancient accounts, sometimes philosophers and especially Jewish martyrs refused to satisfy their judges.

19:10. Pilate’s decree was legally binding in all capital cases; he did not even have to accept the recommendations of his *consilium*, or advisory council. He was authorized to judge in all cases regarding public order, even if no specific laws had been violated. Roman law did not take silence as an admission of guilt, but without a defense a defendant would be convicted by default. In any case, the issue with Pilate is no longer guilt or innocence but weighing the religious

and political consequences of both decisions.

19:11. Judaism understood that rulers held authority only temporarily delegated them by God, who would judge in the end; “above” was sometimes a Jewish way of speaking of God (frequent in John). Here Jesus may imply that the authority of Caiaphas, unlike that of Pilate, is illegitimate; the high priesthood was to be for life, but high priests had been deposed and others installed at the whim and for the political expediency of the Romans. The Roman governor Valerius Gratus (A.D. 15–26) chose Caiaphas as a high priest cooperative with Rome, an approach Caiaphas had continued under Pilate.

19:12. Romans respected courage in the face of death (e.g., one ancient writer praises an ancient Spartan boy who silently let a fox eat away his entrails rather than break the rules of military training). Jesus’ answer may also confirm Pilate’s fear that Jesus is a genuinely divine messenger rather than a deluded street philosopher.

On October 18, A.D. 31, Sejanus, Pilate’s political sponsor in Rome, fell from power, and Pilate had much to fear from any bad reports about him. But Jesus’ trial probably took place before A.D. 31, and the accusation of 19:12 would be a fearful one even with Sejanus in power: the emperor Tiberius was suspicious of the least talk of treason, and a delegation to Rome providing the slightest evidence that Pilate had supported a self-proclaimed king could lead to Pilate’s beheading. *Philo tells us that Pilate also backed down much earlier in his career when the Jewish leaders threatened to petition the emperor against him (*Embassy to Gaius* 301-2).

“Friends” of powerful *patrons were their political dependents, and to be the “friend of the emperor” (NRSV) or the “friend of Caesar” (KJV, NASB, NIV) was a special honor. “Friend of the king” had been an office in Greek and ancient Near Eastern palaces (including Israel, from David through Herod the Great; cf. 1 Kings 4:5; 1 Chron 27:33); “friend of the emperor” was likewise an official title with political implications. As a client of Sejanus, Tiberius’s praetorian prefect and most trusted confidant at this point, it is possible that Pilate may have acquired this title (cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 6.8); otherwise it is intended figuratively.

19:13. Bad reports about one could hinder political ambitions. Some commentators have thought that the “Stone Pavement” is the pavement in the fortress Antonia on the temple mount, but that pavement seems to date from a later period. Instead the text undoubtedly refers to the raised, outdoor paved area near Herod’s palace, where the governor resided when he visited Jerusalem. Other sources confirm that both Pilate and a later governor addressed audiences

from this platform. Evidence suggests that the governor had to pronounce death sentences *pro tribunali*, from the judgment seat (see comment on Rom 14:10-12).

19:14. In slightly different wording, “Behold, your king” repeats part of the quotation in 12:15 (Zech 9:9), so that Pilate unwittingly proclaims truth. The “day of Preparation” (19:14, 31, 42) was the day that the Passover lamb would be slaughtered to be eaten that night (see comment on 18:28). (Jewish people reckoned days from sunset to sunset, so what most people today would call Friday night they considered the beginning of the sabbath, or Saturday.) Later *rabbis estimated that offerings began earlier on Passover eve, but the slaughter of Passover lambs probably had to continue all day and was finally completed about the time the evening offering was slaughtered, roughly at the time (but not the day) when Jesus died in the *Synoptic Gospels (about 3 p.m.).

The “sixth hour” normally should mean noon but by a different (and much less likely) reckoning here could mean 6 a.m., close to dawn. John could use it for a symbolic connection with 4:6 or a symbolic connection with Passover (many scholars argue here that the slaughter of Passover lambs began about noon; this argument rests, however, on late and in this case improbable sources). (The other large Johannine work, Revelation, also uses time symbolically.) In any case, the narrative setting is noon, the hottest hour of the day; people would not normally be in public except for very important matters.

19:15. For Pilate to free someone accused of treason or of insulting the emperor’s *maiestas* would invite the same accusation against himself, especially at this time under Tiberius, one of the most paranoid rulers of the first century. Although not accommodating when he did not need to be, Pilate is known to have acceded to mob demands on other occasions. As a provincial governor he officially had full discretion to decree the penalty. Crucifixion was the standard Roman method of execution for slaves, revolutionaries or other provincials who were not Roman citizens (such as most Palestinian Jews).

The authorities’ cry is typical of the irony of John: Jewish people prayed daily for the royal Messiah, and one Jewish prayer that came to be part of the Passover celebration at least in later times acknowledges no king but God (see also comment on 8:33). (In this period, that precise language may have characterized those desiring to revolt against Rome.)

19:16. Although Pilate was not known for cooperating with the chief priests, neither was he such a poor politician as to risk negative reports about himself over a “minor” case. When a governor decreed that one would be executed, he

would say something like, “You will mount the cross.”

19:17-22

The Crucifixion

19:17. Normally prisoners were marched through crowds of onlookers, using a public execution to warn against rebellion. Condemned criminals normally carried their own cross (the horizontal beam, the *patibulum*, not the upright stake) to the site of the execution, where it would be affixed to the upright stake (*palus*). The victim was usually stripped naked for the procession and execution as well, although this full nakedness must have offended some Jewish sensibilities in Palestine.

Thus Jesus would probably be led from Herod’s old palace, in the Upper City, through the garden gate (against the more traditional route envisioned by tourists). The probable site of Golgotha was outside the city wall and not far from Herod’s palace—perhaps a thousand feet north/northeast of it. Roman custom placed crucifixions, and Jewish custom located stonings, outside towns rather than at their center (in the *Old Testament, cf. Lev 24:14, 23; Num 15:35-36; Deut 17:5; 21:19-21; 22:24; in the *New Testament, cf. Lk 4:29; Acts 7:58).

19:18. Romans could crucify people even on trees, but this public execution at a festival probably involves a more formal cross. Some scholars suggest that several stakes, normally at most about ten feet high, stood in Golgotha ready to be reused whenever executions occurred. (The stakes were low enough that dogs nibbled the feet of some crucifixion victims.) On the top of the stake or slightly below the top was often a groove into which the horizontal beam of the cross would be inserted after the prisoner had been fastened to it with ropes or nails (see some further comment on Mt 27:26).

19:19. Sometimes one would carry a *titulus* stating the reason for the condemned person’s crucifixion, although it is not clear that it was usually displayed above the cross in this period. The charge against Jesus: one who attempted to usurp the prerogatives of royalty, which were properly dispensed only at the decree of Caesar. Jesus is charged with high treason against the majesty of the emperor, a charge that Jesus’ followers would not have made up (followers of one executed for treason were themselves suspect).

19:20. The site of execution was necessarily outside the city, although the soldiers preferred that it be nearby (see comment on 19:17). Jewish people in the

Roman Empire dealt with three or four basic languages: Greek, Latin, *Aramaic and Hebrew (of these, Greek especially was spoken outside Palestine and shared its prominence with Aramaic inside Palestine, which was the dominant language further to the east). Jewish inscriptions to foreigners were written in Greek and Latin. Even in Jerusalem, some very important inscriptions meant to warn all peoples were in both Greek and Latin; Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.194.

19:21-22. No longer faced with the possibility of mob unrest or a complaint to Tiberius, Pilate returns to his characteristic lack of cooperation. In about this same year, Pilate minted a cheap coin of Tiberius bearing the emperor's wand—a pagan symbol quite offensive to Jewish sensibilities.

19:23-37

Jesus' Death

19:23. The “outer garments” would be the rectangular cloth used in bad weather, the inside “tunic” a sleeveless, tightly fitting shirt. Usually the latter was made of two cloths stitched together, so a seamless tunic was more valuable. Roman law as later codified in Roman legal Digests granted the soldiers the right to the clothes the executed man was wearing; it was customary to execute the condemned man naked. The basic unit of the Roman army was the *contubernium*, composed of eight soldiers who shared a tent; half-units of four soldiers each were sometimes assigned to special tasks, such as execution squads.

19:24. John's mention that the soldiers do not want to “tear” it might allude to the *high priest's garment in the Old Testament* (Lev 21:10), which Josephus mentions was also seamless. This interpretation, however, probably reads too much into the text; the wording in Leviticus is quite different. That it was seamless may simply suggest that, as a woven rather than knitted garment, it was more valuable. John finds two distinct acts in Psalm 22:18 (a common ancient Jewish method of interpretation), as Matthew does in Zechariah 9:9 (see comment on Mt 21:4-7). Casting lots was a conventional way to decide disputed matters, leaving the decision to deities (see comment on Acts 1:26); the soldiers may have brought dice or other games to pass the time, or they may create makeshift lots on the spot.

19:25. The evidence is disputed as to whether relatives and close friends were allowed near crucifixions; they probably usually were. In either case, the soldiers supervising the execution may have looked the other way in practice if

they had no reason to forbid it; the prerogatives of motherhood were highly respected in the ancient world. People usually permitted women more latitude in mourning, even in cases when the person being mourned was a criminal, hence often not to be mourned. At the same time, ancients usually considered women less courageous on average than men, and the absence of most male *disciples could shame the absent men.

19:26-27. Because Jesus may not be elevated far above the ground, Jesus' mother and disciple can hear him without being extremely close to the cross. A dying person could make an oral testament even from the cross, so long as witnesses were available; the eldest son might be responsible for his widowed mother's care, and testaments sometimes delegated such care. If a widow's eldest son died, normally younger sons would care for her; Jesus had brothers (cf. 7:3-5). Yet Jesus formally places his mother under his disciple's protection, providing for her after his death. Dying fathers could exhort sons to take care of surviving mothers (which they normally would do); for a disciple to be accorded a role in his teacher's family was a great honor to the disciple (disciples sometimes called their teachers "father").

A primary responsibility which Jewish custom included in "honoring one's father and mother" was providing for them (cf. 1 Sam 22:3) in their old age. Jesus' mother is probably in her mid to late forties, is probably a widow and lives in a society where women rarely earned much income; she is therefore officially especially dependent on her eldest son, Jesus, for support, although after his death her younger sons would support her.

19:28. Some scholars have suggested that Jesus may have recited the rest of Psalm 22 after the verse cited by Mark (15:34); in the light of Mark 15:35, this suggestion is not likely, but those who were most biblically informed would know how the psalm continued, and some think that John could allude here to the same psalm (Ps 22:15).

19:29-30. "Hyssop" was not the most natural instrument to use for this purpose. If this plant is identified as the *Origanum maru l.*, its stalk is over three feet long; others claim that it is a very small plant that could not have reached far, and they suggest a play on words with the similar-sounding term for "javelin." In either case, John presumably mentions hyssop because of its significance in the Passover (Ex 12:22), fitting the symbolism of John 19 as a whole. A low cross (cf. 19:18) would not have required a long reed. "Sour wine" probably refers to *poska*, consisting of cheap wine vinegar mixed with water; it was often used by soldiers and laborers to quench their thirst; cf. vinegar in Ps

69:21.

19:31-33. Those bound with ropes often survived on the cross several days (e.g., Josephus, *Life* 420-21). The dying man could rest himself on a wooden seat (Latin *sedile*) in the middle of the cross. This support allowed him to breathe—and prolonged the agony of his death, until (often) blood loss or dehydration killed him. When the soldiers needed to hasten death by asphyxiation, they would break the legs of the victims with iron clubs so they could no longer push themselves up; *Cicero and others attest this custom of leg breaking. Romans might have allowed the bodies to rot on the crosses (and feed vultures), but Deuteronomy 21:23 and Jewish sensitivities about the sabbath require that these executions be speeded up, and Romans often accommodated Judean leaders' wishes particularly during the crowded festivals. (Josephus declares that Jewish people always buried crucifixion victims before sunset.)

19:34. Some scholars suggest, on some evidence, that Roman execution squads sometimes pierced victims to ensure that they were dead. Jewish tradition also required certification that a person was dead before the person could be treated as dead, but Jewish observers would not treat the body as disrespectfully as this Roman does. (Probably less relevant, according to a probably first-century Jewish tradition, the priests were supposed to pierce Passover lambs with a wood pole from their mouth to their buttocks.)

A foot soldier was armed with a short sword and a *pilum*, or lance; the *pilum* was of light wood with an iron head, and was about three and a half feet long. Such a lance could easily penetrate the pericardial sac that surrounds and protects the heart and contains watery fluid. A Greek might read this description as referring to a demigod, because Greek gods had ichor (which looked like water) instead of blood. But the person who has read the Gospel from start to finish would see in it a symbolic fulfillment of Old Testament and Jewish hopes; see comment on 7:37-39.

19:35. Eyewitness accounts were considered more valuable than secondhand accounts, and narrators who were eyewitnesses (like Josephus) make note of that fact. Narrator-authors in antiquity also sometimes described themselves in the first person, third person, or both.

19:36. John here could allude to Psalm 34:20 or (fitting the context here) to the prohibition of breaking the bones of the Passover lamb (Ex 12:46; Num 9:12), or (some suggest) John could *midrashically blend allusions to both texts*. *Pre-Christian Jewish tradition preserves this practice of avoiding breaking the lamb's bones* (Jubilees 49:13), and Jewish teaching (second century or earlier)

stipulates a maximum corporal punishment for breaking the Passover lamb's bones.

19:37. Although a late rabbinic passage interpreted Zechariah 12:10 messianically, the passage itself seems to refer to *God's* having been pierced by the people of Jerusalem (before the coming of Jesus one would have assumed a figurative sense, "pierced with sorrow"). This would fit John's Christology, although cf. also Zechariah 12:8. (Pronouns with divine referents seem to change readily in Zechariah; cf. 2:8-11 and 4:8-9, unless an angel is in view—4:4-6.) The same passage in Zechariah (12:10) apparently refers to God pouring out his *Spirit.

19:38-42

Jesus' Burial

The traditional Catholic and Orthodox site of Jesus' tomb is probably fairly accurate. Everyone knew that burials must be outside city walls, yet this site is within Jerusalem's walls. Archaeology reveals, however, that Herod Agrippa I expanded the walls of Jerusalem while he was king of Judea (A.D. 41–44) and that this site was *outside* the walls at the historic time of Jesus' burial. The memory of the site thus goes back to within roughly a decade of the event, hence is a fresh and likely accurate memory.

19:38. Crucifixion victims were usually thrown into a common grave for criminals and were not to be mourned publicly after their death; had the Romans had their way, the corpses would not have been buried at all, but such behavior would have needlessly provoked otherwise peaceful local residents. Local Jewish leaders probably normally deposited the bodies in criminals' graves for a year before handing them over to families. But exceptions seem to have been made at times if family or powerful *patrons interceded for the body, naturally inviting comment as in the Gospels. Burying the dead was a crucial and pious duty in Judaism, and an important act of love; being unburied was too horrible to be permitted even for criminals (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.202, 264-65). Scripture and tradition mandated it before sundown (Deut 21:23; Josephus, *Jewish War* 4.317). To accomplish his task before sundown and the advent of the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea has to hurry.

Roman authorities did sometimes hand over bodies to friends or relatives who desired to bury them. Nevertheless, Joseph's request for Jesus' body was an

act of courage. Especially for someone outside the family to make the request, it could identify one with the person executed for treason. Far from Joseph's wealth and influence protecting him, it could have also made him a target of special scrutiny and envy. Joseph acts more courageously here than do Jesus' previously public *disciples.

19:39. If this measure of Nicodemus's mixture is one of weight, it is as much as seventy-five modern pounds (more than thirty kilograms; Roman pounds were lighter than modern pounds); less likely, some have suggested a measure of volume identified with the *Old Testament *log*, hence less than seventy fluid ounces. In either case it is a lavish expression of devotion, as in 12:3; but seventy-five pounds is perhaps a hundred times costlier than the lavish gift of 12:3. Other accounts of lavish devotion for beloved teachers are occasionally reported (a *Gentile convert allegedly burned eighty pounds of spices at the funeral of Gamaliel I, Paul's teacher); indeed, five hundred servants carried all the spices for Herod the Great's funeral (Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.673; *Jewish Antiquities* 17.199). Myrrh was used for embalming the dead, and aloes for perfume.

19:40. John mentions the Jewish custom; Jewish people did not burn dead heroes, as some Gentiles did, or mutilate them for embalming, as Egyptians did. Bodies were wrapped in shrouds, sometimes expensive ones, especially prepared for burials. Jewish sources are emphatic that none of these actions may be undertaken unless the person is clearly dead; thus those burying Jesus have no doubt that he is dead. Here strips of linen rather than a full shroud are used, perhaps because of the imminent approach of the sabbath at sundown.

White linen garments were worn by Jewish priests, by some other ancient priests (devotees of Isis) and by angels in Jewish tradition (e.g., 2 Maccabees 11:8); they were also wrappings for the righteous dead. Spices reduced the odor of decomposition.

19:41. On the locale, see "near the city" in verse 20: according to Jewish custom, burials had to be outside the city walls (one may compare the outrage of pious Jews over Antipas's building Tiberias on a graveyard). To be buried in a tomb not yet used was no doubt a special honor and would make the tomb difficult to confuse with others in the vicinity. Tombs were sometimes in garden areas (cf. 2 Kings 21:18, 26). Most Judean tombs were private burial sites belonging to families; often caves were used, and often entrances were sealed with a large, disk-shaped stone that could not be removed from within and were moved from outside only with considerable effort. A tomb belonging to a

wealthy person such as Joseph might have a stone a full yard or meter in diameter. Other tombs in this area suggest some wealth of the tomb owners (cf. Mt 27:60). On the site, see comment on Matthew 27:60.

19:42. The sabbath (or the coming of Passover—18:28) interrupted all other activities. One could wash and even anoint a body on the sabbath, due to the rapid decomposition of bodies, but more complete burial activities would have to wait. (Because Jesus was condemned as a criminal, there would be no public funeral.) The women needed to return home before dark. Joseph and Nicodemus did not need to “lay” Jesus there very carefully; this would have been only a preliminary burial even had the sabbath not approached, to be completed fully a year later, after the flesh had rotted off the bones.

20:1-10

The Discovery

Some have doubted the empty tomb story simply because Paul does not mention it (although he presupposes it, since by definition Jewish “*resurrection” left no corpse behind; cf. 1 Cor 15:3-4), but the *disciples could not have credibly proclaimed the resurrection in Jerusalem if Jesus’ body were still in the tomb. Although ancient laws of evidence differed somewhat from modern ones (they depended heavily on probability), ancients, like moderns, would not have staked their lives on a report without investigating the tomb! Given how readily holy sites were venerated, many early believers probably also preserved the site of the tomb. Those modern critical scholars who have suggested that the original disciples meant only that they had a spiritual experience but did not claim that Jesus rose bodily read their own modern culture into the New Testament: “resurrection” meant bodily resurrection and nothing else, and no one would have persecuted the disciples for claiming that they had had merely a spiritual experience. Mere belief in ghosts and apparitions was widespread and would not have embroiled them in significant controversy.*

20:1. The nearest of kin would remain home mourning for seven days; Mary Magdalene, who might have grieved as much as the family, might have remained inside had it not been necessary to complete the work left unfinished due to the sabbath (19:42). But Jewish mourners as well as pagans were often known to visit tombs within the three days after the burial.

The first day of the week began at sundown on what we would call Saturday

night, so the sabbath had ended hours before she approaches the tomb; going out at night, however, was rare. Although not coming at night, Mary does not wait till full light of dawn; that she would approach the tomb before daylight demonstrates her eager devotion to Jesus. Disk-shaped stones were often rolled in front of the entrances of tombs and were so heavy that they frequently required several men to roll them away.

20:2-3. Romans saw to it that those crucified were dead; on the rare occasion where a crucifixion was stopped and a person taken down and given medical help, they usually died anyway. Apart from a resurrection, which no one expected, Mary could only imagine that the body had been stolen (not very common in Jewish Palestine), that the authorities had confiscated it (to put it temporarily in a criminals' common grave), or that owners of the site had moved it. Ancient Jewish men did not accept women as reliable witnesses for most legal purposes (their witness was also limited in Roman courts), because many believed they were too moved by emotion. It had also been dark when Mary first reached the tomb. Still, they would in any case want to learn what happened to the body.

20:4. Comparison of characters was important in ancient writing and a standard *rhetorical technique*; it could often elevate one person without denigrating the other, especially if they were friends. Athletic prowess was one ancient basis for comparison, especially concerning young men. Depictions of physical prowess were part of narratives extolling characters (e.g., *Josephus outswims most others in *Life* 15). That the beloved disciple is faster than Peter fits some other comparisons in the Gospel (13:23-24; 21:7).

20:5. The stooping suggests a tomb with a low entrance leading to a lower pit; the lighting or the positioning of Jesus' body (e.g., on shelves to either side) would explain why the head veil was not visible before entering.

20:6-7. Had robbers stolen the body (a rare practice) they would have taken it hastily in its wrappings; had they left the wrappings, they would have left them in disarray (and likely left the body with it). Whoever left the wrappings, left them there neatly. The face cloth separate from the linen is not merely "folded up" (ESV) but "rolled up" (NASB, NRSV, GNT). Again, this could be an indication of neatness, but some think that it was still rolled the way it had been when it was wrapped around Jesus' head—that his body had risen straight out of the wrappings and cloth.

The skeptic's proposal that Jesus had only swooned and then recovered would not explain how he could have loosed the strips tied around him or

escaped a sealed tomb, but it also ignores the nature of crucifixion: Josephus had three of his friends taken down alive from a cross, but two of them died *despite medical attention* because their bodies had been so weakened from the crucifixion.

20:8-10. This disciple's faith may have been due to parallels with John 11 or to the way the cloths were laid (20:6-7) or to how this event climaxed the disciples' earlier experience with Jesus; John implies that they would have already believed it from Scripture had they understood.

20:11-18

The First Appearance: Mary Magdalene

Ancient Mediterranean culture did not value highly the witness of women; that Jesus first appears to a woman would not have been fabricated and shows us how Jesus' values differ from those of his culture. Even the later *church did not always maintain Jesus' countercultural stance, and they would hardly have chosen such initial witnesses in an environment where this account would reinforce pagan prejudices against Christians (see comments on Eph 5:22-33).

20:11. Jewish people took the first seven days of mourning so seriously that mourners could not wash, work, have intercourse or even study the *law. Jewish culture was serious about expressing rather than repressing grief. That the body is missing and thus people are prevented from bestowing final acts of love would be regarded as intolerably tragic; even Gentile tomb robbers usually left the body behind.

20:12-13. Among the many associations of white, angels were normally thought to be arrayed in white; see further comment on 19:40; black garments were used for mourning.

20:14. In Jewish tradition, angels could appear in different forms (e.g., Tobit 5:4; 12:19). Jewish traditions in *Pseudo-Philo also speak of God changing the appearance of some *Old Testament human characters so they would not be recognized, and this evidence might reflect more widespread Jewish tradition.

20:15. Gardeners were at the bottom of the social scale, and a gardener there would have tended to the gardening (cf. 19:41), rather than to the tomb itself. But Mary has no better guess concerning his identity. (That he could be a tomb robber does not occur to Mary; tomb robbers were unlikely to come during the mourning period, when visits to the tomb were still frequent, and such robbers

would be extremely rare in Jewish Palestine.)

20:16. “Rabboni” means “my teacher” and is more personal and less formal than the title “Rabbi.”

20:17. It may be relevant (depending on one’s interpretation of 20:17) that ancient texts sometimes included predictions of events fulfilled only after the close of the *narrative. On ascensions, see comment on Acts 1:9-11. The verb translated “Touch me not” (KJV) is a present imperative and might be better translated “Stop clinging to me” (NASB). The reason she must release him is that she must go testify for him in the short time remaining in view of his coming ascension—despite the cultural opposition to sending a woman to testify to such an important event and one so impossible for unbelievers to accept. “Brothers” suggests that 3:3 is now in effect. People applied sibling language figuratively to members of one’s people, fellow disciples, friends, and others.

20:18. Ancient Mediterranean culture esteemed the testimony of women far less than that of men (and in some circles did not normally accept it). Jesus’ sending Mary with the message transcended usual cultural expectations.

20:19-23

Appearing to Other Disciples

20:19. Even aside from the Feast of Unleavened Bread still going on, the heaviest period of mourning normally lasted seven days, so none of them would have left Jerusalem for Galilee yet anyway. *The disciples would remain inside to mourn. Residences often were equipped with bolts and locks. Bolted doors would prevent anyone from entering (a heavy bolt could be slid through rings attached to the door and its frame), unless one could walk through closed doors. Jesus’ appearance in the locked room suggests a resurrection body whose nature is superior to that often envisioned in other ancient Jewish literature.* “Peace be with you” (i.e., may God cause it to be well with you) was the standard Jewish greeting, but it was meant to communicate peace (like a thoughtful “God bless you” today).

20:20. Wounds were sometimes used as evidence in court or to show how much one had sacrificed for the cause. Here their function is to identify that it is the same Jesus who died; scars could be employed to identify someone. In much of Jewish tradition, the dead would be resurrected in the same form in which they died before God healed them, so that everyone would recognize that the

person who stood before them was the same one who had died (cf. *2 *Baruch* 50:2-4; *rabbis). “Hands” includes one’s wrists, which was presumably where the spikes would have been driven; a nail through the palm would not have secured the person in place on the cross, since the victim’s weight would have ripped the hand open (though they were also tied).

20:21. In Jewish tradition prophets often appointed their successors. Judaism sometimes conceived of prophets as God’s agents; the sender authorized agents with his authority to the extent that they accurately represented him (see “*apostle” in the glossary).

20:22. Jesus’ breathing on them recalls Genesis 2:7, when God breathed into Adam the breath of life (it might also be relevant that later Jewish tradition sometimes connected this passage with Ezek 37, when God’s Spirit or wind revives the dead). Jewish literature especially connected the *Holy Spirit with the power to prophesy, or speak for God. In the *Old Testament and early Judaism, God himself is the sole giver of the Spirit.

20:23. Acting as God’s agents (20:21) the disciples could pronounce the divine prerogative on his authority (i.e., pronouncing it when he would do so).

20:24-31

Appearing to Thomas

20:24-25. In different languages, both “Thomas” and “Didymus” mean “twin,” possibly a nickname. Only the evidence of his senses would persuade Thomas that the other *disciples had not seen merely a phantom or apparition; a ghost or spiritual vision as in pagan tradition, or an image produced by a magician, would not be corporeal. The *resurrection body, by contrast, was clearly corporeal, although the exact nature of such corporeality may have been debated among early Christians. Thomas does not doubt that his friends think they saw something; he doubts only the nature of their experience.

20:26. See comment on 20:19. Now that a week had passed, the feast would be over and the disciples would thus soon be ready to return to Galilee unless they received orders to the contrary.

20:27. Soldiers could bind victims to crosses with rope, but also could nail them to crosses through their wrists.

20:28. Thomas’s response, the climactic confession of Jesus’ identity in this Gospel, is a confession of Jesus’ deity; cf. Revelation 4:11. Pliny, a governor

writing near the probable location of John's readers two or three decades after John, reports that Christians sing hymns to *Christ "as to a god." By contrast, the Roman historian *Suetonius reports that the emperor Domitian (probably reigning when John was writing) wanted to be honored as "Lord God" (*Life of Domitian* 13). Most importantly, "Lord" and "God" appear together repeatedly in the *Septuagint as divine titles, including in forms similar to "my Lord and my God" (Ps 35:23 [34:23 LXX]; Hos 2:23 [2:25 LXX]).

20:29-31. Jesus' blessing (v. 29) applies to the readers of John who believe through the apostolic testimony (v. 31), and Thomas's confession (v. 28) helps define the content of saving faith in verse 31. Verse 30 is the culmination of John's signs motif: signs sometimes lead to faith and sometimes lead to opposition. Narrators sometimes noted that they had many more stories than they could recount (v. 30).

21:1-14

Appearing in Galilee

Some modern scholars have thought that John 21 was not part of the original Gospel of John because it seems anticlimactic. But the conclusion (book 24) of the most popularly read work of Greco-Roman antiquity, the *Iliad*, is also anticlimactic; ancient readers and writers would not have viewed epilogues as "later additions" or the like because of their anticlimactic character.

21:1-3. Even around the lake of Galilee, agriculture constituted the primary occupation; fishing was nevertheless a major industry there, and fishing there often provided an ample income. Fishing was often done at night (cf. Lk 5:5). Some people have reported that fish are more easily caught at night than in the day on the Sea of Galilee (here called Tiberias); they could then be sold in the morning. Nets were probably made of rope woven from substances like flax or hemp. At night fish tended to be in the deep water, so were more easily caught with a dragnet, a net with a narrow end pulled by the men in the boat and a wider end sunk by attached weights. Fishermen working at night could use torches to illumine their work. We do not know for certain what tools the *disciples had used—only that they had not caught anything.

21:5-6. Jewish tradition recognized God as sovereign over fish (e.g., Tobit 6:2-5), which no doubt encouraged many fishermen's prayers. Some suggest that the steering oar was normally on the right side of the boat, so that casting was

normally done from the left. In any case, Jesus' command is unusual, given their failure to catch fish all night.

21:7. Peter should not need help recognizing Jesus, but cf. 20:4-5. For comparisons of Peter and the beloved disciple, see comment on 20:4-5. Many hearers in antiquity respected youthful or athletic prowess, and many also viewed fishermen as tough; they might also view Peter swimming to Jesus as an athletic expression of his devotion to him. "Naked" was used as a relative term (it could mean "without an outer garment"). Greeks stripped for strenuous work, but religious Palestinian Jews avoided nakedness in public. Peter has an inner garment or at least a loincloth on; but even in the cool of dawn he may have worked up enough of a sweat to have kept his outer garment off. (The Sea of Galilee is lower in elevation than Jerusalem.) The term that John uses for Peter girding on his outer garment suggests that he wrapped it around his waist.

21:8. Deep fishing with a dragnet was often better for the night, but a single boat's net was usually more useful for fishing in shallower waters during day. Peter swam; a hundred yards is too far out for Peter to have waded.

21:9-10. Although Jesus provides as he did in chapter 6, this time he gives them a chance to share as the lad had in 6:9. The very small class of leisured, wealthy landowners in the Roman Empire despised manual labor, but most manual laborers seem to have taken pride in their work (they mention their occupations on their tombstones); Jesus affirms their fishing, even though that too had been his provision (21:5-6).

21:11. On Peter's lavish display of physical prowess devoted to Jesus, see comment on 21:7. Jerome claimed that ancient zoologists counted 153 kinds of fish, but extant copies of their writings do not support his hypothesis, which may have stemmed from an attempt to explain this verse; various counts of their number circulated. Various symbolic interpretations of "153" have been offered (from Hebrew words that total 153 when their numerical value is reckoned, to it being a triangular number that would have impressed ancient *Pythagorean philosophers). But ancient miracle stories would stress numbers to heighten the reality of the miracle (e.g., 2 Kings 19:35); 153 is no doubt used because the disciples were impressed enough to have counted the fish. (What fishermen would not have counted such a catch?) The risen Lord has provided them more fish than they could possibly eat by themselves.

21:12-14. The host or the head of the household would usually pass out the bread; cf. 6:11. The term for the meal here in this period could also apply to a light midday meal, though it had earlier applied to a light morning meal (cf.

21:4).

21:15-23

Two Commissions

21:15-17. Most scholars view the two Greek words for “love” here as being used interchangeably, as they are elsewhere in John and generally in the literature of this period; use of synonyms for *rhetorical variation was common in antiquity. The point is not (against some popular interpreters) in the different terms, but that love for Jesus must be demonstrated by obedience to his call and service to his people. As a “follower,” Peter is one of the sheep himself (10:4; on “sheep,” see comment on Jn 10:1-18; for the background on faithful shepherds to feed them, see Jer 23:4; cf. Ezek 34).

21:18-19. Predictions in antiquity were often enigmatic; this one indicates that Peter will not have control even over dressing himself (cf. 21:7) for a journey—in this case, being prepared for execution. Some others employed dependence as an image of powerlessness. Stretching out hands could apply to supplication, but in this context may fit instead voluntary submission to binding, which preceded execution. Some early Christian texts, perhaps developing the idea here, apply “stretching out hands” to crucifixion. For “glorifying” God like Jesus in martyrdom, see 12:23-27; strong tradition declares that Peter was crucified in Rome under Nero about A.D. 64.

21:20-23. Jesus told Peter that the beloved disciple’s call was not a matter for Peter to know about, but this tradition was misinterpreted to mean that the beloved disciple would live till Jesus’ return. The point is that Jesus has the right to choose who will be martyred and who will survive. According to strong (though not unanimous) tradition, John was one of the few original *apostles to escape martyrdom.

21:24-25

Attestation of Witnesses

21:24. Greco-Roman and Jewish legal documents typically ended with attestation by witnesses. “We know that his witness is true” may be a postscript added by John’s own *disciples, attesting to the veracity of his eyewitness, although it is not beyond John to write such words himself (19:35; cf. the plural

witness in 1 John, e.g., 1:1-4).

21:25. When writers had more data before them than they could record, they often noted that they were being selective. Thus, for example, the exploits of Judas Maccabeus were too many to narrate all of them (so 1 Maccabees 9:22), or no human could recount all the sufferings of the Achaians (Homer, *Odyssey* 3.113-17). Greek, Jewish and *Samaritan writers often included *hyperboles like this one as well, sometimes speaking of how the world could not contain the knowledge a particular rabbi had of the *law*, and so forth.

Acts

INTRODUCTION

Authorship. The style and themes of Acts clearly reflect the same authorship as those of the Gospel of Luke. Luke varies between Greek contemporary prose style and a Jewish style of Greek heavily influenced by the *Septuagint.

The author claims to be an eyewitness of some secondary incidents (see comment on Acts 16:10), to have therefore known direct sources for much of his information, and to have acquired thorough knowledge of the rest (Lk 1:1-4). The idea of modern scholars that Luke's use of "we" in Acts to indicate something other than his actual presence reflects a modern agenda rather than sensitivity to the first-century background, for historical works in antiquity barely ever used "we" fictitiously.

Once one accepts the possibility that a traveling companion of Paul authored the work, the tradition that Luke (a physician, Col 4:14) is the author of Luke-Acts has nothing against it and fits what little we know about Luke. A number of terms in Luke-Acts are frequent in medical literature, although most of these terms also occur elsewhere, so this terminology alone would not prove Lukan authorship. Physicians could be lower class, even slaves, but were generally well educated; the presence of women in that field (especially midwifery) may have made some physicians more conscious of women's concerns (which Luke-Acts is).

Date. Most scholars date Luke-Acts between 70 and 90, with a smaller number dating it in the 60s and a still smaller number dating it later. Because Acts breaks off before Paul's death, some scholars have suggested that Acts (and hence Luke or its hypothetical earlier draft, proto-Luke) was written before A.D. 64. Others, reading Luke 21, suggest a date after A.D. 70, saying that Acts breaks off about A.D. 62 for literary reasons or because Luke needed only *positive* legal precedents. (Acts is not a biography of Paul, and Luke has reason to end on the climactic note of the *gospel reaching Rome.) The evidence is not conclusive on either side, but because Luke clearly used the Gospel of Mark as a source, dating Luke-Acts to A.D. 62 would call into question the usual dating of Mark to A.D. 64.

Because of this and possible allusions to the temple's past destruction, the majority of scholars therefore date Luke-Acts later, sometime after 70. Neither the dating of Mark nor that of Luke-Acts is secure, but this commentary tentatively accepts a date for the latter in the early to mid-seventies. Later dates appear less likely. Because Acts recalls in some detail riots that would be counterproductive to narrate unless one could not avoid the truth that they happened, it undoubtedly reflects recent memories that must be addressed. (The charge that Paul was guilty of stirring riots, 24:5, would disturb people loyal to Roman order, and the riots would need to be explained both during his custody and in the wake of his execution.)

Purpose: Legal. One purpose of the work is to record consistent legal precedents in favor of the early Christians. In Acts every Roman court declares Christians not guilty, and this record has so impressed some scholars that they have suggested Luke wrote Acts as a court brief on Paul's behalf. Acts, however, is a *narrative, not a list of precedents. More likely, Luke cites a wide range of legal precedents from different local courts (which would be helpful but not binding) for the same reason that Josephus does on behalf of Judaism: to argue that Christianity should enjoy continued legal protection in the empire.* Luke thus gives Christians legal ammunition (Lk 21:15) and paves the way for later Christian lawyers and philosophers like Tertullian and *Justin Martyr, who would argue for the toleration of Christianity. That Paul's custody and several speeches consume the final quarter of Acts reveals how important it is for Luke to answer the false charges against him.

Purpose: Apologetic. The apologetic in Acts extends beyond Roman law and beyond Paul's case. All history was written with a purpose; it was influenced by *rhetoric and (to a lesser extent) wider literary and dramatic conventions, and was also used to illustrate moral principles. Josephus uses it to justify God and Israel after the war of A.D. 70; *Plutarch and Livy* use it to teach morals; even *Tacitus writes as an aristocrat longing for the grandeur of old Rome. History with a theme or focal point (church history, social history, African-American history, etc.) is no less history for having an interest or editorial perspective. Luke's apologetic purpose is often advanced in the book's speeches.

Acts works on several fronts: the gospel confronts Roman law courts, Greek philosophers, rural Asian farmers and others on their own terms, and nothing can stop it. A major theme is the relationship of Christianity to Judaism. Ancient religions were respected by virtue of their age, and Christians needed to

demonstrate that the *Old Testament was their book and that they were the authentic voice of Judaism (despite the opposition of much of the Jewish community of Luke's day to this claim). Luke develops this theme by displaying the fulfillment of Old Testament motifs.

Genre: History. The majority of scholars view Acts as a historical monograph, that is, a historical work focused on a specific topic (in contrast to many historians' multivolume histories of expansive subjects). Historians were permitted a wide degree of latitude on details, although they were expected to get the bulk of a story right insofar as their sources were accurate. By ancient standards, Luke is meticulously careful with his sources in the Gospel (Lk 1:1-4), and we may regard him as no less trustworthy in Acts, where we can often check him against letters of Paul (few of which would have been available to Luke). Some sections of Acts also include eyewitness accounts of someone who journeyed with Paul; contrary to the opinion of some scholars, "we" normally *did* literally mean "we" in ancient narratives. Luke is a careful enough editor that had he not meant to include himself in the company of Paul, he would not have allowed an earlier source's "we" to stand. First-person pronouns appear in historical writing (such as Josephus) as well as novels, but only historical works had historical prologues (Lk 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2).

Many historical writers also sought an entertaining, lively style just as novelists did; thus the mention of "plot devices" in the following commentary means only that Luke was a good writer, not that he was an inaccurate historian. He was, however, a more popular and less rhetorical historian than most extant ancient historians; like them, he was interested in recounting a cohesive story, but unlike them, he was not interested in showing off lavish rhetoric. "Historian" was not a distinct profession and was practiced by many educated people. Even elite historians who were professional orators, however, like Tacitus, could stick very close to the events (and the substance, though usually not the wording, of speeches) as their sources provided them.

The question of the speeches' historicity invites special comment. Ancient writers never recorded speeches verbatim (cf. even Acts 2:40); they took notes if they were present, got the gist and were guided by their knowledge (when available) of the speechmaker's style and proper speechmaking technique. Historians sometimes fabricated speeches (as Josephus does for a speech at Masada with no surviving credible witnesses) but used the basic thrust of the speech when data about it was available. Luke's editing brings out some consistent themes in the apostolic-proclamation speeches in Acts, but we may

also be confident that they also reflect whatever Luke knew of the speeches or kind of speeches in those settings. Acts's speeches are significant for the book's purpose; they make up roughly one-fourth of the book.

Luke-Acts may be closer to standard forms of Greco-Roman historical writing than are the other Gospels, which resemble ancient biography. Whereas Matthew, Mark and John wrote forms of ancient biography, Luke's second volume shows that he wrote history as well. Some multivolume histories had a volume or two devoted to an individual person; when viewed by itself, that volume would be read as biography, but when read with the rest of the work, as a part of a larger history.

Luke and Acts are each roughly the same length as Matthew, with Mark one-half and John two-thirds that length, indicating scrolls of standardized lengths (Matthew, Luke and Acts were each close to the maximum length for normal scrolls, between thirty-two and thirty-five feet). In the first volume, Luke writes about Jesus; in the second volume, Luke writes about the *Spirit's activity in the Jewish and Gentile churches, especially through the figures of Peter and Paul. Many ancient writers would make comparisons between figures as part of their historiographic technique.* (Plutarch is especially known for paralleling Greek and Roman figures in his biographies; perhaps more to the point, 1 Kings 17–2 Kings 13 seems to compare Elijah and his successor Elisha.)

Message. Aside from the themes already mentioned and typical Lukan emphases on prayer, signs and wonders, and the Spirit, Luke's whole book is structured around world evangelization (1:8), with six or eight summary statements throughout the book displaying the spread of the *gospel* (see 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31). *For Luke, the ultimate goal is crosscultural communication and world evangelization, and the requisite power to carry out the task is only the Holy Spirit.*

Commentaries. For the background used here, see in greatest detail Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–). Many other commentaries also provide much useful background, including C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994–1998); Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB

31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998); Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, SP 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992); Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts*, PCNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); and Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Other helpful works for background include especially Bruce Winter, ed., *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, 6 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993–), all vols.; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004); and F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, eds., *The Beginnings of Christianity*, 5 vols. (1933; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979). Examples of excellent monographs on specific topics include, among many others, Loveday C. A. Alexander, *Acts in its Ancient Literary Context: A Classicist Looks at the Acts of the Apostles*, LNTS 298 (London: T & T Clark International, 2005); Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, ed. Conrad H. Gempf, WUNT 49 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989); Youngmo Cho, *Spirit and Kingdom in the Writings of Luke and Paul: An Attempt to Reconcile these Concepts* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005); Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997); Osvaldo Padilla, *The Speeches of Outsiders in Acts: Poetics, Theology and Historiography*, SNTSM 144 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Stanley E. Porter, *Paul in Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001); Brian M. Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); and Clare K. Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the Rhetoric of History: An Investigation of Early Christian Historiography*, WUNT 2.175 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

1:1-5

Preparing to Go

In a two-volume work it was common to recapitulate the theme or the end of the first volume in the beginning of the second. Thus Luke 24:36-53 is recapitulated in Acts 1:1-14, repeating many points in greater detail. Historians had freedom to arrange materials in their own words and to paraphrase, and readers would have regarded different wording in two volumes of the same work as variation for the sake of readability, not as an accidental oversight. (This pattern also

should warn us not to read modern expectations of verbatim quotation into ancient works that no one read that way.)

1:1. This is not an uncommon way to begin a second volume. “Began” is common Lukan style and could simply reflect a Semitic or Koine (the common Greek dialect) figure of speech, but theologically it may indicate that Acts continues a report of Jesus’ works through the *church*. *Theophilus may be the patron, or sponsor, of the work, to whom Luke formally dedicates it* (as was frequent; see comment on Lk 1:3-4). A writer could also dedicate a work to any person of status who might help circulate the work or whose name in the dedication might be thought useful to circulating the work. Theophilus was a common *Diaspora Jewish name and undoubtedly represents a real person; although the name means “lover of God,” symbolic dedicatees were virtually unknown.

1:2-3. Sample evidences were reported in Luke 24, and the forty days here (perhaps mirroring Luke 4:2) allows for the Galilean ministry reported in the other Gospels. Greeks also wanted eyewitnesses to document the epiphanies (or appearances) of their gods or goddesses, but those appearances were not clearly physical or sustained over such a long period of personal contact.

1:4. “Gathering together” (NASB) is literally “took salt together,” but this was already an idiom for table fellowship. Eating together was the ultimate sign of physicality (in many Jewish traditions, angels could not genuinely eat human food; cf. Lk 24:42-43) and intimacy (see comment on Lk 5:29-32).

1:5. The *Holy Spirit was associated both with purification (thus “*baptism*”) and wisdom or prophecy in segments of ancient Judaism. But the emphasis was usually on the ability to prophesy (speak for God under his inspiration), and Luke especially emphasizes this aspect of the Spirit (see esp. 2:17-18).

1:6-11

Coming and Going

1:6. This question was the most natural one for the *disciples to ask Jesus*. *He had been talking about the kingdom* (1:3), and the references to the outpouring of the *Spirit in the Old Testament* were all in the context of Israel’s restoration (Is 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 36:25-28; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28–3:1).

1:7. See Matthew 24:36. Jewish *apocalyptic writers often saw history as divided into epochs determined by God, yet they sometimes used their

calculations of the epochs to predict that they were near the end. Jesus says that the Father has determined the time but not revealed it. Some Jewish sources believed that human obedience could hasten the end; others that God had ordained the time immutably. (Because much of Judaism embraced both God's sovereignty and human will, these options need not always have been mutually exclusive.)

1:8. Although the time of Israel's restoration might be unknown, the end-time mission given to Israel, to be Spirit-anointed witnesses (Is 42:1, 4, 6; 43:10-12; 44:3, 8), is being given now. The disciples are thus to serve as the prophetic remnant within Israel, and Isaiah's witnesses for God here are witnesses for Jesus. (When Israel had disobeyed God, he had always kept a remnant; see comment on Rom 11:1-5.) In Luke-Acts, "power" is often expressed in healings and exorcisms (Luke 4:36; 5:17; 6:19; 8:46; 9:1; Acts 3:12; 4:7; 6:8; 10:38), which can be construed as signs of the kingdom era (Is 35:5-6 in Luke 7:22).

Different ancient texts referred to different places by the phrase "ends of the earth." Writers commonly meant Ethiopia (8:27; cf. Luke 11:31), but in Acts the short-term strategic goal is Rome (perhaps the phrase's use in **Psalms of Solomon* 8:15), to make an urgent impact on the empire. From a long-range perspective, however, all peoples are meant (Ps 67:1, 7; Is 45:22; 49:6; 52:10). Scripture informs this mission (Lk 24:45-49), especially Isaiah's emphasis noted above (see esp. Is 49:6, cited in Acts 13:47). Many Jewish writers portrayed Jerusalem as the world's center (certainly theologically). Many scholars treat 1:8 as a summary statement of or outline for Acts; many ancient documents included such statements (often much more detailed than Luke's).

1:9-11. In Greek stories, various heroes ascended to heaven, usually by dying and becoming gods (like Heracles on his funeral pyre). For Luke, however, the ascension is only a confirmation of Jesus' status at the *resurrection, a coronation of the king who was both human and divine all along. Jewish accounts of Elijah (from the Old Testament) and others (from later traditions) taken up to heaven show that Jewish readers would understand the ascension, but again, the difference is between the exaltation of a pious man and the exaltation of the Lord, to faith in whom they are to summon humanity. Angels ascended and descended, but Luke's contemporaries did not regard these angelic movements as unique events. (Judaism also spoke figuratively of divine Wisdom ascending or descending but never in a narrative context, because Wisdom was a personification, not a historical character.)*

The most obvious ascension known to Jewish people from Scripture was

Elijah's ascension in 2 Kings 2. In that same context, Elijah's successor Elisha received a double portion of Elijah's spirit to carry on the task (2:9-10). Here Jesus' ascension prepares for the church's prophetic empowerment (Acts 2:17-18) by the Spirit that empowered Jesus.

Moses had passed on his work to Joshua, Elijah to Elisha, and *rabbis and philosophers to their disciples. This model of succession created occasional "succession narratives" that described the passing on of a teacher's call. Jesus' ascension immediately after the commission of 1:8 leaves believers as his successors, responsible for the job of world evangelization, until his return in the same glorified body (1:11). Clouds often aid ascents in ascension narratives; one may think here of the cloud of divine glory (in texts like Ezek 10:4, but especially Dan 7:13, used in Luke 21:27). Angels (as well as priests and others) were often portrayed as wearing white robes (e.g., Dan 10:5; *1 Enoch* 71:1; 2 Maccabees 11:8).

1:12-14

The Prayer Meeting

Given the fifty days from Passover to Pentecost, and subtracting Jesus' time in the tomb and the forty days of 1:3, this meeting may have lasted close to a week. (In church tradition, possibly based on this passage, it is ten days before Pentecost.)

1:12. Mount Olivet was the place of the Lord's expected coming (Zech 14:4; cf. Zech 14:5, evoked in Luke 9:26). It was about half a mile east of the temple and several hundred feet above it—close to "a sabbath day's journey," which was two thousand cubits (sometimes estimated at roughly 2,880 feet). (*Essenes had a shorter measure, but Luke's measure corresponds with the tradition probably most commonly observed by religious Judeans.) This expression is used as a measure of length, not to indicate that it was the sabbath.

1:13. The wealthy part of Jerusalem was the Upper City, where upper rooms were more common and more spacious. Although upper rooms in many Palestinian homes were nothing more than attics, ancient texts do report gatherings of large numbers of sages in more spacious upper rooms.

The list of the names of the Twelve varies slightly in different *New Testament texts. But business documents from the period show that it was common for people to have two identifying names, either or both of which could

be used. The insertion of “brother” before Judas in the KJV is unlikely; ancient inscriptions use Greek phrases like “Judas of James” to mean “Judas son of James.” Some have taken “zealot” as a technical term in use by Luke’s day, but it could also mean one “zealous for the *law.”

1:14. Given the forty days of 1:3, Jesus’ time in the tomb and the fifty days between Passover and Pentecost, the *disciples continued to wait for close to a week. Given the culture’s usual downplaying of women’s public roles, the full participation of women is noteworthy. Nevertheless, women were not necessarily segregated from men in synagogue services, as some have maintained.* The text need not imply uninterrupted prayer by each individual, but it must mean more prayer than usual or Luke would have no reason to mention it.

1:15-26

Replacing an Apostate Apostle

Retaining the number twelve for the leaders remained important for its symbolic message about the restoration of God’s people (cf. Lk 22:30). When the probably *Essene community of the Dead Sea Scrolls* chose a group of leaders that included twelve special officials (cf. 1QM 2.1-2; 11Q19 57.11-13), it was meant to symbolize that this community was the true remnant of Israel, faithful to God even though the rest of the nation was apostate. Jesus had chosen twelve special disciples to make the same point, so the number had to be restored to twelve official leaders at least until the point of having twelve had been effectively communicated. Judas had forfeited his place by apostasy.

1:15. According to a Jewish tradition of uncertain date, 120 elders first passed on the *law in the time of Ezra. Then again, the Dead Sea Scrolls required one priest for every ten men, so 120 may be the number of people a team of twelve leaders could best accommodate; other disciples may not have all been present at one time. But Luke may simply record the number to emphasize that many more than the Twelve gathered.

1:16-17. The masculine address, “Men” (here and often in Acts) was a regular Greek way of addressing large assemblies, and did not always exclude the presence of women (cf. 1:14). Jewish people believed that Scripture “had to be fulfilled” and that God was sovereign over the events of history. Greco-Roman writers used fate as a plot-moving device, but Luke sees history moving in accordance with God’s revealed purposes in Scripture.

1:18-19. *Digressions were common in ancient literature; Luke makes a brief one here. The account has features in common with and diverging from Matthew 27:1-10; these similarities and differences can be explained on the basis of two authors reporting different details and ancient historians' freedom on such details. (Some ancient spoofs on suicide attempts report ropes breaking while a person was attempting to hang himself or herself, but these accounts were normally fictitious and at best would have been uncommon in real life! More plausibly, Luke might depict the fate of the corpse if it was cut down.)

1:20. "It is written" was a common Jewish quotation formula. Here Peter might follow the Jewish interpretive principle *qal vahomer*, a "how much more" argument: if the psalmist (Ps 69:25; 109:8) could speak thus of prominent accusers of the righteous in general, how much more does this principle apply to the epitome of wickedness, the betrayer of the *Messiah*? (New Testament writers appropriately apply many of the points of Ps 69, a psalm of the righteous sufferer, to Jesus.)

1:21-22. Eyewitnesses (cf. 1:8) were very important in ancient times, as they are today; hence the need to select someone who had been with Jesus from his *baptism to his* resurrection. Going "in and out among" people was idiomatic in the *Old Testament for freedom of movement and close association.

1:23. Double (in the case of Joseph Barsabbas, triple) names were quite common, especially with common names (like Joseph) that required qualification. "Barsabbas" is *Aramaic for "son of the sabbath"; normally such a name would apply to someone born on the sabbath.

1:24-25. Greeks and Romans often claimed that particular deities knew or saw matters, and Judaism regularly emphasized the true God's omniscience. Judaism affirmed that God knew people's hearts (Ps 7:9; Jer 17:10), and some called God "Searcher of hearts."

1:26. The lot was often used to select people for special duties in the Old Testament (1 Chron 24:7; 25:8) and in the Dead Sea Scrolls; Romans and Greeks and other peoples also cast lots for this purpose. Lots were also used to decide other matters (so the rabbis, the Jewish historian *Josephus and others), and as a form of divination in Greek circles. Jewish people used the lot because they believed in God's sovereignty (God even made it work for pagans in Jon 1:7, to expose Jonah's disobedience; cf. also Esther 3:7), although they forbade all forms of divination. Lots could be stones or pottery fragments, sometimes with markings, placed in containers (vessels or bags); one designating a person could fall out during shaking, or people could draw lots designating different

outcomes.

2:1-4

The Proofs of Pentecost

Scholars have compared some of the signs of the *Spirit's coming in Acts 2:1-4 with the revelation of the *law on Mount Sinai and other theophanies and especially with expectations for the end time. (Many Jewish expectations for the end appear as fulfilled in the NT, because the kingdom's promised *Messiah had come and been resurrected.)* Jewish people associated the outpouring of the Spirit especially with the end of the age (1:6), and several signs God gave on the day of Pentecost indicate that in some sense, although the kingdom is not yet consummated (1:6-7), its powers had been initiated by the Messiah's first coming (2:17).

2:1. Pentecost was celebrated as a feast of covenant renewal in the *Dead Sea Scrolls; some texts celebrate the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, but these sources are later than Acts. Some commentators have suggested that Luke intends a parallel between Moses' giving the law and Jesus' giving the Spirit, but other scholars argue that little in Acts 2 suggests that Luke makes the connection, even if some Jewish Christians before him might have. Perhaps Luke's real or at least main reason for mentioning the feast, however, is the crowd it would have drawn in terms of both size and geographic diversity; see comment on 2:5.

2:2. God elsewhere used wind to symbolize his Spirit, who would revive the dead at the future restoration of Israel (Ezek 37). This symbol shows the eruption into history of what was anticipated for the future.

2:3. Storm phenomena (cf. 2:2) and fire sometimes appear in theophanies in the *Old Testament (including at Sinai, Ex 19:18). Moreover, God cast his glory on each tabernacle in which he chose to dwell before the exile (Ex 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11). But fire was also used to describe God's impending judgment in the day of his fury and thus could serve as a sign of the future (Is 66:15; cf. comment on Lk 3:16). (Others have suggested an allusion to fire's use in purifying metals; cf. Mal 3:2-3.)

2:4. Some (esp. those who emphasize Sinai allusions here) note the ancient Jewish interpretation in which God offered the law at Sinai first to the seventy *Gentile nations, each in their own language. Some scholars have adduced

instances of incoherent speech in other cultures as parallels to this speaking in tongues, but most scholars today view the purported parallels from Greco-Roman antiquity as weak. Luke presents this speech not as incoherent but as worship in languages they do not know, and he points to an Old Testament background in the gift of *prophecy (see comment on 2:16-18). Inspired worship in others' languages suits Luke's larger emphasis on crosscultural inspired speech (witness, in 1:8).

2:5-13

The Peoples of Pentecost

The most sensible setting for the encounter Luke describes here is the temple courts, where one could preach to such a large crowd (2:41). If the *disciples are still meeting in the "upper room" of 1:13 (this point is debated), they would be near the temple and could have moved to the temple courts; very large upper rooms were found only in Jerusalem's Upper City, near the temple.

2:5. Many Jewish people from throughout the Roman and Parthian worlds would gather for the three main feasts (Tabernacles, Passover and Pentecost). Because Pentecost was only fifty days after Passover, some Diaspora visitors who had spent much to make a rare pilgrimage to Jerusalem stayed the seven weeks between the two feasts. Pentecost was probably the least popular of the three pilgrimage festivals, but *Josephus attests that it was nevertheless crowded. Besides those who stayed between the festivals, some other Diaspora Jews settled in their people's "mother" city (see comment on 6:1).

2:6-8. The Jews from Parthia would know *Aramaic; those from the Roman Empire, Greek. But many of them would also be familiar with local languages and dialects spoken in outlying areas of their cities. (Even most Palestinian Jews were functionally bilingual, as are people in many parts of the world today.)

2:9-11. Although these are Jews, they are culturally and linguistically members of many nations; in keeping with his theme (1:8), Luke thus emphasizes that even from the *church's inception as an identifiable community, the Spirit proleptically moved the church into multicultural diversity under Christ's lordship.

Among suggested backgrounds for the list of nations here, the most compelling is the proposal that Luke has simply updated the names of nations in the table of nations in Genesis 10. As the Bible's first such list, it was the most

obvious background that Luke shared with his hearers. The nations of Genesis 10 were in the very next chapter scattered at the tower of Babel, where God judged them by making them unintelligible to each other; here God transforms the judgment in a miracle that transcends the language barrier.

Many Jews had never returned from exile in Mesopotamia, and most of these lived in Parthia. Many Jews also lived in some of the provinces of Asia Minor, in Syria, and in Alexandria and Cyrene in north Africa; for Jews in Rome, see comment on 28:17; see also “*proselyte” in glossary. “Arabians” applies especially to the Nabateans, a kingdom headquartered in Petra, though Nabateans were widespread, including many in Herod Antipas’s territory of Perea. Jerusalem had much trade with Nabatea. Although the Nabateans were mostly pagan, Jews succeeded in converting some to Judaism.

2:12-13. Hecklers were common and speakers had to learn to deflect their ridicule. This scene occurs in April, and the grape vintage ended by early fall; in speaking of (literally) “sweet wine,” the speakers are mocking, not trying to make a factual statement. Ancient writers sometimes described inspiration in terms of drunkenness; Greeks believed in frenzied inspiration by the gods, and in particular *Philo, a Jewish writer thoroughly in touch with Greek ideas, wrote of divine intoxication. Thus experiences of the transcendent (whether God-inspired or moved by base spirit possession) sometimes appeared to outsiders as ecstasy similar to drunkenness. Some denounced particular ideologies as madness (see comment on 26:24-25). (Although drunkenness was common in Greek parties, it would viewed negatively in Jewish Palestine.)

2:14-21

The Prophecy of Pentecost

2:14-15. In Greco-Roman society, public speakers would normally stand to speak. “Men of [a locale]” was a very frequent form of direct address in ancient speeches. Peter answers the questions (2:12-13) in reverse order. People usually got drunk at night (cf. 1 Thess 5:7), at banquets, not at 9 a.m.; people might have a hangover in the morning, but only in the rarest cases would anyone act drunk then.

2:16-18. “This” (2:16) refers to the speaking in tongues (2:6, 12), which Peter says fulfills Joel’s message about the *Spirit of *prophecy, perhaps evoking an implied Jewish *qal vahomer* (“lesser to greater”) argument: If the

Spirit can inspire them to speak languages they do not know, how much more could he inspire them to prophesy the word of the Lord in their own language? Visions and dreams were especially prophetic activity, and Peter underlines this point by adding “and they will prophesy” at the end of 2:18 (not in Joel).

Peter reads Joel’s “afterward” (2:28) as “in the last days,” a phrase that in the prophets normally meant after the day of the Lord (Is 2:2; Mic 4:1), which fits Joel’s context (Joel 2:30–3:3). Because the future age was to be inaugurated with the *Messiah’s coming, it has been inaugurated in at least some sense because the Messiah, Jesus, had come—a point the outpouring of the Spirit on his followers is meant to demonstrate. Luke elsewhere emphasizes the crossing of barriers noted here (such as gender and age) and especially the ministry to all peoples implied in “all flesh.”

2:19. Joel 2:30 has “wonders” but not “signs”; Peter may add “signs” because he wishes to show that at least some requisite signs took place on earth (Acts 2:22; cf. Deut 26:8). “Blood, fire and columns of smoke” is especially the language of war.

2:20-21. In Joel the sun would be blotted out and the moon discolored especially by the locust (and/or human) invasion (Joel 2:2, 10; 3:15). Peter suggests that in some anticipatory sense, this final time of God’s salvation for Israel has begun. Tongues prove that the Spirit of prophecy has come, which proves that salvation has come, which proves that the messianic era has come, and thus that the Messiah has come.

Peter breaks off his quote from Joel here, but resumes with the final line of Joel 2:32 (“as many as the Lord calls”) at the end of his sermon (Acts 2:39). Thus his sermon is a conventional Jewish (*midrashic) exposition of the last line he quoted, and answers the question: What is the name of the Lord on whom they are to call? In the Hebrew text, “Lord” here is the sacred name of God (Yahweh), which readers in a Judean *synagogue would pronounce as the word for “Lord” (Adonai); in the Greek text that Peter probably cites to communicate with hearers from many nations, it is simply the Greek word for “Lord,” but all biblically literate hearers would know that it means “God” here.

2:22-40

The Preaching of Pentecost

Kenneth Bailey has argued that Peter’s sermon here involves an extensive

*chiasmus, a reverse-parallel literary structure: A. Jesus whom you crucified (2:23, 36b); B. David said, “The Lord . . . is at my right hand” (2:25, 34b); C. David died/did not ascend (2:29, 34a); D. David prophesied/the Spirit is evidenced (2:30a, 33c); E. God swore/the promise of the Spirit (2:30b, 33b); F. *Christ enthroned* (2:30c, 33a); G. *David foresaw/the eleven testify* (2:31a, 32b); H. *Jesus’ resurrection* (2:31b, 32a); I. Jesus did not rot (2:31cd). Point G connects the disciples’ witness with prophetic empowerment (see comment on 1:8).

2:22. See comment on 2:19. Speakers sometimes explicitly appealed to what their hearers already knew. “Signs and wonders” also characterized the first exodus (Deut 26:8).

2:23. Both Jews and most *Gentiles recognized that a divine plan or plans prevailed in human life. Most early Jews did not regard God’s sovereign plan and human choice and responsibility as mutually exclusive. Crucifixion was a particularly shameful form of execution that Romans applied especially to slaves and low-class provincials. Some anti-Semites have used texts like 2:23 to attack Jewish people in general, but Peter’s critique of their corporate responsibility (cf. killing by means of others in 2 Sam 12:9) is no harsher than that of Old Testament prophets (e.g., Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah), and cannot rightly be used as if it were.*

2:24. Although noting Jesus’ death (2:23), Peter focuses on his *resurrection; speeches generally lingered on their central point. He derives the phrase “pangs of death” from the Old Testament (e.g., LXX 2 Sam 22:6); his language of being “loosed” or “freed” from these may reflect Semitic idiom from the Old Testament.

2:25-28. Peter quotes Psalm 16 to establish his point (developed in Acts 2:29-32): God would raise the *Messiah from the dead. Jesus’ resurrection without corruption fulfills the psalm’s highest aspiration.

2:29-31. Peter argues that the psalm cannot refer to David, because David did see corruption (rot). (A tomb in David’s honor had been dedicated outside Jerusalem, along with one of Huldah the prophetess.) Rather, the psalm refers to David’s ultimate descendant, who was widely agreed to be the Messiah (the anointed king), by definition (Acts 2:30; Is 9:6-7; Jer 23:5-6; cf. Ps 89:3-4; Ps 132:11).

2:32. Having noted the Scripture, Peter now proclaims that he and his colleagues were eyewitnesses that Jesus fulfilled it, and their witness is confirmed by the outpouring of the Spirit, which has no other biblical

explanation (2:16-21, 33).

2:33. In the Old Testament, God pours out his Spirit (as was explicit in Joel 2:28-29 in Acts 2:17-18); Jesus' role here is quite exalted (see comment on 2:34-35).

2:34-35. Jewish interpreters often linked texts using the same word or phrase (the principle was called *gezerah shavah*). Peter thus introduces Psalm 110:1, a more clearly messianic passage that includes "right hand" and speaks of exaltation just as Psalm 16 does. (Those commentators who see a link with Moses here point out a Jewish tradition that Moses ascended to heaven to receive the *law; but the text makes better sense as a simple exposition of the psalm in question.) Ancient Near Eastern art sometimes depicted defeated enemies as under the conqueror's feet.

2:36. Peter shows that the resurrected one of Psalm 16 is the one whom David in Psalm 110 called "the Lord." Thus he bears the name of "the Lord" that Joel mentioned (2:32; see comment on Acts 2:21).

2:37-38. See "*repentance" and "*baptism" in the glossary. Peter instructs the people how to call on the Lord's name (2:21): be baptized in Jesus' name. Because baptism was a sign of conversion to Judaism normally reserved for pagans, Peter's demand would offend his Jewish hearers and cost them respectability. He calls for a public, radical testimony of conversion, not a private, noncommittal request for salvation with no conditions. "In the name of Jesus Christ" distinguishes this sort of baptism, requiring faith in Christ, from other ancient baptisms; this phrase simply means that the person being baptized confesses Christ. (Acts always uses this phrase with "be baptized"—the passive, never the active; presumably it thus does not denote a formula said over the person being baptized, but rather indicates the confession of faith of the person receiving baptism; see 2:21 and 22:16.)

Although different segments of Judaism tended to emphasize different aspects of the Spirit (e.g., purification and wisdom in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, or *prophecy by the rabbis* and many others), and Luke's writings specifically emphasize the Spirit of inspiration and prophecy, Luke concurs with other *New Testament writers that the Spirit's work is theologically all one package (cf. comment on 8:14-15).

2:39. Those who read the whole book of Acts will suspect that those who "are far off" are the *Gentiles (Is 57:19; cf. Acts 2:17), though Peter probably is thinking of Jewish people scattered outside Palestine. This universal outpouring of the Spirit was reserved in the Old Testament for the end time and was

expected to continue throughout that time. Isaiah 57:19 is the source of the wording.

2:40. Ancient historians edited and arranged speeches; they did not cite them verbatim (nor could anyone have done so unless the speech was short—*rhetoricians sometimes continued for hours—and the speaker provided the author his prepared manuscript). The best historians merely communicated the gist insofar as their sources allowed this. Luke thus summarizes Peter's point. The exhortation here evokes Deuteronomy 32:5, which also laments a crooked generation (using the same description in the *Septuagint).

2:41-47

The Power of Pentecost

Ancient historians sometimes included summary sections (as here in 2:41-47). Luke's account of the *Spirit's outpouring climaxes with a transformed community of believers. Luke may here include another chiasmic structure:

A People turning to Christ (through proclamation, 2:41)

B Shared worship, meals (2:42)

C Shared possessions (2:44-45)

B' Shared worship, meals (2:46)

A' People turning to Christ (through believers' behavior, 2:47)

2:41. Considering *Josephus's estimate of six thousand* Pharisees in all Palestine, three thousand conversions to the new Jesus movement in Jerusalem is no small start! Still, it is a limited percentage; even without festal pilgrims, Jerusalem's population in this period was probably seventy thousand or higher (some estimate eighty-five thousand; in contrast to lower earlier estimates). The temple mount had many immersion pools that worshipers used to purify themselves ritually; mass *baptisms could thus be conducted quickly under the* apostles' general supervision.

2:42. Most special groups in antiquity ate together (Greek associations, Pharisaic fellowships, etc.). Many Greek associations met for communal meals only once a month, however (contrast 2:46). This earliest Christian practice of daily meals (less practicable in later New Testament settings) is thus noteworthy.

Table fellowship denoted intimacy and trust. Music or other entertainment,

but also discussions and even lectures, were frequent at common meals in antiquity; the topic of discussion recommended by Jewish pietists was Scripture. Given such background and especially what this text says about teaching and prayer (possibly including participation in the temple prayers—3:1), early Christian fellowship undoubtedly centered more on intimate worship, sharing and learning the Scriptures and the apostolic message than its modern Western counterpart often does.

2:43-45. The Greek language Luke uses here resembles language that *Pythagoreans and others used for the ideal, utopian community; others also compare the ancient ideal of “friends” sharing things in common. Luke clearly portrays this radical lifestyle positively, as the result of the outpouring of the Spirit.

Some Jewish groups, such as the group that lived at *Qumran, followed a model similar to that attributed to the Pythagoreans and turned all their possessions over to the leaders of the community so they could all withdraw from society. Differences also remain clear: the Christians do not withdraw from society, and they apparently sell off property to meet needs as they arise (4:34-35), continuing to use their homes (though often as meeting places for fellow Christians, 2:46). These actions do not reflect an *ascetic ideal, as in some Greek and Jewish sects, but instead the practice of radically valuing people over possessions, acknowledging that Jesus owns both them and their property (cf. 4:32). Such behavior reportedly continued among Christians well into the second century, and it was long ridiculed by elite pagans (poor pagans were more appreciative and sometimes converted through it) until pagan values finally overwhelmed the church.

2:46-47. By way of contrast with the daily meetings here, Greek associations (trade guilds, etc.) often met just once a month. Temples were among the most spacious and useful public places to gather, and people often congregated there, especially under the colonnades. There were hours of public prayer at the morning and evening offerings (3:1).

3:1-10

Healing in His Name

Luke here provides the most prominent example of the wonders he mentioned in 2:43, on one of their occasions of prayer in the temple (cf. 2:42, 46).

3:1. There were hours of prayer at the morning and evening offerings (cf. 2:42); the time of prayer for the evening offering mentioned here is about 3 p.m. (The *Dead Sea Scrolls and later sources suggest also a third time of prayer, probably at sunset.)

3:2-3. The “Beautiful Gate” may have been a popular title for what later sources call the Nicanor Gate (named for its Alexandrian donor), covered with bronze. *Josephus indicates that the temple’s main and largest gate was made of the most expensive bronze, more beautiful than gold (*Jewish War* 5.201-4). (Some identify the beautiful gate instead with the Shushan Gate facing east, but based on sources possibly no earlier than the fifth century.) In either case, it was accessible from Solomon’s Portico (cf. 3:11). Any gates leading to the outer court or to the Court of Women on the east may have hosted beggars on its steps who could appeal to those entering.

Although Scripture forbade further entrance only to the unclean, some scholars (noting rules at *Qumran) suspect that the purity-centered temple establishment would have excluded the disabled from the inner courts. Begging alms at public places was common in antiquity, although other peoples did not stress individual charity as the Jewish people did. In Judaism only those who could not work made their living this way, but charity was highly regarded, and the blind or those unable to walk would not have to go hungry, especially if they were near the temple. Congenital infirmities were thought harder to cure than other kinds (Jn 9:32).

3:4-10. Ancient miracle workers usually prayed or invoked spirits rather than commanded the sick person to be healed (the *New Testament* also recommends prayer—*Jas* 5:14); but the Old Testament has ample precedent for doing miracles by simply declaring the word of the Lord, as a prophet speaking God’s will (e.g., 2 Kings 1:10; 2:14, 21-22, 24; 4:43; 5:10). “In the name of Jesus Christ” here probably means “acting as his representative, (I say to you)” or “Jesus cures you” (Acts 3:16; 4:10-12; 9:34; cf. comment on Jn 14:12-14). It credits Jesus exclusively with the honor for the healing (as in 3:12-16).

Many people in the Greco-Roman world were suspicious of potential charlatans who practiced religion or philosophy to acquire wealth for themselves; the *apostles’ lack of resources (3:6) helps to confirm their sincerity.

3:11-26

A Breaching Opportunity

A Preaching Opportunity

Signs and wonders often provide opportunity for witness in Acts, but Luke's primary emphasis is always on the proclamation of the good news itself.

3:11. From the steps of the Beautiful Gate Peter, John and the beggar pass through the temple courts to the eastern colonnade, which supposedly remained from Solomon's temple (see comment on Jn 10:23).

3:12. Jewish people often thought wonderworkers did miracles (e.g., causing rain) by their great piety. Luke emphasizes that the *apostles were normal people, filled with God's *Spirit (Acts 14:15).

3:13. The "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" was celebrated in the daily prayers; "servant" (3:13, 26) alludes to Isaiah's servant (see comment on Mt 12:15-18), who also was "glorified" (the *Septuagint of Is 49:3, 5; 52:13). See the glossary entry on "*Pilate."

3:14. "Holy One" applied especially to God in Jewish literature; "Righteous One" was also commonly a title for God, although it applied to Enoch, Noah, some *rabbis and others as well; the Dead Sea Scrolls spoke of their founder as "the teacher of righteousness." The context would indicate to whom the title applied. It could apply to Isaiah's servant evoked in Acts 3:13; see Isaiah 53:11.

Because the healing did not occur during a feast, most of Peter's audience is now Jerusalemite or Palestinian (contrast 2:23); but the corporate accusation against his hearers here is no stronger than denunciations of *Old Testament prophets (e.g., Amos 2:6–3:8). Calling a revolutionary (Barabbas) a "murderer" (cf. Lk 23:19) starkly distinguishes the apostles from the sort of people who had revolutionary sympathies.

3:15. "Prince" (NASB) or "author" (NIV) was used for founders and protectors of Greek cities, for heads of clans or military judges (Old Testament), or for commanders who lead the way; it was sometimes applied to Greek divine heroes such as Heracles. Here it may mean the leader who pioneered the way of (*resurrection) life (contrast the murderer of 3:14), who forged on ahead of others to make the way for them to live as well. Luke's language employs irony and antithesis (frequent literary devices): when the Jerusalemites accepted a murderer (3:14), they killed the author of life.

3:16-17. The Old Testament and Judaism regarded willful sin (Num 15:30-31) as far more heinous than sins of ignorance (Num 15:22-29), but both were sinful, and they also regarded ignorance of God's truth as sinful (e.g., Is 1:3; 29:11-12; Hos 4:6). Most people in antiquity viewed ignorance as reducing the guilt for crimes.

3:18. Later Jewish teachers sometimes said hyperbolically that the entire message of the prophets dealt with the messianic era or Jerusalem's restoration, or with other favorite topics. Some later rabbis said that a *Messiah would suffer and spoke of two Messiahs, one who would suffer and one who would reign, but the Christians seem to have been the first to proclaim the concept of a suffering Messiah.

3:19. Jewish teachers differed on whether Israel's *repentance had to precede its ultimate restoration, or whether God would simply bring it about in a predetermined time (or, as is possible in early Christians' theology, on some level both). Normally in the Old Testament prophets, Israel's repentance had to precede it; following the Old Testament, some later Jewish traditions (e.g., **Jubilees* 1:15-18; 23:26-27) stressed Israel's repentance as the goal of history.

3:20-21. *Christ would not return again until the time to restore Israel (1:6) and the world had come. *Stoic philosophers spoke of the universe's "cycles": it was periodically destroyed by fire and reborn. But Jewish people expected Israel's restoration; this was a central message of the Old Testament prophets (e.g., Is 40:9-11; Jer 32:42-44; Ezek 37:21-28; Hos 11:9-11; 14:4-7; Amos 9:11-15), and Peter seems to have it in view here (see Acts 1:6-7; though cf. cosmic associations in Is 11:6-9; 65:17-18).

3:22-23. Other New Testament texts also apply Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18 to Jesus. Some other sources (e.g., *Samaritan documents and the Dead Sea Scrolls) also applied this text to a future prophet like Moses. In the first century, some leaders whose followers thought they were prophets tried to duplicate miracles of Moses or Joshua (by trying to part the Jordan or to make Jerusalem's walls fall), probably indicating that they sought this role. Josephus states that their miracles failed, however; Jesus' resurrection places him in a quite different category.

3:24-26. Peter's hearers are spiritually "heirs of the prophets"; on the prophecies, see comment on 3:18. Because Abraham's blessing for the nations/families of the earth (Gen 12:3; 22:18) was to come through Israel, the servant (3:13) had been sent to be the blessing to them first.

4:1-12

Arraigned by the Temple Authorities

4:1. The *Sadducees controlled the temple hierarchy and most of the resident

priesthood. The *sagan*, or captain of the temple guard (a local police force permitted by the Romans and made up of Levites; cf. Neh 13:22), is known from other sources and is probably the same official called “the king’s captain” in Herod the Great’s day. Later tradition reports that he was a Sadducean aristocrat of very high rank and also that he could be very harsh, even with his own guards.

4:2. Sadducees disagreed with the Pharisaic doctrine of the *resurrection, but *Pharisees posed less of a threat to them than the Christians, for the Pharisaic doctrine was only a theoretical hope for the future. From the Jewish perspective, the apostolic witness that one person had already been raised would proclaim that the resurrection had been inaugurated. By guaranteeing rather than simply teaching the future hope of the resurrection, the disciples threatened the Sadducees’ security as leaders of the people.*

4:3. Peter and John had come up to the temple about 3 p.m. (cf. 3:1), hence sundown is near. No longer dealing with someone overturning tables in the temple, the aristocracy is content to follow the law and wait till the next day to try them (night trials were illegal, and most business of any regular sort stopped by sundown).

4:4. Estimates of Jerusalem’s population at this time vary from twenty-five thousand to eighty-five thousand; the higher range is more likely in view of more recent research. *Josephus said that there were only six thousand Pharisees in Palestine. A total of five thousand Jewish Christian “men” in Jerusalem, not including women and children (so the Greek here), is thus quite substantial. (Whoever counted or provided the estimates apparently employed the typical ancient practice of numbering only the men.) Because they were in the outer court, the converts surely included women as well.

4:5. The Jewish authorities mentioned here represent the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling court of Jerusalem; presumably they gather in their meeting hall in the vicinity of the temple.

4:6. These officials were widely known. Like other writers of his day (especially Josephus), Luke uses “*high priest” loosely for any officials of the high priestly household; Caiaphas was officially high priest at this time (see comment on Jn 11:49; 18:13). The *rabbis* and Dead Sea Scrolls (as well as other sources like *2 Baruch) offer an unflattering picture of the final generations of the temple aristocracy, with whom they did not get along. Even Josephus, a first-century Jerusalem aristocrat himself, depicts abuses, plots and even violence among the leading priests.

4:7. Trial scenes, as much as pirates and other hardships, were standard

suspense-builders in ancient stories. Throughout the empire, nonelites also recognized that they were subject to the decisions of the elites, who controlled the courts as well as most other institutions.

4:8. In the *Old Testament, the *Spirit often came upon God's servants for specific tasks (e.g., Ex 35:31; Judg 14:6) and is especially often associated with prophecy and prophetic speech (i.e., the ability to speak what God is saying).*

4:9-12. Salvation “in the name” (v. 12) alludes to Peter’s earlier exposition of Joel 2:32 (Acts 2:21); the term translated “saved” includes making whole (i.e., healing the man—so v. 9, literally). Peter learned this use of Psalm 118:22, cited here in verse 11, from Jesus; see Luke 20:17. The “good deed” (4:9, NRSV) or “benefit” (NASB) is literally a “benefaction”: a kind act for which one would normally be praised. In ancient legal debate, a person who could argue that it was actually a praiseworthy act for which they were on trial cast the accusers in a negative light. It was common to charge one’s accusers with a crime, and that reversal is simple enough here: Jerusalem’s elite instigated Jesus’ execution (cf. also possibly Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.64).

4:13-22

God’s Authority Rather Than the Hierarchy’s

4:13. The elite were surprised by the *apostles’ “boldness” or “confidence.” Moralists and philosophers often praised such frankness, loyalty to truth without fear of consequences, even when addressing rulers. Biblical prophets often demonstrated the same sort of behavior, and it could also characterize martyrs (cf. 4 Maccabees 10:5). “Unschooling” means not trained in Greek *rhetoric (public speaking), unlike much of the priestly aristocracy. (It could also mean that they were not trained under a recognized rabbi, if the aristocrats were too arrogant to count Jesus as a recognized rabbi.) Ordinary people did not always resent this “unschooled” label, but they knew that elites looked down on them. Many popular Greek philosophers used to boast that they were not educated in rhetoric and lived simple lives, so what strikes the Sanhedrin as a weakness of Peter and John might strike many of Luke’s readers as a strength. But the reason for their “uneducated” boldness is obvious: they had been educated by Jesus, who was himself bold and “uneducated.” (It was widely understood that disciples regularly reflected the lifestyle and character they had learned from their teachers.)*

4:14-16. Both the disciples and the priestly aristocracy recognize that there is no valid basis for a legal charge. Still, as custodians of the temple, the priestly aristocracy has the police power to control what they consider subversive teachings on what they consider their grounds. Authorities sometimes accommodated popular sentiment to prevent unrest, but despised demagogues who enticed the uncritical populace with what the elite viewed as flattery or idle promises. Some later Jewish teachers argued that miracles would not validate another's teaching if it did not accord with their own reasoning from Scripture and tradition.

4:17-18. In a society emphasizing honor and shame, the elite would lose face if they allowed the apostles the final word. Authorities in the Roman Empire might be satisfied to execute a movement's ringleader if the group did not threaten further instability. The apostles so far pose no clear serious threat, so that a warning is deemed sufficient.

4:19-20. Philosophers often stressed obeying God rather than people, following truth rather than social convenience; Socrates, who refused to be silent even on pain of death, was a notable example. The *Old Testament prophets (such as Nathan, Elijah and Jeremiah, who confronted kings, or Uriah, who suffered martyrdom—Jer 26:20-23) are even clearer examples. Some modeled nonviolent civil disobedience (Dan 3:16-18; 6:10, 13); Maccabean martyrs offered particularly stark examples. Whether the readers' background is Greek or Jewish, it would be clear to them who is on the side of right.

4:21-22. Although the municipal authorities back down, they do not admit wrongdoing, which would be a matter of shame. Pharisees were more popular with the people, but the politically dominant *Sadducees were less in touch with the people. Elites usually despised populist speakers, whom they considered demagogues, who had exceptional influence with the people.

4:23-31

Praise in the Face of Persecution

4:23-24. Although choruses in Greek drama recited lines together, here “with one accord” (KJV, NASB) simply means “together, in unity” (the same word occurs in 1:14; 2:46; 5:12). This is not a unified liturgy as eventually became standard in *synagogues; scholars do not even all agree that prayers were recited in unison in most Palestinian synagogues in this period. Instead, the text

probably means simply that someone inspired by the Spirit led the prayer.

The title for God as “Master” or “Sovereign Lord” here was used for deities in Greek sources and, more relevantly here, for the one true God in Jewish sources. The prayer begins by confessing God’s sovereignty (his power to answer prayer) with lines from Psalm 146:6, a context praising God’s faithfulness to vindicate the oppressed; he is greater than their opponents.

4:25-26. Psalm 2 refers plainly to a royal descendant of David, and would be applied particularly to the *Messiah (“the anointed one”) against whom the rulers were gathered. (Later rabbis applied this text to Gog and Magog, nations gathered against the Messiah and Israel).

4:27-28. In verse 27 the believers recognize the fulfillment of that opposition in Jesus’ opponents (even Jewish “peoples,” though the psalm focused on *Gentile ones). Others also employed “Herod” as a title for Herod Antipas (e.g., Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.104-6, 243-255). The rejection of the servant might evoke Isaiah (see Is 53:3, 7-9; comment on Acts 3:13), especially in view of his anointing here (Is 61:1; cf. Lk 4:18; Acts 10:38). This is a recognition that the opposition to Jesus (and to themselves) is according to God’s will. God acting “by his hand” reflects *Old Testament language.

4:29-31. Prayers for vindication were common in the Old Testament and Judaism (see 2 Chron 24:21-22; Ps 109:6-20; Jer 15:15; see also Rev 6:10), but this is a prayer for faithfulness and boldness (cf. Ps 138:3). Occasionally ancient texts reported shaking of places in response to prayers; the parallels most obvious to most of Luke’s audience specifically would be biblical theophanies (e.g., Ex 19:18), especially the shaking of God’s house in the context of Isaiah’s empowerment for his mission (Is 6:4). Although Judaism boasted stories of rare miracle workers and paganism had local healing shrines and some magicians, a movement trusting God for such widespread miracles through individuals (cf. Acts 2:43; 5:12) is unparalleled.

4:32-37

Continuing Revival

As in 2:41-47, the outpouring of God’s *Spirit here leads not only to miracles and inspired verbal witness but also to actively caring for one another and sharing possessions. For background, see comment on 2:43-45.

4:32-33. In the *Old Testament, God’s favor and the Spirit could be “upon”

individuals (cf. Num 11:24-29; Ezek 11:5).

4:34-35. In the *Dead Sea Scrolls, community officials distributed contributions to the community; later sources suggest that in most of Palestinian Judaism, supervisors of charity distributed funds given them. For discussion of the sharing, see also comment on 2:44-45.

4:36. Many Jews lived in Cyprus. “Joseph” was a quite common Palestinian Jewish name, inviting the addition of a nickname. The *Aramaic “Barnabas” can mean “son of encouragement” (i.e., encourager) or perhaps “son of a prophet,” that is, prophet and exhorter (cf. 13:1). Nicknames were commonly given to describe personal attributes.

4:37. Donations like Joseph’s happened often (4:34), but Luke wishes to state a positive example before the negative one (5:1-11) and to introduce an important character here (9:27). Contrasting positive and negative examples was a recommended technique of ancient speaking and writing. Although Levites did not own land under Old Testament *law, they commonly did own it in the first century (cf. Barnabas’s relatives in 12:12-13), and some, like the Sadducean priests, were even rich.

5:1-11

Addressing Sin in the Camp

Ancient writers often compared positive and negative examples; Luke contrasts Barnabas (4:36-37) with Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11). In the *Old Testament, the sin of one man who had kept spoils for himself had once brought judgment on all Israel and the death of many, and only the death of the transgressor allowed Israel to move forward again (Josh 7). God took the corporate purity of his people, and the importance of sincerity in claims to total commitment, very seriously.

5:1. Ananias (reflecting the Hebrew Hananiah) was a common name; “Sapphira” was rare and seems to have belonged especially to well-to-do women. Since husbands usually married wives of comparable social status, this couple probably has more money than most.

5:2-3. The Greek term *nosphizo* here may evoke Joshua 7:1, where an “insider” acts secretly regarding property not one’s own. Achan kept some of Jericho’s forbidden wealth and brought judgment on the entire assembly until he and his family (who knew of his activity) were executed. Gehazi also took

wealth, lied about it, and was punished (2 Kings 5:27).

5:4. Ancient groups that required members to turn over their possessions usually had a waiting period during which one could take one's property and leave (see the *Dead Sea Scrolls and the *Pythagoreans). The early Christians act not from a rule but from love, but this passage treats the offense of lying about turning everything over to the community more seriously than others did. The Dead Sea Scrolls excluded such an offender from the communal meal for a year and reduced food rations by one-fourth; here God executes a death sentence. Both 2 Kings 5:20-27 and a Greek inscription from Epidauros show that most ancient people knew the danger of lying to gods, God or one of his representatives.

5:5. God protected the sanctity of the tabernacle by striking down wicked priests (Lev 10:1-5). Judgment miracles were recognized in Greek tradition and are frequent in the Old Testament (e.g., Num 16:28-35; 2 Sam 6:6-7; 2 Kings 1:10, 12; 2:24; 2 Chron 26:16-21). Judgment miracles also appear in later Jewish tradition; for example, when an adulteress drank the bitter waters of the temple (Num 5) she immediately died; or some *rabbis allegedly disintegrated foolish pupils with a harsh look.

5:6. Ancients covered corpses to preserve the dignity of the deceased. It was customary to bury people on the day they died, although normally the wife would know of the burial (5:7). If relevant here, bodies might also need to be carried out of a holy place (cf. Lev 10:4-5). Perhaps Ananias and Sapphira owned no family tomb because they had handed over so much property to the *church.

5:7-11. The Old Testament (e.g., Deut 21:21) and later Judaism (*Dead Sea Scrolls, rabbis, etc.) in many cases prescribed the death penalty so that others might "fear" (v. 11), to deter further crime. Judgment miracles sometimes had the same effect (Num 16:34; 2 Kgs 1:13-14).

5:12-16

Miracles Increase

Although a few ancient teachers were known as miracle workers, only the most prominent were reported to have done miracles like those attributed to the *apostles here (with Elijah and Elisha as major biblical models for Jewish ones), and these reports are not from contemporary sources. More contemporary

sources credited such miracles to deities housed in temples (for the early Christian view of which, see 1 Cor 10:20).

5:12. On Solomon's "porch" (KJV) or "Colonnade" (NIV), see 3:11 and comment on John 10:23.

5:13. "No one else" seems to refer to nonbelievers rather than to other Christians (2:42, 47; in contrast to some Greek sects like that of Pythagoras, which reportedly counted only selected people worthy of entering his presence, or the unapproachability of Moses at times, Ex 34:30). Many non-Jews attended *synagogue and believed in Israel's God without fully converting and keeping Jewish rules (see comment on 10:2); it is possible that a similar group of Jewish outsiders who respect the Jesus movement without converting to it is in view here. In context, people fear to associate with the movement without full commitment, knowing the fate of Ananias and Sapphira.

5:14-16. Ancient people thought that one's shadow was attached to oneself. In Jewish *law, for example, if one's shadow touched a corpse one was as unclean as one who physically touched the corpse; some Greeks felt that one could suffer harm through injury to one's shadow. The public's emphasis on needing to touch healers may be drawn from magical superstition (power as a substance was a pagan magical concept), but God still meets their need through his appointed representatives (cf. 19:11; Mk 5:28-30).

5:17-32

Arrested Again

5:17. The *Sadducees were politically powerful but never gained the popularity that the *Pharisees* enjoyed. *Although the political situation required them to maintain relations with the Pharisees, it is not surprising that they would be "jealous" (cf. Mk 15:10) and act with hostility toward the apostles.* Josephus described the Sadducees as a "sect" (alongside Pharisees and *Essenes), the same term Luke uses here (so most translations; cf. "party"—NIV, GNT; see also Acts 15:5; 26:5); Josephus also wrote for a Greek audience, for whom the term could mean a philosophical school. Ancient sources (biographies, novels and histories) often cite jealousy as a motivation for hostile behavior; envy was common in the honor-based, competitive and stratified culture of ancient Mediterranean cities.

5:18. Jails were normally used for detention until trial, not for imprisonment

as a punishment. The Roman garrison in this period controlled the Fortress Antonia on the temple mount; the Levite temple police thus jail the apostles in a different location, though it might also be near the temple. The elite had accommodated the apostles' popularity so far, but now risked losing face if they continued to fail to act.

5:19. Stories of miraculous escapes from prison appear occasionally in Greek tradition (e.g., the Greek deity Dionysus, imprisoned by King Pentheus, in Euripides's *Bacchae* and subsequent writers) and in one pre-Christian story about Moses in the *Diaspora Jewish writer Artapanus. Of course, even the exodus from Egypt was a miraculous deliverance from captivity (cf. also Lev 26:13; Ps 107:10-16).

5:20-21. The gates of the temple opened at midnight, but the people returned only at daybreak. The hearing for the apostles had been scheduled for daylight, because trials were not to be held at night (4:3, 5).

5:22-23. These guards are fortunate that they are Levites policing for the Jewish temple aristocracy rather than recruits under the Romans or Herod Agrippa I, who might have executed them (see 12:18-19).

5:24-25. Such events would cause these leaders to lose face further.

5:26. Jewish tradition suggests that the Levite temple guards were known for violence during the corrupt administrations of these *high priests; but political sensitivity determines their actions here. Once out of control, ancient mobs often stoned those who acted contrary to their sentiments.

5:27. The high priest presided over the Sanhedrin, or ruling judicial council.

5:28. Transgressors were often given a first warning (hence the first and now a second hearing). But now the apostles' defiance had publicly challenged and shamed the city's leaders, who had approved Jesus' execution; it therefore risked unrest, something too dangerous to tolerate. "Bringing blood on them" is a serious charge, invoking the biblical concept of blood guilt. Biblically, those guilty of murder had to be punished to remove judgment from the land. The charge against the apostles is that they are trying to incite unrest against the municipal aristocracy which the Romans approved, by accusing them of responsibility for Jesus' execution. (The Sanhedrin conversely viewed Jesus' execution as eliminating a revolutionary who was creating unrest.)

5:29-30. See comment on 4:19-20. The apostles claim that the Sanhedrin is responsible for Jesus' execution. A famous line attributed to Socrates was his obedience to God rather than his judges (*Plato, *Apology* 29D); the elite, educated Sadducees would have known this, whether or not Peter did. Although

people were sometimes crucified on trees, no one treated that as the only way to crucify people; the use of “tree” here (literally) alludes to Deuteronomy 21:22-23, which the *Dead Sea Scrolls applied to crucifixion. Philosophers valued frankness and truth rather than diplomatic language at the expense of truth; Luke’s audience undoubtedly appreciate these words much more than the Sanhedrin did. It was customary for defendants to charge their accusers in court, but it was considered dangerous to charge one’s judges.

5:31. See comment on 3:15. The Sadducean leaders of the Sanhedrin might view the apostles’ claim that Jesus is a king after all, reigning for God and vindicated by him after the Sanhedrin had executed him, as an error; but more significantly in this case they would view this claim as a direct challenge to their political power and wisdom.

5:32. On witnesses, see 1:8; the *Holy Spirit is the Spirit of *prophecy inspiring them to witness, so that the apostles claim to speak for God, an authority higher than the Sanhedrin. Many expected the Spirit to be available only in the end time or only to the extremely pious. The apostles’ reply indicates that they do not regard the Sanhedrin as obedient to God (contrast 5:29).

5:33-42

A Pharisaic Moderate’s Support

Whether Sadducean aristocrats with political agendas or Pharisaic teachers with pietistic agendas, all the Sanhedrin members claimed to be followers of Israel’s God and would not wish to oppose him.

5:33. The apostles’ refusal to be intimidated threatens the honor assumptions of the elite. Because it is not a festival and the procurator is thus out of town, the apostles’ critics probably could have lynched them, as illegal and against all protocol as it would have been (cf. chaps. 6–7); they lacked legal authority under the Romans to conduct executions. Pharisaic traditions reported that the leading priestly families in this period sometimes used force to guarantee their will. But lynchings were rare, and once tempers are subdued they revert to a more traditional punishment (5:40).

5:34-35. That Gamaliel I, reputedly the most prominent pupil of the gentle *Hillel, was widely respected may be an understatement; he was probably the most influential Pharisaic leader of the time and held prestige as a Jerusalem aristocrat as well. Later *rabbis extolled his piety and learning, and accorded

him the title “Rabban,” which later belonged to the rulers of the Pharisaic courts. Josephus mentioned Gamaliel’s aristocratic son Simon, indicating the family’s power in Jerusalem. (The later tradition that Gamaliel was Hillel’s son is probably wrong.)

Pharisees had comparatively little political power and did not believe in executing someone for political reasons. Even if the Christians were in serious error, as long as they kept the *law of Moses the Pharisees would not believe in punishing them. Pharisees were known for leniency and devised rules that, if followed, made executions quite difficult (a conclusion particularly convenient since Rome normally prohibited locals from exercising the right to executions anyway). Luke portrays Gamaliel I as acting according to the Pharisees’ noble ideals (see also 22:3).

5:36. Gamaliel compares the Jesus movement with some populist revolutionary movements, revealing a misunderstanding perhaps widely shared in the Sanhedrin. If Josephus is accurate, Theudas arose about A.D. 44—some ten years after Gamaliel’s speech. The name Theudas is not a common enough name to make an earlier revolutionary named Theudas likely, although the name does occur (e.g., in a Jerusalem tomb inscription). Luke may simply fill in names of the most prominent revolutionary leaders known by his own period rather than a less-known name Gamaliel might have cited (historians sometimes adjusted characters’ speeches in their own words); the alternative would be that either Luke or Josephus is mistaken. But ancient historians had more flexibility with the content of speeches than with events, and that would be especially a speech to which the apostles themselves were not privy.

Theudas was a Jewish “magician” (he probably viewed himself as a prophet) who gathered followers to the river Jordan, promising to part it. The Roman governor Fadus sent troops who killed and captured members of the crowd; Theudas was beheaded (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.97-98).

5:37. Judas the Galilean led the tax revolt of A.D. 6 (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.56, 118; *Jewish Antiquities* 18.23). The Romans retaliated by destroying Sepphoris; Judas’s model led to the revolutionaries who later came to be called the *Zealots. Judas’s sons also revolted in the war of 66-70; they were crucified (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.102; cf. *Jewish War* 2.433-34). Judas was helped by a certain Saddok—a Pharisee. Gamaliel would naturally view such revolutionaries more favorably than the *Sadducees would, since the Sadducees had more vested interests in Roman rule.

5:38-39. Continuance was often viewed as a proof of divine help; “fighting

against God” (found in combating Jewish martyrs in 2 Maccabees 7:19) may reflect a familiar Greek saying, perhaps originating with the Greek tragedian Euripides but quoted in anthologies for students learning Greek. Many of those in the Sanhedrin might have used such anthologies and hence been familiar with this expression. Gamaliel and many others would also know the context in Euripides: after a god miraculously released his followers from a prison (see Acts 5:19), one who opposed that god was ultimately destroyed.

Waiting for the Romans to take care of this problem would appeal more to Pharisees, who in this period were more convinced than the Sadducees that a future *Messiah should intervene to establish God’s cause and overthrow the current order. (They were also far more affirming of the idea of resurrection.)* Like many of his successors, Gamaliel wants no trouble with Rome, but he is sure that the Romans could take care of revolutionaries themselves—unless God is with the revolutionaries. By comparing the Jesus movement to followers of Theudas and Judas, however, he shows that he still misunderstands it in merely political terms.

5:40. The Pharisaic element would especially listen to Gamaliel, having great respect for teaching of their elders; perhaps reconsidering the extremeness of an illegal lynching, the predominant Sadducean element also concurs. Lynching or even handing over to the governor for execution leaders of a popular movement could provoke a popular backlash, so they hoped to manage the problem differently. Scourging as a civil punishment unconnected with execution is well-known (Lk 23:16; see comment on Jn 19:1); such beatings were intended to inflict public humiliation as well as pain. If the beating resembled later rabbinic practice, the victim would be bound to a post or laid on the ground, then flogged with a calf-leather strap twenty-six times on the back and thirteen on the chest. Even if Sadducees considered Pharisees too lenient in general, they undoubtedly would observe Deuteronomy 25:2-3, especially in public (see comment on Mt 10:17).

5:41. In Jewish tradition, the righteous could rejoice when they suffered, because of their reward in the world to come; nevertheless, disobeying a ruler’s decree was considered courageous, and Judaism extolled martyrs who did so. (The apostles’ continuing to teach publicly in the temple courts is especially courageous.) Perhaps relevant to *Gentiles in Luke’s audience, many philosophers also taught rejecting worldly definitions of shame and learning to celebrate sufferings as a way of redefining true freedom. Ancient hearers would respect this description of the apostles. When Jewish people suffered on behalf

of the “Name,” they normally meant the divine name, a concept here transferred to Jesus’ name as divine (cf. Acts 2:21, 38).

5:42. “Teaching” is primarily instruction; “preaching” is especially proclamation of the saving *gospel.

6:1-7

The Seven Distributors of Charity

Those with political power generally repressed complaining minorities; here the *apostles hand the whole system over to the offended minority that had felt marginalized. In so doing, they affirmed a minority that would someday yield the church’s future.*

6:1. Some scholars think that the “Hellenists” (NRSV) here are simply Greek-speaking Palestinian Jews, but most Jews in Palestine were bilingual, and Greek was probably the first language for many Jerusalemites. The more likely proposal is that this text refers to Greek-speaking *Diaspora Jews who have settled in Jerusalem, as opposed to more bilingual natives of Judea and Galilee.

The Bible mandated caring for widows, who had no other means of support if they had no family nearby. Judaism took this responsibility very seriously. But because it was considered virtuous to be buried in the land of Israel, many foreign Jews would come to spend their last days there, then die and leave a disproportionate number of widows. (In later centuries, Palestinian rabbis provided further theological incentive to immigrate to the holy land: according to one common tradition, the dead would be resurrected only in Israel, so the righteous dead of other lands would have to roll the whole way back to Israel underground. This was supposed to be a very unpleasant experience for the corpses!)

Thus an apparently disproportionate number of foreign Jewish widows lived in Jerusalem, which did not have enough foreign Jewish *synagogues (6:9) for their distributors of charity to supply all the widows adequately. This urban social problem of Jerusalem spilled over into the church.

6:2-4. “Seven” was a reasonable number for leaders; *Josephus suggests that an average of seven elders governed most towns (*Jewish Antiquities* 4.214, 287; *Jewish War* 2.571). Moses also delegated his work to other leaders who met some spiritual and moral qualifications (Ex 18:21), so Moses could focus on interceding for the people before God (18:19) and teaching his Word (18:20).

The term for “select” need not imply voting, but given the usual Greek practice familiar to Luke’s audience, that might be what he intends. (There seems to be some evidence for some elective offices in Jewish circles as well. Greek voting could be through ballots or raised hands.) Distributors of charity filled an office in later Palestinian Judaism. Reputation was important for the sake of public credibility; see comment on 1 Timothy 3:7. There was *Old Testament precedent for having the people themselves choose these distributors and the leader ratify their choice (Deut 1:13), and the *Essenes reportedly elected their officials. When Moses laid hands on Joshua, the latter was filled with the Spirit of wisdom* (Deut 34:9; cf. Ex 28:3; 31:3; 35:31).

6:5. Tomb inscriptions show that some Jerusalemites had Greek names whether or not their parents or grandparents had lived outside Judea. But even in Rome, under forty percent of Jews had any Greek in their name, and only one or two of the apostles had a Greek name. That all seven of these men have Greek names suggests that they are obvious *Hellenists (6:1), first-or second-generation Jewish immigrants to Palestine—hence members of the offended minority. One is even a proselyte—a former *Gentile who had converted to Judaism; many of these lived in Antioch* (cf. 11:19).

6:6. The laying on of hands communicated blessing in the Old Testament (cf. Gen 48:14; still occasionally attested in the apostolic period), but the idea here seems to be that of ordination or transfer of spiritual power for ministry, as in Numbers 27:18, 23 (cf. 11:25); Joshua was filled with the Spirit of wisdom because Moses laid hands on him (Deut 34:9). Later *rabbis ordained rabbis by laying on hands (with heavy pressure), called *semikhah* (cf. 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). (Rabbis applied this rite of laying on hands only to sacrifices and to ordaining scholars.) If so, the apostles considered their new colleagues’ office of social ministry quite important.

6:7. In ancient literature, summary statements sometimes concluded literary sections. There were probably well over two thousand priests in Jerusalem alone. Although most upper-class priests were *Sadducees, the poorer priests, many of whom came to Jerusalem only several weeks of the year, were not; some priests were even Pharisees*. Priests were accorded high status in the *Qumran community, and Luke’s Diaspora audience would have probably been impressed with them as well. Priests did not represent any given ideology or economic status (Josephus complains that rich priests sometimes oppressed poorer priests), but their conversion here shows that the Christians are making inroads even into the temple establishment, or at least the lower echelon of priests who served

there.

6:8–7:1

Stephen Arraigned

Despite Jesus' orders to engage in the *Gentile mission (1:8), the *apostles had stayed in Jerusalem and remained there as late as 15:2. It is ultimately the bicultural minority within the Jerusalem church that holds the strongest promise for the future. Luke gives us examples of two leaders from that minority (6:5), Stephen (chap. 7) and Philip (chap. 8).

6:9-10. Stephen's fellow Hellenists were debating new ideas more than the church's Hebrew faction (see comment on 6:1). Jerusalem had many synagogues (though not the 480 of later tradition), including some of those mentioned here. Freedpersons constituted a particular class in Greco-Roman society in the first generation; later rabbis ranked freedpersons just below proselytes, but they were probably not thinking primarily of Roman freedpersons. The specific term here is the Latin loanword *libertinus*; the synagogue was established by freed slaves of Roman citizens, who were therefore Roman citizens themselves. Most were probably Judeans enslaved by the Roman general Pompey in the first century B.C., afterward freed by Roman Jews; as Roman citizens, those who returned to Jerusalem would have high status, a status maintained by their descendants so long as they continued to marry and bear other descendants of citizens (cf. 22:28). Archaeologists have found an inscription (the "Theodotus inscription") from a Greek-speaking Jerusalem synagogue from this period; Theodotus's father, Vettenos, was probably a Jew from Rome and, given the name, probably a freedman.

Later sources attest the synagogue of the Alexandrians and that of the Cilicians; the capital of Cilicia was Tarsus, Paul's hometown (for Paul's possible descent from Jews enslaved by Pompey, see comment on 16:37). Other ancient cities with large Jewish immigrant populations also sported diverse synagogues. Luke's description here may be a single synagogue of freedmen constituted by those who have returned from the various locations where they or their ancestors settled for a time after being freed.

6:11. Some ancient *rhetorical handbooks that taught public speakers how to win court cases explicitly instructed them how to prepare false witnesses to be persuasive. "Blasphemy" here does not have the later technical sense of

pronouncing the divine name of God but the more general sense of the Greek term, namely purported disrespect for God. Ironically, perjury (6:13) was always considered disrespectful to deities.

6:12. Ancient courts normally depended on accusers to arraign those they wished to charge. The Sanhedrin was not likely to be favorably disposed toward Stephen; the Jewish *law of rebuke required a warning, but the Sanhedrin had already warned the leaders of this movement (5:40), and from this point the Sanhedrin would have to take action.

6:13-14. On training false witnesses, see comment on 6:13. Ancients viewed perjury as an affront to the god in whose name the false witnesses had sworn an oath. False witnesses in a capital case were to be executed if found out (Deut 19:18-19; also under Roman law), but in this case Stephen will seem to confirm half their charge in reply to the *high priest's interrogation (7:1). He is for the law (cf. the bulk of his quotations in chap. 7) but in some sense challenges the unique role that many of his contemporaries assigned to the temple (chap. 7); for "this holy place" (6:13), see comment on 7:33. Even publicly predicting the temple's destruction could lead to arrest and scourging (as happened a generation later to a figure reported in Josephus). The temple was famous for its beauty and grandeur; it was also central to Jerusalem's economy (e.g., Josephus claims that its completion in A.D. 62-64 put eighteen thousand people out of work). Jewish tradition praised those who had suffered to preserve the ancestral traditions based on Scripture; its defenders would regard Stephen as apostate. The accusers spoke first in a case.

6:15. Like Jesus (Lk 9:29) and Moses of old (Ex 34:29-30, 35), Stephen is somehow transfigured; Stephen will soon mention an angel's glory to Moses (Acts 7:30, 35) and will see Jesus' glory (7:55-56).

7:1. The high priest opens the questioning of the accused; his broad statement would give Stephen the opportunity to deny the charge.

7:2-7

The Abraham Narrative

Reciting Israel's history in ways to make points was common (historical retrospective, e.g., 1 Sam 12:7-12; 1 Maccabees 2:49-69; Sirach 44-50), and one need not study Acts 7:2-53 long before the point becomes clear: Stephen answers the charges (6:11, 13-14). Although he upholds the *law*, *making his case*

profusely from Scripture, he denies that the temple or even the land of Israel is necessarily central to God's short-term working in history. Although Old Testament prophets had made the same case (e.g., Jer 7; Jonah), Stephen is bound to draw at least as much opposition as they did. Where Stephen's points differ from the standard Hebrew text, they generally agree with the Septuagint or sometimes the Samaritan text.

7:2-4. Abraham was the respected ancestor of the Jewish people, the model of faith and obedience, lauded in many Jewish texts. Palestinian Jewish tradition strongly emphasized the specialness of the land of Israel, and some teachers even claimed that God revealed himself directly only in the land of Israel (with a few explainable exceptions; *Mekilta Pisha* 1:35-88). Here, although God calls Abraham to the Promised Land, he reveals himself to Abraham in Mesopotamia, far to the east. In Luke's *narrative, the experience of God's glory that Stephen infers in Genesis 12:1 will anticipate Stephen's own in Acts 7:55. Genesis does not portray Abraham's father as dying before Abraham's departure for the promised land, but some other Jewish traditions do so.

7:5-7. Although Abraham was the ideal man of God, neither he nor his descendants for four centuries were allowed to possess the Holy Land. Alluding to Genesis 17:8, Stephen in Acts 7:5 adapts it with inheritance language from Numbers and Deuteronomy and "not even a foot" from Deuteronomy 2:5. In Acts 7:6-7, Stephen uses especially Genesis 15:13 to anticipate a subsequent section of his speech, regarding Israel in Moses' time.

7:8-16

The Joseph Narrative

Samaritans viewed Joseph and Moses as the greatest leaders of the past. Jewish literature also spoke of them highly.

7:8. For the covenant of circumcision, see Genesis 17:13.

7:9. The patriarchs were jealous of the one whom God planned as their deliverer (Gen 37:11; cf. 37:4). They were the ancestors of most of the Jewish people (for which reason some postbiblical Jewish stories tried to mitigate their guilt). Thus Stephen begins the secondary emphasis of his sermon: you oppose the real leaders God gives you. Returning charges was characteristic of defense speeches, and Stephen is already preparing for this offensive strategy that supplements his defensive one.

7:10. The place where God exalted and blessed Joseph was Egypt, not the Promised Land.

7:11-13. Joseph rescued his family, but at first they did not recognize him. They heard of the grain in Egypt in Genesis 42:2; Pharaoh's hospitality appears in Genesis 45:16-20.

7:14. Citing the Old Testament in Greek for a Jewish audience whose first language is Greek, Stephen follows the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew text for the number of people in Joseph's family—seventy-five (the usual Hebrew text has seventy; two Hebrew texts from the *Dead Sea Scrolls agree with the Septuagint; but Deut 10:22 suggests that seventy is the earlier reading).

Table 5. Old Testament Parallels Between Joseph and Moses

Joseph	Moses
Brothers sold him into slavery	Family, who were slaves, saved him from slavery
Midianites sold Joseph into Egypt	Midianites welcomed Moses when he fled Egypt
Joseph became Pharaoh's "father" (Gen 45:8)	Moses became a son to Pharaoh's daughter
Joseph was abruptly exalted from slavery, made a prince over Egypt	Moses abruptly lost his Egyptian royalty by defending slaves
Joseph made all Egypt Pharaoh's slaves (47:19)	Through Moses God freed slaves
Through Joseph God delivered Egypt during famine	Through Moses God devastated Egypt's economy
Joseph, exiled in Egypt, marries the daughter of an Egyptian priest	Moses, exiled from Egypt, marries the daughter of a Midianite priest
The name of Joseph's first (of two named) sons evokes Joseph's sojourn in a foreign land	The name of the first (of two named) sons evokes Moses' sojourn in a foreign land
Future deliverer's leadership initially rejected	Future deliverer's leadership initially

by brothers	rejected by his people
-------------	------------------------

Table 5 is adapted from Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–2014), 2:1363.

7:15-16. Summaries sometimes condense, telescope and omit information so that some details are missing. Thus Jacob, not Abraham, bought this site (Gen 33:19), although Abraham bought another site for a tomb in the Promised Land (Gen 23). Jacob, Joseph and his brothers died in a foreign land, although their bones were later moved to the Holy Land (cf. comment on 6:1). Scripture does not record that they were all buried in Shechem. (Jacob was buried near Hebron—Gen 23; 49:29-32; 50:13; Joseph was buried at Shechem—Josh 24:32. *Josephus has the other sons buried at Hebron, but because they died after Jacob’s burial, their burial at the same time and place as their brother Joseph seems somewhat more likely.) But Stephen here agrees with Samaritan tradition, which naturally accorded Shechem this honor because it had become the leading city of the Samaritans (see comment on 8:5). Judean purists would be interested in their ancestors being buried not only in the promised land, but in the Judean part of it.

7:17-34
The Moses Narrative

Stephen follows the Old Testament closely, avoiding the extensive elaboration on Moses’ life found in other writers of the period. Here he ties together both his preceding themes: God reveals himself outside the Holy Land, and Israel rejects its deliverers. His connection of Old Testament leaders, noting a pattern of rejection, is not his own invention but is rooted in Genesis and Exodus themselves. Compare, for example, Joseph and Moses, as shown in table 5.

By highlighting connections among biblical leaders (to foreshadow the ultimate leader, Jesus), Stephen merely develops connections already implicit in earlier biblical *narrative.

7:17-18. That they “grew and multiplied” echoes Exodus 1:7; the other king who did not know Joseph quotes Exodus 1:8. Israel’s hard times in Egypt, during which a deliverer was needed, resemble the difficulties in first-century Palestine; many people were looking for another prophet like Moses to deliver

them from oppression.

7:19. In the *New Testament period*, non-Jews often left their children out to die, but Jews (and in this period, Egyptians) abhorred this practice; here Luke uses the same term often used for child abandonment, increasing revulsion for Pharaoh. In Luke's period some rescued discarded babies, but most often reared them as slaves; it was known, however, that the biblical Pharaoh did not want babies rescued. Stephen's hearers might think also of the wicked Gentile oppressor Antiochus Epiphanes, who killed Israel's babies (1 Maccabees 1:61; 2 Maccabees 6:10). For Pharaoh's mistreatment of Israelites summarized here, cf. Exodus 1:9-11, 22.

7:20. Cf. Exodus 2:2. Some writers (especially though not exclusively later *rabbis, perhaps adapting earlier stories about Noah) related fantastic stories about Moses' birth (that his beauty at birth was so great that it lit up the room, that he was born circumcised, that his mother hid him "in her womb" for three more months, etc.); Stephen reports exactly what the Old Testament says about Moses' birth.

7:21. Cf. Exodus 2:5-6, 10. Josephus also interpreted Pharaoh's daughter's action in Exodus 2:10 as adoption (though using a less technical phrase for it than Stephen, who plays on the Septuagint wording). Adoption was widely practiced in the Roman world; the adopted son lost his former legal identity and was counted the legal son of the adopter. Most ancient Jewish sources elaborate the biblical narrative more extensively than Stephen does here; for example, Jewish tradition elaborated on Pharaoh's daughter (e.g., naming her Thermuthis, Tharmuth or later Bithiah).

7:22. Like Josephus, other writers elaborated extensively on Moses' Egyptian education and legendary exploits as an Egyptian general. Stephen infers Moses' Egyptian education, presumably correctly (for all boys in the royal family), yet he simply tells what needs to be told. His emphasis on Moses' Gentile education would not disturb his Greek-speaking hearers the way his emphasis on geographically diverse revelations may have (e.g., 7:2-4, 10). His mention of Moses' Gentile education, though brief, contributes to Stephen's polemic that God planned to reach beyond Israel even from the beginning.

7:23. "Forty" could reflect the average figure for a generation and other numbers in the narrative (Ex 7:7; Deut 34:7). But it also roundly fits other Jewish traditions (forty-two in **Jubilees* 47:10-12; forty in later rabbinic sources, e.g., *Sifre Deuteronomy* 357.14.1).

7:24. Cf. Exodus 2:12. Like both later rabbis and earlier Greco-Jewish

writers such as *Philo and Artapanus, Stephen presents Moses' murder of the Egyptian in a positive light; writing Jewish history for Gentile readers, Josephus omits the incident entirely.

7:25-28. Cf. Exodus 2:13-15. Although Moses sacrificed his standing in Egypt to identify with his people, as a bringer of deliverance (the word usually translated "salvation") for them, they rejected him. See comment on 7:35-37.

7:29. Jewish tradition elaborates Moses' escape (e.g., that Moses killed the assassin sent to slay him), but Stephen's speech sticks to the basic story. Exodus reports Moses' sons (2:22; 4:20; 18:3-6; 1 Chron 23:15); in a narration notable for its conciseness, the *digression on this point may underline Moses' interethnic union (Ex 2:21-22; cf. Num 12:1), highlighting Luke's theme of good news for Gentiles.

7:30-34. Added to the forty years of 7:23, the figure in 7:30 allows Moses' age of eighty in Exodus 7:7. God not only revealed himself to Moses on Mount Sinai and sent him to Egypt, but he also called the mountain "this holy place" (v. 33), a term Stephen's accusers reserved for the temple (6:13). Stephen's narration condenses Exodus 3:2-10.

7:35-41

A Rejected Savior Like Moses

7:35. Like Jesus, Moses was rejected by his people as a deliverer. In 7:35-38, Stephen four times begins with "This one"; orators employed such emphatic repetition to drive home a point.

7:36. Like Jesus, Moses did signs and wonders.

7:37. As many Jewish people and the Samaritans recognized, God would send a deliverer like Moses (Deut 18:18). In the style of a good ancient Jewish expositor of Scripture, Stephen asks, "In what way will the prophet be like Moses?" He answers: he will be rejected by his people (7:35, 39); his hearers' very opposition proves his point (cf. Is 53:1-3).

7:38. The Jewish people celebrated that Moses had received the law *and passed it on to Israel* (Stephen uses terms that might translate those used for Jewish teachers receiving and passing on traditions, though not as strong as those in, e.g., 1 Cor 11:23). The term that Stephen uses for the "congregation" in the wilderness was a legitimate Greek translation for the assembly of Israel (though less common in the Septuagint than the word also translated as

“synagogue”), but it is also the early Christian word for “*church,” allowing Stephen another connection between Moses and Jesus.

7:39. Yet Moses’ own generation rejected him; why is it so hard to believe that the one whom the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ generation rejected might not also be a deliverer for them?

7:40-41. That Egyptians worshiped animal figures was widely known and widely despised in the Greco-Roman world (where most preferred human figures for deities). Egyptians worshiped some cow-figures; Israel may have borrowed this practice. The episode of the golden calf was so embarrassing that Josephus omitted it. It was the incident in Israel’s history of which the rabbis were most ashamed; they felt it was the most sinful of Israel’s acts. But they grew defensive when pagans queried them about it, and several centuries later they argued that the pagans who accompanied Israel, not Israel, made the calf (against Ex 32:1-6). Israel had worshiped idols right after deliverance under Moses; yet, Stephen is going to imply, his accusers also follow the “works of their [human] hands”—an expression often used for idols in the Bible and other Jewish sources but equally applicable, in a literal sense, to their humanly built temple (Acts 7:48).

7:42-50

God’s View of the Temple

Now Stephen replies to the charge directly: Scripture does not support the importance his opponents attach to the temple. To the keepers of the temple—which was the symbol of the unity of Jewish people throughout the empire—Stephen’s accusation sounds like the sort of accusation that *Samaritans or other despisers of the Jerusalem temple might bring. Even the schismatic *Essenes condemned only the impurity of the leadership in the temple, while longing for a restored temple.

7:42-43. The “star” and “host of heaven” might imply astral deities (Deut 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3, 5; 23:4-5); by this period most people in the Mediterranean world viewed stars as divine. In a *prophecy also favored in the *Dead Sea Scrolls (Amos 5:25-27; see CD 7.14-17), Stephen plays on the term translated “tabernacle” (KJV, NASB) or “shrine” (NLT): Israel carried the tabernacle of a pagan god in the wilderness. He follows the Septuagint rendering of the deities’ names. “Beyond Damascus” becomes “beyond Babylon,” perhaps

to warn of an impending captivity in addition to the earlier captivity in Babylon (cf. Lk 21:24).

7:44-47. Stephen quickly qualifies that God did tell Moses to build the tabernacle in a particular way (see comment on Heb 8:1-5), and the tabernacle had remained until David's time; the temple was not built till Solomon's time. Stephen does not deny that God blessed and approved the building of the Old Testament temple; but he denies that God meant it to be the idol that he argues his hearers have made it. In verse 46 Stephen echoes Psalm 132:5.

7:48-50. Isaiah 66:1-2 attest that God does not need the temple made with human hands; his own hands made everything. Although Stephen focuses on the Law (more emphasized by both *Sadducees and many* Diaspora Jews), like many synagogue expositors he afterward explains the Law in terms of a reading from the Prophets. The title "made with hands" may recall 7:41 where, as often elsewhere in Scripture and Jewish tradition, it applies to idols. In verse 50, God's "hand" made everything, so he is not limited to houses made by human "hands" (7:48).

7:51-53

Stephen's Climax

Stephen preaches like the prophets he mentions. Closing arguments of speeches often included intense emotion. The conclusion of a Greco-Roman deliberative speech was meant to produce change or decisive action. Stephen's speech also includes elements of forensic speech, however—more to convict his hearers than to defend himself. Forensic speeches often charged the accusers with the very sort of crime with which they charged the defendant—in this case, with subverting God's *law (cf. 6:13). Courageously, Stephen condemns not only his accusers but also his judges; such behavior, when followed on rare occasions by philosophers and prophets, often led to losing one's case or (as in a serious case like that of Socrates) martyrdom.

7:51. "Stiff-necked" and "uncircumcised heart" are standard prophetic insults in the Old Testament; they appear together in Deuteronomy 10:16. Moses emphasized circumcision (7:8), but those who were spiritually uncircumcised were especially cut off from the covenant (e.g., Deut 10:16; 30:6). Stephen could hardly choose harsher words. His point is that his hearers, like their ancestors, reject God's messengers; the *Holy Spirit was especially seen as the Spirit who

had inspired the prophets (with implications for the application of Acts 7:52).

7:52. Jewish tradition had heightened Israel's responsibility for the death of the prophets (1 Kings 18:4, 13; Neh 9:26; cf. 2 Chron 24:20-22; Jer 26:21-23) beyond what was found in the Old Testament, so Stephen's hearers could not deny his charge. Like Socrates in Greek tradition, but more relevantly like Jesus, Stephen allows his words to provoke his accusers to kill him, thereby proving his point: they are like their ancestors who killed the prophets.

7:53. Aside from the angel who appeared to Moses in the bush, the Old Testament does not say that God mediated the law through angels; Jewish tradition had added them to heighten reverence for the law (Deut 33:2 LXX; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15.136; perhaps Ps 68:17-18; 4Q521; cf. also Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). Stephen concludes that his accusers are wrong; they, not he, are guilty of breaking the law, and are thus uncircumcised in heart. Like Socrates who turned the charge of impiety against the gods upon his accusers, he knows what the result will be: martyrdom.

7:54–8:4

The First Martyr

After speaking like the prophets and noting that prophets get martyred (7:52; cf. 7:9, 35), Stephen experiences a prophet's martyrdom. Romans did not permit subject peoples to execute capital punishment, but Stephen's hearers are so enraged that they lynch him according to their own Jewish *law. Stephen's death proves his point, laying the theological groundwork for the expansion of the Jesus movement outside Palestine; it also leads to further persecution and thus the direct spread of the faith (8:1); and it sows a seed in a certain Saul (7:58)—a seed whose fruit would later be reaped on the road to Damascus (9:3-4; cf. the similar themes shared by Stephen's and Paul's preaching in Acts).

Ancient writers sometimes paralleled figures, and *disciples often imitated their teachers; Stephen's death follows the example of Jesus: compare Acts 7:56 with Luke 22:69; Acts 7:59 with Luke 23:46; and Acts 7:60 with Luke 23:34. Luke may also reverse the charges in his portrayal: note comments below on the Son of Man standing (7:55), the false witnesses stripping themselves (7:58) and Stephen's prayer for them (7:60). Such reversal of charges was standard in forensic rhetoric; ancient thinkers also sometimes spoke of unjust courts (such as the one that condemned Socrates) being those really on trial before truth or*

world opinion.

7:54-55. Looking to heaven was a common posture in prayer. Witnesses typically stood to testify, and judges normally stood to render verdicts (certainly when referring to God; cf. Ps 3:7; 7:6; 9:19; 10:12; 12:5; 17:13; 82:8; Is 3:13); the point might be that Jesus, the true judge, is now vindicating his servant even as his opponents prepare to condemn him. As elsewhere in the narrative, Luke leaves no doubt as to who is really on trial before God (see comment on 7:57-58, 60; cf. Is 54:17).

7:56. In Daniel 7:13-14, the coming of the Son of Man would vindicate the righteous (Israel) against their oppressors (the nations); Stephen's hearers would know in which category he places himself and in which category he places them.

7:57-58. Death by stoning was a common mob action throughout the ancient world, but it was also a legal form of execution in the Torah (including for blasphemy, Lev 24:16). Mob violence and lynchings often used stones, including in Judea; Scripture reported God's people stoning or threatening to stone his agents (e.g., Ex 17:4; Num 14:10; 2 Chron 24:21). Although Stephen's death is a lynching, Jewish traditions about appropriate methods of execution might shed some light on how Stephen's accusers killed him. According to tradition, a condemned criminal would be taken out to the edge of a city (cf. Num 15:35-36) and thrown over a drop at least twice his height. The witnesses would be the first (cf. Deut 17:7) to hurl large stones on top of him, aiming for the chest (though precision was impossible), till the victim died. Under Jewish law, they were to strip the *criminal* before killing him; here Stephen's accusers strip *themselves*, probably because they are hot, as Greeks stripped for athletic activities. (Such self-stripping also appears in some other ancient accounts of violence.) But Luke may record the detail to identify the guilty parties—those stoning Stephen figuratively admit their own guilt by stripping themselves. (Stripping was customary before beatings or execution; nakedness also publicly humiliated those so stripped, especially given Jewish and Middle Eastern revulsion against being seen naked.) Under Mosaic law, false witnesses in a capital case were to be executed themselves (Deut 19:19).

Luke's first-time hearers probably know the name Paul, but perhaps not his other name, Saul (13:9); like a good ancient (or modern) writer, Luke might reserve an important revelation for later. "Young man" or "youth" is not very precise; the usual sense of "youth" extends from fourteen (or twenty-one) to twenty-eight years old, but the word used here can extend up to forty (though Saul is much younger than that here). In Jewish tradition (based on Num 4:35)

one did not qualify for some offices before age thirty, but this point is probably irrelevant to Saul's mission in 9:2, especially if he is single (a common Jewish tradition also encouraged men to marry by age twenty). That Saul is in his twenties (the most common age to which the term translated "youth" referred) is a reasonable guess. People associated young men with vigor, intense feelings, rashness and valor in battle or other violence. Those who could gain respect while young were considered exceptional (cf. Gal 1:14).

7:59. Stephen's prayer parallels Jesus' cry in Luke 23:46. Ancient writers often liked to draw parallels between different figures; Luke wants his readers to see that Stephen, an ideal representative of the church, follows in the steps of his Lord in martyrdom.

7:60. His final cry parallels Luke 23:34; see comment on Acts 7:59. At least according to later rabbinic ideals, the person being executed was to confess his sin and pray, "May my death *atone for all my sins.*" *Stephen confesses not his own sin but that of his false accusers (see 7:57-58). Sometimes Jewish people (and less often Gentiles) would kneel in prayer (as a sign of submission), often with hands lifted toward heaven (1 Kings 8:54; 2 Chron 6:13; Ezra 9:5). Ancients often described death euphemistically as "sleep" (so literally here).*

8:1. It took persecution and the scattering of believers—especially the bicultural, foreign Jews (11:19-20)—to get the *church to begin to do what Jesus had commanded them back in 1:8. As the second-century North African theologian Tertullian pointed out, "the blood of Christians is the seed" of the church's growth.

8:2. Dying unburied was the greatest dishonor possible in the ancient Mediterranean world; many Gentiles even believed that those who died unburied were denied entrance to the netherworld, hence condemned to roam as ghosts. Usually only the cruellest of rulers would deprive even their enemies of burial, though it was sometimes denied criminals; but some prohibited burial for the worst criminals, leaving it to vultures and dogs to pick their bones clean. Most people, however, considered it honorable to bury the dead, and risking one's life to bury the dead (e.g., in the stories of Antigone or Tobit) was considered honorable and heroic. Adult sons or those closest to the deceased would take charge of burial. Although Judaism required burial (often in a criminals' dishonorable grave), and publicly mourning the dead was normally a pious duty in Judaism, Jewish law forbade public mourning for a condemned criminal. Stephen's pious friends ignore the illegal ruling of the highest Jewish court to honor their friend.

8:3. Prison was normally a holding place till trial; that Saul detains women as well as men suggests that he is more zealous than most of his contemporaries would have felt necessary (Gal 1:13-14; Phil 3:6). Crackdowns usually targeted men, but women were included during the most severe crackdowns (e.g., in the cult of Dionysus in earlier Rome). Perhaps the only charge against the church members is an assumption of their opposition to the temple, aroused by Stephen's speech.

8:4. Although Acts focuses on prominent individuals (as was common in ancient history), we learn here that many people were involved. Most ancient religions were spread by traveling merchants or other travelers more than by prominent individuals.

8:5-13

The Conversion of Samaria

Having finished narrating his first example from the Seven (Stephen), Luke now turns to his second example, one of those "scattered" in 8:4.

8:5. "The city of Samaria" could refer to the *Old Testament site of Samaria, now a pagan Greek city called Sebaste, dedicated to the worship of the emperor and full of occult influences (see comment on 8:10). But the bulk of Sebaste's people were Greeks rather than *Samaritans*, so the phrase probably refers to the main Samaritan town of the district of Samaria, later called Neapolis, on the site of ancient Shechem (cf. 7:15-16). This was the religious center of the Samaritans. Inscriptions from Mount Gerizim show that at least many Samaritans knew Greek, and in this urban center the Hellenist Philip could preach in his first language.

8:6-8. Signs were accorded high evidential value in antiquity. That the modern Western educated elite tends to denigrate them is more a commentary on our culture than on theirs; most cultures in the world today (virtually all cultures not influenced by Western deism or atheism) accept some forms of supernatural activity. People often respected exorcisms that included outward signs of the spirit coming out, as here.

8:9. Magicians usually drew large followings in antiquity; given the prominence of Jewish magicians in Greco-Roman antiquity, a Samaritan magician should not surprise us; Samaria had even more Greek influences than Judea. Like the Old Testament, official leaders in mainstream Judaism opposed

magic, but later magical papyri show considerable Jewish influence, and even a minority of later *rabbis reportedly indulged in something like sorcery, claiming simply to exploit insight into the secrets of God's laws of creation. Whether someone was called a miracle-worker or a magician often depended on whether the writer liked him, but in general magicians were thought to act less publicly and particularly to act more for personal gain.

8:10. In nearby Sebaste many Greeks were synthesizing the various Greek gods into one universal male deity and the goddesses into another female one. This synthesis followed a trend that had been developing among some educated Greeks for centuries. A second-century Christian writer suggested that Simon claimed to be the avatar, or incarnation, of the male form of the deity, while his consort Helena was its female form. Samaritans themselves were monotheistic, but syncretism was common on a popular level. Throughout history and in many cultures today people are convinced about God through what missiologists have called "power encounters," where God's power is revealed as greater than that of those claiming to be spiritual competitors (earlier, cf. e.g., Ex 7:10-12; 1 Kings 18:28-39).

8:11. Judaism allowed that *Gentile sorcerers could perform signs; many Jews attributed this to Belial (*Satan). The Old Testament taught that pagan sorcerers could duplicate some of God's signs on a small scale (Ex 7:11, 22; 8:7), but that their power was definitely limited (Ex 8:18-19; 9:11).

8:12. Familiar with Samaritan opposition to Judaism, Jewish people would have found this scenario remarkable. Already circumcised, Samaritans would have converted to Judaism by *baptism alone; but such conversion rarely if ever occurred, because it would have seemed tantamount to betraying one's own people. For Philip, a Jew, to present the gospel in such terms that a Samaritan could follow a *Messiah proclaimed by Jews (probably by not demanding adherence to the Jerusalem temple)* would be viewed by many Judeans as a betrayal of Judaism. Philip follows the same theological program of decentralized witness supported by Stephen in chapter 7 and outlined by Jesus in 1:8.

8:13. Some writers have argued that Simon was not genuinely converted, given his subsequent behavior (8:18-24), but this issue depends on the meaning of "conversion"; like Judaism in the same period, early Christianity lamented not only false converts but also apostates (e.g., 1 Sam 10:6; 16:14; 2 Pet 2:21; 1 Jn 2:19).

8:14-25

Apostolic Ratification of the Samaritan Conversions

Philip's crosscultural ministry has broken new ground, of the sort that might draw opposition from some conservative elements in the Jerusalem church (8:12). It is thus important for Luke to describe the response of the Jerusalem *apostles and the blessing of God on the work.

8:14-15. From a theological standpoint, the work of the *Spirit is one package* (2:38-39), *but in the experience of the church not all aspects of his work are necessarily manifested simultaneously. Luke emphasizes the prophetic--empowerment dimension of the Spirit (1:8) so much that he rarely mentions other aspects of the Spirit's work known in the Old Testament and early Judaism; this prophetic-empowerment aspect could be in view here, although Philip's hearers were already converted in 8:12.*

8:16. "Into the name" is a literal translation that could reflect the language of ancient business documents, meaning that the converts have transferred ownership of their lives to Christ. Conversely, it could simply reflect the increasing ambiguity of Greek prepositions in this period (thus simply meaning, "with reference to Jesus"). Cf. "*baptism" in the glossary.

8:17. Ancient Judaism provides rare examples of laying on hands for prayer (one in the *Dead Sea Scrolls); in the Old Testament hands were laid on to impart blessings in prayer (Gen 48:14-20), among other matters (see comment on 6:6).

8:18-22. The only category into which many Greeks could fit the miracles performed by the apostles would have been that of magical works, but this text clearly distinguishes an amoral, magical interpretation of the miracles from the apostolic miracles, which are much more like those of Old Testament prophets such as Elijah and Elisha. Sorcerers could buy magical formulas; no one could buy the Spirit. One of the ways ancient observers distinguished *magic from miracle is that the former involved greed and self-aggrandisement. Those defending miracle-workers often had to distinguish them from magicians.

8:23-24. "Gall" and "bitterness" appear together in the *Septuagint of Lamentations 3:15, 19, for suffering, but most relevantly in Deuteronomy 29:17; 32:32, in the context of paganism. "Bond of injustice" may reflect Isaiah 58:6.

8:25. After the new mission was pioneered by the bicultural witnesses of Acts 6, the apostles finally begin to develop their own mission (1:8). Far from the apostles fixing or correcting Philip's inadequate conversion of the

Samaritans (as some commentators have suggested), the whole *narrative indicates that they recognize and ratify the propriety of his work and develop what he began*. Because Aramaic would be the dominant language of the Samaritan villages (as opposed to Neapolis; see comment on 8:5), Peter and John could press into villages where Philip had not ministered.

8:26-40

Conversion of an African Official

Luke devotes nearly as much space to the conversion of this one foreigner, who can function as an indigenous witness in his own culture, as to the mass conversion in Samaria. Because *Samaritans were not considered fully Jewish, this is the first fully Gentile convert to Christianity* (probably unknown to most of the Jerusalem church—11:18).

8:26. Two roads led south from near Jerusalem, one through Hebron into Idumea (Edom) and the other joining the coast road before Gaza heading for Egypt, both with plenty of Roman milestones as road markers. Old Gaza was a deserted town whose ruins lay near the now culturally Greek cities of Askalon and New Gaza. Philip might have no one to preach to on a little-traveled road that would lead by a deserted city, and after the revival in Samaria this command must seem absurd to him; but God had often tested faith through apparently absurd commands (e.g., Ex 14:16; 1 Kings 17:3-4, 9-14; 2 Kings 5:10). The term translated “south” can also mean “noon”; traveling at noon was very rare (see 22:6; comment on Jn 4:5-6), so this detail, if intended, would make the command seem even more absurd.

8:27. The Greek term *Aithiopia* (“Ethiopia”) referred not specifically to modern Ethiopia, but to Africa south of Egypt. Ethiopia figured in Mediterranean legends and mythical geography as the very end of the earth (sometimes extending from the far south to the far east), and the most commonly mentioned feature of Ethiopians in Jewish and Greco-Roman literature (also noted in the *Old Testament—Jer 13:23) is their black skin; some sources also depict their hair and other features in ways that leave no doubt that black Africans are in view.

He hails from a black Nubian kingdom south of Egypt partly in what is now the Sudan, a kingdom that had lasted since about 750 B.C. and whose main cities were Meroë and Napata (this should not be confused with Abyssinia, which

came to be called Ethiopia in more recent times and converted to Christianity in the fourth century A.D.). Meroë was so powerful that Rome settled for a peace treaty and trade ties rather than its empire venturing south of Egypt. This official and perhaps members of his entourage would have known Greek, necessary for his kingdom's trade with cities in Egypt. He is probably a Gentile "God-fearer" (see comment on 10:2). As the queen's treasurer, this man is a high and powerful official. Meroë was wealthy, so the treasurer probably supervised considerable wealth. The empire's capital, also named Meroë, was roughly one hundred miles northeast of modern Khartoum and roughly two hundred miles south of modern Egypt—no small journey to Jerusalem. Although this kingdom had some trade with Rome, even the treasurer for Meroë's queen would not normally have business so far north.

Various queens of this African kingdom bore the title "Candace" (*kandak'a*), which Greeks viewed as a dynastic title of the queen mother of Ethiopia, whom they believed ruled in Ethiopia. In fact queens may have borne this title whether or not they were reigning; at least some, however, did rule Ethiopia. If the Candace here is regnant, she might be Queen Nawidemak or one of the queens about whom we lack sufficient knowledge.

When meant literally (which was not always the case—Gen 39:1 LXX), "eunuch" referred to a castrated man. The term's fivefold repetition in this narrative probably signals that the official was a true eunuch, as was often the case of close associates of queens in some regions. Although eunuchs were preferred court officials in the East, many Mediterranean peoples mocked them as deficient in manliness. The Jewish people opposed making men eunuchs, and Jewish *law excluded eunuchs from Israel; the rules were undoubtedly instituted to prevent Israel from neutering boys (Deut 23:1). Thus this official, while Jewish in faith (8:27, 30), would not have been accepted as a full convert to Judaism. But God could certainly accept eunuchs (Is 56:3-5, even foreign eunuchs; Wisdom of Solomon 3:14). An Ethiopian "eunuch" in the Old Testament turned out to be one of Jeremiah's few allies and saved his life (Jer 38:7-13).

8:28. Most people walked, the more well-to-do rode animals, but only the most well-to-do had chariots or carriages. Expensive carriages could be covered and have four wheels, and could be drawn by horses, donkeys, mules or oxen. (The official would probably use the carriage only as far as Alexandria; from there he would sail south on the Nile.) As a wealthy person, he could have had a reader, but as an educated person, he may have been reading the scroll himself

(as Luke's wording probably suggests). People were occasionally known to read while sitting in expensive carriages; thus the chariot may be moving while the eunuch is reading.

8:29-30. Although taught along with reading aloud in modern times, the skill of reading silently was not practiced as often in antiquity; those who could read generally read aloud. Meroë had its own language and alphabetic script. Nevertheless, because of Meroë's trade contacts with Greek-speakers in Egypt, the official knew Greek (the trade language in Egypt's cities). Because Philip understands what he is reading and they go on to communicate, the official may be reading a copy of the *Septuagint. The situation here is obviously divinely arranged (cf., e.g., Gen 24:13-27). The chariot probably was not traveling quickly; its maximum speed might be only twenty-five or thirty miles per day. People in antiquity valued youthful vigor, a vigor Philip employs to good effect here.

8:31. Often only one attendant would accompany the official in a chariot; the wealthy eunuch might have more, but there is still room for Philip.

8:32-35. Earlier servant passages in Isaiah refer explicitly to Israel, but 49:5 distinguishes the servant from the rest of Israel, and in 53:1-3 he is rejected by Israel; in 53:4-12 he bears the sins of Israel, although he himself is not guilty (53:9; contrast 40:2) and suffers voluntarily (53:12). The official's confusion is understandable, but one can well imagine how Philip explained the passage. (Luke does not report all of Is 53, but the context is implied; because chapter and verse references had not yet been assigned, one had to cite part of a passage to let the readers know where one was reading.) Three chapters later Isaiah speaks of God welcoming foreigners and eunuchs (Is 56:3-8).

8:36-38. There are some wadis near Gaza (wadis are dry creek beds that fill with water during the rainy season); because Jewish *baptism presupposed full immersion, this is no doubt what Luke intends here. As a eunuch (a designation highlighted by Luke five times), the official could not be a full *proselyte, hence would have been denied circumcision (Deut 23:1). Now, however, he expresses readiness to embrace baptism. As a God-fearer, the Ethiopian undoubtedly understands the usual Jewish view that full conversion includes baptism; in Jesus, he is welcomed fully into God's people (cf. Is 56:3-5).

8:39. Christianity especially began to expand in Abyssinia through lay witness in the third century, and that empire was declared "Christian" about the same time as the Roman Empire was. Nubia (the region of this official) converted later; no certain record of this Ethiopian's witness remains, but with

Luke we may suppose that he testified of his faith in high places.

Some magicians claimed the ability to fly (not very commonly demonstrated!), but the language of Philip's removal suggests supernatural movement more like that suggested as possible for Elijah (1 Kings 18:12; cf. 2 Kings 2:11, 16) or other biblical sources (Ezek 3:12, 14).

8:40. Ancient writers sometimes framed sections with parallel language; Philip's preaching as he is going might echo 8:4 and 8:25. Philip's continuing ministry involves the coastal plain, again in advance of Peter's mission in the same region (see 9:32, 43; 10:24). The Judean Azotus, about four kilometers from the Mediterranean sea, had been the Old Testament's Philistine city of Ashdod. It was twenty to twenty-five miles northeast of Gaza (about a day's walk) and about thirty to thirty-five miles west of Jerusalem, situated roughly halfway between Gaza and Joppa. Caesarea Maritima (the coastal Caesarea, not Caesarea Philippi) was over fifty miles to the north of Azotus, just off the same coastal road; this city, Judea's Roman capital, will become significant for Acts in 10:1 (cf. 21:8). Although Jews also lived in Gaza, Azotus and Caesarea, these cities all included large numbers of Gentile residents; Philip foreshadows the mission of other *Hellenists (11:20).

9:1-9

Jesus Arrests Saul

The three accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts display some differences (chaps. 9, 22, 26; all fit the accounts in his letters). Classical literature sometimes reports messages given to messengers and then repeats them verbatim on their delivery. *Rhetorical style by Luke's day preferred variation, which makes the repeated narratives much less repetitious, hence more interesting to read.* Luke's three accounts fit their varied audiences.

9:1. Saul may have been a prominent person (cf. Gal 1:14) from a prominent family (cf. Acts 22:3; 26:5) to have direct access to the *high priest.

9:2. Official letters of introduction authorizing or recommending their sender were common, and *Josephus confirms that Palestinian agents could take orders from the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. Jewish communities outside Palestine respected the high priest, and letters from him authorize Saul to carry out his mission with the full cooperation of *synagogues there*. (*Saul rather than the high priest initiates the action here.*) *Because Jerusalem high priests earlier exercised*

extradition rights over fugitive Judeans when they ruled Palestine, local synagogues in Syria may have still recognized this right, although the local ruler would probably not. These synagogue communities could cooperate with Saul in his mission to weed out the Jewish Christians. Contrary to some modern romanticized readings, intra-Jewish conflict occurred and sometimes even became violent (see, e.g., 1 Maccabees 3:8; Dead Sea Scrolls CD 1.20-21; Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 20.213).

The *Essene* sect at Qumran also described itself as “the way”; this was a natural designation for a group that believed that it alone followed the way of righteousness (cf., e.g., Prov 8:20; 12:28; 16:31; they also explicitly drew on Is 40:3). Essenes had apparently also settled in Syrian Damascus, if their writings on this point are meant literally. Tens of thousands of Jews lived in Damascus (as many as eighteen thousand were massacred there in A.D. 66).

9:3. Damascus lay roughly 135 miles north of Jerusalem on the Great North Road, about a six days’ walk (shorter if they rode horses, as is possible, but cf. 9:8). The light from heaven indicates the *Shekinah*, God’s presence (related to the concept of *yeqara*, “glory”), as God often revealed his glory in the *Old Testament. A number of Old Testament calling narratives include a theophany or other direct experience; see Exodus 3:1–4:17; Isaiah 6:1-13; Jeremiah 1:4-19; Ezekiel 1:1–3:15; cf. Judg 6:11-24. Jewish people also recognized that God might suddenly intervene to convert a persecutor (2 Maccabees 3:24-36).

9:4. In the Old Testament and Jewish literature, people often fell to the ground when confronted with divine or angelic revelations (e.g., Ezek 1:28; Dan 8:17). Usually the revealer then commands the person to stand (e.g., Ezek 2:1; Dan 8:18); the lack of such instruction here likely suggests that Saul’s behavior is not an object of divine favor. In Jewish literature names are often repeated when God calls to someone, drawing special attention to what is about to be said (e.g., Gen 22:11; 46:2; Ex 3:4; 1 Sam 3:10). In Jewish literature, a voice from heaven almost always belongs to God himself; usually it was in *Aramaic or Hebrew, as is apparent here (from the form of “Saul” and from 26:14). Given the nature of the revelation, “Lord” here means more than “Sir”; perhaps Saul wonders if God or an angel is addressing him, or perhaps he simply cannot believe he is opposing God.

9:5-6. Persecuting his followers is persecuting Jesus, because they are his representatives (Lk 10:16). Letters of recommendation (cf. Acts 9:2) often identified the sender with the person recommended; here Jesus identifies with his persecuted followers. In the Old Testament God evaluated the treatment of

some people as if it were treatment of himself (Ex 16:8; 1 Sam 8:7; Prov 19:17).

9:7. The reaction of Saul's companions is analogous to that in Daniel 10:7.

9:8. God sometimes struck people with blindness to stop them from an evil purpose or as a temporary measure to get their attention (Gen 19:11; 2 Kings 6:18-20; note also the contextual play on spiritual blindness and sight in 2 Kings 6:17).

9:9. Three days was not uncommon for a fast (Esther 4:16); but without water one would become dehydrated, and to continue without water would eventually lead to death. *New Testament examples usually conjoin fasting with prayer, but fasting was commonly an expression of mourning or repentance.* According to this narrative, Saul does not change religions; he learns the true way to follow his Jewish religion. Social studies of conversion suggest that a convert sometimes retains some basic structures of thought but initially reverses his or her approach.

9:10-19a

Ananias's Mission

The pairing of Ananias's and Saul's visionary experiences, like the pairing of those of Cornelius and Peter in chapter 10, confirm the supernatural character of the revelation (as in some other ancient sources; e.g., Judg 7:9-15).

9:10. Another individual bears the name Ananias elsewhere in Acts (23:2), but this was a common name, the Greek form of the Hebrew Hananiah (e.g., Jer 28:1; Dan 1:6). His response is the proper one for an obedient servant of God ready to obey orders (1 Sam 3:10; Is 6:8). His biblically appropriate response to a theophany (cf. Gen 22:11; 46:2; Ex 3:4; 1 Sam 3:4-8; Is 6:8) contrasts with Saul's less informed approach above. (Damascus, capital of modern Syria, was then the capital of the Nabatean Arabs.)

9:11-12. Each is informed about the other in a vision. Such twin visions occur rarely in ancient literature (e.g., *Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.13; cf. Tobit 3); when they occur they allow no misunderstanding that the event was divinely coordinated (cf. Gen 41:32). Ancient Jewish hospitality was great, and accommodations with a fellow Jew in Damascus would not be hard for Saul to secure, whether or not Judas has advance notice of Saul's coming. Cities built before the *Hellenistic era, like Damascus, would have many narrow, winding streets. Damascus, however, was reconstructed on the Greek grid pattern, with

fairly evenly spaced east-west and north-south streets. Many scholars believe that Straight Street is the long, main east-west street through Damascus, where tradition still places Judas's ancient home (near the street's west end). This important street ran parallel to the Barada River, which passed through Damascus, and was fifty feet (fifteen meters) wide, with colonnades on either side. (We cannot be certain that this was the street, however.) Once one found a street, one normally asked neighbors for directions to the house (although according to local tradition, Ananias's house was near the same street, albeit near the eastern end).

Jews are attested in ancient Tarsus, the capital and most prominent city of Cilicia in southern Asia Minor. Civic strife was apparently characteristic of Tarsian (and more generally Cilician) culture; Cilicia's reputation for viciousness might reflect the influence of the region's common violence a generation or two before. A Hellenized city prosperous from trade, it also had prominent schools and boasted many philosophers, though many of its own residents chose to do advanced studies abroad. But cf. comment on 22:3.

9:13-14. Ananias is naturally less eager to obey his orders (9:10) after he finds out what they are (but he does obey, 9:17). Even after saying, "Here I am" (9:10; cf. Ex 3:4) one might voice objections (e.g., Ex 4:10; see also Acts 10:14). On commands that seem absurd, see 8:26.

9:15-16. The language here is that of *Old Testament call or commissioning narratives; Saul is apparently converted already and is about to be called to ministry. "On behalf of my name" or "for my name" (NIV) means either for Jesus' honor or that these sufferings would be incurred while Saul is acting as his representative (cf. comment on Jn 14:12-14).

9:17. "Brother" was often used for coreligionists, fellow members of the same Greek association or fellow Jews (usually in Acts it applies to fellow believers in Jesus).

9:18-19a. Saul would know the popular Jewish story of the healing of Tobit's blindness, in which white film and scabs (the same language in Greek as here) were removed (Tobit 3:17; 11:11-13); the analogy might underline for Saul the miraculous character of his own experience. Damascus had plenty of places available for *baptism (e.g., the river Barada, running through Damascus near what may have been "Straight Street").

9:19b-31

Confrontation in Damascus and Jerusalem

Confrontations in Damascus and Jerusalem

9:19b-21. Although Saul had carried the letters authorizing his mission (9:2) on his own person and presumably not delivered them, word of his mission had gotten around in Damascus's Jewish community. “*Son of God” is characteristic of Paul's style more than Luke's; writers tried to imitate the style of those whose speeches they reported, and it is not likely that Luke would know Paul's style this early unless he knows him personally (which he undoubtedly did; see the introduction to Acts; 16:10).

9:22. Saul's position presupposes that he is already expert in the Scriptures; now he turns this expertise against his former mission.

9:23-24. Saul's Jewish opponents plan to assassinate him, not to execute him legally; but his own account in 2 Corinthians 11:32-33 indicates that they had secured the cooperation of the (*Gentile) Nabatean ethnarch. Saul's preaching in other cities under the control of Aretas IV of Nabatea (9 B.C.–A.D. 40) for as long as three years (Gal 1:17) had possibly aroused such opposition. The collusion of such interests made Paul's situation in Damascus politically impossible. A city's gates would be closed at night, though individuals might be able to exit with permission.

9:25. Houses were sometimes built into city walls; Saul's escape method has biblical precedent (Josh 2:15; 1 Sam 19:12). A pre-Arabic, Roman-period tradition claims that Ananias's house was built on the wall; if the tradition is early (by no means certain; it could simply reflect on Paul's experience), the house might have even been that of Ananias. That he has gained *disciples there suggests that he has worked like a Christian* rabbi, or teacher, and that he has the requisite training to present himself as such (cf. 22:3; but contrast Mt 23:8).

9:26-29. As provocative as his evangelistic predecessor Stephen, Saul appears headed for the same fate, until he is sent to Tarsus. The only representatives of the *apostles he gets to know well are Peter and James (Gal 1:18-19).

9:30. Caesarea, perhaps two days' journey away on the Judean coast, was the Roman capital of Judea, and Paul could catch a ship from there northward to southern Asia Minor. “Sending him off” may imply also that they paid his fare. Because he had been born in Tarsus (22:3), he possibly had relatives there; but his training had been thoroughly Palestinian Jewish (Phil 3:5), so it is during this period in his life that Saul begins to relate especially to Gentiles from Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

9:31. In ancient literature, summary statements sometimes concluded literary

sections.

9:32-43

Continuing Miracles Through Peter

9:32. Lydda and Joppa (9:36) were the most prominent cities on the coastal plain that were almost completely Jewish. Lydda, about twenty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem, was the most significant Jewish city of the Sharon plain. Capital of one of the Judean districts that included non-Jews, it escaped most of the devastation of the later Judean revolt and eventually hosted many prominent rabbis and a rabbinic school.

9:33. Jewish piety included visiting the sick. Although Aeneas is a familiar *Gentile name, a number of Jews also bore it (which seems likelier here). Aeneas could have been paralyzed from a stroke or another problem with the central nervous system, or from an accident (such as a fall from a roof), or from tuberculosis affecting the spine, or from some other cause. Apart from massaging the person with olive oil, little treatment was available.

9:34-35. Sharon is not a town but the coastal plain that extended from Lydda toward Mount Carmel in the north. Most writers in Greek designate it a “plain” or the like, but Luke has a simple transliteration of the Hebrew expression. The Christian presence was still notable in Lydda in the second century A.D.

9:36. Joppa, modern Yaffa, now joined with Tel-Aviv, was a profitable port city, about eleven miles from Lydda. It was about 30 miles south of Caesarea Maritima (8:40; 10:1, 5), and controlled one of Judea’s administrative districts. It was under Jewish control for about forty years until it came under direct Roman authority in A.D. 6. Tabitha is a Semitic name and Dorcas a Greek one (both meaning the same thing, “gazelle”).

Jewish women were active in charity projects. In Greco-Roman culture in general women were sometimes *patrons, and it has been suggested that Tabitha may have been a patron or benefactor of the widows mentioned in verse 41. But whether officially (as a benefactor) or unofficially, she was looking out for their interests.

9:37. Jewish dead were always washed before burial. Only women prepared women’s bodies for burial. The upper room may evoke 1 Kings 17:19, 23; 2 Kings 4:10-11, 32 (although on other occasions also bodies were kept in upper rooms).

9:38. It is important that Lydda is near Joppa, because corpses had to be buried right away (ideally before sundown). The distance of fewer than twelve miles meant perhaps roughly four hours' journey each way (for the messengers to Peter and Peter to Joppa); because it was customary to bury the corpse before sundown, even if Tabitha had died early in the day they could afford no delay.

9:39. Upper rooms were usually small (1:13 is an exception), generally attics built on the flat rooftops; this one is at least large enough to accommodate a few people. Making clothing was one of the domestic tasks assigned to women in that culture. Well-to-do Roman women had maids to do it but were still considered responsible for it getting done. Caring for widows was a fundamental act of piety in early Judaism; Tabitha had been their benefactor. If we may extrapolate from a somewhat later painting somewhat further to the east, Judean women, or at least those with some means, may have worn ankle-length tunics with wide sleeves at the elbows; over this tunic they might wear a shorter dress.

9:40. In accordance with Jewish scruples, Tabitha's body would be covered before Peter is brought into the room. On Peter's sending the others out, cf. 1 Kings 17:19; 2 Kings 4:33.

9:41-42. The resuscitator normally presented the raised person to the suppliants who had requested the resuscitation (1 Kings 17:23; 2 Kings 4:36; Lk 7:15).

9:43. It was customary to name people by their occupation or parentage. Tanning was a despised trade; because of the odors associated with animal carcasses (perhaps less offensive to a fisherman), tanneries usually existed only outside towns. Strict observers of Pharisaic opinions likewise avoided tanners whenever possible, because their stripping of animal hides continually involved them with unclean carcasses. Second-century rabbis reported that tanners were forbidden in cities, especially Jerusalem (many rabbis were more lenient if the tannery were near water, as Simon's house is—10:6). They even insisted that a tanner must allow his wife a divorce if she could not endure the smell! But Judaism stressed hospitality, and Peter, who probably never followed Pharisaic opinions anyway, is happy to receive it.

10:1-8

Cornelius's Vision

Compare comment on the twin visions of Paul and Ananias in 9:12.

10:1. Herod the Great had renamed Strato's Tower "Caesarea" in honor of the emperor; it now had a splendid theater seating more than four thousand, an amphitheater, temples and a massive harbor complex. By this period, it was a mixed city of both Jews and *Gentiles, with the latter predominating, but the two groups often were in conflict; a generation later, local Syrians slaughtered much of the Jewish population (*Josephus estimates twenty thousand in one hour in A.D. 66; *Jewish War* 2.457). Most local soldiers were anti-Jewish. Nevertheless, some Gentiles honored, and even converted to, Judaism there.

The residence of the Roman governor of Judea (23:23-24), Caesarea held a regular Roman garrison of a cavalry unit and five infantry cohorts. (Even during the brief reign of Agrippa in A.D. 41–44, Gentile troops remained stationed there; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 19.356-65.) The soldiers were auxiliaries, that is, provincials recruited to the Roman army; most were Syrian by birth, although they received Roman citizenship on retirement. Centurions commanded units of roughly eighty men (rather than their official designation of one hundred). Unlike the aristocrats who could directly become tribunes or legates, centurions were often soldiers who worked their way up through the ranks. Some took twenty years to achieve this rank; others achieved it more quickly.

His century was part of a "regiment" (NIV, GNT) or cohort (NASB, NRSV), one-tenth of a legion, made up of up to six hundred men. Five cohorts were stationed in Caesarea and another in Jerusalem. We have attestation for this particular cohort in Palestine a few decades later. More than one cohort in antiquity bore this name; the name simply indicates that the cohort's original members were Italians, sometimes reflecting a cohort's earlier history. Sometimes auxiliaries took a Roman name (such as Cornelius) when enlisting, receiving citizenship only later; but perhaps Cornelius was a Roman citizen and a member of the legion in Syria, lent to an auxiliary cohort for service there (perhaps because of complaints about the behavior of local auxiliaries). Others think that he was retired.

Military service was a preferred occupation. Some estimate that only roughly half those who enlisted survived the twenty years of service (generally ages seventeen to thirty-seven; it became twenty-five years of service later in the first century), but apart from legions that saw heavy fighting the actual figures were probably higher. In any case, rewards for survivors were high. Noncitizens could not join legions but could become auxiliary troops who received citizenship upon their discharge.

10:2. Cornelius is clearly not yet a full convert to Judaism (10:28), but his

almsgiving and the appreciation of Jews who know him (10:22) testify to his devotion. Although the term “God-fearer” had a broader usage, it generally functions technically in Acts and in some other Jewish sources for righteous Gentiles who had not been circumcised. Josephus, *Philo*, *inscriptions* and even *the pagan philosopher* Epictetus mention this class of incomplete converts. Inscriptions indicate a high level of religious interest among many of the soldiers.

If these events are before 41, as many scholars think, Cornelius would probably be retired (centurions could retire at the age of sixty) by the war of 66–70 (if he was not already retired at the time of this *narrative, as some think). Nevertheless, most Jewish Christian readers after A.D. 70 would not be fond of Roman officers stationed in Syria-Palestine, and this account would challenge their prejudices. Recruits had all sworn oaths of allegiance to the divine emperor.

Cornelius’s “household” (NASB, NRSV) or “family” (NIV, GNT) is of interest. Luke would certainly know that military personnel were not officially permitted to marry. Cornelius might be retired, but otherwise he would not be married *officially*. Soldiers, often recruited from the local areas where they served, commonly had illegal concubines whom superiors ignored, but centurions were moved around somewhat more often and thus could maintain long-term informal marriages with local concubines less often than other soldiers might. Thus while Cornelius may have unofficially married a concubine, it is also possible that he did not. It was considered proper for a wife to share her husband’s religion, so if he was married, her shared devotion here would be natural. But the term translated “household” could include servants or *freedpersons; although a cheap slave would cost about one-third of a regular soldier’s annual pay, centurions received fifteen times the pay of rank-and-file soldiers. “Household” here might mean simply “servants” (v. 7).

10:3. The “ninth hour” (KJV, NASB) is about 3 p.m.—he keeps the Jewish hours of prayer, which corresponded to the morning and evening offerings in the temple (3:1).

10:4-8. In the *Old Testament as well God looked out for many Gentiles who were seeking him, whether or not they had yet become full converts (e.g., Josh 6:25; 2 Sam 12:9-10), and revealed himself to individuals other than Abraham’s descendants (Gen 5:24; Num 22–25). “Memorial” (v. 4) may be the language of sacrifice (Lev 2:2), which would be fitting for prayers offered during the time of sacrifice in the temple. Ironically, Joppa (Acts 10:5; cf. 9:36-43) was where Jonah began fleeing to avoid preaching to Gentiles (Jon 1:3).

10:9-16

Peter's Vision

Compare Cornelius's vision in 10:1-8; on such cases of "double vision," compare the comment on 9:12.

10:9. Caesarea was about thirty miles north of Joppa. If Cornelius's messengers left even immediately after 3 p.m. (10:3) on the same day (some commentators believe they left the next day), they must have traveled part of the night on foot, or (less likely) Cornelius must have found horses for them to ride, because here they approach Joppa by noon ("the sixth hour"—KJV, NASB). Thus their task must be urgent.

The flat rooftops were used for drying vegetables and for prayers. If one reclined under a canopy, the rooftops were cooler even at midday than the poorly ventilated rooms of most Palestinian homes (although this home may be larger than most; cf. 10:17). Noon was not a regular hour of prayer (3:1), so Peter prays in addition to the traditional hours followed by many of his contemporaries.

10:10. Peter is not hungry from any special fast; noon was the normal time for a meal in Rome and some other locations and may have been in Joppa as well. Some Jewish writers described mystical experiences when the soul would be so filled with God that one would lose touch with one's surroundings; but in contrast to those who sought mystical experiences, Peter has done nothing intentionally to bring it about.

10:11-13. Even Palestinian Jews most lenient in other regards kept kosher. By conservative standards, any animals that were clean by themselves would have been contaminated by contact with the unclean animals. Thus this vision would present a horrifying situation for any first-century Palestinian Jew (and the vast majority of foreign Jews as well): God commands Peter to eat all these animals, some of which are unclean, forbidden creatures. Hungry he may be (10:10), but he is not *that* hungry!

10:14-16. In another vision half a millennium before, God had similarly called Ezekiel, a priest, to eat something unclean, and he had offered the same protest; in that case, God granted an improvement (Ezek 4:13-15). Jewish people had preferred death to eating unclean (nonkosher) food in the time of the *Maccabees; thus Jewish readers would be appalled that God would require anything so disgusting (from the perspective of cultural cuisine) and impious (from an *Old Testament perspective). The point of the vision, that God can declare anything clean, applies especially to the Gentiles Peter is about to meet

(10:28; 15:9). Repetition of a revelation is not unusual (1 Sam 3:4-10).

10:17-23a

Receiving the Gentiles

10:17. Joppa was a large town, but knowing Simon's profession and that his house was near the sea would make it easy to find him. In many cities of the Roman world, people of the same trade would live in the same district; most people in Joppa would know the right district. Moreover, tanners normally lived outside or near the edge of a city, preferably near a water source. Asking directions was common. That Simon has an outer gate indicates that he is a man of some means.

10:18. Being knowledgeable about Judaism themselves (10:2), Cornelius's messengers "call out" rather than simply going up to the house to enter (10:28), although as representatives of a Roman centurion they could surely have done so with official impunity.

10:19-21. Peter "went down" to them possibly by a ladder but much more likely by an outside staircase leading from the flat roof.

10:22. Although many stories tell of Jewish teachers talking with *Gentiles, strict Jews would not enter a Gentile's house or allow a Gentile in theirs. Thus Peter faces a problem in being invited to Cornelius's house. Although more lax Jews would probably not object (v. 23a), Peter has to be concerned about stricter elements within the Jerusalem church, *which eventually included even Pharisees* (15:5).

10:23a. Pharisees and other pietists were concerned about impure table fellowship; lodging Gentiles overnight, no matter how exhausted the guests may have been, contradicted strict Jewish piety (though it was understood that in some regions one could not avoid Gentiles altogether). Although some allowed eating with Gentiles, so long as the food was "pure," others opposed eating with Gentiles altogether. Many forbade eating with them on the principle that they were evil company (**Jubilees* 22:16). Perhaps Simon, being a tanner, is less concerned with strict rules; although most of his customers were probably Jewish, Joppa was a mixed town and his was a profession despised by strict pietists anyway. (Even later *rabbis allowed some short-term business contacts with Gentiles and recognized that some shops employed both Gentile and Jewish workers.) But Peter's vision probably has something to do with the treatment the

guests receive.

10:23b-33

Cornelius Receives Peter

10:23b. Peter's companions are no doubt brought partly to serve as witnesses that he behaves properly (10:45; cf. Deut 17:6; 19:15).

10:24. The return journey is less rushed (if the messengers rode to them, which is uncertain, Peter and his companions lack horses). Had they left around sunrise, after the Gentiles had lodged in his house overnight (NASB "he arose"—v. 23), and walked at a fast pace without stopping, they could have arrived at Cornelius's house that evening, but they did not. "The following day" here means that they all stopped for overnight lodging along the way (v. 30), presumably in a mixed town (perhaps in Apollonia, just under halfway along the Mediterranean coast, or perhaps a town further along the way). That Cornelius is patiently "waiting" (NASB, GNT) for them means not only that he trusted his servants not to run off but also that he is eager to hear Peter's message. Whereas Roman policy had failed to reconcile Jew and Gentile in Caesarea, divine visions succeeded, at least for the circles of their recipients.

"Friends" here could include social dependents as well as peers (see comment on Acts 19:31). The term translated "relatives" (NASB, NIV) can also mean "countrymen." If it means relatives, it could mean distant relatives who were soldiers stationed in the same city, although that coincidence is unlikely. Because soldiers in this period were often stationed in the region from which they come, these may be local Syrian kin of either Cornelius or his wife or concubine (if he had one; cf. comment on 10:2). It is not the usual way to describe one's immediate family (cf. also on 10:2), but it is even less likely to include servants. That he had "called them together" suggests that they are not infants (cf. also v. 46), and nothing in this passage requires the reference to infant *baptism that some writers have seen here (v. 48).

10:25-26. Greco-Roman paganism believed not only in gods but in semidivine men, often sons of the gods, who had supernatural powers (14:11; 28:6; cf. 12:22-23). One would offer obeisance to gods by falling at their feet and worshiping them, as Cornelius does to Peter here. Cornelius should know better (10:2) than to treat Peter with such reverence; perhaps he intends only a special form of homage (as was customary for Eastern rulers), which a servant of

Jesus finds inappropriate (cf. Lk 22:25-27). Even Greeks considered it hubris for a mortal to accept worship, and respected those who declined divine honors. Yet people often fell at others' feet or sometimes grasped their knees (an ancient Greek approach) to beg for mercy or an essential request.

10:27-29. Devout Jews would not enter into idolaters' homes lest they unwittingly participate in idolatry; some may have extended this custom to not entering any Gentile's home. Strict Jews considered it unclean to eat Gentiles' food or to drink their wine; although this purity regulation did not prohibit all social contact, it prevented dining together at banquets and led much of the Roman world to feel that Jews were antisocial. Cornelius is probably accustomed to accepting reluctant (10:22) snubs, so Peter's statement in 10:28 would mean much to him. Hospitality obligations would demand (sooner or later) the new guests being fed, which would also raise questions about table fellowship (see comment on 10:23).

10:30-33. See comment on 10:3-6. By ancient reckoning, "four days" means at least parts of four different days (thus the NIV, "three days ago").

10:34-43

Peter's Message

10:34-35. Peter begins this speech to Gentiles with a complimentary *exordium*, or preface, according to *rhetorical custom (and perhaps polite propriety in any case). Judaism heavily emphasized God's impartiality; cf. Romans 2:11. Some Gentile thinkers also envisioned their chief deity Zeus as impartial and universal.

10:36. Jewish people in general would call *God* "Lord of all" (Wisdom of Solomon 6:7; 8:3). "Preaching peace" alludes to the concept of Israel's redemption, found in Isaiah 52:7 and similar passages, although even God-fearing Gentiles might not catch this allusion (but perhaps cf. Is 57:19 in Acts 2:39). This was a better hope than the empire's fictitious promise of "Roman peace."

10:37. "Judea" here apparently includes Galilee and is used in the broader sense (common in *Diaspora usage) of "the Jewish land." This makes sense in addressing Gentile hearers.

10:38. "Doing good" is literally "benefacting"—the sort of thing a ruler, deity, or some other powerful person would do when bestowing gifts or mercy on those of lower status (often cities or groups). Depending on how much

Cornelius knows about Judaism, he may recognize that anyone anointed with the *Holy Spirit in his own time would be considered extraordinary by his Jewish contemporaries*. On the Christ as “anointed one,” see “*Messiah” in the glossary; the present allusion is to Is 61:1 in Luke 4:18.

10:39. Hanging on a tree alludes to Deut 21:22-23, where it is a shameful death.

10:40-41. Some Greeks seem to have believed that heroes or gods sometimes remained invisible; cf. also Num 22:23, 27-28; 2 Kings 6:16-17. But Peter has no thought here of Jesus’ remaining selectively invisible; rather, he comes only to those whom God had chosen.

10:42. Although subordinate human judges do appear for the judgment of the dead in both Jewish and most often Greek tradition, Jewish tradition especially emphasizes God as the ultimate judge.

10:43. Many prophets had messianic prophecies, but only a few of them (e.g., Is 53) directly connected the *Messiah and the forgiveness of sins. Peter probably means this in a general sense: all the prophets testify of forgiveness through God’s *grace, which will be provided in the time of the Messiah (cf., e.g., Jer 23:5-6).

10:44-48

Saved Gentiles

10:44. Luke’s audience, familiar with public speeches, would understand that Peter’s speech remained *rhetorically incomplete; the *gospel message, however, is complete*. *Interruption was a common literary device; when enough has been said, the author allows the speaker to be interrupted*. Of course, it happened in real life as well as in the literature that imitated it; public speakers were often interrupted by individuals in the crowd. “Fell upon” is equivalent to “filled” here (cf. 2 Chron 7:2-3). The Spirit “upon” appears in both of Luke’s most prominent programmatic texts from Scripture (Lk 4:18; Acts 2:17-18); in the *Old Testament, the idiom usually refers to empowerment, whether to prophesy (most often), lead, or show superhuman strength (Num 11:17, 25-26; Judg 3:10; 6:34; 1 Sam 19:20, 23; Ezek 11:5).

10:45-47. Most Jewish teachers felt that the Spirit inspired only the most pious with divine utterances, or that the Spirit would mark God’s people in the future age. That Gentiles would receive the gift was unthinkable. Most

importantly, the Spirit was an *eschatological promise only for the people of the covenant (e.g., Is 44:3; Ezek 39:29). Gentiles obviously could not receive the gift if God had not accepted them, so he clearly *had* accepted them—even without circumcision.

10:48. *Baptism was used as a public declaration of conversion (see comment on 2:37-38)—but accompanied by circumcision, which is not demanded here. Peter’s lodging at a Gentile home for several more days would compound the offense to Jewish piety but drives home Peter’s lesson (10:28).

11:1-18

Called to Account

11:1. On “brethren” (KJV, NASB) or “brothers” (ESV), see comment on 9:17.

11:2-3. Not all Jews were this strict, but some were, especially in Judea (see comment on 10:23), and the Jerusalem leaders here are as strict about eating as were the *Pharisees in Luke’s Gospel. Table fellowship created a covenant between host and guests. Most Jews welcomed God-fearers (10:2), but *Gentiles had to be circumcised to convert fully to Judaism. (This requirement is a natural inference from the law and continues to be an issue as late as 15:1, 5.)* No one objected to Peter preaching *Christ to Gentiles; the issue is that he ate with them even though as Gentiles they were ritually unclean (10:28; cf. Gal 2:12).

11:4-15. See comment on 10:9-46. On repeating a story in slightly different words, see the introduction to 9:1-9. Claiming (truly or falsely) divine authorization or sanction (v. 12) was a common means of defending one’s actions in antiquity; Peter’s ultimate evidence, then, is in 11:16-17.

11:16-17. Peter may imply a standard Jewish “how-much-more” argument: if God gave them the greater *baptism, how could he withhold the lesser one? Because Judaism used baptism alongside circumcision to signify conversion, if God had baptized someone in his *Spirit, he had certainly accepted their - conversion—with or without circumcision.

11:18. The believers in Jerusalem marvel that God has given “even the Gentiles” (cf. NIV, NRSV; likelier than merely “also”—KJV, NASB, GNT) the gift. Jewish people believed that Gentiles could be saved by converting to Judaism; many also believed that Gentiles could be saved simply by being righteous, which for some meant keeping the seven laws God gave to Noah (according to developing Jewish tradition). But no one had believed that Gentiles could be

welcomed on the same terms as Jewish people, who had been chosen for salvation by God's sovereign *grace. More importantly, more conservative Jewish movements (such as the *Essenes) believed that even most Jewish people were lost, so the salvation of the Gentiles without fully embracing Judaism appeared difficult.

11:19-30

The Ministry at Antioch

The Jesus movement shifts from a predominantly rural movement in Galilee to an urban movement in Jerusalem to a cosmopolitan movement in Antioch. Such a rapid transition is virtually unparalleled in antiquity and indicates considerable social flexibility. That Judaism had already adapted to these various settings over the centuries provided a conduit for these rapid transitions within the Jewish Christian community.

11:19. The large Jewish communities in Phoenicia, Cyprus (4:36) and Antioch (6:5) were natural places for Jewish Christians to settle after 8:1-4.

11:20-21. Antioch on the Orontes in Syria was the third (or possibly fourth) largest urban center of the Roman empire (after Rome and Alexandria), though population estimates range from one hundred thousand to six hundred thousand. As the seat of Syria's Roman governor, it was the headquarters of Rome's Syrian legion. Rome granted it the privilege of being a "free city," mostly governing itself. With a famous cult center of Apollo within walking distance and Seleucia, its port city off the Mediterranean coast, only a brief river journey, it boasted numerous *mystery cults and was known for its pagan religious diversity.

Because of its cultural pluralism, it included an upwardly mobile and *generally* accepted Jewish element with many "God-fearers" (see 10:2) and was far less segregated than Alexandria. The Jewish community here was large; some guess roughly twenty thousand, perhaps around ten percent of the city's population. Antioch, in contrast to most predominantly *Gentile cities in the region*, *spared its Jewish inhabitants in the war of 66–70, though they did not fully trust them. Some more liberal non-Palestinian Jewish people saw their witness to the God of Israel among the Gentiles as making monotheism reasonable and contacting the best in pagan philosophy; circumcision was to them a lesser issue. Antioch's cosmopolitan nature allowed for much*

interchange of different cultural ideas. Many proselytes and God-fearers attended Antioch's synagogues. Thus Antioch was a more natural place for Gentiles (here, perhaps "Hellenizing" Syrians) to hear the gospel without circumcision than Judea was (15:1).

11:22-24. Barnabas trusts God's work in people (9:27; 15:37-39).

11:25. Tarsus was about a hundred miles to the north, but Jerusalem was more than three hundred (to the south). This is no short journey, but Barnabas knows of Paul's calling.

11:26. "Christians" occurs in the *New Testament only here, as a nickname given by outsiders, and in 1 Peter 4:16, as something like a legal charge. The title is formed on the analogy of adherents to a political party: the "Caesarians," the "Herodians," the "Pompeians" and so forth. Had it been interpreted politically ("partisans of the executed Judean king") it could have stirred persecution, but here it apparently functions merely as derision. At least by a later period, Antiochans were known for making fun of people. By the early second century, however, Jesus' followers had welcomed the title.

11:27. That the movement had a number of prophets would impress those outside the movement; few if any movements even claimed to have many prophets acting together, although Greek oracles still operated at cultic centers (less popular than in the past), and *Josephus claimed that many *Essenes could prophesy. Syria was known for its oracles, so Antiochans are probably also impressed by Christian prophets.

11:28. A person would rise to speak in an assembly. A series of famines devastated Mediterranean agriculture in the time of Claudius: *papyri show high grain prices around A.D. 46; a grain shortage in Rome nearly led to Claudius's being mobbed in the streets (about A.D. 51); Queen Helena of Adiabene bought Egyptian grain "for large sums" (due to famine there) to help Judea (about 45–46).

11:29. Antioch was a wealthy city with many trade connections, and some of the Jewish community there was also wealthy. Most Jewish relief efforts were local except in severe cases, for instance, when Queen Helena helped famine-stricken Palestinian Jews. But this local focus was due more to the nature of the Roman Empire—where multiprovincial organizations were suspect—than to the nature of Judaism; cf. comment on 2 Corinthians 8–9. *Wealthy patrons often alleviated food crises in cities, but here all the believers participate. What is significant here is that the believers act in advance of the famine through faith in the prophecy (cf. Gen 41:33-36)—even though the hardship is likely to strike*

Antioch as well.

11:30. “Elders” reflects the traditional Israelite leadership structure for towns and villages, continuing in this period. Ancient historians had to compromise between following the action of their story and events occurring elsewhere at the same time; Luke postpones taking up the completion of the project until 12:25.

12:1-24

Peter’s Deliverance

12:1. This Herod is Agrippa I, brother-in-law, and son of a half-brother, of Antipas, the Herod of the Gospels whose attempt to gain as much power as Agrippa cost him his own kingdom. (Antipas’s fatal jealousy of Agrippa was instigated by his own consort Herodias—*Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.7.1-2, 240-44, 250-54—although she had helped her brother Agrippa out after he had wasted all his money in Rome and returned to Palestine in debt—*Jewish Antiquities* 18.6.1-2, 143-49.) Herod Agrippa I had partied with Gaius Caligula in Rome; when Caligula became emperor, Agrippa I became the first official Jewish “king” since his grandfather Herod the Great. Although Caligula kept Agrippa in Rome, the following emperor Claudius sent him to Judea, where he reigned from 41 until his death in 44. Because his grandmother Mariamne was a Hasmonean princess, he was ethnically Jewish as well as Idumean (in contrast to Herod the Great). He was thus very popular with the people, on behalf of whom he used his influence. He was pro-*Pharisee and frequented the temple.

12:2. Formerly often performed with an ax, in this period beheading was performed with the sword and was the more merciful form of execution given to Roman citizens and others for whom crucifixion was considered too cruel. As king, Agrippa had the legal right of life and death that had been denied the Sanhedrin before and after him. Like Judaism, early Christians believed that death did not come apart from the sovereign purpose of God.

12:3. Luke may specify the Feast of Unleavened Bread to recall to the reader the time of Jesus’ execution (Lk 22:7). Although Agrippa gave generously to *Gentiles outside Judea, his policies made him much more popular with his Jewish subjects (to whose majority whims he catered) than with his pagan subjects. He identified with and appealed to Judean values despite his past aristocratic Roman lifestyle. He worked hard to please people, and had sometimes spent lavishly to do so, though ancient writers (normally from the

elite) viewed with contempt “demagogues” who catered to what elite writers regularly portrayed as the fickle whims of the “masses.” His brief reign seems to have ignited conservative nationalist sentiments that ultimately clashed with Roman rule.

12:4. Agrippa I resided in Jerusalem. Luke does not mention the specific place of Peter’s imprisonment, but the fortress Antonia on the temple mount is one possibility. As a trusted client ruler of Rome, Agrippa could have his own army, so the soldiers mentioned here need not be Romans, although they are described in terms of Roman organization. The basic unit of the Roman army was the *contubernium*, composed of eight soldiers who shared a tent; half units were sometimes assigned to special tasks, as here (sixteen soldiers total). Perhaps these groups of four worked in four three-hour shifts during the night. Agrippa perhaps feared armed resistance. Luke may use “Passover” in its general sense in this period to refer to the entire Feast of Unleavened Bread. Following Roman custom, he was known to execute criminals for public entertainment. Executions during festivals provided optimum propaganda value, though Romans usually waited until afterward.

12:5-6. Prisoners who were chained between guards (as often they were—21:33; cf. 28:16, 20) had no human hope of escaping. Peter was chained between two guards, with the other two watching the door.

12:7-11. On miraculous escapes, see comment on 5:19-20. Agrippa wielded much more direct power than the Sanhedrin had, and his guards were much more efficient. Prisons did not supply clothes, so the cloak and sandals (12:8) are Peter’s own. Outer garments were often used for sleep at night, so Peter may have been using it as a blanket. To “gird” himself might refer to wrapping a sash or belt around his waist, or tucking his robe into his sash, to allow free mobility. In a popular Greek story, Dionysus had made chains drop off and locked doors open; doors opening “by themselves” appear in ancient literature from Homer to Josephus (see esp. Euripides, *Bacchae* 447-48). They appear in the *Hellenistic Jewish story of God freeing Moses from Pharaoh’s prison (Artapanus in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 9.27.23). Thus we can understand why Peter might think he is dreaming.

12:12-13. A home with an outer gate, a servant girl who could serve as a porter and a gathering much farther back in the house would suggest the home of a fairly wealthy resident of Jerusalem’s Upper City. (For another indication of the family’s wealth, cf. Col 4:10 with Acts 4:36-37. As Levites—4:36—they may have had ties with the priestly aristocracy; many well-to-do priests lived in

the Upper City.) Thus the home is not far from the temple mount (hence not far from the fortress Antonia, where Peter may have been held). In fact, one branch of Jerusalem's main street (although Luke's term here could refer to an alley) ran along the temple's western wall from the Antonia southward; from there Peter could cross Wilson's Arch into the Upper City. That Rhoda (a common slave name) has to come to the door, rather than being a full-time porter, however, suggests that though they had means, they were not extremely wealthy. Household slaves often lived in better economic conditions (and had far better chances of improving their positions, including gaining freedom) than free peasants, but they had other disadvantages. Among Gentiles, female household slaves could be subject to sexual harassment; but Jewish ethics despised this behavior (though it happened), and this household headed by a woman made it much less likely here.

Believers met in homes rather than church buildings for the first three centuries of the *church* (e.g., Rom 16:5). *Greek and Roman associations without their own buildings usually met in homes, and many Diaspora *synagogues* apparently started the same way. House gatherings thus followed association patterns available (as well as practical) in the culture.

"Mary" was the most common woman's name in Palestine. "Mark" is a Latin name, but as a *praenomen* it need not indicate Roman citizenship; still, the name was rare in Palestine, and its use hardly indicates antipathy toward Rome or its interests in Jerusalem, and may again suggest the family's wealth (see 12:13).

12:14-16. In Greek comedy, a slave sometimes utters foolishness; here, however, it is her free hearers who serve for comic relief. Given the purpose for this prayer meeting (12:5), their surprise (and Peter's having to keep pounding on the gate—which could wake up some of the other neighbors, who are probably from aristocratic priestly families and hence potentially dangerous) is ironic; ancient hearers probably would have picked up on the irony (cf. Lk 24:10-11, 37). In some popular Jewish traditions the righteous would become like angels after death.

12:17. The hand gesture for silence was a raised right hand, extending the smallest finger; a gesture preparing for one's speech extended the thumb and next two fingers. "James" (literally "Jacob," as with every use of "James" in the *New Testament) was a common Jewish name; this is not the James of 12:2, but the James of 15:13, 1 Corinthians 15:7 and Galatians 2:9. Jewish sources tell us that this James, Jesus' younger brother, was highly reputed for his devoutness in

Judaism (cf. Acts 21:18-20), and when he was later martyred some leading Jerusalemites protested his death (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.200-203). He would thus be more safe from Agrippa, who catered to the conservative Jewish masses (12:1-3).

12:18-19. Given the soldiers' precautions (chains, doors and different guards posted for each—12:6), it was humanly impossible for Peter to have escaped without all the guards having aided him. Agrippa examines them for information, perhaps under torture, but they have none. Under Roman law, a guard whose prisoner escaped would pay for it with the penalty due the prisoner—in this case, his own life (cf. 16:27; 27:42), a custom Agrippa, deprived of a favor for the masses, chooses to follow (at least with the final shift of guards). Since Agrippa cannot acknowledge divine intervention on Peter's behalf, he executes the guards for their complicity or negligence.

12:20. The *Hellenistic (culturally Greek) cities of Tyre and Sidon were dependent on Agrippa's territories for vital food supplies; he had been withholding trade from them (perhaps a special problem now; 11:28).

12:21. Agrippa I liked to flaunt his power; his self-display had unfortunately led to anti-Jewish riots in Alexandria earlier. His public meeting with these emissaries is in the theater of Caesarea, built by his grandfather Herod the Great; the foundations of this theater still remain today. (This was a mercantile port city easily accessible to Tyrian and Sidonian delegates.) According to Josephus this speech occurred on a festival day in honor of the emperor (*Jewish Antiquities* 19.343).

12:22-24. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus reports that on this occasion Agrippa flaunted his power, and his flatterers praised him as a god—the sort of flattery toward royal *patrons common for centuries in the Greek East. But in the Roman period Caesar expected even pagans who were not emperors (such as the general Germanicus in Egypt) to humbly deflect such praise. Because Agrippa does not repudiate their praise, he collapses immediately. Josephus reports that he was carried to the palace, where he died at the age of fifty-four, after five days of stomach pains (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 19.344-50). Deaths from bowel diseases and worms were thought among the most horrible (e.g., 2 Chron 21:15-19; 2 Maccabees 9:5-9; Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.453).

12:25–13:3

Antioch Sends Out Missionaries

Antioch Sends Out Missionaries

Despite the commission of 1:8, the Galilean *apostles are still in Jerusalem (15:6)*. The leaders of the church in Antioch, however, discovered success in the *Gentile mission (11:19-26) and are moved to ratify the apostolic call of two of their number.

12:25. The journey from Jerusalem to Antioch was over three hundred miles. It was customary for ancient teachers to take *disciples with them, and it was safer to travel in groups.

13:1. All the overseers of this church are probably understood to be both prophets and teachers. What sounds normal in early Christianity would sound phenomenal to its culture, for prophets were thought to be rare. Simeon and Manaen (= Menahem) are Jewish names, suggesting strong Jewish representation still in the leadership of the church (no doubt because they had better background for teaching Scripture). But Simeon's surname "Niger" was a very respectable and common Roman name; he may be a Roman citizen, although this is not clear—the name was also used by Jews and is here apparently a *nickname*. Nicknames were common and usually significant in antiquity; the meaning of Simeon's Latin nickname suggests a dark complexion and allows for the possibility that he was descended from *proselytes from the Romanized coast of North Africa (as could have been the case also with Lucius). Cyrene, on the North African coast, had a large Jewish population and a large Greek population as well as including indigenous residents from the area. Jewish residents revolted there in A.D. 115–17 and were decimated.

That Manaen (who may be in his sixties) was "brought up" with Herod could mean they had the same wet nurse, but the term also had broader connotations. Slaves who grew up in the master's household with the son who would inherit them were often later freed by the son, who had been their companion at play; even as slaves they were powerful because of their relation to the owner. Other boys brought up with princes at the royal court and tutored by the same elite teachers also attained prominence. Especially in Greek culture, friendships from youth determined political alliances and favors. Thus, until the fall of Herod Antipas ("the tetrarch") perhaps a decade before, Manaen had held a socially prominent position (and could well be Luke's main source, directly or via Paul, for the Antipas material unique to his Gospel).

13:2-3. Fasting was rare among Gentiles, although sometimes used in mourning. Jewish people fasted to mourn or repent, and some fasted to seek revelations; special fasts for prayer related to mourning were called in the face of

great crises such as droughts. Here fasting is apparently simply conjoined with seeking God in prayer. The *Holy Spirit was especially known as the Spirit of *prophecy, so “the Holy Spirit said” probably means that one of the prophets prophesied. For the laying on of hands, see comment on 6:6.

13:4-12

The Proconsul of Cyprus Believes

Messengers customarily traveled by twos. Students of the *law also preferred having companions to study with, even on journeys; Saul, Barnabas and Mark (v. 13) no doubt discussed Scripture during many of their long walks. Roman roads were good and generally safe during the day, and travel was easier than it ever had been or would be again until close to the modern period.

13:4. Antioch lay inland on the Orontes; its port roughly fifteen miles to the west was the heavily fortified, free mercantile city Seleucia. Seleucia was Antioch’s port city on the Mediterranean. The island of Cyprus is a natural destination if Barnabas knows the culture and has relatives there (4:36). In addition to being Barnabas’ homeland (and connected politically to Paul’s homeland Cilicia a generation earlier), Cyprus was prosperous and strategically located at a connection of many sea routes.

13:5. Salamis was the chief city of Cyprus, with (by some estimates) more than a hundred thousand residents (its theater seated fifteen thousand). It was a port city only perhaps sixty miles from Seleucia, a straight voyage by ship. As visiting teachers skilled in the law, Barnabas and Saul would be asked to speak in local *synagogues (with its large Jewish community, Salamis must have had several synagogues). Roughly seventy years later, in the early second century (A.D. 116), the Cypriot Jewish community is said to have attacked Salamis in a revolt and to have itself been destroyed.

13:6. New Paphos (also called Augusta), a harbor town on the west side of Cyprus, had long been the provincial capital and maintained some trade relations with Judea. The area around Paphos (especially at old Paphos, some seven miles to the southeast) was traditionally associated with the local cult of the goddess Aphrodite. Jewish magicians were reputed to be among the best in the Roman Empire (though forbidden in Scripture and mistrusted among pious Jews). It was not unusual for Roman aristocrats to attach philosophers to their court; while magicians would be less appealing, the proconsul probably sees Bar-Jesus (“son

of Joshua”) as a useful prophetic adviser from a “Jewish” perspective. Even some emperors had astrologers as advisers, and “Magi” were highly reputed for predicting the future. (Romans generally distrusted *magic, but *Josephus said that Felix, a Roman governor of Judea, counted among his friends a Cyprian Jew reputed to be a magician. His name is not Bar-Jesus, but he and Bar-Jesus attest to the same activity of Jewish magicians on Cyprus and their appeal to some Roman officials.)

13:7-8. Sergius Paulus was proconsul of Cyprus (the highest Roman official on the island) about A.D. 45–46. As always, Luke has the correct, specific local title of the Roman official, even though these titles varied from place to place and decade to decade, and the only way to check all the proper titles would be to go to those places. Although we lack the names of most (more than eighty percent) of the proconsuls of Cyprus, for Sergius Paulus to be proconsul there at this time fits his known senatorial career. He was one of the first senators from the east. Inscriptions indicate that his Roman family lived in southern Asia Minor. A rectangular room in what is thought to be the governor’s palace in Cyprus contains a raised apse where the governor may have sat; as it has survived, the room is decorated with floor mosaics and wall panels, including a scene about the mythical hero Achilles as a baby.

13:9. Roman citizens had three names. As a citizen, Saul had a Roman *cognomen* (“Paul,” meaning “small”) given (or sometimes inherited) at birth (not at Paul’s conversion, against some); his other Roman names remain unknown to us. “Paul” was a fairly respectable Roman name and rare among non-Romans, especially in the Greek East; it is difficult to imagine why Jewish parents would give their child this name if they were not Roman citizens. Inscriptions show that Jews sometimes took Roman names that sounded similar to or carried meanings similar to their Jewish names. Paul’s Roman name sounded similar to his Jewish name (Saul, from the name of the *Old Testament’s most famous Benjamite; cf. Phil 3:5). This is not a name change; now that Paul is moving in a predominantly Roman environment, he begins to go by his Roman name.

13:10-11. Paul’s rebuke of Elymas sounds like an Old Testament judgment oracle. In Jewish literature, temporary blindness was sometimes a judgment to prevent further damage from sin (**Letter of Aristeas* 316); see 2 Kings 6:18 and comment on 9:8.

13:12. The proconsul’s employ of a Jewish “prophet” demonstrates his openness to Judaism (v. 6), but Paul and Barnabas show superior power and a better presentation of Judaism than Bar-Jesus had provided.

13:13-52

Sermon in Pisidian Antioch

The cities that Paul and his companions visit in 13:13–14:26 were along the same Roman military road, the Via Augusta, which was built roughly half a century before.

13:13. Pamphylia was north of Paphos, on Asia Minor's southern coast. They probably landed at Attalia, the main harbor, then proceeded by road to Perga, approximately ten miles north and at least five miles from navigable water. It was part of the district Pamphylia-Lycia in this period (A.D. 43 to about 68). Perga was one of the leading cities of Pamphylia, perhaps as large or nearly as large as Salamis (see comment on 13:5).

13:14. Antioch near Pisidia (not to be confused with Syrian Antioch in v. 1) was a Roman *colony; it was ethnically Phrygian (and officially Galatian, as part of that province), but people identified it as near Pisidia to distinguish it from another Phrygian town of the same name. The second largest town in the province of Galatia, its wall enclosed some 115 acres, with probably more than five thousand Roman citizens of the colony, plus a much larger number of other residents. The town was fairly prosperous, sustained by the produce of the surrounding territory; as a colony, it boasted of its ties with Rome. A prominent local Phrygian deity was *Men Askaenos*, but the town's most prominent temple was one devoted to the worship of the emperor.

If Sergius Paulus (13:12) had supplied them with letters of recommendation (cf. 9:2) to the local aristocracy, they would receive immediate hospitality; his own relatives were from this region. (Some of the largest land holdings in the region belonged to the Sergii Paulli, about halfway between Antioch and north Galatia's capital.)

Pisidian Antioch lay more than a week's walk (roughly 125 miles, 200 kilometers) uphill into the mountainous interior (3600 feet above sea level). Instead of rugged mountain trails they could follow the paved Via Sebaste from Perga; it continued on after Antioch to Iconium (13:51) in the east. Based on later remains and writings, some people sat on benches along the synagogue walls or elsewhere, with the most prominent sometimes on a raised platform with the Law scroll. Regular Jewish public gatherings at the synagogue in this period were normally only on the sabbath and festivals.

13:15. Other sources make clear that people read Scripture in synagogues in this period (see comment on 1 Tim 4:13). In a later period, the biblical readings

(especially from the *law) were fixed; this might not be the case this early, especially in the *Diaspora* (and especially from the prophets). Later the synagogue sermon would be a homily on the texts read, similar to the one in this chapter; homilies (expositions of texts) were probably already used in this period. In this period, synagogues probably did not have regular preachers, and maybe not always expositions; but educated members did try to explain the Scripture readings. “Rulers of the synagogue” are attested in Jewish inscriptions throughout the empire. In many cases the titles are honorary—for example, for Gentile donors—but sometimes they do refer to Jewish people (even if they achieved their influence as wealthy donors or community leaders), as here and normally in the *New Testament.

13:16. Many scholars have drawn parallels between Paul’s speech here and the synagogue teaching form that came to be known as the “proem homily”; others have questioned whether the proem homily can be documented this early so far from Palestine (the similarity could reflect the influence of Greco-Roman *rhetoric on both). Whichever is the case, Paul’s Scripture-laced exposition in 13:16-43 contrasts plainly with 14:15-17 and 17:22-31, showing that Paul adapted to different audiences in his speeches, as he did in his letters. Such adaptation was recommended rhetorical practice (as well as common sense). In Jewish Palestine, one sat to expound the law; in the Diaspora one would normally stand to speak. If Diaspora Jewish speakers used gestures similar to Greeks, the hand motion mentioned here may involve the right hand stretched out, with the thumb pointed upward, the bottom two fingers folded inward, and the two fingers beneath the thumb extended. Speakers often started with an appeal to “listen” to them.

13:17-21. “450 years” may be a rounded figure that includes the estimated four centuries in Egypt (see 7:6) and 40 years in the wilderness. The forty years of Saul’s reign is taken from early Jewish tradition, also preserved in Josephus (although alternative traditions also existed).

13:22-24. David’s reign is the climax of centuries of waiting through other models of leadership; Jesus is the descendant of David, the *Messiah of whom the prophets spoke. Thus they proclaim one greater than the ancient hero David.

13:25. Only servants dealt with the master’s feet; John thus claims he is not even worthy to be the coming one’s servant (though *Old Testament prophets were called the Lord’s “servants”).

13:26. “Children of Abraham” are his Jewish hearers; “God-fearers” here may refer to interested Gentiles (cf. 10:2) or perhaps full *proselytes (cf. 13:43).

13:27. Luke's speech summary might allude to texts that he cites elsewhere. For the Jerusalemites' fulfilling the Scriptures in condemning Jesus, see especially Isaiah 53, which states that the servant would be rejected by his own people; early Christians also cited psalms of righteous sufferers (Ps 22 and 69). Luke does not cite all Paul's references, because he would not have room in his scroll to record the whole speech (see comment on 2:40).

13:28-29. The Sanhedrin lacked capital authority; only Rome could legally execute Jesus.

13:30-32. Paul needed to bolster especially this section of his proclamation with Scripture (13:33-35), because Judaism did not expect the death of a Messiah or his *resurrection *within* history.

13:33. Psalm 2:7 was already applied to the messianic enthronement in Judaism (most clearly in the *Dead Sea Scrolls). Psalm 2 celebrated the promise made to David of an eternal dynasty, a promise that was repeated regularly in the temple worship, in the hope of the ultimate Davidic king who would fulfill it completely.

13:34. Paul cites Isaiah 55:3 (and perhaps originally 55:4, with its hope for the Gentiles) to indicate that Israel's future hope was bound up with the promise to David. Paul might connect "David" in his quotation in verse 34 with the implicitly assumed author of the psalm cited in verse 33.

13:35. Rabbis used a technique called *gezerah shavah* to connect passages that used the same key word; thus here Paul may use "holy" in Isaiah 55:3 to lead into a citation of Psalm 16:10, which guarantees that the object of David's promise would never rot (cf. also Acts 2:25-28).

13:36-37. "Sleep" was a common metaphor for death. Paul *midrashically demonstrates that David could not have fulfilled the promise himself, so it must apply to his descendant.

13:38-41. Paul concludes with Habakkuk 1:5; he says "in the Prophets" (NASB) because some of the smaller books of the prophets were grouped together and treated as a single book. Habakkuk refers to impending judgment under the Chaldeans (1:6), which only the righteous remnant will endure by faith (2:4, a verse possibly cited in the fuller Pauline exposition behind Luke's summary at Acts 13:38-39); here the principle is applied to the judgment of the end. The Dead Sea Scrolls apply the text to those who violated God's covenant by disbelieving the Teacher of Righteousness (the founder of the *Qumran community).

13:42-43. Luke speaks here of *proselytes, but other Gentiles were interested

as well (13:44-45). According to *Josephus*, many Gentiles attended synagogues with great interest. Even as late as the fourth century, the Christian preacher John Chrysostom complains that Gentiles—in this case Christians—were still attending synagogue services. Those who were interested in Judaism but unattracted to circumcision might well find Paul’s message appealing.

13:44. When famous speakers (e.g., Dio Chrysostom) would come to town, much of the town would go to hear him. Word of a skilled new speaker thus spread quickly in cities, especially a smaller inland town like Antioch. Most of the Gentiles who came had worshiped at the major imperial temple in Antioch, and probably most also had worshiped the local deity *Men Askaenos*. Paul, probably originally more comfortable giving expositions of Scripture than public speeches in the Greek style, is billed as a *rhetorician or philosopher.

13:45-46. Paul and Barnabas’s response to their opponents here has some Old Testament precedent (cf. Lk 4:24-27; Amos 9:7) but goes further. It had always been God’s purpose to bless the Gentiles in Abraham (Gen 12:3), but the tenacity of ancestral religions as part of cultural tradition is well known; when ethnic religion loses its uniquely ethnic component it may attract outsiders but simultaneously weaken its own constituency.

13:47. Here they quote the mission of the servant of Isaiah 49:6. The servant is clearly Israel in 49:3-4; in 49:5-7 it is the one who fully carries out the servant’s mission and suffers on behalf of Israel (as in 52:13–53:12), whom the early Christians recognized to be Jesus. As followers of Jesus, Paul and Barnabas take up the servant’s mission, part of which was revealing the way of salvation to the Gentiles.

13:48-49. Because the Jewish people believed that they were predestined for salvation by virtue of descent from Abraham, the idea that many Gentiles had been “ordained to *eternal life” (KJV) could be offensive—but was apparently what Isaiah 49:6 implied (see Acts 13:47).

13:50. Ancient sources report that many prominent women were interested in Judaism (partly because their wealth gave them leisure to consider it, partly because they, unlike men, did not have to face circumcision if they became serious about it, and partly because it did not diminish their status the way it diminished that of men); these women in turn could influence their powerful husbands. (Women appear on only forty percent of tomb inscriptions, yet they comprise fifty percent of proselytes and eighty percent of God-fearers.) Local aristocracies made up a fraction of the population but held great wealth and most of the political power; from them came *decurions* for the local councils, and

their opposition could drive someone out of town. In Pisidian Antioch, these leaders would have been Roman citizens, descendants of the Roman veteran colonists who founded the city, who took great pride in their status. The two leading families of Antioch known to us were the Caristanii and relatives of Sergius Paulus. But the leaders' authority was only local, and by going to Iconium Paul and Barnabas move out of their jurisdiction.

13:51-52. Iconium was further along the same road (the Via Sebaste) at the very east end of Phrygia-Galatia (assuming, as is probable though disputed, that this region was called "Galatia" in this period). Iconium was apparently more than eighty-five miles beyond Antioch, so the *apostles walk for at least four days in 13:51. Using the main road, the Via Sebaste (Augustus Highway), made them easier to follow (cf. 14:19). They had no choice but to take this road unless they wished to retrace their steps; this was the only easily passable east-west route available in this mountainous terrain.

Showing one's heel or shaking dust was a visible way to show rejection. Jewish tradition suggests that many Jewish people on returning to the Holy Land would shake the dust of a pagan land from their feet; because the temple was considered holier than the rest of Israel, they would also shake the dust from their feet when they entered the temple. Paul and Barnabas probably imply that those who reject their message are pagan and stand under God's judgment. Jesus had commanded his *disciples to follow this practice even in Jewish Palestine (Lk 10:10-12).

14:1-7

Opposition in Iconium

14:1-4. Although Iconium was a wealthy and prosperous town, it was hardly the size of a city like Ephesus or Smyrna. It was apparently not yet a Roman *colony. "Greeks" might distinguish Paul's hearers here not only from Jews but also from the less Hellenized people of the countryside (despite Iconium's identity also as Phrygian). Whereas urban culture in the empire tended to be uniformly Greco-Roman, rural society preserved local language and customs, and a town like Iconium would have its share of both. Traveling teachers would undoubtedly have drawn more attention in a town like Iconium than in larger cities. Inside the synagogue the language would be Greek. Outside the synagogue, because the native language of Iconium was Phrygian, Paul and

Barnabas may address mainly the Greek-speaking upper social strata, or they may speak through interpreters (cf. 14:11, 14); but it is more likely that most of the crowd understands Greek, even if it is not their first language.

Among the deities that the *Gentiles of Iconium worshiped, the most prominent was Cybele, the Phrygian mother goddess; Phrygian *mystery cults were also common. But Iconium's civic religion included the cult of the emperor, and in general Gentile religion there was more Greek than Phrygian. Inscriptions testify that the Christian faith spread and Iconium later became a major center of Christianity in Asia Minor.

14:5. Under law, city magistrates could do whatever necessary to quell disturbances; in the case of Paul and Barnabas, the officials could quell the disturbance simply by legally banning them from the city. Thus the plot to kill them goes beyond the law.

14:6-7. Iconium was in Phrygia near the border of Lycaonia, which contained Lystra and Derbe. In this period Iconium was a Greek city culturally distinct from the surrounding countryside; most ancient writers counted it part of Lycaonia, but it was culturally Phrygian, so writers sometimes counted it part of Phrygia (whose culture and political administration it shared). It shared elements of each local culture; from a political standpoint it belonged to the larger province of Galatia. (Some argue that Iconium was in Isaurian rather than Lycaonia in this period; at the least, they left the Phrygian linguistic and cultural sphere for Lycaonia.)

Some people considered flight undignified, but others recognized it as common sense in some situations. Jewish teachers preferred it to death, unless flight required denying the *law of God. The estates of the Sergii Paulli are about 110–20 kilometers north of Iconium, but there were few possible evangelistic goals to the north, and the *apostles venture south. Although they continued on the paved Via Sebaste, their flight was likely not pleasant; the plateaus of Lycaonia tended to be cold and poorly watered. The road to Derbe, over sixty miles southeast of Lystra, may not have even been paved.

14:8-20a

Preaching at Lystra

14:8. Lystra, a thriving market town, was about twenty to twenty-five miles (thirty-five to forty kilometers) south-southwest of Iconium. For half a century

Lystra had been a Roman *colony, beginning with the settlement of perhaps a thousand Romans; its own citizens were accorded privileges as citizens of Rome. It valued its local culture and its Roman character alongside Pisidian Antioch and against the geographically closer Greek cities of the region. Greek flourished in the countryside, but nearly a third of Lystra's inscriptions are Latin (though some of it poor Latin). But although it viewed Antioch as a sister city, it emphasized its Roman character less than did Antioch.

Although some philosophers lectured in halls or served wealthy *patrons*, *many preached their philosophical wares on street corners or in marketplaces; powerful speakers like Dio Chrysostom criticized philosophers like Epictetus* who reserved their lectures for the classroom. Higher classes normally disdained those who preached in the open market, but would-be sages may have outnumbered those who could hire them in more professional settings. Like some ancient philosophers, Paul here preaches on the street rather than in a *synagogue (perhaps Lystra has none; see 14:19). Paul's approach should not surprise us; his own letters indicate that he shares some of this philosophical ideal (1 Cor 4:11-13), and he often uses the Cynic-*Stoic preaching style in them (which could be used both on the street and in the classroom). What is surprising is not that Paul would occasionally preach this way but that he draws such a vigorous response; perhaps the controversy his opponents create helps him. Secluded philosophers tended toward academic discourse, while those on the streets were ready to denounce the folly of their hearers to secure their attention.*

14:9-11. The parallels between the healings in 3:6-8 and 14:8-10, like many other parallels in Luke-Acts, are probably deliberate, fitting ancient literary conventions that highlighted such possible parallels. Local Phrygian legend told of an ancient visitation by Zeus and Hermes to Phrygia. In the story only one couple, Baucis and Philemon, received them graciously; the rest of the population was destroyed in a flood. Knowing some form of the story in their own language, the Lycaonians are not about to make the same mistake ancient Phrygia had made; they want to honor Paul and Barnabas, whom they mistake for gods. People sometimes considered miracle workers as gods. Lystra's colonists, who were Roman citizens, employed Latin for official business; those speaking Lycaonian here are the longstanding indigenous residents of the area (who may have been more prone to listen than the more elite citizens).

14:12. Hermes was the messenger of the Olympian gods who spoke for the more dignified Zeus (though in other stories Zeus was less dignified and out

chasing women or occasionally boys for his sexual delights). Like most early Jewish and Christian writers (cf. also Is 46:5-7), Luke is not above making fun of what he viewed as paganism's folly.

14:13. Inscriptions show that Hermes and Zeus were worshiped together in the Phrygian region. An inscription allows that Lystra's temple of Zeus may have had multiple priests, though only one is acting here. People could wear garlands at festivals, but sacrificial animals were often decorated with garlands before being offered. Oxen and bulls were among the most expensive sacrifices; priests sometimes were wealthy benefactors who donated their services to the community, including at times sacrifices. Temples "outside the city gates" or "just outside the city" (NIV) were quite common in Asia Minor; some scholars, however, believe that the gates belong instead to the sacred enclosure of Zeus (it is not clear that Lystra had walls in this period). The disabled man had probably been healed at the gate, because disabled people often made their living by begging, and beggars normally found their best income at such places of transit (cf. 3:2).

14:14. Villages of the East usually kept their own ancient language after Greek had become the language of the cities. Landowning citizens of Lystra spoke Latin, but outside the town proper people spoke Greek and the local dialect; Lystra was a market town for the surrounding territory. (outside Lystra, most inscriptions are Greek, but names are local, suggesting use of a mother-tongue in addition to the more geographically widespread trade and literary language.) Although the hearers would have understood Greek, they spoke among themselves in their mother tongue. Paul and Barnabas are preaching to the masses, the abundant Anatolian noncitizens who lived there; only at verse 14 are they informed of what the crowds are saying. Jewish people were required to tear their robes when they heard blasphemy (forming an ironic contrast with 14:19!)

14:15-16. One may contrast this speech, to rural farmers, with the somewhat similar philosophic speech in 17:22-31 and the very different synagogue homily in 13:16-47; *rhetoric emphasized adaptability to one's audience*. "Turning" was biblical language for repentance, and "vain things" for idols; "the living God" is also biblical language, and "maker of . . . all that is in them" evokes Ps 146:6 (cf. Ex 20:11; Neh 9:6). Although using biblical language, Barnabas and Paul preach to these Anatolian farmers in terms they would not need to know the Bible to understand, emphasizing the God who rules nature, who was already recognized by paganism. Jewish people often pointed to pagan philosophical teachings on

the supreme god, which Jews felt contradicted the pagan worship of idols. Jews called idols “vain” (futile), in contrast to the “living” God. Jewish people sometimes believed that God allowed a lower moral standard for *Gentiles; but idolatry, like sexual immorality, was not an issue on which God would permit compromise. They often mocked the worship of other gods (see comment on 19:37). Perhaps God’s patience here evokes Wisdom of Solomon 11:23.

14:17. Phrygia was fertile, and Phrygians especially worshiped the mother goddess who was supposed to provide fertility to the earth. Lycaonia was less fertile, but Lystra’s residents were mostly rural in orientation. Various philosophers, especially Stoics, believed that nature itself testified to the character of the supreme god. Jewish teachers agreed that nature testifies to God’s character (this is biblical; cf. Ps 19:1; 89:37) and taught that he provides all peoples with health, food and so forth. Scripture already emphasized that God was the source of these agricultural blessings.

14:18-20a. The visitors from Antioch had no legal authority outside their own territory, but they are able to persuade the mob to accomplish what had failed in Iconium (14:5-6). A mob could change its views quickly (cf. Lk 23:18), especially in a case like this one: when Paul and Barnabas deny the gods, they would be considered impious and hence would appear to fit a different category of ancient paganism. Now they were not gods after all, but dangerous magicians. (Whereas gods were popularly regarded as generally beneficent, sorcerers were viewed as secretive and usually harmful.)

Iconium was only twenty miles away, but Antioch was four or five days’ travel, nearly a hundred miles from Lystra by road. Nevertheless, it is known that Antioch and Lystra were in contact with each other, considering themselves sister cities. Sources show that particularly effective speakers could sometimes (though not always) calm mobs. Stoning was an appropriate penalty for blasphemy (for Luke’s audience an ironic treatment of the monotheistic preacher in 14:14-18). See 7:58 for details on Jewish stoning, but stoning was also the most common form of urban mob violence in the Gentile world. Stones, tiles and cobbles were readily available in ancient streets. When Jewish crowds stoned a transgressor, they sought the transgressor’s death; Paul’s survival undoubtedly points to divine protection. Normally such executions were performed outside the city, and they may have dragged him out of the city for purity reasons; that he not only survived but could walk afterward must be understood as miraculous.

14:20b-28

Consolidating the Work

14:20b. The site usually considered Derbe today was some sixty miles (about ninety-six kilometers) southeast of Lystra; Luke reports that the journey toward Derbe started on the next day, but presumably it took more than a day to complete. Unlike the Via Sebaste from Iconium to Lystra, this road was apparently unpaved. Derbe had only recently begun to achieve some status (it became a Greek polis, Claudioderbe, only in Claudius' reign); but it would be out of the way of their enemies. Luke does not report *legal* action against Paul and Barnabas in Lystra, but even if there had been, decrees from one town were not automatically binding in another.

14:21. From Derbe they could have crossed the Taurus mountains (it was presumably not yet winter) to Paul's home town of Tarsus (perhaps over a week's walk, about 150 miles), but they wanted to revisit the *churches. Returning to towns where they had faced persecution required courage (praiseworthy in ancient accounts), though the opposition may have usually involved mob actions (even with officials' cooperation) rather than official decrees. It would offer a model of faithfulness to local believers who could not leave so easily.

14:22. Judaism also demanded perseverance (as opposed to apostasy). Much traditional Jewish teaching spoke of a period of intense suffering before the time of the *kingdom (cf. Dan 12:1); Paul could allude to this idea in verse 22, although "tribulation" (KJV, NASB) here could also be more generic.

14:23. Elders had always governed and judged in towns and villages in the *Old Testament (and in much of the rest of the Mediterranean world as well), and the evidence is abundant that this form of rule continued in many places in the *New Testament period. Many ancient synagogues had several elders who filled a religious office (acting as councils rather than as individuals); indeed, a "council of elders" ruled the massive Jewish community in Alexandria. Normally rule was exercised by a council of elders, not a single elder. On fasting, see comment on 13:2.

14:24. It was known that Pamphylia was near Pisidia; given their proximity, ancient writers sometimes treated Pisidia and Pamphylia together. Both peoples were reputed to be especially adept in augury (predicting the future by the flights of birds)—forbidden by the Old Testament prohibition of divination (Deut 18:10).

14:25. Perge (see comment on 13:13) in Pamphylia was largely *Gentile, perhaps explaining why Luke does not mention the *apostles preaching there in 13:13-14; perhaps they have gained more confidence now. The Via Sebaste probably ended in Perge, so they would have taken a lesser road to Attalia. Attalia was Pamphylia's main port, and it lay on the mouth of the Catarractes. Most of Attalia lay on a steep elevation just above the sea. That port town included some high-status Roman settlers (notably the Calpurnii), and had many ships sailing to Syria, being a major port for trade with that region.

14:26-28. When they return to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas report on their missionary work to the sending church. Although Jewish people in the *Diaspora were concerned to propagate a favorable impression of their religion and to gain converts when possible, they do not seem to have engaged in a concerted effort at what we call "mission." Yet synagogue communities throughout the Diaspora informally remained in contact through travelers who reported news, and reports of large numbers of converts to Judaism would have been considered news when it occurred. The Antiochan church's commitment probably goes beyond such interest, because the early Christians' interest in missions was far more central than that of other Jewish sects; Luke-Acts is clear that missions is at the heart of Jesus' purpose for his church. For "open door" as an idiom, see comment on 1 Cor 16:9.

15:1-5

The Controversy

15:1. Many Jewish people believed that *Gentiles were saved simply by avoiding major sins (such as idolatry and sexual immorality; later rabbis summarized these as seven laws allegedly given to Noah)*; some others believed that Gentiles had to convert to Judaism by being circumcised (if male) and (according to most of this group) baptized (whether male or female). (*Josephus reported that some Jews insisted on a Gentile king being circumcised, whereas others believed that his acceptance of Jewish faith was sufficient. Indeed, some of Josephus's colleagues demanded the circumcision of Gentiles who had come to them for refuge, but Josephus himself forbade this requirement.) Of course, even those Jewish people who believed that righteous Gentiles could be saved without converting to Judaism did not accept them as part of God's people Israel unless they converted (cf. comment on Galatians, where inclusion in God's people,

rather than salvation, may be in view).

15:2. Strife was common in ancient Mediterranean public life. These believers would “go up” because Jerusalem is higher in elevation than Antioch (the image of “ascending” to Jerusalem recurs often in the *Old Testament*). The churches of the *Diaspora*, like the synagogues, were ruled by local elders, not by a hierarchy in Jerusalem; but just as synagogues respected messengers from the temple authorities in the homeland, the non-Palestinian churches need to resolve the issues raised by those purporting to speak for Judean Christians (15:1). (Josephus pointed out that Jerusalemites, priests and those who knew the *law well were given great respect by others. He reported that some who were qualified in this way were sent to subvert his own similar qualifications as an officer in Galilee.)

15:3-4. Their testimonies, like Peter’s (11:12; 15:8), appeal to divine attestation, which was widely accepted in both Jewish and Gentile circles. But many strict *Pharisees believed that even miracles were insufficient attestation if they contradicted traditional interpretations of the law (15:5).

15:5. “Sect” or “party” was a standard way of referring to the Pharisees (and other Jewish groups like *Sadducees* and *Essenes*), found also in Josephus. Among the Pharisees, the stricter school of *Shammai* may have prevailed at this time; the school of Hillel, which predominated later, was more generous toward Gentiles. Other Jews respected Pharisees for their piety, and the Jerusalem church no doubt accorded them high status for their knowledge of the law. Nationalism and conservative sentiments had been on the rise in Judea since the hopes stirred by the brief reign of Agrippa I (A.D. 41–44; see comment on 12:1) a few years earlier.

15:6-11

Peter’s Response

In ancient *rhetoric, citing a voice respected by one’s opposition was strategic. Having the backing of the leading minister to the traditional constituency (Gal 2:7) on one’s side (Acts 10–11) is certainly strategic in granting credibility to the very different ministry of the Antioch church.

15:6-7. The *apostles do not rule without the elders, and both engage in vigorous debate, as Jewish teachers did in their schools. Jewish assemblies often sought to function by majority opinion or consensus among themselves rather

than fiat. In later rabbinic schools, rabbis often had to agree to disagree, though submitting to majority opinion; this assembly seeks to achieve consensus (v. 22). The *Essenes reportedly worked by consensus, but it was difficult to achieve in most of ancient society, which was very divisive.

15:8-9. The Spirit was an *eschatological gift for Israel (Ezek 36:27). Gentiles were continually impure by virtue of their state as Gentiles; for this reason, they were expected to undergo *proselyte* baptism when they converted to Judaism. Peter, however, emphasizes that God enacts that “cleansing” (NASB, NRSV) or “purifying” (NIV, KJV; cf. 10:15) simply through their faith. For God knowing the heart, see 1 Samuel 16:7.

15:10-11. Here Peter may refer to the common Jewish tradition of the “yoke” of God’s *law or his* kingdom as opposed to the yoke of worldly care. Most Jewish people saw the law not as a burden but as a gracious gift; they believed that its duties freed them from real burdens (cf. Mt 11:29-30). If he refers here to the law, Peter may think of its inadequacy only in the sense found in Jeremiah 31:32: the ancestors broke it, but under the new covenant God would write the law in their hearts (Jer 31:33-34). Later rabbis sometimes offered more lenient rulings for the sake of the majority of their people, who could not live by the stricter ones.

15:12-21

James’s Response

15:12. See comment on 15:3-4. “The multitude” (KJV, NASB) means “the assembly” (NIV, NRSV), as in the *Dead Sea Scrolls.

15:13-14. In the *Old Testament “a people for his name” (KJV, NASB, NRSV, literally; or “a people for himself”—NLT) normally meant Israel (whom he “took” for his name in Ex 6:7); James derives this title for Gentile Christians from Amos, whom he cites in verse 17.

15:15-16. James refers to “the Prophets” (plural) in this case presumably because he is speaking of the scroll containing the twelve smaller books of the prophets, including Amos.

“Tabernacle of David” (Amos 9:11) probably means the “house [line] of David,” fallen into such pitiable disrepair that it is called merely a tabernacle (KJV, NASB), or tent (NIV). Rebuilding David’s house would mean raising up a *Messiah after the Davidic line’s rule had been cut off. The Dead Sea Scrolls

also cited this text as messianic, along with 2 Samuel 7:10b-14.

15:17. James uses the *Septuagint, appropriate for an argument that will be used in the Diaspora; later rabbis mixed and matched variant readings as they suited their point. Amos 9:12 says “the remnant of Edom,” but by slightly changing the spelling (as Jewish interpreters often did to make points), the Septuagint (followed by James and Luke here) can read the text as if it said “the remnant of Adam,” meaning “of humanity.” (Amos 9:12 refers to “possessing” Edom, and nations being “called by my [God’s] name” (NASB) could refer to conquest rather than willing submission. But God’s people are also “called by his name” (Deut 28:10; Is 63:19; Jer 14:9; Dan 9:19). The point is that the nations will come under the rule of God (cf. Is 19:24-25; Zeph 3:8-9; Zech 2:11; 9:7), and the context in Amos (9:7) suggests that God is concerned for the nations themselves.

15:18. James may blend in an allusion to Isaiah 45:21.

15:19-20. God forbade Noah and his descendants to eat meat with blood in it (Gen 9:4); Jewish people thus deemed as unacceptable even for Gentile consumption animals killed by strangling without draining the blood. The few requirements James suggests they impose may derive from requirements for Gentiles living among Israelites in Leviticus 17–18 and are representative of the handful of laws that Jewish tradition came to believe that God gave Noah. According to the more lenient Jewish position, any righteous Gentiles who kept those basic laws would have a share in the world to come. Because even stricter Pharisees had to get along with the majority of more lenient people, these teachers did not try to invalidate other teachers’ rulings if they had majority consent. James provides a compromise approach that gives each side the basic element of what they need to work together (and not lose face with their constituencies): even conservative Jewish believers should treat Gentile Christians as saved provided they follow the minimal Jewish expectations for God-fearers. This means that cooperation was possible based on shared common ground; it does not mean that everyone in the Jerusalem church consented to Paul’s view (articulated in his letters) that Gentiles were full members of God’s people.

15:21. James’s statement here could mean that Moses already has enough observers of his *law*; *or it could mean that believers are to abstain from the practices in verse 20 lest they offend the many people of verse 21.* Synagogues existed in major cities throughout the empire, and those who wished to observe the law as *proselytes could learn about it there.

15:22-35

The Church's Decree

15:22. When views were disputed in the later rabbinic academies, the majority view always prevailed; here a partial compromise (in favor of the Antioch church) seems to command consensus. Other Jewish groups also had “general sessions,” such as at *Qumran, where the priests, elders and people would gather. “Silas” and “Silanus” are attested as names used by Jewish people; the nearest Latin name is “Silvanus” (1 Thess 1:1). (Some also suggest that “Silas” may be an *Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew “Saul.”)

15:23. That ethnic *Gentiles should be called “brothers and sisters” is significant (though sometimes Jews had called Gentile allies this; cf. 1 Maccabees 12:6; 14:40). The greetings are standard for Greco-Roman letters; the address shows that it is a circular letter, to be copied and circulated by its messengers to these different regions. Central authorities sometimes sent their authorized agents bearing circular letters. Both novels and historical works sometimes cited the contents of letters. The letter is of average length (papyrus letters averaged eighty-seven words, and this one is just over a hundred). Antioch was the leading city of Syria; Cilicia adjoined Syria and was administered as a common province with it in this period.

15:24. One sign of the respect the Jerusalem church shows the Gentile believers is the care with which they craft the letter; 15:24-26 is a “periodic sentence,” the most intricately designed rhetoric in the entire book of Acts. Division and rivalry characterized ancient urban life, but moralists often exhorted people to unity; “harmony” was a major topic of ancient civic rhetoric and the discussion of moralists (on consensus, see comment on 15:22).

15:25-27. In accordance with custom, the messengers they send to deliver the decree will be widely respected as trustworthy and representative of the council (analogies occur elsewhere, e.g., **Letter of Aristeas* 40).

15:28. Because the *Holy Spirit was frequently associated with prophetic inspiration or special enlightenment, readers would understand that the apostles and elders are claiming that God directly led the decision of their community. “It seemed good” (also v. 22) appears in Greek decrees in the sense, “Be it resolved” or “it was decided,” often associated with votes in citizen assemblies (or decrees from emperors or local councils).

15:29. See comment on verse 20. Greco-Roman letters normally ended with “Farewell,” as here.

15:30-31. Most people could not read, especially a letter in such sophisticated Greek; someone would read it while others listened.

15:32-35. The frequency with which prophets turn up in Acts would seem phenomenal to ancient readers. Although some ancient *Essenes and others claimed to be prophets, this was a rare phenomenon and no group boasted prophetic activity to the extent that Christians did; many Jews felt that there were no genuine prophets in their own time. To send people away “in peace” indicates that they had been received in an acceptable manner (Gen 26:29, 31; 2 Sam 3:21-23).

15:36-41

Returning to the Mission Field

15:36-40. That Israelite literature reported the failings of its heroes even during the epic period may be noteworthy, but by this time it had long been standard for Greco-Roman biographers to admit their heroes’ weaknesses. Luke surely intends us to see God’s blessing on the new Paul-Silas team (15:40; cf. 16:37), but this does not signal his approval of the dispute between Paul and Barnabas, handled so unlike the council in 15:22.

15:41. Cilicia (Paul’s home province) adjoined Syria (which included Antioch, from which he was being sent); see comment on 15:23. From Tarsus, the new team could then take the Roman trade route over the Taurus mountains (it would not be winter) to Lycaonia.

16:1-5

Spreading the Word

On Derbe and Lystra, see 14:8, 20. Palestinian Jews considered intermarriage between Jews and pagans a horrible sin (Tobit 4:12; 1 Esdras 8:68-96; 9:7-9), but views were no doubt more lenient in places like Lystra, where the Jewish community was smaller. Under Jewish *law at least as early as the second century, a person was presumed Jewish if his or her mother was Jewish. But even if that ruling was in effect in Paul’s day (which is questionable), Timothy would not have been accepted as fully Jewish, because he had not been circumcised. (Wives were expected to submit to their husband’s religion, and Timothy’s father had probably refused to let him be circumcised.)

Paul makes him a full Jew for the sake of his witness to the Jewish community (cf. the different situation addressed in Gal 2:3-4, where the issue is not witness but coercion). Paul opposed forcing circumcision on Gentiles (Acts 15:1-2), but not someone Jewish or partly Jewish identifying with their Jewish heritage for witness to their community. The Gentile community already recognized Christians as proclaimers of a form of Judaism; thus, offended as many of them were by the idea of circumcision, they would not be more offended by a circumcised Jewish Christian than by an uncircumcised Christian. For the decrees, see 15:29 (though these were specifically addressed only to Syria and Cilicia, see 15:23).

16:6-10

The Spirit's Guidance

16:6. The Greek phrase here may view Phrygia and Galatia together as a unit (though cf. 18:23); most scholars believe that Paul's letter to the Galatians covers the Phrygian regions included in Acts 14. The phrase here likely involves "Phrygia-Galatia," that is, the southern part of the province of Galatia encompassing traditional peoples of Phrygia. ("North" Galatia is about two hundred kilometers away from the most obvious route between Lystra and Mysia.) "Asia" is the Roman province in western Turkey, whose leading city was Ephesus; journeying west on a major road that passed Colosse and Laodicea would have taken him there. In antiquity, both Israelites and *Gentiles sought divine guidance*. *Most Jewish groups believed that the Holy Spirit* was no longer active in the *Old Testament sense, and none paralleled the magnitude of the Spirit's working regarded as normal among the early Christians.

16:7. They were opposite Mysia, possibly at a city on its eastern border in northern Phrygia; there they could turn right to Bithynia in the north (a strategic region), or left to Mysia and Asia in the west. They pass northwest through Mysia in 16:8.

16:8. The Troad (including Troas) was in northwest Mysia. Troas was directly to the west of much of Mysia; Bithynia was a senatorial province northeast of Mysia. Thus Paul and his companions go from eastern Mysia (near Bithynia and just north of Phrygia) westward toward Alexandria Troas, which was about ten to fifteen miles south-southwest of the more famous ancient Ilium, Homer's Troy. (Because Rome traced its mythical lineage to Troy, the site had

symbolic significance for Rome.) Troas was not the most accessible site, so they probably journeyed there not for convenience but because it was a strategic site not forbidden to them by the *Spirit. Troas, a Roman *colony with population estimates as high as a hundred thousand, had a mixed population of Roman citizens and natives who never quite adjusted to one another's presence; it was also where two major routes from the East toward Rome converged, and those traveling from Asia to Macedonia or the reverse regularly passed through the port of Troas. Alexandria Troas's artificial harbor had made it the leading mercantile port between Macedonia and Asia Minor, and Greco-Roman history and legend amplified the area's importance.

16:9. Macedonia had been a Roman province since 146 B.C. In some respects it was strategically more important to Rome than Achaia (most of Greece) was, because it was the link between Rome and the whole eastern part of the empire along the Via Egnatia (the Egnatian Way), a road originally constructed about 148 B.C. The narrow body of water between Troas and Thrace was the famous divider of Asia and Europe. (Old Troy's status as a traditional boundary between Europe and Asia was highlighted, for example, by Alexander the Great's invasion of Asia there; by contrast, the *gospel of peace here moves from Asia to Europe. Romans counted themselves as part of Europe, but believed themselves descended from a Trojan.) Because deities in Greek religion used visions to send people on missions, even unconverted Gentile readers would understand Luke's point here.

16:10. Most people believed in divine guidance through dreams, or at least through some dreams. In contrast to the views of some scholars (who regard "we" as a fictitious literary device because it appears in some novels as well as in historical works), "we" in ancient historical texts nearly always *meant* "we." (A fictive eyewitness claim might have also made the narrator more central to the *narrative or emphasized his presence on more dramatic occasions such as Pentecost; Luke instead indicates his presence in passing here, leaving off at Philippi, then picking up at Philippi years later [20:6] until the end of the book.) Luke is writing a historical work (novels did not have historical prologues or address very recent historical characters), so he is no doubt reporting that he was with Paul as an eyewitness on this and subsequent occasions when he uses the term. Personal eyewitness experience was considered the most dependable source for history. Historians sometimes mentioned their own presence or activity in either the first person or the third person (or both).

16:11-15

A Response in Philippi

16:11. The mountainous and thus easily visible island of Samothrace (with Mount Fengari over five thousand feet high) is the first port travelers would reach; it was about halfway on the voyage and was a major landmark. Its northern port city (also called Samothrace) was a natural location for spending a night in port. Samothrace was famous for the nocturnal mysteries of the Cabiri. Neapolis was one of the two best ports of south Macedonia, directly serving Philippi (the other major port was Thessalonica). A voyage from Troas to Neapolis covered over 150 miles; a two-day voyage indicates favorable winds (cf. 20:6), probably from the northeast. Except during the winter (mid-November to early March), sea travel was quicker and less expensive than land travel, allowing one to cover perhaps a hundred miles a day.

16:12. Neapolis was the port of Philippi, which lay about ten miles to the northwest across Mount Symbolum. This was the eastern end of the Via Egnatia, which led westward to Dyrrhachium, an Adriatic port from which one could sail to Italy. Philippi had been a Roman *colony (see comment on Phil 3:20) since Rome had settled veterans there in 42 B.C. Some 85 percent of Philippi's inscriptions are in Latin, roughly double the proportion in an earlier colony Paul visited, Pisidian Antioch. Although not all its residents were citizens of Philippi, its citizens also held Roman citizenship. Its population is sometimes estimated at five to ten thousand. Although prosperous, it was more an agricultural than commercial center, unlike many urban areas Paul visited.

Thessalonica, not Philippi, was Macedonia's capital; moreover, Amphipolis (17:1) held the designation of "first" city of the district. Philippi was considered in the "first part" or "first district" (GNT) of Macedonia, which was divided into four districts. More importantly for Luke's account, Philippi was also a "first" or "leading" city of the province in the sense that it was one of the most eminent there (alongside Thessalonica); it was the wealthiest and most honored city of this district.

16:13. "Place of prayer" was a customary non-Palestinian Jewish term for a *synagogue*, but the gathering here seems to be without a building. According to later Jewish pietists concerned about assimilation, a minimum of ten Jewish men was necessary to constitute a regular synagogue and thus indicate a city where Jewish people would be likely to form their own community; this number of Jewish men may not have lived in Philippi. But in places with no official

synagogue, Jewish people preferred to meet in a ritually pure place near water; ritual washing of hands before prayer seems to have been standard in Diaspora Judaism, and excavations show the importance of water to synagogues.

The nearest major body of flowing water, the Gangites (a tributary of the Strymon), is about one and a quarter miles (2.4 km) west of Philippi. It was thus more than a “sabbath day’s journey” by Pharisaic standards (see comment on 1:12), suggesting that they were more concerned with assembling near a pure place than with the technicalities of Palestinian legal ideals. If Luke has this river in view, the “gate” is probably the colonial archway of the city, through which the Via Egnatia (cf. 16:9) went out to the Gangites. Some others prefer a site on the Krenides creek, nearer the city, or to the east, at a stream that existed in antiquity.

16:14. Conservative Roman writers often complained that women pursued religions from the eastern Mediterranean, and both *Josephus and inscriptions attest that tremendous numbers of women (far more than men) were attracted to Judaism. The sphere of religion was the one sphere in Greek culture where women were given some public responsibility, and the Diana cult in Philippi may have made women more prominent than in other Greek centers. Macedonian women traditionally exercised more freedom than Greek women, and Roman women also had more freedom than Greeks (relevant for Philippi as a Roman colony heavily influenced by Roman custom). But Greek religion consisted of ritual, not teaching, and without a local synagogue there would be little study of the *law.* Thus these women would have had little training in Scripture and would welcome Paul’s teaching. Many men looked down on preachers who catered to women, especially when they felt that these speakers undermined women’s loyalty to their family religion.

The name “Lydia,” though common, would be especially natural for a woman from Thyatira, which was in the region of ancient Lydia. Thyatira was known for its dyers’ guilds and textiles, and inscriptions show that other Thyatiran business agents also sold purple dye in Macedonia, becoming prosperous. (Although Macedonians, like inhabitants of most of the empire, were generally poor, Macedonia had historically been one of the more prosperous provinces.) Some plausibly suggest that her name and trade may indicate that she was a freedwoman (former slave); many traders in purple dye were freedwomen who continued to work as agents of their former masters’ businesses. Other traders, however, were free born. The most expensive purple was dye that Tyrians, in Phoenicia, extracted by crushing shellfish. Some

estimate that it took 10,000 shellfish to produce a little of the costly dye; despite the foul odor associated with the dye, its rareness made it a symbol of wealth and power. Some suggest that Thyatira used a cheaper form of purple from the madder plant (see comment on 16:15).

16:15. By this period, some women gained wealth through business; even slave women could become managers, just like slave men. More than likely Lydia has some means as a seller of purple, a luxury good associated with wealth throughout Mediterranean culture for over a thousand years. (The dye had been especially procured from the murex shellfish near Tyre, but in Macedonia it could have been procured from the mollusks near Thessalonica. Thyatiran purple often came from the madder plant, not the more expensive Tyrian shellfish.) Well-to-do women sometimes became *patrons, or sponsors, of pagan religious associations; those attracted to Judaism helped support Jewish causes.

Paul and his companions might have been staying at an inn till the sabbath (a less than ideal choice; inns were notoriously dangerous and immoral), but Lydia immediately offers the proper Jewish hospitality and invites the *apostles into her home, thus serving as a patron of their work (cf. 1 Kings 17:13-24; especially 2 Kings 4:8-11). Jewish people often displayed hospitality by welcoming fellow Jews into their homes (sometimes for up to three weeks) if they had reason to trust them. Some people would have looked askance at the group staying in a woman's home, but she was not alone, having a "household" (which could include servants). She appears to be the head of a household consisting mainly of servants, though it is not impossible that she is married to a husband who simply leaves her religious activities alone (contrast the usual custom in Acts 16:31-32; cf. 2 Kings 4:8-23). Widowhood could explain Lydia's independence, though it could also be explained in other ways (being a divorcée or a freedwoman).

16:16-22

Exorcisms and Economics

16:16. This slave girl (as in 12:13, the Greek implies that she is very young) has literally a "spirit of a pythoness"—the same sort of spirit that stood behind the most famous of all Greek oracles, the Delphic oracle of Apollo whose priestess was called a pythoness (she was named after the "Pythian Apollo," slayer of the

great Python). Thus Paul and his companions confront a powerful *demon here.

16:17. “Most High God” is ambiguous, a common designation for God in Jewish texts but also occurs in pagan sources for Zeus or for the Jewish God with whom pagans sometimes identified Zeus. Magical texts show that pagans respected this supreme God, often identified with the Jewish God, as the most powerful. The spirit ambiguously reduces the missionaries’ deity to a chief role in polytheism.

16:18. Exorcists sometimes tried to use names of higher spirits to evict lower spirits (see comment on 19:13); but for the use of “the name of Jesus Christ” here, signifying that Paul acts as Jesus’ agent, see comment on 3:6 (cf. also comment on Jn 14:12-14).

16:19. On shared ownership, see comment on Matthew 6:24. The “authorities” here are the “magistrates” (v. 20), the most common Greek title for the Latin *duoviri*, the two Roman officials of Philippi, who probably called themselves by the more dignified title of “praetor.” What most translations call the “marketplace” was normally the square agora at the center of a Greek town, the center of all civic activity. Philippi, however, was a Roman colony. The commercial agora was nearby, but the passage refers to the central agora, the colony’s Roman rectangular forum. It stood on the main road, the Via Egnatia, that passed through the city. At 230 by 485 feet, the forum could hold many people. In the ancient system, accusers were responsible for charging the accused before the magistrates, here at the raised platform near the forum’s main, north entrances. The raised platform was the rostrum or bema, approached by stairs on both its sides.

16:20. People could be jailed for disturbing the peace; normally the plaintiffs could be assured the court’s favor if their social status was higher than that of the defendants. The accusers are property-owning Philippian citizens, hence Roman citizens (see comment on 16:12), hence fancy themselves of higher status than the foreign preachers (unaware of their citizenship, 16:37).

The charge of “property damage” would be difficult to prove, so they charge them with disturbing the peace—a prisonable offense—and that they preach non-Roman customs. These charges were particularly sensitive in a Roman colony since the emperor Claudius’ recent expulsion of Jews from Rome (see comment on 18:2). The Jewish-Roman contrast (16:20-21) is a taste of common ancient anti-Judaism, although the assumption that one could not be both Jewish and Roman will not hold up in this case (16:37). Proponents of traditional ways always demanded avoidance of new or alien gods, and one of the main

complaints Romans brought against Jews was that they were always converting people to their religion (especially when the converts were Roman women). Although the Jewish population of Philippi was very small, there was a large native non-Roman population, and other immigrants from the East had settled there.

16:21. Philippi was extremely Romanized; despite its location, over half of its inscriptions are in Latin, more than usual in most eastern Mediterranean colonies. Because Philippi was a Roman colony (16:12), its citizens enjoyed Roman rights, used Roman law, were exempt from tribute and modeled their constitution on that of Rome. Foreigners and noncitizen residents did not acquire Roman rights simply by settling in Philippi.

16:22. Unless the accused were Roman citizens, they could be beaten even before trial as a means of securing evidence (this was called the *coercitio*); in practice, lower-class persons had few legal protections. Roman magistrates' six attendants, called lictors, walked single-file before duoviri and carried *fasces*, or bundles of rods, which they could use for beatings, as here. Normally, as here, the accused were stripped first. Public beatings served not only to secure evidence but also to humiliate those beaten and to discourage their followers. The mob's role here reflects badly on the magistrates, who were officially responsible to maintain order. Roman citizens were not allowed to be beaten with rods, but ancient reports show that local officials sometimes ignored this rule in practice, so Paul and Silas could not be certain to gain exemption even if they protested. (Governors acted with greater freedom in Judea, the setting the pair knew best. It turns out that Philippi, however, with its close ties to Rome, took the rule quite seriously; 16:38.)

Perhaps because of the mob situation, or because this advantage had not yet occurred to them, or because they did not have their travel documents on hand, or simply because they wished to put the court in a situation where it would have to negotiate afterward (16:37-39), Paul and Silas cannot or do not reveal their citizenship.

16:23-40

Prison Ministry

16:23. Some jailers were public slaves. Prison directors (whether slave or free, as may be likelier here; cf. 16:33-34) could receive good pay. Prisons were

typically filthy, risking infection for the men's wounds. Jailers were often known for, and sometimes chosen for, their brutality. Women did not have separate facilities, but men were the majority of prisoners.

16:24. The jailer guards them "securely" (16:23)—far more than needed for those who have just been beaten with rods. A prison's "inner cell" was usually its harshest, least ventilated, and most degrading part; jailers sometimes secured all prisoners there for the night for security reasons, here undoubtedly producing crowding. (Such conditions led to excess heat and dehydration, as well as spreading sickness.) Wooden stocks, anchored to the floor, were often used for torture as well as detention, with extra holes so the legs could be forced into painful positions. They were normally reserved for prisoners of low social status; prisoners in stocks could barely shift position.

16:25. Jewish sources praised the ability to glorify God amidst suffering and shame, and Greco-Roman philosophers praised the wisdom of being content and thankful in one's situation. Ancient sources honor sages who lived consistently with their teachings about endurance. Most people were usually well into their sleep around midnight, which was also not a customary time for Jewish prayers (though cf. Ps 119:61-62). Prisoners apparently often slept on the floor, using a cloak for a cover.

16:26. Miraculous deliverances are common in Jewish and other traditions (cf. the exaggerated deliverance of Abram by an earthquake in *Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 6:17). Earthquakes are known to occur near Philippi, but an earthquake severe enough to split the staples of prisoners' bonds from the wall could have brought down the roof as well but miraculously does not. Although some ancient intellectuals offered naturalistic explanations for earthquakes, most people viewed them as acts of deities.

16:27. When confronted with execution (in this case, for letting prisoners escape), Romans considered suicide a noble alternative (contrast Mt 27:5). Falling on one's sword was a preferred Roman method. (Many Jews, however, considered it normally shameful, as people generally considered it under normal circumstances. Ancient Christian sources oppose suicide.) Although a jailer would not be responsible for earthquake damage, he could be responsible if deemed negligent in adequately securing the prisoners (cf. 12:19). The jailer was asleep (though we cannot say whether his subordinate guards or servants were).

16:28. The other prisoners may have remained for fear of the guards (the jailer "calls for" torches—v. 29—hence he has subordinates) or because of the missionaries' witness (v. 25). Roman law treated escape from custody as a

criminal act, but often treated with favor those who refused to escape.

16:29-30. An inner cell (16:24) would be very dark, even if it had not been night; the jail official requests torches or perhaps lamps from his subordinates. Asking how to be saved is a motif in Luke-Acts (Lk 3:10; 10:25; 18:18; Acts 2:37); the jailer in this case may be familiar with the report about their teaching (see the “way of salvation” in 16:17; the report in 16:23 is merely a summary). The term translated “sir” often means this in direct address, but in other contexts can mean “lord” (as in 16:31).

16:31-32. Romans expected the whole household to follow the religion of its head; they also expected the head to lead his household to the worship of Roman gods. Here conversion is not automatic; the whole household must hear the word.

16:33. Prisoners normally were unable to wash or trim hair in jails. Since jails were usually in city centers, many sources of water were available in the public area of Philippi near the likely area of the prison, helpful for the jailer’s washing of the prisoners and their washing of his household in *baptism (although these could have increased the risk of being seen by Philippi’s night watchmen). If the jailer removed them from the prison, he risks punishment for negligence if they escaped (cf. 16:23; but cf. also 16:28).

16:34. Prison rations were meager at best; normally prisoners depended on those outside the prison to supply food. In view of 16:20-21, the jailer risks getting in serious trouble here. If discovered, a jailer eating with prisoners was punishable, potentially even by death (and minimally by loss of job; cf., e.g., Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.230-33). Because the jailer would not likely have fully kosher food available, Paul and Silas accepting his food (cf. Luke 10:8) might be offensive to some fellow Jews, who sometimes subsisted even on figs and nuts in prison to avoid eating unclean food.

16:35-36. Perhaps the magistrates felt that public humiliation would have been sufficient punishment to silence the troublemakers. Or the magistrates could have regarded the earthquake as a sign, perhaps from the gods or dangerous magicians. The financial intercession of Lydia may have helped, but because she was not likely a citizen her effectiveness with the officials was less likely.

16:37. Because public stripping and beatings involved shame, that shame would follow the new *church unless Paul and Silas can receive a measure of public vindication. Even Paul’s name probably indicates his citizenship; usually only Roman citizens bore this cognomen, and Jewish people rarely if ever bore it

if they were not citizens. (Silas' Roman name is "Silvanus," e.g., 2 Cor 1:19.) Roman citizenship in the provinces in this period was a mark of high status. (Paul's ancestors may have been among Jewish captives taken by the Roman general Pompey; these slaves received Roman citizenship when they were freed. The Julian law forbade binding or beating Roman citizens without trial; sometimes ancient officials ignored these rules, but Philippi, proud of its Roman heritage, did not. No one would lie about Roman citizenship once they had nothing to gain from it except to recoup their honor; falsely claiming citizenship was a capital offense, and, given enough time, documentation could be checked.

16:38. Ancient writers tell of a Roman citizen who cried out that he was a citizen during a scourging, thereby humiliating his oppressors, who had not properly recognized his high status. By waiting until after the beating (cf. 22:29) to inform the authorities that they were citizens, the missionaries had placed the magistrates themselves in an awkward legal position: now the magistrates, not the missionaries, are forced to negotiate. The *duoviri* could act without trial only against noncitizens, and had simply assumed without inquiry that Paul and Silas were not Roman citizens. Paul and Silas could bring a case against the magistrates; if found guilty of depriving Roman citizens of rights, the magistrates could be barred from office, and their city could (in principle, though it was rare) lose privileges. This strategy might help secure the future safety of the fledgling Christian community.

16:39. The magistrates had no legal authority to expel Roman citizens without trial, but a trial would bring up their own breach of law; thus they are reduced to pleading. To force Paul and Silas to leave secretly would reinforce the public humiliation; Paul demands vindication. The officials still want them to leave to prevent trouble, but by forming their escort from the jail (which was probably in or near the forum) the officials had to humble themselves and offer at least some vindication to those they beat in Philippi, a highly honor-conscious city.

16:40. To visit the believers shows boldness and refusal to accept the humiliation; but per the officials' request, Paul and Silas do leave quickly. The western city gate was thirteen hundred feet (four hundred meters) from the forum. Through it ran the Via Egnatia, on which Paul and Silas would have headed north alongside the Krenides and then west to the river Gangites; ahead on the same road are the cities of 17:1.

Turmoil in Thessalonica

17:1. Amphipolis on the Strymon (thirty-three miles, over fifty kilometers, beyond Philippi), Apollonia (twenty-seven miles, forty kilometers, or a day's travel, beyond Amphipolis), and Thessalonica (thirty-five miles west of Apollonia) were all on the Via Egnatia (16:9, 12); this road continued further westward into Illyricum (Rom 15:19), but Acts reports only Paul's turn to the south, off this road, to Berea (17:10). Roads were usually no more than twenty feet wide, but they were better and safer than most European roads before 1850, and especially inviting to those who traveled on foot or with donkeys or mules.

Luke may well mention Amphipolis and Apollonia as night stops; these were slightly uphill from Philippi hence could represent significant haste, though it is possible that they did stop elsewhere on the way or stayed longer than overnight. The longest leg of the journey, however, to Thessalonica, was mostly downhill. Thessalonica was an important city in this period, Macedonia's largest port, capital of its old second district and now residence of the provincial governor. Although the real population must have been much lower, the highest estimates of Thessalonica's population place it at about two hundred thousand, roughly ten times the population of the average ancient city. While Rome did not grant Thessalonica "*colony" status (unlike Philippi; see 16:12), it made it a "free" (mostly self-governing) city.

17:2-3. Thessalonica's non-Greek religious importations included not only Judaism but the Egyptian cult of Serapis and Isis. Paul had to be there long enough to receive support from Philippi (Phil 4:15-16), about a hundred miles away; until then, his occupation, which would allow him to set up shop in the agora, must have supported him (1 Thess 2:9).

17:4. Macedonian women had earlier gained a reputation for their influence, which they probably still exercised in this period (though they did not always exercise as much influence as men of their own social class). As *patrons within church or synagogue, upper-class women could also enjoy higher status than was available to them in society at large due to their gender. Social conditions made it easier for well-to-do women than for men to convert.* Gentile women are attested as following Judaism far more often than Gentile men.

17:5. Despite the city's economic strength, many people in Thessalonica were poor and many were unemployed. Ancient examples attest that the idle unemployed of the marketplace, usually despised in ancient sources, could be stirred to mob action. Jewish inhabitants were a small minority in Thessalonica,

so those Jews whom Paul did not persuade (v. 4) would need help to oppose Paul effectively. The most likely site for the Jewish quarter in Thessalonica is not far from the forum. “The people” (KJV, NASB, GNT) means the citizen body (cf. “assembly”—NRSV); as a “free city,” Thessalonica’s gathered citizen body performed judicial functions.

17:6. Jason was a common Greek name but was also common among Hellenized Jews, as inscriptions and business documents alike testify (cf. Rom 16:21). He is probably a Jewish host with whom Paul and Silas stay while working there. *Delatores*, or accusers, were necessary to open a case under Roman law; dragging a person to court was one way to ensure their appearance. Polemical *hyperbole about “the world” was common in ancient literature. Anti-Jewish Gentiles in this era sometimes slandered Jews as “stirring unrest,” but the charge here comes from Paul’s own people. So serious was the charge that it could warrant even execution.

17:7. Romans could understand proclaiming another king (i.e., the *Messiah—v. 3) as treason against the majesty of the emperor; they could take mention of signs indicating this new ruler’s coming (see 1–2 Thessalonians) as predictions of the current emperor’s demise, and such predictions violated imperial edicts. That Jesus had been crucified on the charge of sedition only lent further credibility to the charge against Paul and his associates. Citizens who pledged loyalty to Caesar also pledged to report any possible treason; Thessalonica’s devotion to the imperial cult made this a religious matter as well. Thessalonica had a temple for the worship of the emperor and its coins honored Julius and Augustus Caesar as gods. The distorted accusations here, however, are slander; ancient *rhetorical handbooks in fact supported attacking opponents’ character with any believable charges. Like John, Luke likes to show the denseness of the gospel’s opponents*; cf. 17:18.

17:8. Luke uses the precise designation for Thessalonica’s city officials, “politarchs” (also v. 6), a term virtually restricted to Macedonia; there were between three and seven politarchs at given times during the early Roman Empire period. Rome gave them a free hand to run the city, although they ultimately had to answer to Rome for inappropriate actions. Evidence indicates that local officials in the eastern Mediterranean were responsible for enforcing loyalty to Caesar.

17:9. As their host (v. 6), Jason is held responsible for their actions and required to post bond for them, as if they were members of his household. Nevertheless, the officials possibly recognized that Paul and Silas posed little

real threat to order, and simply accommodate the mob to allow the situation to quiet down. Usual punishments for genuinely stirring unrest were serious. By contrast, a fine was a lenient penalty as far as Roman courts went, and a bond to curtail troublemakers would not have been unusual. But given the charge (v. 7), had Paul himself been caught, he might not have been so fortunate. The politarchs' decision would stand till they left office (cf. 1 Thess 2:18). Laws and rulings in Greek cities did not apply outside their area; so long as Paul and Silas keep moving, his antagonists must charge him anew in each city.

17:10-15

Response at Berea

17:10. One who fled trial could be presumed guilty, but given the seriousness of the charge and the local forces against them, Paul and Silas are better off escaping. The Via Egnatia (17:1) continued westward, but it is now safer to travel south, off the major Via Egnatia. Berea, some fifty miles southwest of Thessalonica, was not even on the main coastal road south; off the beaten path, it might throw off pursuers for awhile. Still, it was a significant town, possibly the second most important city in the province of Macedonia as well as a center of the imperial cult. Some considered fleeing by night cowardly, but it was also acknowledged as the most practical way to escape undetected.

17:11. Judaism regarded nobly those who checked everything against the Scriptures and diligently listened to teachers; Greek philosophers likewise praised those who listened attentively.

17:12. For the special mention of women (especially before men), see comment on 17:4.

17:13. Thessalonians had no legal jurisdiction in Berea, but mobs are not prone to follow the law and could create political pressure in Berea as they had in Thessalonica.

17:14. Messengers rarely traveled alone, and travelers over long distances were safer to travel in the company of those they knew. If a direct land route to Dion on the coast existed, Paul journeyed some thirty miles; if not, he may have been forced into a roundabout journey of some fifty miles. Once reaching Dion, he could take a ship south to Athens. The intervening land of Thessaly was apparently sparsely inhabited in this period, and Paul may have also wished to be farther from his slanderers on this occasion.

17:15. At least three miles inland, Athens had port towns, such as the walled seaports Piraeus and (less used in this period) Phalerum. Cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:1.

17:16-20

Entering Athens

Athens's fame rested mainly on the glories of its past; even as a philosophical center, its primacy was challenged by other centers in the East such as Alexandria and Tarsus. (Even in its immediate vicinity Corinth had long surpassed it in power, population and prosperity.) But Athens remained the *symbol* of the great philosophers in popular opinion, so much so that it made a useful foil for other cities or groups (for example, later *rabbis liked to tell stories of earlier rabbis besting Athenian philosophers in debate). Romans did not always trust philosophers, but Acts records other speeches to appeal to those with less philosophical tastes. This speech is Paul's defense of the gospel before Greek intellectuals.

17:16. Some majestic temples on Athens's Acropolis, such as Athena's temple (the Parthenon), were visible from afar; sanctuaries and images stood even in Piraeus and other ports of Athens. The second-century travel narrator Pausanias depicts in detail the various idols that consumed much public space in Athens; one could not avoid them. Shrines filled the agora and Acropolis, city streets were often lined with statues of men and gods, and Athens was decorated with the *Hermae*, pillars mounted with heads of Hermes; many visitors wrote of the evidences of Athenian piety. From an aesthetic standpoint, Athens was unrivaled for its exquisite architecture and statues. Paul's concern is not aesthetics, however, but the impact of idols on human lives.

17:17. Inscriptions attest the Jewish community in Athens, but it was not prominent. Those without an official post in rhetoric could at least speak in the marketplace.

17:18. *Epicureans were influential only in the educated upper classes, and their views about God were similar to deism (he was uninvolved in the universe and irrelevant); if there were gods, they were only those known through sense knowledge, like stars or planets. Life's goal was pleasure, which they defined as the lack of physical pain and emotional disturbance. *Stoics were more popular, opposed pleasure, and criticized Epicureans (though not as much as they had in previous times). Here, as in 23:6, Paul practices the maxim "divide and

conquer”: 17:22-29 is calculated to gain a Stoic hearing, but Paul and the Epicureans have much less common ground.

Although Stoics still professed belief in the gods, many philosophers were considered impious, because they questioned the old traditions, although allowing them for the masses. The charge against Paul, “proclaimer of strange deities” (NASB), would remind Greek readers of the charge of impiety against Socrates centuries earlier (cf. 17:19-20; e.g., Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.1; Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 43.9). Others had been prosecuted for the charge in earlier centuries, and it still violated the Athenian psyche in Paul’s day.

“Babbler” (NIV, NASB) translates a Greek expression applied originally to birds pecking up grain but which came to apply to common chatterers in the marketplace or those who simply gathered and spread scraps of others’ opinions. But in the same verse Luke lets these critics demonstrate their own ignorance: they think Paul is preaching *gods* (plural), because he preaches Jesus and *resurrection—“Resurrection” (Anastasis) was also a woman’s name.

17:19-20. Socrates had also been “led” or “brought” to the Areopagus many centuries before, as was well known. Socrates was the ideal philosopher, and Luke may portray Paul as a new Socrates for his Greek audience; given the outcome of Socrates’s speech (which, like Stephen’s, provoked his hearers to martyr him), this allusion builds suspense, although no one would expect the Areopagus to execute anyone for ideas in this period.

The Areopagus is here the council, not the site earlier used for this council (the literal hill of Ares). In this period the council may have met in the Stoa Basileios, in the Agora where Paul had already been ministering (v. 17). Because Rome had made Athens a “free” city, it had its own ruling bodies: another council, the city assembly, and, highest of all, the Areopagus. It was Athens’s chief court, consisting in this period of probably roughly a hundred elite members. They had authority to evaluate new cults coming to town, and city officials would also evaluate potential lecturers who sought official platforms (though mere discussion in the market would require no accreditation).

17:21-31

Before the Areopagus Council

Paul’s views are quite different from those of the Stoics, but he emphasizes the points of contact, even when they are only verbal (e.g., Paul believed that God’s

presence was everywhere, but not in the Stoic sense, which could divinize creation itself)—until the climax of his sermon. Defenders of Judaism had worked for centuries to make their faith philosophically respectable, and here, as in his letters, Paul draws heavily on his Jewish predecessors' arguments. Ancients valued the rhetorical skill of being able to communicate relevantly to different audiences; Paul communicates in synagogues (13:16-41), to farmers (14:15-17), and to the philosophically educated (17:22-31). Given its brevity, this speech summary is rhetorically sophisticated, with many rhetorical devices (e.g., alliteration) in Greek, and some high-class Greek (e.g., use of the optative).

17:21. Athens was proverbial for its residents' curiosity and their captivity to novelty. By the first century, Athenian desire for entertainment also extended to gladiatorial shows, but the city was especially known for seeking intellectual stimulation.

17:22. It was customary to begin a speech by complimenting the hearers in the opening *exordium*, designed to secure their favor. Some scholars think that this practice was forbidden at the Areopagus, but numerous examples show that even in Athens, speakers usually praised their hearers. "Religious" meant that they were religiously observant, not that he agreed with their religion. Paul's hearers would naturally assume it to be a compliment; Luke's audience will recognize the term's potential ambiguity (cf. KJV: "superstitious"). Many people thought of philosophers as unreligious (even though Stoics tried to accommodate the beliefs of the masses; see comment on 17:18). But Paul is thinking of the religious interest expressed in the idols (17:16).

17:23. A visiting speaker would sometimes start by commenting on a city's splendid sites, building rapport with the audience. Paul preaches here no "foreign deities" (17:18), but a deity that was near them (17:27-28). One Athenian tradition about the altars—associated with one of the very poets Paul may quote in 17:28 (Epimenides)—would have served Paul's point. During a plague long before Paul's time, no sacrifices had successfully propitiated the gods; Athens had finally offered sacrifices to the unidentified deities of the sites where the sacrificial sheep lay down, immediately staying the plague. These altars of nameless deities were still standing, and Paul uses them as the basis for his speech. Paul does avoid, however, the practice of some of his Jewish predecessors and some second-century Christian successors of accusing pagan philosophers of plagiarizing their good ideas from Moses.

17:24. While rooted in Scripture, most of Paul's speech until the end emphasizes points of contact shared with Stoicism (his letters also reveal his

familiarity with some Stoic language). For at least three centuries Jewish apologists (defenders of Judaism) had worked to make their faith respectable to Greek philosophers, so Paul is able to draw on a long heritage here. His rhetoric here is of the highest quality, as would be essential before the Areopagus. Paul preaches differently to philosophers (here) than to farmers (14:15-17) and synagogues (13:16-47); good rhetoricians were supposed to be able to adapt to their audiences. Paul's language here is fully biblical, yet chosen also to be intelligible to his audience.

Some philosophical trends in this era combined deities, moving toward a single supreme god. Non-Palestinian Jews sometimes identified their God with the supreme God of the pagans, hoping to show pagans that their highest religious aspirations were best met in Judaism. *Epicureans rejected temples and sacrifices; Stoics believed that God permeated all things and therefore was not localized in temples (cf. Is 66:1, cited in Acts 7:49), though by this period some Stoics sacrificed in them. The idea had a respectable intellectual pedigree; nevertheless, Paul's words would contrast starkly with all the temples (those of Hephaistos, Athena, Ares, Zeus and the deified Augustus) in plain sight of the council!

17:25. Stoics and Greek-speaking Jews emphasized that God "needs nothing," using the same word Paul uses here; the concept was also biblical (Ps 50:8-13), as was God giving breath to all (Gen 2:7; Is 42:5).

17:26. For Jews, creation from "one" meant from Adam; it contradicts an Athenian tradition of a special origin of Athenians from the soil. Jews and many Greeks agreed that God was creator and divider of the earth's boundaries and of seasons' boundaries; here, however, Paul probably has in mind especially human epochs and (as in Genesis 10) the boundaries of peoples. Jewish people commented especially on the four world empires of Daniel 2:37-44 and 7:3-8, which they believed climaxed in Rome. Stoics also believed that the universe periodically dissolved back into God, but on this belief they had no point of contact with mainstream Judaism.

17:27-28. Jewish people usually spoke of God as a father to his people (in the *Old Testament, e.g., Deut 32:6; Is 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:4). But Greeks (including some Stoic thinkers), *Diaspora Jews and some second-century Christian writers spoke of God as the world's father in the sense of creator, as here. Stoics believed that deity pervaded all things, though Hellenistic Jews applied such language to God's omnipresence, not (as in many early Stoics) to pantheism. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28) has long*

been attributed to the Greek poet Epimenides (from the same poem as Tit 1:12), who in one tradition was the person who advised building altars to the unknown gods (cf. 17:23). The other quotation, “we are his offspring,” is likeliest from the third century B.C. Greek poet Aratus, who was from Paul’s region, Cilicia (a similar line appears in the Stoic Cleanthes). It appears in Jewish anthologies of proof texts useful for showing pagans the truth about God, and Paul may have learned it from such a text. (Greeks cited Homer and other poets as proof texts in a manner similar to how Jewish people cited Scripture; they also exhibited their education by their array of quotations.) Some philosophers criticized poets as too mythological, but others freely used their wording to prove their own case.

17:29. Many philosophers viewed images of deities as at best props to remind people of the deities; most at least retained them for their symbolic value, however, unlike Jews, including Paul (v. 30).

17:30. Speakers sometimes reserved their most controversial arguments for the end of the speech, first building agreement where possible. After building rapport with some of his hearers through much of the speech, here Paul breaks with his audience’s views; although philosophers spoke of conversion to philosophy through a change of thinking, Paul here clearly communicates the Jewish doctrine of *repentance toward God. Many philosophers emphasized knowledge of God; Paul’s claim of their ignorance (here and in v. 23) would not be flattering.

17:31. The Greek view of time was that it would simply continue, not that history had a future climax in the day of judgment. (The closest idea, the Stoic conception of a cyclical repetition of history, is quite unlike the biblical prophets’ future “day” of judgment.) Most offensive is Paul’s doctrine of the *resurrection; see comment on verse 32.

17:32-34

Response of the Intellectuals

Although Paul’s message to the intellectual elite of his day does not produce massive immediate results, his ministry to the Areopagus is effective, apparently reaching even some of the elite.

17:32. Unlike many philosophers, *Epicureans* (17:18) *denied the soul’s immortality: they believed that the soul was material, like the body, and died with it. Greeks traditionally believed in a shadowy afterlife in the underworld*

(perhaps similar to the Old Testament refa'im); some no longer believed in afterlife; some now accepted reincarnation (found in some philosophers); under Plato's influence some Greeks sought to free the immortal soul from worldly existence so it could escape back to the pure heavens from which it was created. Stoics believed that the soul lived on after death (although, like everything else, it was cyclically resolved back into primeval fire), but like other Greeks they could not conceive of a resurrection of the body. Many Greeks believed in ghosts (disembodied souls) on the earth, but physical "resurrection" would conjure images of reconstituting corpses. Those who wanted to hear him again apparently maintained intellectual interest in something "new" (cf. 17:21); Epicureans (17:18) were likely among the mockers.

17:33-34. The Areopagus probably held about a hundred members but included only those of highest status in this university community, so the conversion of Dionysius is significant. Modern readers who judge Paul's work in Athens a failure on the basis of 1 Corinthians 2:1 have missed Luke's point (the emphasis of Acts is on his success, and the original readers of Acts could not simply turn to 1 Corinthians).

Damaris would not have been a member of the ruling Areopagus court and might have simply been listening in the marketplace (17:19-20), but she may have belonged to the elite. Although traditionally the most educated and publicly seen women in Athens were prostitutes and foreigners, some schools of philosophers (including Epicureans, Pythagoreans and some Stoics) had some women *disciples, though they were always a minority. Damaris may have been a philosopher, or (more likely) the student of one.

18:1-11

The Church in Corinth

18:1. Corinth was fifty-three miles (eighty-five kilometers) west of Athens, so the next natural stop for Paul; but it was also strategic. Rome destroyed Corinth in 146 B.C.; some Greeks continued to live on the site, but it was revived as a city again only when Julius Caesar refounded it as a Roman *colony in 44 B.C. Although one of Athens's ancient rivals, after being revived it had long since surpassed Athens. Its citizens were citizens of Rome, and official inscriptions emphasize its Roman character, but many Greeks (and others) continued to live there, with an apparent influx of more non-Romans in this period. Roman

Corinth was the political and economic center of Greece, the capital of the Roman province of Achaia and the transit point for all maritime trade between Rome and the prosperous Roman province of Asia.

18:2. Like Tiberius, an earlier emperor, Claudius officially expelled the Jewish community from Rome (probably around A.D. 49); probably only some of the Jewish community actually left, but those who left undoubtedly included leading figures in the controversy that precipitated the expulsion. (Jews who were Roman citizens probably would not have been forced to leave.) *Suetonius, a Roman historian, is often understood as indicating that the Jewish community was expelled because of disturbances about the Messiah, perhaps caused by opposition to Jewish Christians.* Given Luke's emphasis on legal precedents in favor of Christianity (18:14-16), it is easy to see why Luke would omit that detail. Corinth was a major conduit for trade with Rome and a primary destination of Roman ships; it was heavily Romanized and a natural destination for someone leaving Rome for the East.

18:3. In the ancient economy, people of the same trade usually lived together in the same part of town and formed trade guilds. Their trade guilds normally adopted a patron deity, and they ate sacrificial food at their regular banquets together. This cultic orientation of trade guilds would exclude practicing Jews from the fellowship, making Jews delighted to find other Jews of their own trade.

Women could be artisans, and many worked alongside their husbands in small shops. Arrangements varied, but multistory apartment buildings with ground-floor workshops were common; a number of urban artisans lived onsite, sometimes in a mezzanine level above their ground-floor shops. (We cannot be certain about the arrangements here.) Although many sold from shops in their homes, it is also interesting that Corinth's *agora* (central marketplace) had one of the longest lines of colonnaded shops in the empire.

By this period, the term translated "tentmaker" was also applied to leatherworking in general; scholars debate which is intended here. Leatherworkers were artisans; Paul could have also carried his leatherworking tools from city to city. Artisans were typically proud of their work, despite the long hours they had to invest to succeed, and were higher than peasants in status and income; but they were despised by higher classes, who thought most labor with one's hands degrading (see the conflicts described in the introduction to 1 Corinthians; comment on 1 Cor 4:12). Some sages worked (*Cynics even begged), but the elite usually preferred to pay sages a salary or be their patrons.

(Many Jewish teachers viewed labor more positively; boys learned trades as apprentices, often to their own fathers.) Artisans' long hours in their shops afforded them much time to talk while doing their work, but Paul apparently is able to discontinue the labor (1 Cor 4:12) when his companions bring a gift from the Macedonian *church (v. 5; 2 Cor 11:8-9; 12:13; Phil 4:15).

18:4. Many foreign religions had settled in Corinth, including Egyptian religions (mushrooming in popularity by the second century). An inscription from a Corinthian *synagogue has also been recovered near the *agora* (central marketplace); its location suggests that some members of this synagogue had wealth and social status (see vv. 7-8). The inscription is from a later century, however, and the Jewish situation in Corinth after Claudius's decree (18:2) may have felt less comfortable (note also the probable attendant influx of more Roman Jews). In any case, most Jewish Corinthians in this period were probably immigrants or children of immigrants, holding the somewhat stigmatized status of resident aliens.

18:5. A gift from the Macedonian Christians apparently allowed Paul to spend less time on manual labor (2 Cor 11:8-9; 12:13; Phil 4:15).

18:6. One could shake a garment to warn violators of God's law that God would judge them (Neh 5:13). In Ezekiel, one who fails to warn people to *repentance has blood on one's head, that is, is morally responsible for the people's judgment (Ezek 3:18-21; esp. 33:4).

18:7. The church met in houses for the first three centuries (12:12; Rom 16:5). Synagogues also sometimes gathered in homes until the Jewish community could afford a special building, and between persecution and the need for funds to free slaves, feed the poor and support missionaries, the churches had no money left for buildings anyway. Some scholars note that patrons' homes in Corinth normally reclined nine to twelve in the *triclinium* (the best room) and as many as forty others in the adjoining *atrium* (the largest furnished room). Larger homes are possible, since homes varied in size; most homes were much smaller. (Poorer people could live in upper-story tenement apartments that offered little more than room to sleep.)

For God-fearers, see comment on Acts 10:2. The status and thoroughly Latin name of "Titius Justus" identify him as a Roman citizen and part of the Roman culture (Corinth was both Greek and Roman in this period); he may have been from one of the Roman families established there in the time of Julius Caesar. Some have identified him with Gaius (Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14); Roman citizens had three names (Gaius being a *praenomen*).

18:8. “Crispus” is a typical Roman name. It was not uncommon for Jewish people to have Latin names (“Crispus” and “Crispina” appear several times in Jewish inscriptions), but the proportion of Latin names among Paul’s associates is so much higher than generally in inscriptions (even though inscriptions were normally made by the well-to-do) that it is likely that a number of Paul’s Jewish and Greek associates were also Roman citizens. To be “synagogue ruler” means that Crispus is a person of status and wealth, responsible for the synagogue services. Given the many public baths and fountain houses in Corinth, finding nearby water for *baptism would not be problematic.

18:9-10. In “assurance oracles,” God often told people not to fear because he was with them (e.g., Gen 15:1; 26:24; 28:15; Jer 1:8; 15:20). In Greek literature gods or goddesses often appeared to people at night, frequently while they slept; but such revelations from God or his angels are no less common in the *Old Testament (e.g., Gen 26:24; 28:12-15; 31:24).

18:11. This duration probably meant that the biennial Isthmian Games occurred when Paul was in Corinth, perhaps providing both some additional “tentmaking” or leather business, and additional opportunities to spread his message.

18:12-17

Gallio’s Refusal

18:12. A proconsul governed Achaia (most of Greece) from 27 B.C. to A.D. 15 and from A.D. 44 on. Gallio apparently began his two-year term of office July 1 of A.D. 51 (or possibly 52); it was cut short by sickness, so we may reasonably date this appearance in A.D. 51–52, somewhat more likely before the end of 51. His brother, the *Stoic philosopher *Seneca, Nero’s tutor, speaks well of him. Luke could not have had access to names of such officials at precise dates unless he learned them from Paul; there were no reference works listing them.

As proconsul, Gallio would decide important cases at his judgment seat in the morning. This “judgment seat” (KJV, NASB) is probably the then-recently constructed ceremonial rostrum that archaeologists have found on the south end of the Corinthian forum, in full view of the public, although some scholars have suggested a tribunal (cf. NRSV) in an administrative building at the forum’s eastern edge.

18:13. If Paul’s views put him outside Judaism, his followers would not have

the protection Roman tradition gave to Judaism by virtue of its antiquity. Corinth's dedication to the imperial cult might potentially render suspect nonparticipants who lacked the excuse accorded to the Jewish community as members of an ancient religion. Others, however, doubt that the governor was enforcing imperial worship in Corinth, where commitment to Rome was not much in question.

18:14. A Roman magistrate's first decision was whether to accept a charge and so decide a case. Gallio's wording in 18:14-15 fits standard Roman legal usage.

18:15. Although some Corinthian Jews were likely Roman (and Corinthian) citizens, most would be considered resident aliens. Gallio dismisses the case. Roman courts decided violations of Roman law; but various individual edicts throughout the empire had given Jewish courts jurisdiction over internal Jewish affairs, and Gallio is not about to meddle in them. Gallio thus accepts Paul's religion as a variant form of Judaism, rather than a new and illegal religion (*religio illicita*). Although precedent was not binding in Roman law, it was important and could be followed by other provincial governors; if involved in legal cases, Luke's Christian readers can cite this case on their own behalf.

18:16. That Gallio "drove them away" (NASB), perhaps with the force of his lictors' (attendants') rods, betrays more than a tinge of Roman impatience for Jewish religious disputes. Many upper-class Romans viewed Jews as uncultured troublemakers, classing them alongside other religions from Syria and Egypt (cf. 16:20-21). The emperor's own action in 18:2 would give free rein to other *Gentiles' disrespect of Jewish people.

18:17. Law courts (especially if held at the forum, or *agora*) were typically loud and crowded, and tempers flared. Luke may mean that the Jewish community disciplined a leader who was a Christian sympathizer (if this is the same Sosthenes as in 1 Cor 1:1—it was a somewhat common name), or that they beat their leader for getting them into political trouble. Or Luke may mean that, given Gallio's expression of his anti-Jewish sentiments, some local Gentiles felt free to vent their own. Other Roman officials had encouraged or done worse. Crowds often became unruly during public hearings, though they would normally lead to violence in front of the governor himself only if he were thought sympathetic to the abusers' cause. If the synagogue officials had publicly charged Paul to dissociate themselves from a potential troublemaker (cf. 19:33-34), the plot backfired.

18:18-23

Paul Returns Home

18:18. On the naming of Priscilla before her husband here, see comment on 18:26. Cenchrea was Corinth's port on the Aegean side of the isthmus; it also harbored temples of Isis, Artemis, Aphrodite, Asclepius and Poseidon. Travel was easier, faster and cheaper by ship than by land. But ships were generally meant as cargo transports, so seafarers had to bring their own food and bedding.

Some pagan priests (e.g., of Isis) shaved their heads; hence a pagan observer who did not know Paul could have taken him for such a priest (in view of the Isis temple in Cenchrea). But Jewish people shaved their heads after completing a Nazirite vow, and Paul's faith in Jesus had not diminished his own Jewishness in the least (21:23-24). Technically one shaved at the completion of the vow when offering sacrifice (Num 6:18), thus in Jerusalem. Paul may have shaved before a vow fulfilled later in Jerusalem in Acts 18:22 (if he stopped in Jerusalem) or two years later in 21:17-26. Or Paul may have taken a less Jerusalem-centered approach of *Diaspora (non-Palestinian) Jews who had not the time or money to travel to Jerusalem very frequently. Even in Judea, one could vow to abstain from various matters (here, cutting one's hair) without it being a technical Nazirite vow (see comment on Mt 26:29).

18:19. Ephesus was the leading city in the Roman province of Asia and the governor's seat. Many centuries old by this period, it may have held at least a hundred thousand people in Paul's day (many estimate even twice that number). It was often ranked the fourth city in the empire. It hosted many foreigners, and a recent economic elite not dependent on ancestral nobility. The Jewish community had long held rights there as Ephesians (*Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.39).

18:20-21. "If God wills" was a standard statement of pious Greeks and some Jews.

18:22. Summer winds were generally northerly but often east of north, which made Caesarea easier to reach by ship than Antioch's port city of Seleucia. But because Antioch was such a major destination (probably the empire's third largest city), sailing to Caesarea, only to walk more than two hundred miles north to Antioch, seems out of the way. Many commentators thus suspect that Paul stopped in Jerusalem as well (thus "went up" to greet the church—Jerusalem being in the hills), though this is not explicit (in the Greek; it is reasonably added in some translations). (The Roman province of "Syria" in

18:18 can include Judea; see Lk 2:2-3.)

18:23. The general time of year seems fairly clear: only by late spring or early summer was the land route open from Antioch through the Cilician Gates (a pass in the Taurus mountains) on into Galatia and Phrygia; it would become impassable again in winter.

18:24-28

Apollos's Enlightenment

18:24. Many Alexandrian Jews had names compounded with “Apollo,” a prominent Greek god (Apollos might be a contraction for Apollonius). As in other ancient uses of the term, “eloquent” (NASB) or “learned” (NIV) most likely means “formally skilled in *rhetoric,” the more practical form of advanced learning to which well-to-do pupils could attain (the other was philosophy).

Alexandria, the empire's largest city after Rome, may have had the largest Jewish community in the empire outside Syria-Palestine, with numerous synagogues. For the most part, however, only Greeks (perhaps a third of the residents) were citizens of Alexandria. The Jewish aristocracy (including *Philo) had worked hard to be culturally acceptable to the Greek privileged class, and they resented their own inferior status. (Most of the ethnocentric Greeks in Alexandria despised Jews and Egyptians, who made up the other possibly two-thirds of their city; thus they spoke of “Alexandria near Egypt.”) Later, the clash of cultures and oppression of Jews ultimately led to a Jewish revolt—and the massacre of the Jewish community.

18:25. Scholars disagree whether “fervent in spirit” (NASB) refers to Apollos's own spirit or to him being fervent in God's *Spirit. Although the matter is debated, early Christian usage and context might favor the latter.

18:26. Normally husbands were named first, unless the wife was of higher status, but Priscilla (the formal form of which is “Prisca,” as in Paul's letters) is named first twice as often in the *New Testament as Aquila. Her role here is fairly unusual by ancient standards (enough that it drew notice from some ancient commentators and apparent discomfort in the later Western text). Although most men in Mediterranean antiquity resented women speaking in public and generally did not respect women teaching, Priscilla teaches privately, and many men did recognize exceptions for exceptional women.

18:27-28. Letters of recommendation were standard in Greco-Roman society

(see comment on 9:2). Apollos's learning might well appeal to the educated elite of the Corinthian church (see the introduction to 1 Corinthians). *Rhetoric (see comment on 18:24) was highly prized in urban Greco-Roman society, notably in Corinth.

19:1-7

The Spirit Poured Out in Ephesus

19:1. Ephesus afforded an opportunity to influence all of Asia (not meaning the continent, but the Roman province "Asia" in what is now western Turkey). It was the most populous city of the most prosperous and populated province in the empire. Although Pergamum remained the official capital of Asia, Ephesus became the chief city with the real seat of provincial administration. Some argue that Paul's approach by the "upper country" (NASB) means that he took a higher road further north, one that would lead to the Cestrus valley, rather than the customary route by the Lycus and Meander valleys. Highland travel could avoid the intense heat of the lowlands if the travel were in summer.

"*Disciples" means adherents or students, here perhaps of John (19:3; but cf. 18:25). The Roman world was cosmopolitan, and other Palestinian Jews also settled in Ephesus, which had a large, ancient and influential Jewish community.

19:2. They had to have heard something about the Holy Spirit (Ps 51:11; Is 63:10), though they had not heard that the Spirit had *come* (cf. Jn 7:39). In most of ancient Judaism and in Luke-Acts, the *Holy Spirit is the Spirit who inspired the prophets. Paul can somehow tell these disciples lack this measure of inspiration, despite much sound knowledge (18:25).

19:3-5. For John's *baptism, see comment on Mark 1:5; for baptism in Jesus' name, see comment on Acts 2:38. Water sources were widely available in and near Ephesus. The Selinus River passed the Artemisium; probably more accessible were Ephesus' many public baths and fountains (other cities also had these).

19:6-7. The tongues and *prophecy, as inspired speech, evidence their reception of the Spirit of prophecy; see comment on 19:2.

19:8-12

Word Spreads in Ephesus

19:8-9. Established philosophers and other teachers often lectured in rented halls; this could have been a guild hall, but because it is named for a person it seems likelier a “lecture hall” (NIV), where Tyrannus is the landlord or (somewhat more probably) the customary lecturer. “Tyrannus” (a common name in Ephesus) might be a nickname, perhaps for a severe teacher. Public life in Ephesus, including philosophical lectures, ended by noon; most people in antiquity rested for one or two hours at midday, and advanced education lectures might finish by 11 a.m. Thus if Tyrannus lectured in the mornings Paul used it in the afternoons (perhaps doing manual labor in the mornings, cf. 20:34). In any case, residents of Ephesus would view Paul as a philosopher or sophist (professional public speaker). Many early Greco-Roman observers thought that Christians were a religious association or club (like other such associations in antiquity), or a philosophical school that took the form of a such an association. To outsiders, groups that taught ethics and lacked the sacrifices and idols characteristic of most religious groups could appear like philosophic schools.

19:10. Ancient audiences would understand the *hyperbole of “all Asia” (cf. 19:17, 20); such hyperbole fits frequent ancient usage. Nevertheless, in antiquity travelers did spread word quickly around a region; Luke reiterates the theme in 19:17 and 19:20. Ephesus genuinely was a cosmopolitan center from which word would spread quickly, especially if Paul were training disciples (as philosophers and *rabbis typically did) and sending them out to spread the message.

19:11-12. Paul’s “handkerchiefs and aprons” (NIV) could be rags tied around his head to catch sweat and his work aprons tied around his waist (cf. 20:34; or, less commonly suggested, pieces of his teaching uniform); some suggest that they were taken without his knowledge. Although practitioners of *magic might try to use materials associated with a powerful person, Luke repudiates magic in the following context (19:13-19). Sometimes power was communicated by contact even in the *Old Testament (e.g., 2 Kings 13:21); if contact in the Old Testament communicated uncleanness, it could also be used to communicate God’s power (cf. Num 27:23; Deut 34:9; 2 Kings 4:29). Cf. Acts 5:15.

19:13-20

The Inadequacy of Magic

Although some Ephesians who knew no better may have regarded Paul as a

magician, God seems to have healed them anyway to draw their attention to his message (19:11-12); but God did not bless unauthorized use of Jesus' name. Ephesus was widely reputed for its trade in *magic and the need for exorcisms and protection against evil spirits.

19:13. Magic was widespread, but Ephesus had a reputation as one of its centers. Magical exorcists often invoked the names of higher spirits to cast out lower ones. According to magical theory, exorcists could coerce a deity or spirit to do their will by invoking its name. Exorcists sometimes “adjured” spirits (cf. comment on Mk 5:7). Ancient magical texts show that many exorcists were Jewish or drew on some knowledge of Judaism, and these texts include every possible permutation of vowels as guesses for pronouncing the unpronounced name of God (cf. comment on 2:20-21). Others invoked Solomon’s name in expelling *demons* (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.47). Some later ancient magical texts invoked the name of Jesus alongside other formulas, recognizing, as do the exorcists in this *narrative, its efficacy when employed by Christians to expel demons.

19:14. “Sceva” is a Latin name; although Judeans used “*high priest” loosely for the highest members of the priestly aristocracy, it is possible that Sceva simply appropriated the title for himself, since few in the *Diaspora could have easily checked. Inscriptions and texts testify to other irregularities in Jewish priestly claims outside Jewish Palestine. Because Jewish chief priests would be thought to have access to the sacred name (v. 13) and hidden names, especially of the supreme god, were thought to wield great power in magical circles, Sceva is probably highly reputed in those circles. “Sons” could mean they were part of Sceva’s guild, although it is probably meant literally.

19:15. Spirits behind oracles could grant recognition to inquirers (cf. 16:17); these spirits instead insult the exorcists. Ancient literature reports that demons were typically unimpressed with orders from those who had no power over them, although they feared God and could be controlled by the manipulation of spirits more powerful than themselves (who may have appreciated the influence this gave them with the magicians).

19:16-17. Paul has more power than the magicians (cf. Gen 41:8, 39; Ex 7:11). Both in antiquity and today, some of those thought to be spirit-possessed can act violently, sometimes demonstrating feats of pain immunity or unnatural strength.

19:18. When people recognize that Paul’s Jesus cannot be manipulated like lower spirits, they understand that he is a servant of God and not a mere

magician. Some translate “confessing practices” (NASB, NRSV) as “divulging spells,” a possible meaning; divulging secret spells was believed to deprive them of their power.

19:19-20. Magical *papyri contained spells; Luke’s term “books” or “scrolls” (NIV) may refer to such papyri. Briefer charms were rolled up in small cylinders or locketts used as amulets around the neck. These magical incantations were so common in Ephesus that some concise magical terms used in charms and amulets were apparently called *Ephesia grammata*, or Ephesian writings. Books were commonly burned in antiquity to repudiate their contents (in the *Old Testament, cf. analogously the destruction of idols in Deut 7:5, 25; 1 Chron 14:12). The total price of what is burned comes out to about fifty thousand days’ wages for an average worker.

19:21-22

Changing Course

Ancient writers sometimes had statements outlining the rest of the book (this one resembles Lk 9:51), though clearly Paul also did have these plans (Rom 15:24-26). Luke shows that Paul had already planned to leave Ephesus before he knew that trouble was coming (19:23-41), and also sets the pace for the rest of the book, outlined as one more trip through Greece, then to Rome via Jerusalem. Joshua served Moses, Elisha served Elijah, and Gehazi served Elisha; sages in a later period (esp. rabbis) also sometimes expected disciples to serve them. If this is the same person, Erastus may have been the *aedile*, or commissioner of public works, in Corinth for a time (see comment on Rom 16:23); if so, this text shows that status in the *kingdom and in the world are not determined on the same terms.

19:23-41

Artemis and Economics

When Jewish people could show that not they but their enemies started riots, they could appeal for the government’s reaffirmation of their rights; Luke is emphatic that not Paul but his enemies started the riot. As often, religious piety becomes a thin cloak for personal economic interests. The temple of Artemis served as a bank as well as a temple, and people from all over the world

deposited funds there. Amassing significant wealth, the temple apparently controlled more than seventy thousand acres of agricultural land, and some of the temple's wealth benefitted the city itself. About A.D. 44 (roughly a decade before Paul's arrival), inscriptions there show that the proconsul had to get involved in the temple treasury due to some serious financial irregularities: temple monies were being funneled to private individuals. In Ephesus, politics and religion were as heavily intertwined as religion and economics, and local civic pride was inseparable from the worship of the Ephesian Artemis.

19:23. The month of Artemis's reputed birth was called Artemisium and hosted a major festival in her honor, at which Asiarchs (see comment on 19:30-31) would be present (v. 31). Some scholars have suggested that this narrative makes the most sense if it happened at that time; although this theory is possible, loyalty to Artemis ran strong all year long, and processions from Ephesus went out to the temple once or twice a month. The Asiarchs who knew Paul best were those who resided in Ephesus anyway.

19:24-25. Ephesus was growing rapidly, the most prominent city in the empire's wealthiest province. "Demetrius" was a common name in Ephesus and elsewhere. Metalworkers were usually of low status, though in Ephesus some craftsmen joined the rising class of new and even respected wealth. Members of the same trade united to form professional guilds, or *collegia*, which set standards for their own trade and united to defend their economic interests. Gathering them would not be difficult, since members of similar trades normally lived in the same section of a city; silversmiths' shops in Ephesus were probably close to the theater, apparently on what was later called Arkadiane Street, the full half-kilometer length of which ran from the harbor to the theater (on which see 19:29). Miniature shrines were made as souvenirs and amulets; most of the ones we know about were terra cotta, so Demetrius was probably one of the most prestigious shrine-makers. Demetrius's guild may be that of silversmiths or metalworkers more generally, many of whom did make statuettes of Artemis. Small gold and silver images of Artemis weighing three to seven pounds were dedicated in her temple. Sculptures and other artwork featuring Artemis were common in Ephesus.

19:26. "Not gods at all" was the refrain of Isaiah (e.g., 37:19; 44:9-20; 46:1-11), other prophets (Jer 2:11) and Judaism. Although Demetrius exaggerates (the way ancient audiences expected demagogues to do), mass conversions could have a local impact. By the early second century the Roman governor of a nearby province complained that the temples of the gods were being forsaken

due to conversions to Christianity. After the arrest of many Christians, the governor reported, more people did buy animals for sacrifices again (Pliny, *Epistles* 10.96).

19:27. In the view of many intellectuals, speakers who manipulated religious emotion without offering evidence were demagogues; nevertheless, orators often sought to stir indignation against their enemies. Ephesus did not take well to anyone insulting their patron goddess; earlier, forty-five residents of Sardis accused of assaulting a group of followers of the Ephesian Artemis received the death penalty. Artemis, Ephesus' patron deity, appears on coins and many statues from Ephesus. "The world worships" reflects the fact that the Ephesian Artemis, distinct from other forms of Artemis, had cult centers dedicated to her in at least thirty-three places in the Mediterranean world. Her fame is widely attested in antiquity: she commanded followers in visions to spread her cult; her temple, on a platform that measured 130 by 70 meters, was roughly four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens and was listed as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world; Jewish texts also mention her temple. It was a mile and a half northeast of Ephesus proper. Ironically, Artemis's worshipers depicted her as compassionate, and her temple was to be a place of refuge even for foreigners.

19:28. Riots and unrest were common in Asia Minor's cities in this period. Crying out "Great is [such and such a deity]" seems to have been a standard way of expressing devotion. People could be worked into a frenzy, chanting together. Ephesians often employed the title, "great goddess Artemis," and used the acclamation reported here and others like it.

19:29. News and trouble spread quickly in ancient cities, which were very crowded (at least in Rome, perhaps two hundred people per acre, a population density found today in the West only in slums). Evidence currently suggests that silversmiths worked in a business district on the road between the harbor and the theater; the street would be crowded during the day, and, more clearly, the large market near the theater would be full of people. Thus one could easily stir a large portion of the populace before entering the theater. The citizen assembly held its normal meetings in this open-air theater, which in this period accommodated some twenty thousand people, was almost five hundred feet in diameter and contained many statues of deities. This was not a regularly scheduled assembly of the citizens, but some, assuming that officials had summoned the crowd, may have believed it was a special assembly.

19:30-31. Asiarchs were the most prominent men of the province; former Asiarchs retained the title, and some filled the office more than once. Many lived

in Ephesus; of more than two hundred Asiarchs known from over the course of antiquity, over half came from or were related to Ephesus alone. Because of their elite status, some of them had probably also presided in one-year terms over the cult of the emperor and the goddess Roma. Different cities in the Greek East competed for the honor of having the largest imperial cult, so its priests were important to local civic pride. They had authority over the theater, but here they cannot quell this riot; they can only try to stop their Jewish Christian friend from entering. In accordance with Roman customs, they may have viewed their “friendship” with Paul in terms of providing him support as patrons; the wealthy often enhanced their public reputation by acting as patrons of arts or respected teachers. Benefactors acted in return for honor. The public controversy, however, risks their embarrassment, inhibiting Paul’s entrance; they may count it more prudent to work through the town clerk (19:35), a member of their class.

19:32. Greek comedy frequently parodied people’s stupidity; Luke’s hearers could laugh at the crowd not knowing the purpose of their rioting (cf. 21:34), even though this ignorance characterizes mob psychology well. Luke may employ the Greek term for “citizen assembly” here ironically: it is in fact a mob, not a legal gathering (v. 39). In addition to its regularly scheduled gatherings, the citizen assembly could have emergency meetings, which some participants in the present gathering may assume has happened.

19:33-34. Ancient sources confirm that securing a hearing in a noisy assembly was difficult. Various cities had taken action against their resident Jewish populations at times, and Jewish people in Roman Asia sometimes had to offer defenses of their rights. They were normally careful not to offend the local residents, and Alexander no doubt intends to explain that the Jewish community did not instigate the current confusion; they want to dissociate themselves from this more controversial monotheist (cf. 19:9, 26). But Greek anti-Judaism was common and *Gentiles often resented Jewish monotheism and dietary “separatism.” The knowledge that the Jewish community accepted only one God leads to the assumption that the Jewish community instead wishes to explain their *responsibility* for the riot. (This event may help explain the Asian Jewish community’s dislike for Paul in 21:27.) Controversial public trials were also often punctuated with shouts.

19:35-36. The clerk here makes a deliberative speech, intended to change the mob’s course of action (v. 36). The “city clerk” (NIV) was the top civic official in Ephesus, who made known the citizen assembly’s rulings and represented the city to the Roman provincial officials also headquartered in Ephesus. Civic pride

was common in the cities of Asia Minor, and praising a city was common in the opening of a civic speech. Slightly later sources from Ephesus show that it prided itself on being “guardian” of the imperial cult; no less did the city pride itself on being wardens of their famous local cult.

Other statues worshiped in ancient Asia Minor also purportedly fell from heaven. No records survive of this claim for Ephesus’s Artemis image; the clerk might even be simply currying favor with the religiously motivated crowd. Luke’s own audience might laugh at what “everyone” here supposedly “knows”; they understand that rather than falling from heaven, the statue was “made by hands” (19:26). The bulbous appendages on the statue have been variously identified as breasts, castrated appendages, fruits, or bee or ostrich eggs; these interpretations suggest an Asian fertility goddess related to the local mother goddess and quite different from the Greek virgin Artemis. (Other scholars suggest that the objects represent planets, which fits the picture of Artemis as deliverer from Fate and its astrological agents.) Whatever the appendages are, literary sources show that in this period the Ephesian Artemis remained the virgin huntress of traditional Greek religion.

19:37. “Temple robbery” was considered one of the most impious of crimes, a capital offense, and the term eventually came to stand for sacrilege in a broader sense. Some Jewish apologists claimed that Jewish people did not mock other deities (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.207; *Against Apion* 2.237; *Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.205), but many Jewish people did mock them (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 13:10–14:7). In Greek, the masculine noun for deity with a feminine definite article here seems strange, but inscriptions reveal that Ephesians sometimes used precisely this form for their patron goddess Artemis.

19:38. The proconsul met with the gatherings of citizens on various days in nine different cities of the province, hence was available in Ephesus only on particular days; from the wording some suspect that he was in Ephesus at the time. Each province had only one proconsul, but some think that Luke may use the plural because the proconsul of Ephesus had recently died (A.D. 54), after which several officials carried out his administrative functions till the new proconsul arrived. Alternatively, it could simply be a generalizing plural. Publicly naming Demetrius would shame him before the assembly; Demetrius might try to recoup honor by bringing charges (19:38) and certainly by depicting himself as defender of the Artemis cult. The city clerk’s source of information may be from Paul’s Asiarch benefactors (19:31), who would belong to the clerk’s social circle.

19:39. A later source suggests that this assembly met three times a month. Rome allowed Ephesus to hold public meetings legally, having granted it the title of a “free” city. The lawful gathering of the citizen assembly, however, differed significantly from a mob (as here): the former met with Rome’s favor, but the latter could lead to Roman disciplinary measures against the city (in principle even revocation of their status as a free city).

19:40-41. Other examples show that leaders of cities warned their people that Rome would hear of their riots; other riots are recorded as having happened in Ephesus, although Rome never did withdraw their privileges. But the special privileges Ephesus enjoyed as a “free city” (including its own senate) depended completely on Rome’s favor, and other cities had had such privileges revoked. A famous late-first-century *rhetorician named Dio Chrysostom warned the citizens of another Asian city that those who abused the right of free speech had that right taken away.

20:1-6

To and from Greece

The *narratives of Acts 20 and 27 presuppose correct data on the length of travel between the places listed and take into account seasonal wind patterns and so forth. In short, they read like the report of an eyewitness.

20:1-2. Hinted in Acts only at 24:17 but clear in his letters, Paul’s purpose is to collect the offering of the Macedonian (Philippi, Thessalonica) and Achaian (Corinth) *churches to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem, to demonstrate the unity of Jewish and Gentile Christians* (see comment on Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 16:1, 5; 2 Cor 8–9). He may have gone through Illyricum from Macedonia’s Via Egnatia (Rom 15:19; cf. comment on Acts 16:9); if so, many months pass before he reaches Achaia.

20:3. The three months may be three winter months, during which travel was difficult. Paul wrote Romans from this area (Rom 15:26-28). Although some sailors and shipowners were Jewish, most were Gentiles. On a ship to Syria, however, many travelers may have been Jewish—especially if the ship planned to reach Syria by Passover (Judea was part of the Roman province of Syria); cf. Acts 20:6. Travel to Philippi may have consumed two weeks if they traveled on foot; Paul will miss Passover but still has time to reach Jerusalem for the next major pilgrimage festival, Pentecost (20:16).

20:4. *Disciples often traveled with teachers, More relevantly here, just as prominent representatives from each of the Jewish communities would bring the annual temple tax to Jerusalem, so Paul has traveling companions from different Christian communities serving the poor in Jerusalem (20:1-2; cf. earlier, 2 Cor 8:18-24). This offering would show the Jerusalem church that the Gentile Christians still recognize the Jewishness of their faith (see Rom 15:26-27). Travelers, including pilgrims headed for Jerusalem, often voyaged in groups, especially those carrying much money (including those carrying the temple tax).

20:5-6. The “we” picks up where it left off; Paul had left Luke in Philippi (16:10-17). They spend the week in Philippi for the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. When one adds the remaining days (with parts of days reckoned as wholes, as generally in antiquity) presumed in the narrative, from their arrival in Philippi to their arrival in Jerusalem requires over thirty days. Thus they would arrive in Jerusalem before Pentecost (fifty days after Passover) in time for this one of the three major pilgrimage festivals (20:16). “Five days” (i.e., parts of five—perhaps four) was a slow voyage to Troas (16:11) but may include the half-day land journey from Philippi to Neapolis. Paul’s letters show that at some point he had founded a church at Troas.

20:7-12

Resuscitation at Troas

20:7. Most religious associations in the Greco-Roman world met together once a month. Although some early Christians may have met daily (2:46), at some point they began meeting especially on the first day of the week (Sunday), probably because of the *resurrection (Lk 24:1) and to avoid conflicting with *synagogue gatherings on the sabbath (Saturday).

This may be a special meeting, because Paul is leaving the next day. Christians may have often met early, before sunrise, but would have to work Sunday mornings like everyone else in the empire; so this meeting may have begun late Sunday afternoon or Saturday at sunset. It depends on whether one reckons days from midnight to midnight, like the Romans and modern Westerners, or from sundown to sundown, like ancient Jews. In the former case, the first day means Sunday; in the latter, it started on what we consider Saturday evening. Most likely, this meeting began Sunday evening and ended Monday morning. Whatever view one takes, because most people went to bed not long

after sunset, midnight was well into one's sleeping time. (Lacking electric lighting, people usually rose at sunrise, hence most people did not stay up late.) Long speeches were common in antiquity—though not usually at night! Paul wants to impart as much insight as possible before his departure the next day.

20:8. Lamps would be needed in night meetings. Scholars sometimes speculate that the odor or heat of the oil lamps may have helped produce drowsiness; more likely, the lamps showed that the meeting had taken the best precautions available against sleep. Most homes did not have so many lamps, so people have come ready and eager for Paul's long night of teaching.

20:9. Open windows were generally blocked off in the winter, but during summer one could sit in a large one to cool off. (Only a very few windows in this period had glass; they were especially rare in the eastern Mediterranean.) Either the heat from the lamps (midnight in April at Troas was not normally hot) or likelier the crowdedness of the room had forced Eutychus to take a window seat. Many looked down on pupils falling asleep (though lectures were normally in mornings, not at midnight!). Homes in much of the empire were a single story, but they were often in apartment buildings with two or more stories in more crowded urban areas. While most apartment dwellings were small, they might have met (with residents' approval) in the long hall (with windows) that connected the apartments. This is a fall from what the British would call the second floor (which most languages call the "third floor"), which is not necessarily fatal; but someone who was sound asleep could not break one's fall.

20:10. For Paul's action, cf. 1 Kings 17:21-22 and 2 Kings 4:34-35.

20:11-12. When people had not seen each other for a long time, it was common to stay up late filling each other in on one another's lives.

20:13-17

Continuing the Journey

More than many modern readers, ancient readers were often interested in travel details; educated people knew many of these locations. As elsewhere, Luke's travel details (e.g., the sequence of locations and the length of time spent traveling between them in view of seasonal wind patterns) fit the geography precisely, as one could expect for an eyewitness account.

20:13. Assos, the best harbor between Troas and Adramyttium, was about twenty miles directly overland from Alexandria Troas, the main port; this was

about a day's journey on foot. The actual road, however, was not direct; following the coast, it was closer to thirty-eight miles. We can only speculate why Paul chose the land route, though walking would be cheaper than buying passage on a boat.

20:14. Mitylene was the largest city on the island of Lesbos, with two functioning harbors. Sailing in from the north, they would have come to the deeper northern harbor, near a smaller island that contained part of Mitylene's population.

20:15. They take the customary sea route, across from the large island of Chios (probably near Cape Argennum. From Chios it was quicker to sail by the island of Samos and straight to Miletus, rather than cutting in toward the Asian coast to Ephesus. They put in at the Lion Harbor at Miletus, which sported a temple of Apollo; the city also had a sizable Jewish community (as did Samos, where the worship of Aphrodite and Isis was prominent).

20:16-17. Waiting for messengers to bring elders from Ephesus would require a minimum of four days. Various reasons for Paul avoiding Ephesus are possible, including any or all of the following. Their ship had avoided the busy harbor of Ephesus, which was out of the way by the route across Chios and Samos; this ship may have been the only one available going the right direction and with room for all, but had not been going to their exact destination; or the captain could have changed plans. Perhaps more likely, hospitality obligations would risk detaining him in Ephesus. Although Luke does not mention it, some of Paul's elite supporters or former supporters may have felt that it was better for both Paul and his supporters if he remained away from the city (19:23–20:1; esp. 19:38; cf. 21:27 and comment on 19:31).

The land route for messengers to reach Ephesus was over thirty miles, so they would have to travel quickly to arrive by Paul's third day; for those who could leave their work, to do so would be a big sacrifice. But Paul's mission to Jerusalem was urgent; he needed to present the offering at a festival, when Jerusalem would be full and this symbol of the church's ethnic unity would make the loudest statement. It may have also appeared safer for Paul and his Gentile guests. After Pentecost, it would be three months before the next major pilgrimage festival.

20:18-35

Paul's Farewell Speech

Farewell speeches developed a standard form in antiquity. (Jewish “testaments,” in which a dying or departing figure left important, wise instructions for his children or followers, were one specific kind of farewell speech; against some scholars, they are less relevant here, because Paul bids farewell rather than dies at the end of the speech.) The language of the speech is more like Paul’s than Luke’s. Although historians tended to rewrite speeches in their own words, regular *rhetorical training included practice in imitating others’ styles (*prosopopoeia*). Because Luke presumably had little access to most of Paul’s letters (they were not collected from various churches till long after Paul’s death), he must have learned Paul’s style from direct contact with him. In this case the speech includes even Pauline phraseology and possibly undeveloped hints of the Scripture texts he used, supporting an eyewitness account (he alludes in 20:26 to Ezek 33, and probably in Acts 20:28-29 to Ezek 34:1-8). Ancient speakers were expected to avoid self-praise except in special circumstances such as offering a positive example. The endearing language of the speech fits other intimate speeches (like philosophic discourse to disciples), and the emotional “pathos” was appropriate to farewell speeches.

20:18-19. Appeals to what an audience already knew were common. Many philosophers customarily appealed to their hearers in endearing terms, such as Paul uses here, and reminded them that any reproofs were given as signs of true friendship, as opposed to the flattery of false friends. That this language was common means only that it was culturally relevant to the hearers’ needs, not that it was merely an empty *rhetorical form; Paul and most others who used such language also meant it sincerely. Likewise orators often employed moving emotional language, but many who spoke with emotion also felt it. In ancient rhetoric, noting one’s misfortunes or struggles against adversity could help dispose audiences well toward oneself.

20:20-21. Moralists often emphasized that they were frank and withheld nothing needed for their hearers’ benefit. Ancients often conceptualized the world in private (domestic) and public spheres; the best sages were thought able to address both. Romans considered what was only private to be potentially subversive, but Paul spoke publicly as well.

20:22. True intellectual heroes in Greco-Roman tradition were those who believed their teaching so much that they were willing to die for it. Paul stands in the *Old Testament prophetic tradition of speaking God’s message no matter what the cost, but he also presents his message in a manner that resonates with the best in his hearers’ culture.

20:23. “The *Holy Spirit’s testimony” surely includes prophecies (21:4); early Judaism viewed the Spirit especially as the agent that had inspired the prophets.

20:24. Farewell speeches often explained the need that compelled one’s departure. “Finish the course” (e.g., NASB) or “finish the race” (NIV) is an athletic image; philosophers and moralists often used such images to describe their own mission (cf. GNT).

20:25-27. The image of secondhand guilt for someone’s blood is common in the Old Testament (e.g., Deut 21:1-9), but here Paul refers especially to the watchman who does not warn the wicked to turn from his or her way (Ezek 3:18-20; esp. 33:8-9). If Paul is explaining a text, it would not be surprising to proceed to the shepherd image of Ezekiel 34 in Acts 20:28-29.

20:28. “Overseer” was usually a Greek term for a ruling officer, but it appears in the same sense in the *LXX, and the *Dead Sea Scrolls include a Hebrew equivalent. The image of shepherd as a leader (ideally a benevolent one) was pervasive in antiquity, but those schooled in Scripture would think especially of Old Testament language for the leaders of God’s people. God would call shepherds to account for how they watched over his flock; see Ezekiel 34:1-8 and comment on John 10:1-18. “Take heed” was standard language for moral exhortations.

20:29-30. Both figuratively and literally, ancients often contrasted predatory wolves with helpless sheep, which the shepherd (20:28) must defend. “Wolves” were viewed as treacherous, unfaithful, deceptive, and greedy for plunder or to exploit in other ways. Jesus had warned of false prophets, and Jewish *apocalyptic texts foresaw great trials for the righteous before the end.

20:31. Exhortation often appealed to people to remember. “Night and day” was a standard way of saying “all the time”; parts of a night and of a day could be reckoned as the whole, and “three years” includes a year and at least parts of two others (cf. 19:8-10). Good public speakers were supposed to feel their speeches enough to express proper emotion and to move the crowds emotionally; both might be moved to tears.

20:32. Jewish people believed that they had been “set apart” by God’s covenant. “An inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (NASB) (i.e., “set apart,” “separated” or “consecrated” for God) refers to the Jewish hope that God’s people would inherit the world to come, just as Israel had “inherited” the Promised Land. Paul applies this language to the believers present.

20:33. Philosophers were often accused of seeking personal monetary gain,

and many (especially those who acted from sincere motives) had to deny it, providing supporting evidence for their denial. “Clothes” (NASB) were part of one’s substance in the ancient East, just as silver coins were.

20:34. Sages sometimes presented themselves as examples or models. Working with one’s hands was not humiliating to an artisan, but in most cities the small upper class (who drew their income from landowning) and most of the philosophical elite despised manual labor. Many *rabbis had trades, but philosophers preferred charging fees, sponging off rich patrons* or (especially in the case of *Cynics) begging. The motives of those who gave freely (what ancients called benefaction) were harder to question, as philosophers who lived off charity and moralists who demanded no return often pointed out. In Ephesus Paul’s manual labor may have generated less concern than elsewhere; Ephesus had both many wealthy artisans and a rising class of *nouveau riche*, gradually supplanting the earlier elite class.

20:35. One could close a speech by quoting a familiar maxim. Cf. Luke 6:20-21, 24-25, 35, 38.

20:36–21:6

The Affection of Paul’s Friends

20:36-38. Brief kisses might be used in momentary greetings, but repeated kissing and embraces were signs of great affection, such as one would bestow on a family member, a dear teacher or a close friend; thus Paul had bonded deeply with these Christians (cf. 1 Sam 20:41; comment on Rom 16:16). Although some Romans and Greek philosophers believed that it was not proper for men to cry, narrative sources often report it in moving circumstances, such as a sad parting. Narratives sometimes thereby use pathos to emphasize how the persons they describe valued each other (e.g., 1 Sam 20:41). Accompanying a departing loved one to the ship displayed affection.

21:1-2. They put into Cos overnight; a small island, it was on the usual route to Rhodes and had a large Jewish community. (Its chief coastal city was also named Cos.) Wealthy and famous Rhodes was a regular stopping place for ships; its capital bore the same name as the island, and had an influential Jewish community. It had one of the best harbors; on the island’s northeast, it faced Patara and was very accessible from Cos to its northwest. Alexandrian grain ships hugging close to the coast of southern Asia Minor frequently made tedious

stops at each port, due to the uncertainty of land breezes; thus after they have put in at the prominent Lycian port of Patara in southern Asia Minor, Paul and his companions find a larger ship sailing across open water directly for Phoenicia, cutting along the south of Cyprus, still under a slight time constraint (20:16). Patara was a major port from which Alexandrian grain ships voyaged to Rome (though less significant than Myra, 27:5). At Patara they found a larger ship that could sail the 350 miles (roughly 550 km) across the open sea to Tyre (a voyage of perhaps four or five days) without hugging the coast and putting into many small ports.

21:3. The southern shore of Cyprus, by which they passed, was shallow and had no harbors, so the ship did not try to put in there. The Roman province of Syria included not only Antioch to the north but also Phoenicia and Judea to the south; they had saved considerable time by sailing across the open sea toward Tyre, which would provide safe harbor throughout the year. A large ship could take a month to unload fully; apparently this one takes a week (21:4-6).

21:4. Tyre was just two days' walk from Ptolemais, so mere ship's delays were not what kept them there. Jewish people and Christians could expect hospitality from other members of their groups wherever they traveled; it was an expected part of their culture, honored their host and was an incomparably superior alternative to spending the night in inns, which usually doubled as brothels.

In light of the standard Jewish view that God's *Spirit especially inspired *prophecy, prophecy is surely somehow involved in their exhortation. Yet this phrase is not Luke's usual description of prophecy and probably indicates that they were simply warning him not to go *on the basis of* their prophecies about what would happen (20:23; 21:11). Ancients recognized that prophecies were often ambiguous; among Greeks, they were sometimes virtually riddles. Interpretations of prophecies could be fallible (cf. Jer 35:5; Lk 7:19-20). In Elisha's day, other prophets recognized that Elijah would soon depart (2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7), but their understanding was incomplete (2 Kings 2:15-18); Elijah and Elisha had the fuller understanding (2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6, 9-10), as does Paul here (Acts 21:13-14).

21:5-6. Tyre was known for its smooth sand beaches.

21:7-16

Agabus's Prophecy

21:7. Greetings were a prominent part of ancient Mediterranean culture. Ptolemais was some thirty miles (roughly 48 km) south of Tyre. Ptolemy II had made Ptolemais, a strong fortress once named Acco, an important harbor. It had been under Roman control for over a century, but Claudius had made it a Roman *colony just recently, in A.D. 51. Jewish people as well as *Gentiles lived there* (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.477)

21:8. Caesarea was thirty to (more commonly estimated) forty miles south of Ptolemais, and if the text suggests that they made the journey in one day, they must have gone by boat. Given the nature of ancient hospitality, much time was probably spent in conversation; guests carried news, and Luke may have heard stories shared by Philip and his former persecutor Paul.

21:9. Some Gentiles associated virginity with spiritual power (as with a special Roman order of celibate women called the Vestal Virgins), but the point of “virgins” here is probably that Philip’s daughters are young, under the age of sixteen (cf. 2:17). (Palestinian Jewish women usually married fairly young, between the ages of twelve and eighteen.) The verb tense indicates that they prophesied regularly or habitually. Despite frequent gender and age prejudice in antiquity, most people did respect prophetesses. The Jewish tradition about Job’s prophetically endowed daughters (in the **Testament of Job*) might be later, but it illustrates the high esteem in which such prophetesses were often held in antiquity.

21:10. Agabus “came down” from the mountainous part of Judea, including Jerusalem. Caesarea was the Roman headquarters for Judea, but Luke here uses “Judea” in the narrower sense of Jewish Palestine or the region of ancient Judah, rather than the stricter Roman sense. Caesarea had a mixed Jewish and Gentile population.

21:11. *Old Testament prophets often acted out their prophecies in ways similar to Agabus’s action here (e.g., Jer 13:1-11; 27:2). Some commentators point out that the details were not all fulfilled literally (it was the Gentiles who bound him, although his accusers were Jewish), but one need not study the Old Testament prophets long before it is clear that they were allowed a large measure of poetic license, even though the essential message had to be accurate (e.g., 2 Kings 19:7, 28, 33, 35). The girdle was a long cloth wrapped around the waist several times and sometimes used as a pocket; not everyone wore them in this period.

21:12-14. Greeks and Jewish people under the influence of Greek oracular thinking saw predictive oracles especially as preventive warnings (e.g., Jer 18:7-

8; Jon 3:4-10); but Paul is convinced that God wants him to face the test (see comment on 21:4). Accounts of martyrs frequently include exhortations to avoid the martyrdom (on account of age, youth, etc.); people also often urged their friends against leaving and against danger. Paul's friends act out of love but must acknowledge his mission (v. 14).

21:15. The journey from Caesarea to Jerusalem would take two or (probably) three days; they lodge overnight with Mnason (v. 16).

21:16. Cyprus had a large Jewish community, some of whom had migrated to Jerusalem and been among the first *disciples* (4:36). *Mnason must be a person of means to be able to host this sizeable group (20:4-5). "Mnason" was an old Greek name; Jews more often preferred the Greek name, "Jason," but occasionally used "Mnason" too (e.g., a later rabbi in Rome).* Mnason is thus apparently a *Hellenistic Jew; that he provides hospitality for Paul's Gentiles is significant (see 10:23, 28). That Jewish Christians from Caesarea travel with Paul's Gentiles underlines that church's unity, as did Philip's hospitality; Caesarea was bitterly and often violently divided between Jew and Gentile.

21:17-26

Paul's Jewish Identity Affirmed

21:17. This gracious reception would necessarily include hospitality for the whole delegation—including offering lodging in Jewish Christian homes to uncircumcised *Gentile Christians (although Paul himself could have stayed with his nephew's family—23:16). This line thus has more significance than would normally strike the modern reader (see comment on 10:28).

21:18-19. Paul delivers the collection from the Gentile Christians at this time (24:17; cf. comment on 20:1-4).

21:20-22. The Jerusalem believers accept the Gentile work but in so doing are confronted by a conflict with their culture. Jerusalem is not what it had been in Acts 2; tensions are rising, and in the temple *sicarii*, or assassins, are murdering aristocrats suspected of collaborating with the Gentiles. Jewish nationalism has been on the rise since the brief reign of Agrippa I (see comment on 12:1), and nationalism's exclusivity often makes it intolerant of supposedly faithful members of its people who have fellowship with members of other peoples. Thus it is incumbent on Paul to prove the integrity of his Jewishness; he cannot compromise the Gentile mission, but he will intentionally affirm his

Jewish heritage at any cost short of unbiblical exclusivism.

The Jerusalem church is providing an effective indigenous witness within its culture, which is good; but most did not understand Paul's valuable mission to other cultures. James says literally that "many ten thousands" of Judeans believe (v. 20)—though Palestine's estimated Jewish population might be just half a million and the estimated number of Pharisees just six thousand. It could be hyperbole, but the estimated number of believers here is not implausible; Jerusalem alone may have had close to eighty thousand residents, and the surrounding Judean countryside would include far more people. James himself was martyred, along with some other law-observers, by the *high priest a few years after this time, but his witness to his culture had been so effective that those diligent in the law (possibly Pharisees) demanded the removal of his killer from office. The rise of Judean nationalism, however, was also affecting Judean believers. Jews almost universally despised apostates from Judaism and those whose teaching was held to undermine the law. Rumors spread quickly, and those away from the centers of power (earlier, e.g., Caesar from Rome) could not readily defend their reputations.

21:23-26. These precautions are to protect Paul from false accusations, especially if he is going to move about publicly in the temple courts. Paul pays the fees for the devout Jerusalem Christians who are completing a Nazirite vow. One shaved one's head on the seventh day if corpse impurity interrupted a vow and offered sacrifice in the temple on the eighth day (Num 6:1-21), but the minimum period of the vow according to widespread Jewish tradition in this period seems to have been thirty days, so scholars differ on the exact meaning here; that Paul is purified and helps them need not mean that he participated in their vow. Those (like Agrippa I) who used their own funds to pay the expenses of Nazirites were considered pious (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 19.293-294).

21:27-36

Riot in the Temple

Under Cumanus, the Roman governor immediately preceding Felix (23:24), a Roman soldier lewdly exposed himself in the temple area; Josephus estimated that ten thousand people were trampled to death in the ensuing riot (*Jewish War* 2.224-27; doubled in *Antiquities*). When another soldier burned a Jewish Law scroll, Cumanus acceded to the crowds' demands and executed him (*Jewish War*

2.229-31). Hostility against *Gentiles and collaborators with Gentiles had been mounting, and in less than a decade would lead to a war that would produce massacres (reportedly over twenty thousand Jews slaughtered in Caesarea in an hour; *Jewish War* 2.457-58) and culminate in the temple's destruction.

21:27. "Asia" means the Roman province of Asia, in what is now western Turkey. The chief city of Roman Asia was Ephesus, where Paul had incurred some enemies in the Jewish community (19:9, 33-34); thus they recognized an Ephesian Gentile in 21:29.

21:28. The temple mount consumed most of northeastern Jerusalem. Although Scripture welcomed Gentiles to the temple (1 Kings 8:41-43), a later understanding of purity led to their separation from the Court of Israel (exclusively for Jewish men) and even the Court of Women (which excluded Gentiles; Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.102-5). The barrier between the outer court, open to the Gentiles, and the Court of Women was about four feet high, with warning signs posted at intervals in Greek and Latin: "Any foreigner who passes this point will be responsible for their own death" (the inscriptions are reported in ancient literature and one has been found by archaeologists; cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15.417; *Jewish War* 5.194; 6.125-26). This was the one offense for which Jewish authorities could execute capital punishment—even on Roman citizens—without consulting with Rome. (This special privilege was also accorded the Greek temple at Eleusis; but Rome delegated the right of execution only in rare cases like these, because local nationalists could otherwise use the penalty against Rome's own supporters.)

21:29. Ephesus was the chief city of the Roman province of Asia, and the Jewish community there knew Paul and his companions well (19:33-34; cf. 18:19-21, 26). Although the assumption of these Jews from Asia is false, it is occasioned by Paul's relationships with Gentile Christians, which he would not compromise.

21:30. Antipathy toward Gentiles and their collaborators was growing (and would lead to war with Rome less than a decade later). Reports of temple desecration could lead to uncontrolled riots; a few years earlier, as noted when a Roman soldier exposed himself in the temple, a riot led to hundreds of trampling deaths (never one to underestimate, Josephus guesses twenty thousand; *Jewish Antiquities* 20.112). They drag Paul "out of the temple," from its inner courts, into the outer Court of the Gentiles. Most of the temple's gates each had two doors, somewhere around fifty feet high (around fourteen meters) and more than twenty feet (or about seven meters) wide (Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.202-5); the

largest gate was perhaps eighty feet (roughly twenty-five meters) high and more than sixty feet (close to twenty meters) wide (*Jewish War* 5.205). The *sagan*, or chief of the Levite temple guard, may have ordered the doors at the Court of Women shut to keep out other intruders or to keep the violence certain to ensue from spilling into the temple proper; bloodshed violated a sanctuary. (Josephus regarded the shedding of blood in the sanctuary as the “abomination of desolation”; keeping bloodshed from the sacred precincts was important.) Alternatively, outer gates may have been shut to prevent escape; or (perhaps most likely) all gates were shut for the moment.

21:31. That the report “came up” to the officer and (in 21:32) the soldiers came down fits the topography of the temple. On the northern part of the Temple Mount was the fortress Antonia, which housed a permanent Roman garrison of 480 to (at its heaviest strength) 600 men; from its towers guards watched for disturbances, especially during festival seasons (relevant here; see 20:16). (Its southeastern tower was more than one hundred feet, or over thirty meters, high, allowing guards to observe the entire temple mount; Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.242.) To rush into the outer court of the temple, they had only to rush down the stairs from the fortress. The “commander” is a *chiliarch*, or tribune, literally commander of 1,000 but actually of 480 to 600 troops. Most tribunes were drawn from the small, well-to-do Roman “knight” class, using the office briefly as a political stepping stone. (This tribune is an exception; see 22:28.)

Judea’s Roman governor lacked a full legion (some six thousand troops), but had five auxiliary cohorts, each with about 480–500 infantry. Most cohorts stayed with the governor in Caesarea, but one resided in the Fortress Antonia, on the northern side of the Temple Mount; the cavalry in 23:23 suggests a cavalry unit at this time (which added 120 riders to the infantry). The garrison’s strength was bolstered for festivals, possibly relevant here (cf. 20:16).

21:32. Because “centurions” (KJV, NASB, NRSV) is plural, many soldiers are likely in view (a centurion commanded about eighty troops, although this rapid, emergency deployment may not involve such precision). These troops would be enough to disperse a crowd (cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.111), although they had not always been effective in the recent past. The beating was presumably to kill Paul, to avenge the temple’s sanctity.

21:33-34. Paul is apparently bound between two soldiers (12:6); chains were considered shameful. Apparently believing reports that the crowd has captured a troublemaker, the tribune reasonably asks for coherent witnesses with specific charges; guesses vary (21:34; cf. one guess in 21:38). Ancient audiences were

well aware that confused mobs were unreliable; such were those who opposed Paul (cf. 19:29, 32).

The “barracks” by the temple is the old castle Antonia, called Baris by the Hasmoneans but renamed for Mark Antony by his friend Herod the Great.

21:35. The steps of the fortress Antonia led directly down to the temple’s outer court.

21:36. Some Greek writers of this period liked to draw parallels between analogous historical figures; Luke’s record here parallels Jesus and Paul (Lk 23:18).

21:37–22:2

Paul and the Tribune

21:37. In the eastern part of the empire, Latin was confined to use in the military and in documents concerning Roman citizens. The public administration of Syria-Palestine used Greek, which was also the first language of the Jerusalem aristocracy, and most Jewish people in Palestine knew at least some Greek. The “tribune” (NRSV) or “commander” assumes that Paul is a particular troublemaker (v. 38); most rabble-rousers he would know of would have spoken *Aramaic by choice. But most Egyptian business documents of this period were in Greek, which Egyptian Jews normally spoke; he thus should not be surprised that one he supposes to be an Egyptian speaks Greek. The point is not that Paul speaks Greek; it is that he speaks it without an accent, like someone educated and fluent in the language by Aegean standards, which the tribune assumes the Egyptian Jew who had caused problems would not be. Egyptians were normally supposed to have a distinctively Egyptian accent.

21:38. *Josephus wrote (*Jewish War* 2.261-63) of a Jewish false prophet from Egypt who gained a following of roughly thirty thousand (a figure less realistic than those given in Acts), leading them from the wilderness to the Mount of Olives. The Roman governor Felix (23:24) defeated him, but the Egyptian himself escaped. Many of the messianic-prophetic figures reported in this period gained followings in the “wilderness,” probably partly because they were safer there from official intervention, but perhaps also expecting deliverance to come like a new exodus under a new Moses.

The word for “assassins” (NASB) or “terrorists” (NIV) here is *sicarii*. These were Jewish terrorists who carried curved daggers under their cloaks and

brutally stabbed to death aristocrats in the midst of crowds in the temple, then slipped back into the crowds unseen. A few years after this encounter they kidnapped people to secure the release of their own adherents held by the procurator. Others terrorized the countryside. Josephus's final reports of them are at the fortress Masada, where they finally perished in A.D. 73. The tribune might be confusing two different kinds of threats, perhaps based on conflicting guesses from the crowd (21:34).

21:39. Romans and Greeks in this period often looked down on Egyptians (21:38), but Tarsus was a respected city. Citizenship in a Greek city gave one higher status than the many who were merely "residents" of the city (who were in turn considered above transients and rural people). One became a citizen only by birth in a citizen family or as a grant from the city authorities. City pride and rivalry were fierce in antiquity, especially in Asia Minor, and Tarsus was a prominent city. It was one of antiquity's chief educational centers. Rome had made Tarsus a "free" city, the highest honor a city in the empire could receive next to being a Roman *colony. Tarsus's citizens were not automatically *Roman* citizens (it was not a Roman colony), but dual citizenship was allowed in this period. Paul saves his disclosure of Roman citizenship as a trump card in case he needs it later. Although most Jews were not citizens of Gentile cities, some of their most prominent members were. Paul's Roman citizenship was more important than his Tarsian citizenship, but perhaps based on what he had learned in 16:37-40, he saves that privilege for later use in case he needs it.

21:40. The tribune grants Paul permission to speak, probably hoping that he will clarify his identity to a crowd he thinks has wrongly supposed him a leader of temple assassins. Good speakers were supposed to be able to quiet crowds (cf. 19:35), and certain gestures would indicate a request for attention (the tribune's presence would have helped). "Hebrew" (a language Paul would have studied; cf. 22:3) is possible, but is here probably a loose expression for *Aramaic (so NIV), long the vernacular of much of rural Syria-Palestine and all lands to the east (cf. Neh 8:8). It is especially significant for Paul's purposes that Aramaic was the vernacular of the Jewish nationalists, and that Paul speaks it as well as they (cf. Phil 3:5). Neither the tribune nor his Asian Jewish accusers (21:27-29) would understand any of what Paul is saying, however; Aramaic is similar to Hebrew, but bears little relation to Latin and Greek (see 22:24).

22:1. This typically Greek way to begin a speech reflects the extent to which Greek culture had permeated Palestine (Greek loanwords even occur throughout rabbinic Hebrew; Paul's hearers would not automatically associate his words

with Gentile culture). The parallel with Stephen (7:2), who provoked his audience to martyr him, also builds suspense for Luke's readers.

22:2. Those who thought that they had caught a *Diaspora collaborator with the Gentiles must have reconsidered after they heard his fluent Aramaic (see comment on 21:40).

22:3-21

Paul's Speech in the Temple

Rhetoricians urged building rapport with one's audience at the beginning of a speech, if possible. Of the three accounts of Paul's call, this is the one clearly designed for a nationalistic Jewish audience; good *rhetoric included adaptation for one's audience. Despite his clear Jewishness, however, his refusal to compromise God's call to the *Gentiles in the end incites the crowd's wrath* (22:21-22). *Paul was always sensitive to his audience but never willing to compromise the gospel.* Speeches usually included a *narrative component; this component takes up Paul's whole speech, perhaps because he is not permitted to complete it. The outcome of this speech during the Pentecost season (20:16) contrasts starkly with the outcome of Peter's Pentecost message in chapter 2.

22:3. Tarsus was famous for its education, but while many Tarsians did their studies there, many also went abroad. Alexandria might be a more prestigious center for studying rhetoric, but for the study of Torah a *Diaspora Jew could have no greater place for education than Jerusalem. Paul, however, may have emigrated before this advanced stage. In ancient statements, "brought up" and "educated" (NASB) typically refer to different periods in a person's life; thus Paul was raised in Jerusalem (cf. 23:16; see comment on Phil 3:5) and studied to become a teacher of the *law under the prestigious Gamaliel I—the famous successor of Hillel* (see comment on 5:34-35). (Paul's family was probably well-endowed to be able to fund such an education.) Although he was born in another country, he can therefore explain that he is really a Jerusalemite by upbringing and an orthodox Pharisaic teacher by training.

As a son in an educated and perhaps aristocratic home (his father being a citizen; cf. also 9:1), Paul may have begun to learn the law around his fifth year and other Pharisaic traditions around his tenth year, and to pursue training to be able to teach the law sometime after turning thirteen (cf. also Gal 1:14 and his letters' debate style). He would have probably completed his role as *disciple no*

later than age twenty (and perhaps much earlier). Although Gamaliel's household may have included education in Greek, Paul's tertiary academic focus, in whatever language, was Scripture; those focused on rhetoric or philosophy normally did tertiary study elsewhere. People who could afford to do so normally sat on chairs (or reclined on couches for banquets); sitting at someone's feet was taking the posture of a disciple. Paul's model for "zeal" may have been Phinehas, who killed for God (Num 25:13), and his successors in the Maccabees, who because of zeal killed those they considered traitors in Israel (1 Maccabees 2:26, 54; 3:8; cf. 4 Maccabees 18:12). Within eight years of Paul's speech the revolutionaries were calling themselves "Zealots," those zealous for God; this title may thus have appealed to Paul's more nationalistic hearers.

22:4-5. See comment on 9:2. Prisons were usually temporary sites for detention until trial or punishment. A different *high priest is now in office than when Paul received letters of authorization (23:5), but Paul may depend on the leaders' collective memory.

22:6. People normally tried to avoid the noonday sun if possible, seeking shade for themselves and their animals and often eating and/or taking a siesta at that time. Nevertheless, it was unavoidable on urgent missions and on long journeys which required that much of the day be spent traveling.

22:7-15. The background is essentially the same as in 9:4-17, although this speech emphasizes different features, such as Ananias's Jewish piety, which would commend themselves to Paul's nationalistic hearers. Minor differences of detail would not have concerned ancient audiences the way they sometimes concern modern ones.

22:16. Some *Old Testament texts speak of ritual washing away of sins (Lev 14:19, 31; 16:30; Num 8:21), but other texts apply the language figuratively (e.g., Ezek 36:33; 37:23; 43:22), most prominently Ezekiel 36:25.

22:17. The ancient Near East and eastern Mediterranean world had a long tradition of receiving revelations (often dreams) in sanctuaries or holy places. God had revealed himself to his servants in such places in the Old Testament (1 Sam 3:3-10; 1 Kings 3:4-5), and Paul's hearers would regard the temple as the most appropriate place to receive revelations (cf. comment on 7:2-7).

22:18. If Paul had been in danger in the past (as he narrates here), he is in even more danger now, with hostilities rising against Gentile collaborators; Paul would not be able to speak long after this point and could not realistically intend to get past the *narratio* of his speech (the narrative part occurred early in a speech).

22:19. At least in later times, the *chazan*, or *synagogue attendant*, was normally responsible for beating wayward Jews as public discipline for their crimes, after judges (probably elders; rabbis in a later period) pronounced judgment. If Paul had been given this responsibility, it was due to some respected authorization (similar to that mentioned in 22:5).

22:20. See comment on 7:58.

22:21. Like Jesus (Lk 4:22-30), Paul knows that this statement will offend his hearers, given the escalation of Jewish-Gentile tensions in Palestine in recent years, tensions that would soon escalate into war (A.D. 66–73). But he cannot compromise the gospel that makes siblings out of believers from different peoples and backgrounds. Ironically, it is Paul's commitment to welcome Gentiles that will lead momentarily to his Roman custody.

22:22-29

Examining Paul

22:22. The reaction is predictable; see comment on 21:20-22; cf. Luke 23:18, 21. On interruption, see comment on 10:44.

22:23. Throwing dust on one's head was a sign of mourning; removing it from one's feet meant removing what was unholy (13:51); they may also shake dust from their removed garments to repudiate Paul (cf. 18:6). Here they might wish to stone him but have nothing else to throw at him at the moment (cf., e.g., 2 Maccabees 4:41). They may throw off their cloaks for the same reason (perhaps they also tore them, as one would after hearing blasphemy), although Luke may record it ironically to underline their guilt: see comment on 7:58.

22:24-25. Even had Paul not been a Roman citizen, the tribune would have no authority to try a provincial belonging to another jurisdiction (21:39), after he had quelled the unrest. But it was legal to scourge slaves or aliens, to extort confessions or to determine the truth concerning a situation. In younger days, Paul had experienced Jewish synagogue beatings and lictors' rods. But this scourge is with a more dangerous Roman whip, which typically included either iron chains ending in metal balls or leather thongs into which pieces of metal or bone were woven. It could tear open the flesh, leaving it hanging in bloody strips or even exposing bones. It could easily lead to the victim's death, and would certainly scar and probably maim him. Centurions were sometimes left to supervise executions and related duties.

But the Porcian and Valerian laws exempted Roman citizens from such beatings without trial. Paul's citizenship excluded him from being tortured for information, and together with his being untried, it excluded him from punishment.

22:26-27. In this period, Roman citizenship was not common in the east, especially among the nonelite, so no one had expected it for this prisoner. Paul might wait until he has been chained for the same reason as in 16:37: he now has legal room to maneuver against *them*. Law prohibited even *binding* a Roman citizen without trial; although not all governors followed the law, the tribune would be wise to avoid a breach that could bring him into trouble with the governor. If one claimed to be a citizen, officials were supposed to treat him as such until documentation could be procured or checked.

22:28. Scholars note that one could achieve Roman citizenship in several ways: one could be (1) born to a Roman father (so Paul); (2) a citizen of a Roman *colony (say, Pisidian Antioch, Corinth or Philippi); (3) a retired auxiliary soldier; (4) given a special privilege from Rome (granted to groups or individuals), sometimes as part of a municipal aristocracy or other group honored by Rome; or (5)—and this was most common after being born in Rome or in a colony—a slave freed by his or her owner (so perhaps Paul's ancestors).

This tribune or commander, Lysias, bought his citizenship by a bribe, which was common under the preceding emperor, whose name he took (23:26). To achieve the status of a tribune, he must have had a powerful *patron or been one of the rare individuals who toiled his way up through the ranks to this position, probably partly with more bribes. Tribunes were usually equestrians (the Roman knight class) working their way up the political career ladder; this one had not even been born a Roman citizen. But the current governor himself was not an equestrian, so Lysias may not have experienced much disadvantage.

Lysias the tribune may want to assess Paul's relative status. Some commentators note that the cost of citizenship bribes declined toward the end of Claudius's reign, so he may be suggesting, "You probably acquired your citizenship more cheaply than I acquired mine!" (Claudius's successor reduced such corruption, so the information Luke reports here reflects the period in question.) Paul may have replied in Latin: he was *ingenuus*, a citizen by birth (though cf. his family in 16:37). Those who were born citizens had higher status in that regard than those who achieved it; Paul thus has superior citizenship status in some sense.

22:29. See comment on 22:26-27. Not all officials would have cared about

violating the law—some Roman procurators crucified Jerusalem aristocrats who were Roman citizens—but a tribune was not a governor, and could be held more accountable for actions if accusations came and the governor deemed it politically expedient.

22:30–23:10

Before the Sanhedrin

The Sanhedrin was the highest Judean court. The *Pharisees and Sadducees* disagreed on many points. The Pharisees apparently had less power and representation on the council, but some of them (like the aristocratic Simon son of Gamaliel I) would have had some power.

22:30. Because Paul's offense is clearly a religious one related to the temple, the perplexed official is going to try to ascertain the charge by consulting the Sanhedrin. This council met regularly (though not all members were present on every occasion) and would undoubtedly grant a hearing requested by the Roman garrison's tribune.

23:1. *Rhetorically, Paul's claim here (cf. also 24:16; Phil 3:6) may seek to build rapport with devout hearers in his audience (cf. Acts 23:6). In court cases, much often hinged on the person's known character; whenever the accused could claim to have lived his life previously free of reproach, it counted in one's favor rhetorically.

23:2-3. Ananias was *high priest from A.D. 47 to 58 or 59, at which time Agrippa II removed him (see comment on 24:27). Ananias was popular and powerful but also a Roman vassal, known for his greed in a period when rapacious aristocratic priests were stealing the tithes belonging to the poorer priests. Aware of his abuses, the *Zealot revolutionaries killed him in A.D. 66, perhaps eight years after this hearing. Sadducees were known for their harshness. Slapping one on the cheek was a grievous insult (see comment on Mt 5:39), sometimes experienced by prophets (1 Kings 22:24; 2 Chron 18:23); officials could use it to defend their honor, but it was technically illegal and considered unfair in a court setting.

Jewish *law forbade unjust treatment (e.g., Lev 19:15), including condemnation before the accused was proved guilty. Paul's appeal to Scripture may build rapport with devout Pharisees (cf. Acts 23:6), who were known for careful adherence to Scripture and who were less comfortable with the high

priest's abuses of power. Judicial rhetoric often returned charges on the accuser; Paul accuses his abuser of violating the law. He also pronounces judgment like a prophet; Ananias was murdered by revolutionaries in A.D. 66. A "whitewashed wall" was one whose weakness or ugliness might be concealed—but not changed—by a veneer of whitewash: an appropriate condemnation of abusive leaders of Israel (Ezek 13:10-11; 22:28). Walls facing the street in the eastern Mediterranean were often whitewashed. Ancient sources often honor those courageous enough to confront tyrants.

23:4-5. One should not speak abusively of magistrates (Ex 22:28), but Ananias's behavior undermines the integrity of his office. Paul has simply appealed to God's true judgment to reverse the charge and punishment. The *high priest normally sat in a special place and exercised obvious authority (though he would not wear his special, high-priestly robes for this kind of setting). Either he does not do so here because the gathering is informal, or (more likely) Paul answers ironically, because of the official's corruption and improper claim to power. Socrates and others had endeavored to show themselves more pious in the matter concerning which they were accused than their judges were, which naturally led to condemnation by an angry court. Paul is content to show his piety by citing Scripture (which will appeal to the Pharisees; 23:6).*

23:6. "Son of Pharisees" could be a figurative expression for discipleship; if meant literally, it would be likelier that his father joined the sect after moving from Tarsus (we have little evidence for Pharisees in the *Diaspora*). *Other sharp-witted Jewish strategists of this period, like Josephus not many years later (Life 139, 28), also practiced this method of "divide and conquer."* Paul finds supporters to whom he can appeal. The hope of the *resurrection was central to Judaism, and many martyrs had died staking their hope on it. Paul's views did not violate any central tenets of Pharisaism; he was now a "Pharisee plus," who taught that the resurrection had already been inaugurated in Jesus. Pharisees recognized that no true Pharisee would have committed the crime with which Paul had been charged by the original crowd (21:28). Moreover, Paul maneuvers strategically: if the tribune can be persuaded that his opposition's motives are merely theological, this verdict will later help his case before the governor (24:20-21).

23:7. Pharisees and Sadducees were notorious for their disagreements, especially over the doctrine of the resurrection; Pharisees taught that Sadducees had no part in the world to come, because they did not believe in life after death (at least not in a form acceptable to most other Palestinian Jews).

23:8. Some scholars contend that the Sadducees believed only in the five books of Moses; but even if this were the case, they must have believed in the angels that appeared in Genesis. Luke's parenthetical comment here probably refers to the Sadducees' denial of the developed angelology and demonology of the Pharisees (12:15 is not Pharisaic), or maybe ideas about people becoming angels after death or being resurrected in angelic form. "Spirit" may address a different issue: The Sadducees reportedly did not believe in life after death; belief in an afterlife before the resurrection allowed Pharisees to accept that Jesus could have appeared to Paul as a spirit (cf. 22:7-8; 23:9) even if they did not accept his resurrection. Many Jewish people believed that resurrection bodies would be like angelic bodies; some also portrayed the intermediate state in angelic terms.

23:9. From the Pharisaic standpoint, if Paul were being condemned for being consistent with his doctrine of the resurrection, then it is natural that the Sadducees want him convicted and likewise natural that the Pharisees and Sadducees should oppose each other on this matter. Later Pharisaic reports declare that the Sadducees would have no share in the world to come, because they did not believe in it. Pharisees, who believed in angels and afterlife, could allow that Paul had a revelation from some spirit.

23:10. Mobs sometimes tore people apart. Raucous though they were, disputes in courtrooms chaired by high officials rarely came to blows; nevertheless, it sometimes happened, even in elite bodies. For example, Josephus shows that in this period some members of Jerusalem's elite became so hostile toward each other that they threw stones at each other (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.180, 213). Ancient sources do report that the Sanhedrin and even the Roman Senate broke into confusion sometimes.

The site of the council chamber favored by most scholars today (based especially on Josephus) adjoins the temple on the southwest, perhaps a third of a mile (or half a kilometer) from the Fortress Antonia, where the Roman garrison lay. Nevertheless, Lysias probably had soldiers with him (for safety if nothing else; 21:38). Soldiers from the "barracks," the Fortress Antonia, on the northwest of the temple mount, would have approached this hall along the west side of the temple, for a distance of over a thousand feet. Prisoners could be detained in the Fortress Antonia, but it also could be a place of relative comfort; it included a bathhouse and rows of rooms.

The Plot Against Paul

23:11. See comment on 18:9-10.

23:12-13. Vows of abstinence (promises to abstain from something for a designated period of time) were common. One would swear an “oath” by calling a deity to witness, inviting the deity’s vengeance if one broke one’s word. Revolutionary-minded Jews considered some assassinations pious acts; Herod the Great had once executed ten Pharisees who had formed an association by oath for the purpose of killing him. If Paul’s enemies eventually broke their oaths to kill him, Jewish *law would simply require them to bring *atonement offerings to the temple; thus their oath here does not mean they would literally starve.

23:14-15. Ambushes by robbers and terrorists were common (e.g., Josephus, *Jewish War* 4.538), especially at night. During these years shortly before the Jewish war with Rome, the *sicarii* (21:38) regularly assassinated Jews suspected of collaboration with the Romans, and all Palestine was uneasy; this report is thus quite believable. That some aristocratic priests, who in the war of 66–70 turned out to have their own violent agendas, would cooperate in this plot is not surprising. Some of them, and especially some younger members of their families, had revolutionary sympathies, though much of this class remained more loyal to Rome (cf., e.g., Josephus, *War of the Jews* 2.409; 5.6). (These priests would be some high Sadducean members of the council, not Pharisees.) As noted at 23:10, Paul’s place of detention was probably not far from the council chamber; soldiers bringing him would have to march the thousand to fifteen hundred feet between the Antonia and (probable) location of the council chamber (see comment on 23:10), most of it in fairly narrow formation through public space adjoining the temple.

23:16. Ancient writers report a number of plots foiled on account of “leaks.” Ancient historians report leaks from the Roman Senate, the Jerusalem Sanhedrin and groups such as this one. If Paul’s sister was raised with him in Jerusalem, the whole family had presumably moved there from Tarsus after Paul’s birth, rather than only having sent him there to study. If she married into a similar (Roman citizen) family, Paul’s nephew would be a Roman citizen, perhaps aiding his access at the Antonia. People could visit prisoners at the guards’ discretion (easier for light detentions, but sometimes facilitated with bribes).

23:17-18. In custody, persons of status were sometimes guarded by centurions; on occasion they even became friends (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*

18.230-31). Paul's access to centurions indicates that his custody is a relatively light one at this point; his status as a Roman citizen in the East would have helped him.

23:19-21. Taking one by the hand was often a gesture of peace, welcome or assurance.

23:22. The tribune must act quickly and discreetly or be seen favoring this report over counterclaims by Jerusalem's aristocrats. Assassins also killed collaborators, so discretion would help protect Paul's nephew.

23:23-32

The Commander's Countermeasures

23:23. Somewhere around this period Rome began using units of eight hundred to a thousand soldiers; until this transition, units of 480 soldiers, or (for partly mounted units, as here) 480 infantry and 120 horsemen, were more common. The commander's assignment of two hundred soldiers with the centurions (perhaps a paper strength; two centurions might command only 160 troops in practice) to guard Paul would weaken the garrison in Jerusalem's fortress Antonia significantly; thus they must return quickly (23:32). Some evidence suggests that the two hundred "spearmen" (NASB; NRSV; the term is rare) may be non-Roman light auxiliary infantry. Given the unrest in Palestine and night attacks by robbers, especially prevalent under governor Felix's tenure, a smaller contingent would not be safe in the hills of Judea at night.

The Roman procurator or governor resided in Caesarea, visiting Jerusalem only for the feasts (to insure order). Whether or not Felix came in person for Pentecost (which has just occurred, 20:16; 24:11), he is now in Caesarea; governors usually strengthened the Jerusalem cohort during festivals, so possibly additional troops were stationed in Jerusalem at this time, some of which would be scheduled to return to Caesarea soon. Caesarea was the military headquarters for Judea (the Roman overseer for all Syria-Palestine resided in Syria); a few years after this scene, Syrian residents slaughtered thousands of Jews there.

Leaving at 9 p.m. (the night's "third hour"), might supply sufficient darkness to keep the nature of their activity obscure, while leaving enough of the night to keep them well on their way to Antipatris. Even then, only a protracted march would get them well on their way; Caesarea was sixty miles away.

23:24. Ancient historians do not portray very favorably Tiberius Claudius

Felix (*Tacitus said Antonius; Josephus, in a better position to know, said Claudius; an inscription may support Josephus's position but the matter is disputed); he governed from A.D. 52 to probably 59. He married three princesses in his lifetime; most relevant among these, shortly after he became procurator of Palestine, he convinced Drusilla to divorce her husband and marry him (24:24). Although technically unqualified, he secured his position because his brother was Pallas, a powerful freedman of Claudius, emperor from 41 to 54. Tacitus reported that Felix was corrupt, having a king's authority but a slave's mind (from a Roman aristocrat, the latter was hardly a compliment). Josephus likewise condemned him as thoroughly corrupt, accusing him of bloody massacres and repression. He remained procurator until A.D. 59 or 60 (see comment on 24:27).

23:25. The empire (except perhaps for Egypt) had no postal service except for official government business; most people sent letters via persons who were traveling, or (for official imperial business) by the Roman military's imperial post. The commander sends this letter with the soldiers. Its legal terms confirm that it is a formal referral; as part of Paul's court dossier, it would have been available to both Paul's supporters and accusers.

23:26. This was the standard greeting in letters, and the respectful title was standard for an equestrian official (equestrians were the so-called knight class). Although Felix was not equestrian, his power and status as procurator made that fact irrelevant. Indeed, despite his low birth, his three successive wives (Drusilla probably being the final one) were all from royal households. Lysias is a Greek name; because he achieved citizenship under the emperor Claudius (notorious for selling the privilege indiscreetly), this *patron's name has become part of his own.

23:27-29. Subordinate officials sometimes put their own slant on a story to make themselves sound good to their superiors; this commander, who may have worked his way up through the ranks (22:28), knows how to play the game well. Given ancient Mediterranean emphasis on gratitude obligations, Lysias can trust Paul as an honorable person not to put Lysias in a bad light with Felix, an action also not in Paul's interests.

23:30. Local officials (and as Rome's chief representative in Jerusalem, this military tribune was an official) had to determine which cases should be referred to the procurator. This was obviously such a case. Given the heavy case load in Caesarea, there could be a long delay in Paul's case; Lysias' urgent actions may help move the case up on the docket (though ultimately the status of the official plaintiffs will effect this result in any case; 24:1).

23:31. Troops were able and trained to undertake all-night marches when necessary, as Josephus and other ancient historians testify. When military discipline was properly observed, soldiers exercised daily, and were drilled regularly with forced marches of twenty miles at four miles an hour; sometimes the drills were closer to five miles per hour. Antipatris was less than thirty miles (about forty-five kilometers) south of Caesarea, about a day's march. But by the shortest route Antipatris was at least thirty-five to forty miles (fortunately downhill) from Jerusalem, hence the troops would have to march all night (and into the morning) at a much faster pace than normal travelers. (Such rapid forced marches are reported for soldiers in emergency situations, such as nocturnal surprise attacks.) Antipatris bordered Judea and Samaria, and was a natural stopping place on the inland road between Jerusalem and Caesarea.

23:32. The infantry's return journey need not have been undertaken so rapidly, nor with so much protection, because it would be in daylight and brigands more frequently and dangerously struck at night. It would be unwise, however, to leave the Antonia garrison's force depleted very long (cf. 23:23). The mounted troops continuing to Caesarea could proceed across the mostly *Gentile open plain more quickly without infantry protection, but the infantry had been needed during the night journey in mountainous terrain infested with Judean brigands.

23:33–24:9

The Hearing Before Felix

The technical details of the trials here accord so well with other evidence on Roman legal procedure that some noted Roman historians use them as major source material for understanding Roman provincial judicial proceedings. Ancient writers often highlighted parallels between major characters; Luke's Gospel reports three hearings of Jesus (two before the governor and one before a Herodian ruler), and Acts reports three hearings of Paul once he is in Roman custody (two before governors, one before Herod Agrippa II). Courts kept written summaries of the speeches offered. Courts used the shared language of participants, in this case, Greek.

23:33. Caesarea was divided between Jewish and *Gentile residents, with harsh tension between them. Josephus (admittedly known to inflate figures) claims that, with the outbreak of war a few years later, Gentiles massacred over

twenty thousand Jews in Caesarea in a single hour.

23:34. Normally people read aloud, so Paul would hear the letter. It was good protocol to check the jurisdiction to which a person belonged before deciding a case. Officials had the authority to try the accused, wherever he might be from, for crimes committed in their region of jurisdiction; but they could also refer the case of the accused to the governor of the latter's home province, a procedure less complicated for Felix here. Some ancient writers liked to draw parallels between related historical figures; here, cf. Luke 23:6-9.

Cilicia was an imperial province, the capital of which was Tarsus. But during Paul's period (not, however, Luke's period), Cilicia was governed as part of Syria. The Syrian legate had too much territory to concern himself with a relatively minor case, so Felix assumes jurisdiction rather than troubling his superior.

23:35. Hearings for Roman citizens arraigned on capital charges required painstaking examination, if Felix were to follow the law. Accusers normally initiated proceedings in a Roman court, so Felix awaits their arrival. The procurator's residence in Caesarea was a palace built by Herod the Great; Paul was thus kept elsewhere in Felix's own residence. Officials generally provided better accommodations for prisoners of higher status.

24:1. Given Judea's political situation, Felix would defer to the *high priest and grant an immediate hearing. The status of the forces against Paul is serious; Felix was now governor because Ananias and his associates won a case against Felix's predecessor in office (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.243-47), but Felix's relationship with Ananias may not have been entirely positive. Although Tertullus bears a fairly common Latin name, he could easily be a Jewish Roman citizen like Paul. As noted here, the plaintiffs would summarize the nature of the case before Paul was brought in.

24:2. Although a full speech could last for two hours, abbreviated forms (such as we have here) were recorded and kept as legal documents; Luke could thus cite actual court summaries here. The prosecution would always begin first, both in Roman and in Jewish trials. Tertullus begins his speech with a standard *captatio benevolentiae*—flattery to secure Felix's favor. (*Rhetoric manuals emphasized winning the judge's favor, and speeches before public officials always opened by praising them. "Peace" and "foresight" are common topics of praise for administrators, and also relevant to this case.) Although flattery was sometimes true, this example is blatantly false: revolutionaries had escalated under Felix's corrupt, repressive administration, which brought neither peace nor

reforms. Tertullus's speech includes flowery rhetoric (including some alliteration) but is weak on facts.

24:3. "In every way and everywhere" is a good rhetorical flourish (rhetoric valued repetition of sounds).

24:4. Many valued conciseness, and one could offer claims or promises of brevity. As here, speakers could also apologize for wearying the official as if they had not really finished praising him; this was a rhetorical technique for flattering someone even beyond the limits of one's own rhetorical skills or credibility.

24:5-6. Compare the analogously triple charge of Luke 23:2; some historians liked to parallel different historical figures. Paul's accusers make themselves out to be allies of the Romans, who especially in these years were concerned about Jewish unrest throughout the empire. "Pest" (NASB) or "pestilent" (NRSV) and "throughout the world" resemble a charge the emperor Claudius had leveled against Jewish agitators. Profaning the temple was a capital charge, and inciting people to riot against Rome was *maiestas*, treason; Rome treated sedition (stirring unrest) as one of the worst crimes. Tertullus could accuse Paul only of *trying* to desecrate the temple, because no witnesses had apprehended a *Gentile with him in the temple (21:29).

If one's opponent in court were known to be a persuasive speaker, it was also common to warn about his crafty speaking ability; and character defamation (often freely invented) was a major part of winning ancient lawsuits.

"Sect" is not a derogatory term in itself. The term was employed simply to designate various Greek philosophic schools and (by *Josephus) various schools of thought in Judaism (such as *Pharisees* or *Sadducees*). "Nazarenes" (a term Jewish Christians in time generally applied to themselves) was perhaps originally an insult, calculated against the obscurity of Jesus' hometown (cf. Jn 1:46).

24:7-8. The text of verses 7-8a is questionable (see marginal notes in translations). Invitations for judges to examine matters for themselves (as in 24:8b) were frequent in forensic rhetoric. Of course, judges could investigate and decide with or without the litigants' permission, so the invitation was just another way of *implying* the correctness of one's assertions.

24:9. It was common in forensic rhetoric for accusers to amplify charges with unsupported assertions of guilt; speakers on both sides normally also claimed to present only the facts. Assertions by a number of people of status could carry weight, and Felix had political as well as judicial considerations in

this case (members of Jerusalem's aristocracy, some of them Roman citizens, versus a Roman citizen who, according to them, was a leader in a widespread movement). A few years earlier, Judeans protested so severely after a Roman soldier burned a Law scroll that the Roman governor had him executed.

24:10-21

Paul's Defense Before Felix

Paul's *rhetorical skills prove more effective than those of his paid accuser Tertullus.

24:10. The defendant spoke after the accuser in Roman trials, as soon as he was given permission to do so. Paul also includes a *captatio benevolentiae* (see comment on 24:2-3), although a more modest and believable one than that of Tertullus. Felix may have held office since A.D. 52 (i.e., for four to six years) and had been in Judea in another capacity earlier. Proclaiming one's confidence in the judge's fairness was an implicit statement of innocence, and other trained speakers appealed to this in court cases as well.

24:11. Here Paul begins a *narratio*, a stating of the case's facts or of events leading up to the case; a *narratio* could be brief when necessary. Paul shows himself skilled in the rhetoric of his day. That he came to worship supports his character; the timing presumably coincides with Pentecost (20:16), suggesting that he had come for the festival (cf. 20:16), like many other good Jews. Luke's narrative names some of the many witnesses to the timing of Paul's arrival. Someone who traveled so far to worship is not the sort of person who would try to defile the temple.

24:12. This verse is a *propositio*, the proposition or thesis of Paul's speech; this was a standard part of ancient speeches. Paul begins, as speakers sometimes did, by refuting the opponent's charges.

24:13. Although ancient courts preferred arguments from probability over eyewitness accounts, proof was essential. For example, Herod's son Antipater, after much proof of his guilt, offered only oaths in favor of his innocence, so the Syrian legate Varus had him executed. Speakers often (and fairly often accurately) charged their opponents with lacking proof; in this kind of case, the burden of proof rested with the accusers.

24:14. In 24:14-17, Paul reinforces a positive portrayal of his character, important in defense speeches; he is not the kind of person who would have

committed the crime with which he was charged. Roman lawyers also had defenses for those who confessed their guilt, admitting that the deed was wrong (*concessio*); they could claim they meant well (*purgatio*) or simply beseech pardon (*deprecatio*). But while Paul admits a deed, he does not admit that it is wrong or ask pardon for it. Instead, like some other forensic speakers, he confesses a non-crime. This creates a masterful defense: First, this is an issue of internal Jewish *law, not a crime under Roman law, and therefore worthy neither of Roman trial nor of Roman execution at Jewish instigation. Further, the Christian faith springs from the *Old Testament and is thus an ancient religion, which should be protected as a form of Judaism under Roman toleration. Confessing what was not a crime was a strategic rhetorical move; it would heighten one's credibility while doing nothing for the opponents' charge that the defendant had broken the law.

24:15. Sadducees who denied the future *resurrection of the righteous represented a minority position within Judean Judaism; Felix would know that Paul spoke for a majority position on this point. Pharisaism and the rest of Judaism that believed in the resurrection of the righteous were divided on the resurrection of the wicked. Some believed that the wicked would be raised for judgment (either temporary torture followed by annihilation, or eternal torture); others believed that they would not be raised. The early Christians who comment on the matter accept a resurrection of the wicked to judgment (Jn 5:29; Rev 20:5), the most natural way to read Daniel 12:2.

24:16. Establishing one's character was important for the defense. Here Paul means that one who truly believed the hope stated in verse 15 would be careful to do right before God and people. This is an implied argument from probability, a strongly favored line of argument in ancient law courts. Pharisees and other believers in future judgment often questioned its deniers' basis for morality.

24:17. Almsgiving was highly regarded in Judaism; it demonstrates Paul's solidarity with his people and their ancestral customs. Again on a probability argument (v. 16), this point would make the charge of violating the temple absurd. Also, a defendant sometimes sought to show the ingratitude of plaintiffs prosecuting their benefactor (cf. 4:9). (The offerings refer to Paul's collection, more emphasized in his letters, e.g., Rom 15:26-27.)

24:18-19. Temples were to be places of refuge, yet Paul had been apprehended during worship. It was standard practice in legal rhetoric to reverse the accusers' charges onto them; speakers often could also insinuate someone's guilt. Paul here implies that his accusers rather than himself were responsible for

the riot. Moreover, the original accusers have not shown up, and therefore could be charged with abandoning the case, a punishable offense (for frivolous prosecution). The current “plaintiffs” are not eyewitnesses and could not withstand cross-examination, and the original plaintiffs have abandoned the case! By the conventions of Roman law, the case should simply be dismissed at this point; that Felix fails to dismiss it suggests the political dangers of doing so.

24:20-21. Speakers sometimes saved the climactic argument for the end. Paul’s concluding, ultimate argument is that his accusers previously disputed only his affirmation of the resurrection, that is, a theological charge (that he had cunningly brought up!), which the tribune had attested (23:29). Roman magistrates would view this as a matter of internal Jewish religious disputes, nothing on which to judge a case of Roman law. Moreover, when plaintiffs changed charges in the midst of the legal process (cf. 23:6, 29; 24:5-6), the case was supposed to be thrown out.

24:22-27

Felix’s Procrastination

Paul’s case (24:10-21) was legally airtight; Felix should have thrown out the case. Doing so, however, would have alienated members of the Judean elite. Had Paul not been a Roman citizen with a possible supporting constituency, Felix might have even handed him over (cf. Lk 23:23-24).

24:22. Lysias would be considered the independent witness; but Felix already has sufficient facts, and is simply stalling for political reasons, much to the chagrin of Paul’s accusers and (still more) Paul himself. By setting no timetable for Lysias’s coming, Felix fairly obviously postpones the case; he had authority to defer it as long as he wished.

It would have been difficult for Felix not to have known of the massive Judean Jesus movement (21:20), especially given his Judean wife (24:24), but he and the Romans by this period were treating it as politically innocuous, unlike the many bandits in the countryside.

24:23. Prisoners of status usually received lighter custody, especially if the charges against them were not persuasive. Paul is probably still kept in the procurator’s own palace (23:35), making it easy for Felix to visit him. Centurions sometimes oversaw prisoners of status (cf. 23:17). Apart from very meager prison rations, prisoners depended on friends to bring food and other

items; guards sometimes charged bribes for access to prisoners, but Felix's instructions here could forestall that.

24:24. Officials who interviewed prisoners privately for their own ends were often considered corrupt.

Drusilla was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I (see comment on 12:1) and sister of Agrippa II and Berenice (see comment on 25:13). She married the king of a small region in Syria, but at the age of sixteen divorced him at Felix's instigation to marry him instead. Although it violated normal Roman policy for a governor to marry a woman from his province, Felix had much power as long as his brother Pallas remained in favor in Rome (cf. comment on 23:24). Drusilla is about twenty years old here.

24:25. Although wealthy households often sponsored philosophers to provide interesting insights at dinners or tutor family members, God's prophets were less pleasant than most philosophers (Jer 38:14-23). Justice and self-control were among the favored topics of many moralists, but the future judgment was especially Jewish teaching and probably not the side of Jewish teaching the procurator was accustomed to hearing. (Future judgment was not emphasized by most upper-class Jews under Greek influence, such as Sadducees or a handful of aristocratic Pharisees such as *Josephus—who could accommodate Platonic views of the afterlife—or like *Philo*, whose views accommodated Hellenism to the furthest possible extent.)

24:26. Felix was not known to be particularly just; Josephus complained that he sent priests to Caesar on a trifling charge. Josephus also complained that the procurator Albinus, several years after Felix, released anyone—including revolutionaries—from jail whose relatives paid him something. All ancient sources agree that Felix also was corrupt, and this verse should not surprise us. Bribery and corruption were punishable offenses, but very common, including among many governors; Josephus reports this among various governors of Judea. If locals complained, however, a governor could be removed from office for the offense.

24:27. When Felix was being replaced by Porcius Festus (probably July of A.D. 59, though some say 60, or even 55–56), Jewish leaders from Caesarea finally went to Rome and accused him. Roman law had permitted provincials to accuse their governors since 149 B.C., and a number of governors faced prosecution. Fortunately for his sake, his powerful brother Pallas, although no longer in power in Nero's court, retained sufficient influence to protect him from Judean retribution (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.182). "Wishing to do the Jews a favor"

(NASB) here may mean that he needs any Jewish mercy he can get, as he is leaving for the hearing in Rome. (At the same time, he would not want to create other enemies or charges by deciding against another interest group.) Governors did not usually try to clear the slate of backlogged cases before leaving office; the new governor might have to start judicial proceedings all over again.

25:1-12

Hearing Before Festus

*Josephus's portrait of Porcius Festus is much more positive than his portrait of Felix or Albinus. Festus was an efficient and mostly just administrator; he also corrected disturbances and caught many of the revolutionaries. Josephus also indicates that Festus died in office (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.197), apparently having served in Judea only a year or two. A Roman administrator might struggle to balance the interests of justice for an individual and political sensitivity to the local elite, especially if there was a potential for unrest. Extensive parallels between Jesus' hearings in Luke 23 and Paul's in Acts 25–26 indicate that Luke wishes to parallel them, as some other historians paralleled figures; Luke's point is that Christians must follow in Jesus' footsteps.

25:1. Festus's residence would be in Caesarea, but it was politically appropriate to visit the local authorities centered in Jerusalem.

25:2. Relations between Felix and the Jewish authorities had been strained; a new governor, however, meant a new chance to introduce agendas previously deferred. Agrippa II appointed a new *high priest, Ishmael son of Phabi, probably shortly before Festus's arrival (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.179, 182). As was customary, the plaintiffs advance the complaint.

25:3-5. They wanted Paul moved; given the frequent assaults by revolutionaries throughout the country, members of the priestly aristocracy would not necessarily appear to have sponsored the violence against Paul (as violent as the agendas of some of them were reported to be, according to Josephus and other early Jewish sources). Festus would be eager to correct the bad relationship of the previous administration, hence to accommodate local politics. He thus moves the issue up on the docket, but does not breach protocol (nor plan to remain long in Jerusalem).

25:6. Sitting on his tribunal (NASB), *pro tribunali*, means that this is an official hearing.

25:7-8. A case could be reopened based on new evidence, but it would be thrown out if no such evidence were presented. Ancients often claimed (often rightly) that their legal opponents offered no proof. A speaker often summarized and then refuted opponents' charges; like court recorders, Luke also summarizes Paul's response here. The accusations against Jewish *law and temple (21:28) would be relevant to a Roman magistrate only if Paul had violated the sanctity of the temple (see comment on 21:28), a charge that had not been demonstrated. An implication of treason (*seditio*) against Caesar, however, would be fatal. Changing charges in the midst of a case was illegal, but with a new governor Paul's enemies have started the case anew.

25:9. History reports that Festus was a fairer and more cooperative governor than most who ruled Judea; he undoubtedly wishes to engender a good relationship with the provincials here.

25:10-11. Roman citizens had the right to appeal to Caesar's tribunal (*provocatio ad Caesarem*), although the emperor in this period (Nero) normally delegated the hearing and judging of cases to others. Later, the governor Pliny in Bithynia executed many Christians but sent those who were citizens to Rome for trial. Noncitizen provincials had no automatic right to appeal a governor's decision (except to accuse the governor of extortion or on a capital charge). Defendants often expressed willingness to die if found guilty as a way to emphasize their innocence or their indignation at the charge. The current emperor to whom Paul appeals is Nero; still under the more positive influences, he had not yet become notoriously immoral or begun to persecute Christians.

25:12. A Roman judge normally had a *consilium*, or council, with whom to confer; because a governor might not be learned in the law (*iuris prudentes*), it was important for him to have some advisors who were, although he was ultimately free to disregard their counsel. This was an unusual case. A citizen could appeal even to the emperor, especially for a capital sentence (*appellatio*), but appealing before a case had been heard (*provocatio*), as Paul does here, was unusual, because it was not necessarily advantageous. Nevertheless, Festus has reason to comply with Paul's request. Under ordinary circumstances, appeals were granted. Moreover, in any case the political implications of dismissing an appeal to Caesar were unpleasant (a critic could potentially accuse the governor of usurping imperial privileges), whereas the benefits of sending Paul to Rome free Festus from having to disappoint the Jerusalem leaders if his own juridical conclusions differ from theirs. Although many Roman governors of Judea ignored inconvenient rules, Festus is the one governor of Judea in this period

whom Josephus presents as most faithful in carrying out Roman policies (*Jewish War* 2.271-72).

25:13-22

Festus and Agrippa II

Some argue that Luke did not necessarily have inside information concerning the conversation, since he could safely infer its substance from the outcome (25:26); ancient historians could make such inferences and shape them as readable *narrative.

25:13-14. When Agrippa I died (12:23), his son, Agrippa II (here), was only seventeen; his daughters were Berenice (sixteen), Mariamne (ten) and Drusilla (six). Agrippa II ruled a small part of Palestine and worked with the Roman administration. He was an advocate for his people but was also loyal to Rome and later struck a coin in A.D. 89 commemorating Rome's triumph over the Jewish rebels. *Josephus's record shows that Agrippa visited Roman officials frequently, especially when they first arrived. Because Agrippa was authorized even to appoint high priests (Jewish Antiquities 20.179, 196), Festus can obtain Judean advice more important than that of Paul's accusers. Festus later took Agrippa's side in a dispute with the priests.*

Berenice (which ancient writers sometimes abbreviated as Bernice, as Luke does) was Agrippa's sister. Some ancient writers maligned her close relationship with her brother Agrippa, slandering it as incestuous, but their charge, whether motivated by politics, anti-Judaism or love of gossip, is unlikely. Berenice later became the mistress of the Roman general Titus, who besieged Jerusalem. Though he was fifteen years her junior, he promised to make her empress once he became emperor. Anti-Jewish public opinion, however, ultimately forced him to renege on the promise, so she finally left Rome brokenhearted. Jewish aristocrats who sided with Rome during the war (like Josephus, at least after his capture) portray Agrippa II and his sister very favorably, and they remained alive when Luke was writing.

25:15-16. Roman law required that the accused be permitted to confront his accusers and defend himself against charges in a public hearing.

25:17-21. "Crimes that I could recognize as such" in 25:18 might reflect a Roman legal formulation. The real issue here is one of Jewish *law—one not tried by Roman courts. Luke again shows the Roman impression that

Christianity was part of Judaism and thus should be accorded legal toleration.

25:22. Compare Luke 23:8; historians and biographers often looked for parallels among characters in history. As a newcomer, Festus would naturally want the counsel of Agrippa, who knew Judaism but was more sympathetic to Roman interests than the priestly aristocracy was proving to be. Agrippa had a good Greek education, and Festus might have gravitated to him as one of the few local people with whom he could discuss such matters. If Festus follows Agrippa's advice, he need not worry about Jerusalem aristocrats' complaints against his recommendation being conveyed to Caesar's tribunal (cf. 25:26).

25:23–26:1

The Hearing Before Agrippa Begins

25:23. The pomp Luke mentions here was characteristic of royal families, including Jewish ones (e.g., 1 Maccabees 11:6). The “commanders” (NASB) or “officers” (NIV) are as many as five tribunes, Roman commanders of the five cohorts in Caesarea (cf. the sixth tribune in Jerusalem, 21:31, although given the political mobility of those in this office, Lysias might no longer be there).

25:24–26. “Lord” (v. 26) was a common title for the emperor by this period. Romans, unlike Greeks, would not yet be using it as a divine title. Festus regards particularly Agrippa, as a Romanized Jew, as both unbiased and competent to give Festus advice.

25:27. A governor would not dare to send a case to the emperor's court frivolously; Festus needs to provide a document explaining the prior inquiry (a cover letter, *litterae dimissoriae*). The charge against Paul is political, but all the evidence involves Jewish religion, which would be incomprehensible to Roman procurators. Agrippa II is the first official competent in both Roman and Jewish *law to hear Paul's defense; he will thus supply the evaluation for Festus's letter to Nero. If this Jewish king does not think Paul guilty, Festus has protected himself against complaints from Jerusalem's aristocratic priests.

26:1. On receiving permission from the judge (in this case, unofficially Agrippa), one could speak. Paul's hand is stretched forth in customary *rhetorical style; gestures were an important part of ancient training in public speaking. Studies of ancient gestures suggest that the gesture opening this kind of speech might include pushing together the thumb and middle finger as the outstretched arm moved from right to left.

26:2-11

Paul's Pious Background

Standard defense speeches varied somewhat in form but had general consistency, as exhibited here: the complimentary address to the judge (26:2-3), the *narratio* (narration of events—26:4-18) and finally the *argumentio* (proofs for one's case—26:19-23). Whereas in 24:10-21 Paul sought to show his innocence and seek toleration for his message, here he further argues that his message is true.

26:2-3. Here Paul offers the *exordium* of the speech, in which it was customary to praise the judge (*captatio benevolentiae*). Paul is able to do so honestly; Agrippa's interest in the *law was known (though it did not always satisfy the priests), and his realm became a safe haven for Jewish practice after the Jewish-Roman war of 66–70. Requests to hear the speaker patiently appear frequently in ancient speeches.

26:4. Luke's summary focuses on the speech's *narratio*, or preliminary narration of events leading up to the legal situation; here it stretches from 26:4 to at least 26:18 (and perhaps 26:20). Defendants often challenged charges by appealing to their known character. On Paul's youth in Jerusalem, see 22:3; speeches praising a person often started with the person's honorable upbringing, when possible.

26:5. The appeal to many potential witnesses is not unusual; it occurs even in *Plato's version of Socrates' defense*. Also frequent were appeals to common knowledge, often on the part of the audience, and the insistence that one was more upright or pious than one's accusers in the matter on which one was accused. Pharisees were less strict than *Essenes, but most Judeans had significantly less contact with Essenes.

26:6-7. Two of the most basic future hopes of most Judeans were the *resurrection of the bodies of the righteous and the restoration of the twelve tribes at the same time. Although the *Sadducees and many Diaspora Jews* may have doubted future resurrection, it was probably the majority view in Palestinian Judaism.

26:8. Ancient courtrooms often counted arguments from probability more heavily than they counted what we would consider hard evidence (such as reliable witnesses); Paul must thus counter the supposition that a resurrection is improbable by reminding his hearers of God's power and that resurrection is rooted in the most basic Jewish hope.

26:9-10. Favorable testimony from a source expected to be hostile counted more heavily; as a former persecutor Paul has special credibility. Ancient writers sometimes used “casting a vote” figuratively for agreement with decisions; Paul himself had been too young (Acts 7:58; cf. Gal 1:14) to belong to the Sanhedrin. (“Casting a vote,” literally, “a pebble,” was also likely a pun here, similar to some others in antiquity; while witnesses cast their stones, Paul cast what he could, his pebble, i.e., his consent, since pebbles had long stood for voting.) Roman rule forbade executions without the governor’s consent, but they could not prevent lynchings; their Judean forces stayed in Jerusalem and especially Caesarea. Paul’s account here thus paints members of the class to which his accusers belonged as complicit in his past crimes.

26:11. Pliny, governor of Bithynia in the second century, noted that former Christians could easily be moved to worship the gods, but complained that genuine Christians could not be forced to do so, even on the pain of death. Pagan rulers who had earlier tried to force Jews to abandon their ancestral customs had encountered the same resistance, which pagan officials generally considered obstinate.

26:12-23

The Risen Christ Calls Paul to the Gentiles

26:12-13. On “midday” or “noon” (NIV), see 22:6. In 26:13 Paul uses clearly Jewish language for a theophany, a revelation of God’s glory.

26:14. Falling down was a common response to divine (and sometimes even angelic) revelations in the *Old Testament and Jewish tradition*. The “heavenly voice” (which some segments of Judaism thought had replaced prophecy) was often thought to speak in Hebrew or *Aramaic. “Kicking against the goads” was a Greek proverb about fighting a god; its best known form appears in Euripides’ *Bacchae* 794-95, which is also the ultimate source for the term translated “fighting against God” in 5:39. It is not cited in the other accounts of Paul’s conversion, but it is appropriate in an address to Agrippa, who had an ample Greek education. Greeks displayed their education by providing classical allusions. A “goad” was a pricked utensil used to get animals to move in the right way; ancient writers often applied it figuratively.

26:15-18. Jesus’ words to Paul evoke Old Testament passages about prophets’ calls (Jer 1:5-8) and Israel’s call to the *Gentiles (Is 42:6-7, 16). “An

inheritance among those who have been sanctified” (NASB) or “the set-apart ones” refers to the Jewish hope that they as God’s set-apart people would inherit the world to come, just as Israel had “inherited” the Promised Land.

26:19-21. A Roman aristocrat like Festus may dislike Paul’s mission to move Gentiles to repent, but he would not understand the Jewish opposition. Agrippa II, who had pagan friends and knew well the mounting animosity of Judean Jewry against Gentiles, would understand Paul all too well, and it is to him that Paul directs these words. One ancient defense was that one acted by necessity; this could take the form of having to obey a god. In 26:21, Paul again reverses charges; see comment on 24:18-19.

26:22-23. Paul begins marshaling evidence at this point (26:8) that the faith he represents is in continuity with the Old Testament religion tolerated by the Romans as an ancient and ethnic religion.

26:24-32

The Court’s Evaluation

26:24. Magistrates could interrupt with questions and challenges, as here. Undoubtedly referring to Paul’s Jewish learning (26:4-5) and probably also his visionary claims (26:13-19), Festus gives the usual answer that educated Romans gave to concepts so foreign and barbarian to them as *resurrection. Greeks associated some “madness” with prophetic inspiration; philosophers often considered themselves sober and the masses mad (cf., e.g., Musonius Rufus 20, p. 126.2-3 Lutz), but the masses sometimes considered philosophers mad (possibly relevant to Festus’s claim here).

26:25. A term in Paul’s reply (“utter”—NASB; “saying”—NIV) may imply that he is speaking under inspiration (the same term is used in Acts only at 2:4, 14). But “sober” (or “reasonable”—NIV) speech was a virtue appreciated by Romans, related to the ideas of dignity and respectability; “sober” could contrast with “mad” (26:24), and philosophers, who considered themselves the sanest of all, emphasized their sobriety.

26:26. The charge “speaking in a corner” was an idiom for private speech, and some argue that it was sometimes used to criticize sages who avoided helping the public with their perspectives. Romans mistrusted private meetings as potentially subversive. By the second century Christians were often charged with being secretive (although sometimes they were meeting secretly to avoid

being arrested), but Paul argues that Christian claims are public facts, dismissed or ignored by others only because of the others' bias. Speakers often appealed to public knowledge.

26:27. Paul returns to his argument from Scripture, directed toward Agrippa although incomprehensible to Festus (26:22-24).

26:28. Agrippa evades the force of Paul's appeal to the prophets by protesting that Paul would make him play the role of a Christian by answering Yes. The rejoinder may be witty rather than harsh.

26:29. Paul is not embarrassed to admit his desire to convert Agrippa. Mentioning Paul's chains heightens pathos; speakers often emphasized emotional appeal at the conclusion of their speech. Often a prisoner's right hand would be manacled to a guard's left; the iron chains frequently weighed ten to fifteen pounds.

26:30-31. Paul is not guilty before Roman law, and this is the only conclusion that Roman law would care about. Nor is he offensive to Agrippa's more liberal form of Judaism, which abhorred revolutionaries and did not accede to the demands of the Jerusalem aristocracy.

26:32. Agrippa's opinion would have been included in the cover letter for the case. Because Paul had used his Roman right to appeal to Caesar's tribunal, Agrippa and Festus can only refer him there with a letter specifying their own opinion. This necessity was likely political rather than legal, and it extracted Festus from a difficult political situation vis-à-vis Paul's local accusers. This appeal had earlier saved Paul's life (25:3), and now it provides him free passage to Rome (cf. 19:21) and a public forum for the *gospel there.

27:1-8

The Voyage to Rome Begins

Both eyewitness reports and novels included descriptions of storms and shipwrecks; eyewitness reports could tell their story using patterns also found in epic. This *narrative is clearly eyewitness history; the details of the voyage, including the number of days it took to reach particular harbors given the winds mentioned, fit exactly the report of one who had undertaken such a voyage. This point was shown already in the nineteenth century by an experienced Mediterranean mariner.

27:1. Governors at times assigned special duties to centurions and a handful

of their soldiers with them. In custody, persons of status were sometimes guarded by centurions; on occasion they even became friends. Given his name, “Julius” may be a Roman citizen, assigned to guard Paul the citizen, though Julius’s soldiers may still be noncitizen auxiliaries. “Augustan” (NASB, NRSV) was often an honorary term; multiple legions and presumably cohorts carried this title, and one cohort known in Syria-Palestine from this period bore that name. Centurions could be moved around. The “other prisoners” may include some sent for trial as Roman citizens, but a higher number of those sent normally were convicted criminals to be killed in the games for the entertainment of the Roman public.

27:2. Shippers had low status but often made large profits. Ancient Mediterranean ships were quite small by modern standards; most of them weighed less than 250 tons, although Alexandrian grain ships (27:6) were much heavier (often estimated at eight hundred tons or more). Caesarea, where they embark, was a major port; its famous and massive artificial harbor was earlier constructed by Herod the Great. Because Adramyttium, southeast of Troas, was the ship’s home port, it was apparently returning northward to Asia Minor, where Julius and the prisoners could transfer to a larger vessel. Imperial messengers normally traveled by land, unless a ship were convenient, as this one proved to be. As an agent of Rome, Julius could requisition passage on ships without paying for it. A prisoner’s friends or servants would be permitted to accompany him only if the captors allowed this; the nature of Paul’s judges’ verdict (26:31-32) has clearly given him light treatment, since two companions accompany him.

27:3. Sidon had a double harbor and was some sixty-nine nautical miles (perhaps a day’s voyage) north of Caesarea, where they had started; their rapid progress suggests smooth sailing at this point. Loading and unloading cargo could take days (or longer) at a busy port, so passengers often went ashore. Ships’ primary purpose was to transport cargo; passengers thus were responsible to bring their own food and other supplies. (At night they slept on deck either in the open or in tents that they brought and erected.) Soldiers normally would need to requisition provisions for themselves and their prisoners from locals, so Paul’s friends’ voluntary support (cf. 24:23) exempts Julius from this unpleasant task here. Although it could be politically dangerous to display loyalty to a prisoner, ancients valued true friendship that remained loyal no matter what one’s circumstances (cf. also 28:13-15).

27:4. The ship is opposed by the usual winds of late sailing season, which

blew from the northwest, the direction that they wished to travel. Unable to sail directly northwest toward Myra, they sail on the east of Cyprus, which shields them from westerly winds. Thus, remaining close to the Syrian coast east of Cyprus, and northward to the south of Asia Minor, their voyage is much slower than the reverse voyage across open sea (21:1-3), although aided in their westward movement along the southern coast of Asia Minor by land breezes. Even in better weather, however, ships normally sailed north to Asia Minor before turning west to the south of Crete.

27:5. Myra, a common destination for Alexandrian grain ships, was two miles from its harbor, Andriace. The soldiers and their prisoners could have gone on by land, but the centurion is able to find another ship (27:6).

27:6. Grain ships bound to and from Rome accounted for a vast proportion of Mediterranean trade; ships from Alexandria, Egypt, would travel northward and then westward to bear their cargoes to Rome. This journey took from as little as forty days to over two months (with up to another month to unload the cargo in Italy), although the reverse voyage from Rome to Alexandria could take as little as nine to thirteen days. A particularly large ship could be about 180 feet long, forty-five feet wide and (at their deepest) over forty feet deep; estimates of the amount of grain imported to Rome annually range from two to four hundred thousand tons, probably over a hundred thousand tons of that being imported from Egypt. Because of the fertile Nile valley, Egypt supplied possibly a third of Rome's grain. Egyptian peasants who raised the grain could not always feed their families, but the grain was disbursed free to citizens of Rome to maintain stability in the heart of the empire. Rome provided economic incentives for shipowners, securing as much grain for Rome as possible. Although in this period owned and operated by private merchants, this was the largest mercantile fleet known to Europe before the 1700s. The Alexandrian fleet was the quickest means of transportation from Syria to Rome.

27:7. Cnidus lay partly on a peninsula, partly on an island, and had two harbors. Ships that sailed over against Cnidus were keeping north of Rhodes. Between storms, they could venture the two or three days from Cnidus to Salmone, on Crete's northeastern tip, the easiest place to reach in view of the winds from the northwest. Crete was the largest island of the Aegean Sea. It had few harbors in the north, and the current, seasonal winds from the northwest could wreck a ship against the coast. But the south coast of Crete had more harbors, and the south winds there were more gentle.

27:8. Fair Havens is a bay two kilometers west of Lasea; sheltered by small

islands, it would protect ships from strong winds. Nevertheless, this fishing village was not a pleasant place for the crew and passengers to spend winter. Six miles (ten kilometers) beyond Fair Havens, however, Crete's southern coast veers sharply northward after Cape Matala, exposing a ship to the full harshness of a northwesterly wind blowing across the land. To find the better winter harbor of Phoenix further west, therefore, the ship would likely sail northwest across open sea through the Gulf of Mesara toward their destination, but in so doing would gamble that they would not suddenly face a northwester.

27:9-19

The Crisis at Sea

Danger was so common at sea that some estimate that a fifth of voyagers faced danger on significant voyages; perhaps half of all voyages faced delays. Shipwrecks were so common that archaeologists have identified more than a thousand ancient shipwreck remains. Luke had good reason to supply many details; ancient readers were interested in stories about such experiences.

27:9. Ships usually left Alexandria in the spring, but could be delayed administratively in Italian ports. Those that returned to Alexandria before late August might venture a second trip; later voyages were more risky, but shipowners' profit determined whether such voyages would be undertaken. Owners (often newly wealthy urban merchants) could borrow money to pay for their cargo; the loan would be canceled if the ship were lost, but such loans could run as high as thirty percent of the cargo's cost. Indeed, eager to import more grain, the previous emperor, Claudius, had offered special financial incentives to shippers who would bring grain even in winter (*Suetonius, *Life of Claudius* 18.2-3). If sailing became too dangerous, ships might winter along the way and resume their voyage in the spring. The "fast" here refers to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which occurs in September or October. Sea travel became more dangerous as winter approached (2 Tim 4:21; Tit 3:12). Shipping was completely closed down (except for the brave or foolhardy) from around November 10 to as late as March 10, but September 15–November 10 and March 11–May 26 could be risky periods as well. Given the financial incentives of multiple annual runs for the grain ships, however, some shipowners took the risks.

27:10. Paul's Roman citizenship and perhaps status as leader of a movement

or one with an approving letter from Festus keep him in the presence of the centurion. Pagans undertaking sea voyages always sacrificed to the gods and sought their protection. Bad omens, astrological interpretations or dreams sometimes prevented a ship from sailing if they were taken seriously. Before going to war Romans would check the entrails of animals, the flight of birds and other forms of divination; religious advice was always important to those contemplating a potentially risky venture. Paul might sound to them like the kind of seer who could predict the future without divination. (Unlike Greeks, Romans respected divination more than this kind of *prophecy.) His hearers will take Paul more seriously later in the chapter.

27:11. Most of the elite considered shippers of low status, but the latter often did make huge profits. Although Paul's travel experience and spiritual reputation might allow Paul a hearing, the centurion, who must decide whether to leave with the ship, gives greater credence to the nautical knowledge of the captain (and the decision of the "majority," 27:12). Yet such a decision was often made more on economic than nautical grounds. Ships' contents were expensively insured in case of shipwreck. Grain ships sometimes traveled together; this one is making the voyage alone and is probably one of the latest vessels of the shipping season. The captain at best hopes to make it to a better and/or further harbor before the seas close down for the winter (27:12); he cannot hope to reach Italy this late in the year (27:9).

27:12. Most of Crete's southwest coast is steep, but one city with an excellent harbor was Phoenix, on the southern side of a Cretan isthmus. Phoenix was probably a common winter harbor; its site is probably a bay across from Loutro, though the topography has changed since antiquity. The voyage would be more than fifty miles (eighty kilometers). The "majority," presumably of people with rank, come to a consensus.

27:13-14. A south wind would help them stay close to shore and bring them safely to their destination. They would pass Cape Matala four miles to the west, following the coast, but then might try to sail west-northwest in the open across the gulf of Mesará for some thirty-four to thirty-six miles to reach Phoenix. Unfortunately, in this region the south wind often changes suddenly to a dangerous wind from the northeast (a *gregale*); the conflicting air currents increase the danger. Mountains just one or two kilometers north of Fair Havens could have initially obstructed the sailors' view of storms coming from the north. They may have seen them when crossing the bay, but (not being from this region) could not have known that the nearby Platanos Valley could funnel the

wind toward them and blast them out to sea. The “Euraquilo” mentioned here (NASB; the term mixes Greek and Latin) may be a wind blowing from the east by northeast—the most dangerous kind of wind.

27:15. With a favorable wind in their mainsail, these ships could cover about fifty nautical miles in daylight, or ninety miles in twenty-four hours. But ancient ships had square mainsails and could face into even a normal headwind only with much effort; this wind was more powerful.

27:16. Cauda’s probable location (modern Gavdhos) was over twenty miles southwest of where the storm probably caught them in the bay of Mesará. It offered no place to anchor on the side of the island they were passing; the momentary shelter from the storm’s force, however, allowed for some quick maneuvers. The “boat” or “lifeboat” (NIV), a dinghy, was used for landings, to maneuver the ship for tacking and so forth. Often these boats were towed behind, typically with a sailor in it. Here, filled with water or in danger of breaking loose from the ship or being smashed against it, it has to be brought on deck to be rescued.

27:17. The “supporting cables” (NASB) or “ropes” (NIV) were frapping cables used to undergird the hull against the raging sea in times of fierce storms; they may have been slipped around the stern or prow and worked backward to brace the whole hull.

If they continued on their present course too far (four hundred miles) to the southwest, they would eventually be destroyed in Syrtis Major (modern Gulf of Sidra), a dreaded shoal west of Cyrenaica along the African coast. (Syrtis Minor was further west than their path risked carrying them.) Ancient literature is replete with accounts of ships trapped in these shallows, then destroyed when the water levels rose. Even in good weather, Alexandrian grain ships sailed northward to Asia and then westward to Italy, rather than directly northwest, because a sudden change in winds could wreck them on this shoal.

27:18. Other sources illustrate that jettisoning some of the cargo is the natural step at this point; in crises like this one no distinction is made between valuable and cheap cargo (Jon 1:5; also *Josephus, others). They do not discard all the cargo here (27:38); ships carried at least 68 tons, large ones (such as this one) usually carried over 250 tons, and some could carry up to 1200 tons. Unloading such a ship once docked could take twelve days. Hurling merchandise into the sea required less caution, but the crew certainly could not finish the task in one day. The grain was probably stored in sacks piled six feet high, which could be moved manually only with great effort, without the equipment normally

available on docks.

27:19. If, as many commentators think, Luke refers to the yard (“tackle”—NIV)—a spar that could be nearly the ship’s own length—it would take many of those on deck to lower it down to the deck. One would secure it if possible, but in the severity of this storm, they cannot afford the encumbrance created by retaining it.

27:20-44

The God of Safety on the Sea

27:20. Stars were needed for navigation. Pagans felt that those who died at sea never entered the realm of the dead; instead their souls wandered aimlessly forever above the waters in which they perished.

27:21-22. Paul might speak below deck; in any case, some people were able to project their voices so as to be heard widely, even with competing noise. Ancient people often evaluated the sincerity of philosophers (e.g., Aristippus) according to how calm they stayed under pressure. People believed that a true philosopher consistent with his teachings would remain calm in a dangerous storm at sea (so Pyrrho the Skeptic), whereas a false prophet such as Peregrinus would not. The others’ lack of eating could stem from fear or seasickness. The conventional address “Men” need not imply that all 276 persons aboard are male (see comment on 1:16).

27:23-25. It was not unusual for ancient writers in the middle of a story to report earlier events they had not yet mentioned.

Many believed that ships would be destroyed because of the impious aboard, or spared because one of special piety was aboard. A story is told that even some unreligious men began to supplicate the gods during a raging storm; the philosopher Bias, aboard the same ship, urged them to be quiet, lest the gods recognize they were aboard and sink the ship! Like Jonah’s behavior in the *Old Testament (Jon 1:6-16), this attitude contrasts sharply with Paul’s concern for all aboard. (A few other people, like Caesar, were said to have claimed that a ship could not sink with them on it, but Paul’s claim is because of God’s mission and message, not because he is personally indispensable.) Various deities claimed the role of protector at sea, like Isis or the Dioscuri (28:11); but God is the true protector.

27:26-27. Running aground was dangerous, but Paul prepares them for this

news. The sea around Malta (28:1) is far south of what is called the “Adriatic Sea” today but was included in the “Sea of Adria” in antiquity. The rate of drift per day and the trajectory they would have followed from Cauda to avoid Syrtis has been calculated; it was exactly fourteen days to reach Malta (28:1). If the wind was below gale strength at this point, a ship heading toward Malta from the east could hear water breaking against land even at a mile and a half from Point Koura.

27:28. Sailors would judge the depth of the water by lowering lead weights smeared with grease on a hollow underside, to pick up samples from the sea floor. The soundings suggest that they were at this point near Koura, east of Malta; they may have passed within a quarter mile of it. Roughly half an hour would pass between twenty and fifteen fathoms, showing that they are approaching grounding dangerously quickly, probably with underwater rocks that would rip open the hull.

27:29. Because they are shoaling quickly with low visibility, they use anchors as brakes. These were normally cast from the bow, but here they are cast from the stern, probably so the stern cannot be blown around into the rocks or because they will advance bow-first in the morning light. The anchors were probably used in succession to prevent the vessel from being smashed against the reefs.

27:30. Other cases are known of crew members’ trying to escape a doomed ship in a small boat; these boats were not meant as lifeboats and fitted only a handful of people. Sailors were sometimes slaves; at other times they sailed to make a living; but they had little stake in the ship.

27:31. The sailors’ expertise will be needed aboard to ground the ship. The centurion and soldiers, being armed, could take charge.

27:32. On the next day they could have used the small boat to ferry people to land (although it would have taken many trips); without it, they would have to run the whole ship aground. Although the captain might hold more rank on the ship than a passenger centurion (against some earlier views of the Roman grain fleet), in an emergency the soldiers would exercise more authority—if only because they were the ones with the weapons.

27:33-34. “Not a hair of one’s head” was a proverbial expression in the Old Testament (1 Sam 14:45; 2 Sam 14:11; 1 Kings 1:52); but it would make sense even to hearers who were not familiar with it.

27:35-36. The meal here is done in the traditional Jewish manner: the head of the household thanked God and distributed the bread. Most passengers would

have brought their own food on the ship, probably especially bread (the most fundamental staple of the ancient Mediterranean diet) and other food that did not require cooking. Some of the raw wheat in 27:38 could also be edible in this emergency, though it could be difficult to digest.

27:37. Large ships frequently carried several hundred people; Josephus even claimed that he had traveled aboard a ship with six hundred people. Most ships that hugged the coasts weighed less, but large ones could weigh 250 tons. Alexandrian grain ships (such as in 27:6; 28:11), built for the open sea, were larger, many weighing 340 tons, some over eight hundred tons, and a few to twelve hundred tons.

27:38. They need to lighten the ship further (27:18), in order to run aground as close to land as possible. Once wet, grain would also pose a hazard to the ship, since the grain could swell to twice its original volume and split the hull. Many suggest that they had so far retained some of the cargo as ballast (heavy material kept in the hold of a ship to steady it); whether or not this is the case, such ships carried hundreds of tons of wheat, so they could not have finished the job in 27:18. An Alexandrian ship's cargo would be wheat.

27:39. Apart from some topographic details that have changed over the centuries, the traditional site of St. Paul's Bay in northeastern Malta fits all the details of the narrative. Ships often stopped at Malta, but normally in better weather and at safe harbors.

27:40. These actions are normal for a disabled ship trying to come near land. A helmsman would pull and push a tiller, or handle, to control two steering paddles (oars) connected as rudders. The sailors had apparently bound the rudders to prevent unwelcome movement, but now needed to steer. Ships normally had a large, square sail and (mentioned here) a smaller, triangular foresail; the latter could be removed when slowing down when coming into a harbor, but here the objective is to reach the beach as quickly as possible.

27:41. Between St. Paul's Bay and the island of Salmonetta on the northwest is a shallow channel about three hundred yards wide. The ship may have wedged on a sandbar there, while waves pound the immobilized rear of the vessel.

27:42-43. Chained prisoners cannot swim; unchained prisoners can escape. Guards were responsible for the prisoners' safe custody. They would be less liable for their charges if the prisoners "died at sea" than if they escaped. In any case, most of these prisoners were likely going to be fed to animals for public entertainment in Rome; out of consistency, Julius might have a hard time later explaining how he spared one prisoner (Paul) and not others, so he spares all.

27:44. The boards might be taken from the grain holds below deck. Papyrus is not waterproof; Luke would have to put any notes in a sealed container and keep it atop a plank. Although some survivors of a shipwreck so close to shore would be likely, the survival of all passengers (likely including the aged, infirm and children), after two weeks without eating and many or most being unable to swim, would be viewed as extraordinary. In Greco-Roman literature, someone's escape from disaster at sea could serve as evidence of that person's religious purity even before a court.

28:1-10

Miracles on Malta

28:1. Malta (ancient Melite), some fifty-eight miles south of Sicily, was on the shipping route from Rome to Egypt, whereby empty ships would sail quickly to Alexandria to load up more cargoes. It was the stop immediately after Syracuse in Sicily (28:12). The alternative proposed site for Luke's island, near Dalmatia (Meleda, modern Mljet, also called Melite in antiquity), is based on a misreading of "Adria" in 27:27 and has no merit; winds from the northeast could not have driven them there, nor would they have sailed from there to Syracuse instead of Italy (28:12).

28:2. Ancients valued hospitality, particularly to survivors of shipwrecks. The Maltese were of Phoenician descent, and most commoners there spoke and read only Punic (the late Phoenician dialect of the Carthaginians). But Roman citizens and retired soldiers also lived there, the elite spoke Latin or Greek, and the island was certainly not considered culturally primitive. The title "barbarians" ("barbarous"—KJV; "natives"—NRSV, NASB; "islanders"—NIV) could apply to all non-Greeks, or, as here, to anyone who did not speak Greek. Greeks did not ordinarily expect kind treatment from them, but Luke's use of the term is not derisive; he indicts Greek ethnic prejudice at the same time that he displays God's providential care through them. The temperature during that season would have been typically below 60 degrees Fahrenheit when raining, and being wet probably made people feel even cooler.

28:3. In cold weather some snakes can look stiff like twigs until the heat of a fire stirs them. Snakebites were a topic of medical concern in antiquity. Poisonous snakes are now extinct on heavily populated Malta, probably partly because the forest cover that once existed is now gone.

28:4. Ancients could argue even in courts that their survival of troubles at sea proved their piety and hence innocence; on the importance of arguing Paul's innocence, see the introduction to Acts. In some stories, the impious escaped one form of terrible death (e.g., at sea) only to face something worse (besides Greek stories, see Amos 5:19). "Justice" was a goddess who executed the will of Fortune or the Fates; although both Romans and local Punic tradition had personified Justice as a deity, Luke translates the observers' idea into the idiom of Greek poets. Animals were considered one means of divine punishment. Several groups of Jewish catacombs dating between the second and fifth centuries A.D. have been found on the island; but if Jewish people were on the island in the first century, this *narrative does not mention them.

28:5. For divine protection from or healing of snake bites, see, e.g., Num 21:6-9; for protection more generally, e.g., Ps 91:13; Dan 6:22. (Some Jewish traditions also emphasize Adam's rule over the beasts [Gen 1:26] or its restoration in Is 11:6-9.)

28:6. Whenever similar stories were told, those who survived bites from poisonous snakes or lizards were considered holy men (e.g., the pious Jewish holy man Hanina ben Dosa); Greco-Roman paganism often considered such holy men to be divine or semidivine. The change of mind on the part of Paul's viewers could strike the ancient reader as humorous, as in some similar accounts in antiquity where a human was mistaken for a particular divinity. Ancient writers often paralleled or contrasted figures; cf. here 10:25-26; 12:22-23; 14:11, 15.

28:7. Hospitality was an important virtue, especially toward people who had been shipwrecked and were stranded without possessions. Both Greek and Latin often employ "first" (as here) for leading citizens, and the title is attested on Malta. Publius is a Latin *praenomen*, and as a top official he had probably received a grant of Roman citizenship; the title assigned to him here has been found in Greek and Latin inscriptions as the proper title of the island's governor.

28:8-9. The most common form of fever was malaria (typhoid also occurred); the description here could fit malaria, with intermittent attacks. Fevers could last briefly or for a year, and could be mild or fatal. Some ancient treatments were superstitious, but many physicians treated winter fever by giving fluids. Dysentery most often accompanied fever during summer, but the dysentery may have persisted or exploited the man's weakened condition, or the fever may stem from dysentery. Some commentators also note that in subsequent times the Maltese were affected by a special sickness due to a microbe in the

milk of the goats there; although such organisms would have mutated over the centuries, perhaps a similar illness is in view here.

28:10. People typically were expected to respond to benefactions with other gifts or honors.

28:11-16

Journey to Rome

28:11. As an agent of Rome, Julius could requisition passage on ships without paying for it. The seas opened as early as February 7–8 or as late as March 10, depending on the weather; in the year in view here they seem to open toward the earlier date. On Alexandrian ships, see comment on 27:6; like most ships wintering on the island, this one would have left Alexandria too late in the season and spent the winter in a Maltese harbor rather than risking the voyage on to Rome at that time. Ships were named for their patron deity (e.g., “the Isis”) in whose protection they trusted and whose image was used as the ship’s figurehead. The Dioscuri (Castor and Pollux, twin heroes; Pollux, a son of Zeus, shared his immortality with his brother during half the year) were considered special protectors of ships, on whom one might call in a storm. They were also popular deities in Rome and in this region.

28:12. Well-fortified Syracuse was the chief city of Sicily, on its southeast, with a rich Greek and Roman heritage and renowned for its beauty; it boasted two harbors and was perhaps a quarter the size of Rome itself. The voyage there was roughly a hundred miles.

28:13. Rhegium was the Italian harbor closest to Sicily, with a long history as a Greek settlement but also Roman citizenship. In the first century, mercantile vessels, including the Alexandrian grain fleet, put in at Puteoli some twenty miles west of Naples (although the harbor Claudius had improved at Ostia eventually surpassed it). To have reached Puteoli in two days meant that they had made optimum time (about ninety miles a day). Yet from Puteoli they still had far more than a hundred miles left to Rome.

28:14. The Jewish community in Puteoli had been there a long time, as had Egyptian and Phoenician cults. As a regular port receiving visitors from the East, it naturally received foreign religions as well as goods. Thus it is not surprising to find Christians there; but readers of Luke’s day might be more surprised that these Christians offer such extensive hospitality to Paul’s captors, who (probably

in view of Paul's role during the storm) accept it from them. The journey from here to Rome would be perhaps 120 to 130 miles, some of it through hill country; it might take up to a week. On the journey they would proceed first to Capua (some twenty miles on the Via Campana) and from there follow the Via Appia (the "Appian Way").

28:15. Honorary delegations would come from cities to meet a visiting dignitary; local Christians, probably familiar with Paul's letter to the Romans and some Christian leaders in Rome who know him, honor Paul in this way, coming even much further than ordinary delegations. (For information about some of the Roman believers, esp. their leaders, see Rom 16.) In older times, isolated inns had grown into larger settlements that retained the names of the inns. One of these was the Tres Tabernae, or Three Inns, 33 Roman miles from Rome on the ancient and famous Appian Way. (A Roman mile was a thousand average-sized paces for a Roman soldier, eventually standardized as about 4,851 feet, about 92 percent of the English mile of 5,280 feet [i.e., about 1479 meters].) The "Market of Appius," or Appii Forum, was about 43 Roman miles (39.5 miles; 63.5 kilometers) from Rome on the same paved road. Jewish communities had existed in Italy for a long time and may have formed the basis for the first Christian groups there (cf. 2:10).

28:16. Rome had as many as a million residents, though not all fit within its traditional walls. Along the Appian Way, Paul and the others would enter Rome's Porta Capena, through an area with many poor immigrants. Paul was loosely chained by the wrist to a soldier (28:20), presumably a member of the Praetorian Guard, Caesar's elite personal guard in Rome, which consisted of nine or twelve cohorts. The relatively light confinement reported here was used only for prisoners of status who posed no threat (officials would know of the opinion in 26:31), though he did not receive the lightest custody (i.e., without chains). Paul would have considerable freedom within the home, which may have been an apartment in one of Rome's many blocks of tenements; he could have met with visitors in the building's courtyard, if available.

Two soldiers normally guarded dangerous prisoners; the single soldier (cf. also the single chain of 28:20) suggests that Paul was considered a minimal security threat. The guard likely belonged to the Praetorian Guard, the elite part of the Roman army used in Italy itself. The Praetorian Guard was commanded by the Praetorian prefect, one of the most powerful men in Rome, who was at this time Afranius Burrus. Burrus was officially responsible for all prisoners from the provinces to be tried by Caesar's court, although the task itself was

probably delegated to a lower officer.

28:17-31

Paul, Jews and Gentiles in Rome

28:17. Rome had a significant Jewish community (a common guess is forty to fifty thousand) organized in numerous *synagogues. Many lived in the impoverished area across the Tiber; the majority spoke predominantly Greek. The “local Jewish leaders” (NIV) are leaders (apparently bearing titles such as “rulers of synagogues,” “gerousiarchs,” and “rulers”) of different synagogue communities; in contrast to Alexandria’s Jewish community, no single leader or body ruled over the whole Jewish community in Rome. The Jewish congregations in Rome were all autonomous, and Christians could spread their views among the various synagogues with relative freedom. The Jewish community there had also made many Roman converts and sympathizers (to the chagrin of many male Roman aristocrats). Many of these sympathizers would be happy to embrace a version of the Jewish faith that accepted them fully without circumcision. Many Jewish believers may have been expelled a decade or so earlier due to tensions over Jesus’ identity (see comment on 18:2), however, and though many would have returned on Claudius’s death, it is not clear that they returned to the synagogues.

28:18-20. In terms of ancient logic and *rhetoric, that Paul was “forced” to appeal is an argument from “necessity,” often used to show that a particular behavior was not wrong in a given case. Paul is not, he says, out to bring a countercharge (see comment on 24:19) or embarrass his people, already a sometimes marginal minority in Rome. Paul must also explain his chain, normally a mark of dishonor. Paul continues to emphasize the continuity between the *Old Testament message and his own; this point would be important to Jewish leaders and also to Roman officials, who needed to understand that the Jesus movement was rooted in an ancient religion worthy of toleration (even if, after 70, Judaism was unpopular in some circles).

28:21-22. Paul’s accusers may not yet have arrived (cf. 28:11), but they may also have abandoned the case. Unable to win their case in Judea, Paul’s accusers would have even less chance in Rome; if accusers did not eventually come, a case was to be decided in favor of the defendant. Those who failed to prosecute a charge could also be accused of having fabricated it. By A.D. 62, the Jewish

community in Rome had an advocate with the emperor in his wife (and former mistress) Poppaea Sabina—until Nero kicked her to death while she was pregnant. The Roman Jewish community may have had conflicts over the identity of Jesus a decade earlier (see comment on 18:2). These leaders could not but know about this large movement (a few years later Nero killed hundreds of Christians), but they may have lacked an educated Jewish Christian leader who could dialogue with them about it. It is by no means clear that the Roman Jewish community was uniformly hostile to the Christian movement (28:24), but they naturally had questions, especially if their previous (probably partial) expulsion in 18:2 was related to Christian teachings.

28:23-28. Paul's citation of Isaiah 6 climaxes a theme throughout Acts: that most of God's own chosen people reject their *Messiah while *Gentiles accept him is not amazing but the fulfillment of Scripture. Toward the end of their work, writers often recapitulated major themes that came up earlier in their book.

28:30. At the end of two years, if no accusers had arrived and no charges had been sent against him (28:21), the case against him might be closed by default. Careful records were kept, so the system would not simply lose track of its prisoners, especially in Rome itself. Paul was later arrested again and beheaded (according to strong tradition, in Nero's persecution, which began in A.D. 64), but Luke wishes to end on a note of positive legal precedent, before the corruptions introduced by Nero's tyranny. A number of ancient works had sudden endings; and following the pattern of other Jewish and Christian works (but in contrast to many Greek works), Luke wishes to end happily. Open endings sometimes look beyond the narrative's closing to the promised or foreshadowed future (here, the completion of Acts 1:8).

28:31. That Paul could preach under the very nose of the Praetorian Guard suggests that, before Nero instituted his persecution against Christians for political reasons, they were tolerated under Roman law. Luke's defense of Christianity on legal and philosophical grounds paved the way for second-century defenders of Christianity and points the way for Christian lawyers, statespersons and others to work in society today.

New Testament Letters

Letters. The vast majority of ancient letters were short—an estimated average is eighty-seven words. 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)*. Given the costs of papyrus and labor, a letter such as Romans could have cost more than twenty denarii—perhaps some two thousand dollars in earnings equivalent in the recent U.S. Lacking access to shorthand, Paul may have dictated Romans (Rom 16:22) painstakingly over the course of eleven hours. Such letters were more literary undertakings than most other ancient letters.

Later 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. These categories offered samples for the practice of writing letters, but genuine first-century letters were not confined to airtight categories.

Rhetoric. Many scholars have associated Paul's letters with *rhetoric, the study and use of proper forms for public speaking, so we introduce the character of ancient rhetoric here. (Some *church fathers and Renaissance and Reformation interpreters also read Paul in light of Greco-Roman rhetoric.) Certainly at least one church cared about rhetoric and apparently judged Paul's letters (which exhibit his argumentation) stronger than his speaking (which would also include accent, gestures and the like), to Paul's dismay (1 Cor 1:17, 20; 2:1-5, 13; 4:19-20; 2 Cor 10:10-11; 11:6). Paul studied in Jerusalem not as a rhetoric or philosophy major but as a Bible major (cf. Acts 22:3)—whereas orators flaunted their cultural literacy by lavish quotations from Greek literature, Paul expounds Scripture. Perhaps his training in rhetoric amounted to what today might be a couple of homiletics courses, augmented through his argumentative dialogues with others in subsequent years. Nevertheless, he not only spoke Greek but he spoke and wrote good Greek that reflects his sensitivity to cultural idioms. In the Greco-Roman world, it was impossible for him not to dialogue

and communicate with people influenced to one degree or another by rhetoric.

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*, often beginning around age ten or twelve, and the fewer who could afford the next stage proceeded to the *sophistes* or rhetorician, often around the age of fifteen or sixteen. Most who had advanced education completed it by around age 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. The majority of urban people not specifically trained in rhetoric picked up its basic outlines from listening to public speeches, which pervaded urban public life.

Types of Rhetoric. Those who wrote rhetorical handbooks divided rhetoric into three main categories, although these overlapped in practice: 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 speeches mixed the forms.

Rhetoric in New Testament Letters. Most ancient letters were simply business documents or personal notes; such letters averaged eighty-seven words. Even most letters from orators (such as *Cicero, Pliny the Younger or Fronto) contain few rhetorical devices; certainly one could not outline them as speeches. Many of Paul's letters, however, contain significant argumentation, which was especially the domain of rhetoric. For this reason it is helpful to note Paul's use of rhetorical devices and conventional forms of argument. More debatably and controversially, some scholars find larger patterns of argumentation matching the typical outlines of speeches. It should be noted, however, that actual speeches did not always conform to the outlines proposed in handbooks; and even the most didactic of letters from members of the rhetorically trained elite do not normally fit such outlines.

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 ancient writers often used. Paul was undoubtedly more

conscious of and concerned for his culturally relevant communication 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 in these letters is accordingly more detailed than that of his other letters. Some objected to Paul's delivery (cf. 1 Cor 2:3; 2 Cor 10:10; 11:6), but Paul fills some of his letters with more rhetorical devices than some orators would have deemed suitable for mere letters.

Purpose of Letters. Although most brief papyrus letters were merely personal or business communications, some wrote letters with a long-term purpose, intending publication and ideally 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; later epistolary theorists stressed adapting letters to the situation of the readers. James might be 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 sometimes addressed different standard themes (now loosely called *topoi*). For instance, ancient letters of consolation repeated some basic themes, just as modern sympathy cards, epitaphs or eulogies do. The use of conventional themes does not mean insincerity, however; for example, 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 comments 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 (much higher for elite urban males, lower for others); 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 usually done aloud even in private; churches receiving Paul's letters would have them read publicly in the congregation's services, probably often by those who normally read Scripture in the meetings (for those who had Scripture scrolls available). Readers might try to help communicate the thought with appropriate intonation and gestures.

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 should try to assume the original situation and then catch the writer's flow of thought by reading through the whole context. We may put ourselves, as best as possible, in their situation and consider how the principles apply in our situations today.

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 and memories of a key leader in the *Diaspora mission.

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 audience 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 exclusively on differences among Paul's or other early Christian letters.

Works on Ancient Letter Writing. The most readable and helpful introductions to the *genre include Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, LEC 5 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986); David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, LEC 8 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), pp. 158-225; and E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004). For rhetoric, see, e.g., S. E. Porter, ed., *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 b.c.–a.d. 400* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); R. D. Anderson Jr., *Glossary of Greek Rhetorical Terms Connected to Methods of Argumentation, Figures and Tropes from Anaximenes to Quintilian* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000); D. E. Aune, *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament & Early Christian Literature & Rhetoric* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003); and J. D. Harvey, *Listening to the Text: Oral Patterning in Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998). For background to Paul and his thought, see, e.g., A. J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); many articles in J. P. Sampley, ed., *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003); on Paul more generally, see, e.g., Stephen Westerholm, ed., *The*

Blackwell Companion to Paul (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011). For specialized studies, see, e.g., Terence L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Techniques in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature*, SNTSMS 69 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Romans

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 may have had a million inhabitants; supported by its empire, it imported at least two hundred thousand tons of grain annually. Estimates of the Jewish community in this period range between roughly twenty thousand and fifty thousand, thus (by the usual educated guesses) perhaps five percent of the population. 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 (mostly in ethnically segregated communities) and had their own leaders. It is thought that many of the predominantly Jewish house *churches existed in the Jewish ghetto across the Tiber, many Jewish residents working on the docks there. Rome included a community of Jewish Roman citizens, mostly descended from Judeans enslaved by Pompey and then freed by other Jews in Rome (*Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 155). More than half of the Jewish residents of Rome had Latin names.

The primary language of the Jewish community in Rome, however, was not Latin but Greek, the language in which Paul writes (seventy-six percent of their burial inscriptions are in Greek, twenty-three percent in Latin and one percent in Hebrew or Aramaic). *Many Roman conversions to Judaism created resentment among other aristocratic Romans and led to tension between the Jewish and Gentile elements in the city.* Relevant to this letter, ancient literature suggests that many Romans looked down on Jewish people especially for circumcision

(cf. Rom 2:25-29; 4:9-12), Sabbath-keeping (cf. 14:5-6) and food customs (cf. 14:2-23).

Jewish soteriology. Jewish beliefs in the empire in Paul's day were diverse on many points, but most agreed on central issues such as the value of circumcision, Torah, and the temple for Jewish identity. E. P. Sanders challenged many earlier readings of Paul that assumed pervasive Jewish legalism, but the emerging "new perspective" has yielded a conglomeration of different solutions rather than a unified understanding of Paul. Sanders persuasively made the case for *grace in ancient Judaism, but other scholars note that Judaism was diverse, and even a religion insistent on grace (such as Christianity) has its share of legalists. (Merely emphasizing reward or punishment for deeds, however, is not necessarily legalistic, also appearing in Paul, e.g., 2 Cor 5:10.)

Paul's depiction of opposing positions follows standard *rhetorical conventions for polemic in his day, caricaturizing his opponents for the purpose of *reductio ad absurdum*. His argument is rhetorically designed to persuade a first-century audience, even though today he might need to argue differently for a different audience. (For example, Rom 2:17-24, condemning an extreme Jewish teacher, and more general Psalms verses cited in 3:10-20, would not technically make all Jewish individuals sinful. Paul does believe that all people have sinned, but his supporting arguments use the rhetoric that was effective in his setting.)

Paul thus challenges not Jewish people or Jewish views as a whole but some Jewish attitudes and practices. He does this most often in letters such as Romans and Galatians where he addresses the relationship of Gentile believers to Israel's heritage. For the Jewish people, observance of the *law was a matter of culture regardless of views about salvation. For Gentile converts, however, imposing observance of the law's Israel-specific markers as a condition of belonging to Christ's community raised starkly the question of what believers rely on for salvation. Paul recognized Christ as the way of salvation and dependence on him as its necessary condition. For Paul, the Spirit provides the inward circumcision and law that meets what outward circumcision and observance of ancient regulations could only symbolize or approximate* (cf. Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:26-27).

Situation. Although Jesus's movement in Rome started among Jewish believers (cf. Acts 2:10), most of the believers in Rome by the time Paul writes were probably Gentiles (cf. Rom 1:5; 11:13; 16:4; esp. 1:13), possibly because

many of the Jewish Christian leaders had been temporarily expelled for half a decade (see comment on Acts 18:2). Sometime in the 40s A.D., probably in 49, the emperor Claudius expelled some or much of the Jewish community from Rome, apparently over debates about the *Christ (cf. Suetonius, *Life of Claudius* 25.4). The Roman church was thus composed largely of Gentiles until Claudius's death in A.D. 54, when his edict was automatically repealed, and a number of Jewish Christians returned to Rome (Rom 16:3). Jewish and Gentile Christians (as well as Gentiles influenced by Jews, and lax Jews less observant of the law) had different cultural ways of expressing their faith in Jesus (cf. Rom 14); Paul thus uses the *gospel to address, among other matters, a church experiencing tension between two valid cultural expressions of the Christian faith.

Paul probably wrote Romans around 55–58 (I tend to favor closer to 58), shortly after Claudius's death. A decade after Claudius's death and perhaps six years (give or take two) after Paul wrote this letter, Christians of all ethnic backgrounds would suffer together in Rome (*Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44). That the church remained strong after Nero killed hundreds testifies to how much the movement had grown.

Theme. Paul's gospel, or good news, was the message about Jesus that could save Jew and Gentile alike (Rom 1:16-17). Given the situation noted above, what the Roman Christians needed was what we could call ethnic reconciliation and crosscultural sensitivity in Christ. Paul reminds Jewish hearers that they are as damned without *Christ as Gentiles (chaps. 1–3); that spiritual, not ethnic, descent from Abraham is what matters with respect to personal salvation (chaps. 4, 9); that all people (including Abraham's ethnic descendants) 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-Jewish (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 ethnic reconciliation, and unity (16:17-20) is the paramount issue. Paul wants them to accept each other and glorify God together (15:5-12; in 15:9-12 he offers his strongest and climactic texts supporting Gentile salvation).

Paul also explains in this letter that he has not yet visited them because his mission to the unreached is urgent (Rom 15:20-22); the same mission will require him to move beyond them to reach Spain (Rom 15:23-24; cf. 1:13-14). Both of these missions, however, are also part of Paul's vision of reaching all peoples for Christ.

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 functions more like “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 most 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. Did they need to become ethnically Jewish (adopting circumcision and Israel-specific laws) to become spiritual children of Abraham? 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 background. Not even outward observance of God's law can make one right before God's justice; only through Jesus can people be righted. Paul may stress justification by faith, a truth most of his readers would know, in part so he can emphasize reconciliation with one another, a reality they still need to learn.

Commentaries. Detailed commentaries providing significant background include Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, with Roy D. Kotansky, ed. Eldon Jay Epp, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, WBC 38A and B, 2 vols. (Dallas: Word, 1988); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993); Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998). Works on a mid-level range include Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, SP 6 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996); Charles H. Talbert, *Romans*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002); and Thomas H. Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts: The Argument of Romans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004). A helpful shorter commentary with background is Craig S. Keener, *Romans* NCC 6 (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009); for an introduction to issues in the book, see, e.g., Richard N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

For views on the background, see especially Karl P. Donfried, ed., *The Romans Debate*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 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, although some details of his approach are now much debated; for Paul's view on the law in Romans, see, e.g., 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 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. Paul's name was normally a cognomen held by Roman citizens, rarely if ever used by Jews who were not Roman citizens, so his citizenship would likely be assumed (cf. Acts 16:37). 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.

The ideas of being "called" and "set apart" go back to Old Testament language for Israel and, more important here, Israel's prophets; for "*apostle," see the glossary.

1:2-3. When Israel's prophets proclaimed "good news," they could associate it with the restoration of God's people (Is 52:7), which the prophets elsewhere associated with the ultimate Davidic ruler and the *resurrection (Ezek 37:1-14). "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. Although Romans could hear the phrase "*Son of God*" as portraying Jesus as a rival to the emperor, this letter is full of quotations from the Old Testament, where 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 prophets promised that a representative remnant from among the nations would turn to God (Is 2:2; 11:10; 19:23-25; 42:1, 6; 49:6; Zech 2:11). Paul applies to these believers biblical language for God's people, such as "called" (1:6-7) and "consecrated ones" (1:7).

1:7. "*Saints" or "those who have been set apart" or "consecrated" 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" (1:6-7); Paul embraces them as fellow heirs in the mission, not as inferiors.

The standard Greek greeting was "greetings" (*chairein*—Jas 1:1), a term related to "*grace" (*charis*); Jewish people greeted one another with "peace," and Jewish letters sometimes began, "Greetings and peace" (2 Maccabees 1:1; for "mercy and peace," see *2 Baruch 78:2-3). 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

Although less pervasive than prayers and reports of prayers, thanksgivings sometimes appeared in the openings of the bodies of ancient letters; 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. Letters commonly included an opening prayer (cf. 1:7) or the report of prayer. For "in my spirit" (NASB; NIV) the modern idiom would be "from the

bottom of my heart,” “with all my heart” (GNT; NLT). It was common to call as witness the one who knew one’s heart—God. Recurrent prayer was sometimes described as “remembering,” “reminding” or making mention to God.

1:10. 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). Earlier the banning of Jews or at least prominent Jewish Christians from Rome (Acts 18:2) could have delayed Paul’s coming, but ultimately the delay stems from his mission (Rom 15:20-22).

1:14-15. Gentiles (1:13) included two categories, by the Greek division: Greeks considered everyone else in the world “barbarians” (cf. “non-Greeks”—NIV); they also often 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.

1:16. Verses 16-17 seem to be the *propositio*, or thesis statement, which begins Paul’s argument. Paul stresses that the good news of salvation (especially Israel’s deliverance in Is 52:7) is for all peoples (see discussion of the situation in the introduction to Romans); if to both Jews and Greeks (Greeks were often the most anti-Jewish), then to all peoples between Jews and Greeks.

1:17. In Greek the term translated “righteousness” often means “justice.” With reference to God, in the *Old Testament and in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, “God’s righteousness” includes that aspect of his character on account of which he vindicates his people and shows their faithfulness to him to be right; sometimes it also expresses his mercy (e.g., Dan 9:16). Thus it relates to “justification,” or legal acquittal and vindication. (In Romans, many English versions translate the same Greek word as both “righteousness” and “justification.”) Because God’s creative word brings into being, his verdict in practice is also transformative.

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 apparently 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 easy for his readers to follow. Jewish people viewed idolatry (1:18-23) and sexual misconduct (1:24-27), particularly homosexual intercourse (1:26-27), as sins committed by *Gentiles; Paul sets them up for condemnation of vices they too may have shared in 1:28-32.

1:18. "Heaven" was a Jewish circumlocution for God, and the phrase here is a typically Jewish way of saying "God is angry." (That wrath is "revealed" parallels the revealing of God's merciful righteousness in the *gospel in 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; most Gentile intellectuals affirmed divine design in nature.* 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 Greco-Roman world used this sort of argument to persuade pagans to recognize the true God. Even later 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 later rabbinic count), most Gentiles disobeyed even the laws of Noah. In a social world built around benefaction and honor, ingratitude (1:21) was one of the

worst offenses, and grateful expressions of honor the one obligation expected of recipients of gifts.

1:23. Even Greeks disdained animal images of deities (practiced by the Egyptians), but Greeks worshiped deities in human form. 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. Having distorted God's image (1:23), which was originally in male and female humans (Gen 1:26-27), humanity now distorted its own sexuality (Rom 1:24-27). 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) suggests 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 often 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. Probably 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 women who were eighteen or even younger; husbands usually did not respect them. Men had access to only three forms of sexual release until such late marriages: slaves, prostitutes and other males. Men often preferred boys on the edge of puberty or adolescents. Lesbianism, though less widely reported, is also attested.

Although many upper-class Romans were affected by Greek ideals, some other Romans, including a number of Roman philosophers, disliked homosexual practice. Greco-Roman moralists sometimes opposed gender reversal as "against

nature,” which would resemble the Jewish argument from God’s original purposes in creation (Gen 2:18). This argument appealed to the procreative function of intercourse in nature and the way that male and female organs fit together. Jewish people, whose Scriptures already condemned homosexual acts wherever they were mentioned (including Lev 18:22; 20:13), also borrowed the argument that homosexual acts were “against nature” (cf., e.g., *Philo, *Life of Abraham* 135-37; *Special Laws* 3.37-39; *Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.273-75; *Pseudo-Phocylides 190-92). Although Jewish texts speak of Jewish adulterers and thieves, they nearly always treat homosexual behavior as a Gentile practice. (Socialization affected 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. Like skillful ancient speakers, Paul drives home the point with both repetition and variation: “filled with” four fundamental evils; “full of” five kinds of sin; listing eight samples of sinners; and noting that they lack four crucial virtues. 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: Gentiles are not the only ones who are damned.

2:1-11

No Partiality

Not only *Gentiles (1:18-32) but also Jewish people (2:1-29) sinned. Paul engages in a lively *diatribe style (a common ancient teaching style), by using rhetorical questions and especially by challenging an imaginary opponent. Paul thus demolishes possible objections to his position in a vivid manner.

2:1-3. Speakers often 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 universal. Paul

demands that people be consistent with their denunciations, which meant taking sin more seriously than most people did. Skilled speakers would sometimes single out a hearer (2:1, 3); cf. Isaiah 22:17; Micah 6:8.

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 7:19; 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 for the future, 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 Judaism commonly stressed God's impartiality (although Israel's preferential treatment at the day of judgment was also explained as righteous); cf. Deuteronomy 10:17. Judaism also acknowledged that the wise person worked for long-range rewards (Rom 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 most crucial commandments (what some traditions called the Noahide 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 Greco-Roman 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 out the evils of any measure of hypocrisy. (Similar attacks were made on "pretentious philosophers" in Greco-Roman 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. Ancient communication valued repetition to drive home a point; in 2:17-20 Paul offers eleven claims for the interlocutor.

2:19-20. Some of Paul's language here comes from the *Old Testament (Is 42:6-7; cf. 42:18-20).

2:21-23. Appealing to ancient *rhetoric and communication ideals, Paul in 2:21-23 drives home his point with antithesis (contrasting points) and the technique of starting and ending with parallel language (x . . . y/x . . . y). Diatribe 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. In the context of Isaiah 52:5, *Gentiles blasphemed God because of Israel's suffering; here they do so because of Israel's sin (cf. Ezek 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, possibly known to much of Paul's audience, was a charlatan in Rome a generation earlier whose behavior had led to the expulsion of Jews from Rome under Tiberius; *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.81-84.)

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). Later *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), the heart of God's covenant to which outward circumcision could merely point as an external symbol. Both Jewish and Greco-Roman writers emphasized caring what the deity thinks, not what other people think (Rom 2:29). In verse 29, Paul might play on the meaning of "Judah" ("praise"), from which the title translated "Jew" comes.

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 Paul argues that Israel, not God, had been unfaithful to the covenant.

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 Greco-Roman 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?” (NASB) 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 (quoting Ps 51:4). “Everyone is a liar” comes from Psalm 116:11; as part of the familiar Hallel psalms, it may have been recognized by his audience.*

3:5-6. *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. Cf. Acts 21:21.*

3:9-18

Proof from Scripture

*Some would string together texts (“pearl stringing”) with common elements at the opening of *synagogue homilies and in the Dead Sea Scrolls, though rarely at such length as here. Paul draws especially passages from the Psalms, most linked by the common element of body parts mentioned, and some mentioning death. The Psalms passages apply mostly to enemies; only the quotation from Isaiah 59:7-8 (in Rom 3:15-17) contextually applied to all of Israel. Linking the texts midrashically, however, allows Paul to draw on the language of all of them.*

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). Because the psalm repeats twice the line “no one does kindness,” Paul changes one to “no one righteous” to connect with his larger argument; Jewish teachers commonly adapted the language of texts accordingly.

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, mouth (3:13-14; respectively, Ps 5:9; 10:7; 140:3), 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 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. Paul’s use of Scripture shows that Jews as well as *Gentiles are sinful. 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, which pleads for God’s mercy based on his righteousness and faithfulness (143:1). 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). The sense of “works of the law” is debated here, as in a *Qumran text (4QMMT); probably it evokes biblical language about “doing” the law, hence remains

general, though Jewish distinctives would reinforce Paul's point the most.

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) among sinners refers to Jew and Gentile; both must approach God on the same terms, through Jesus Christ. This statement 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. Although the matter may be debated, "falling short of God's glory" here might allude to the Jewish idea that humanity lost God's glory when Adam sinned (cf. 5:12-21).

3:24. "Redemption" (freeing a slave) was a standard Old Testament concept; the Old Testament terms often involve the paying of a price. God "redeemed" 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. The term here translated "propitiation" (NASB) or "sacrifice of *atonement" (NRSV) refers to the mercy seat, the cover of the ark of the covenant (in the *Septuagint*). *This site was consecrated to God by blood each year on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:14-15); "blood" here therefore presumably interprets Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice. Some other early Jewish sources used the image for a person's death that turned away God's wrath from Israel (4 Maccabees 17:22).* Although in Jewish tradition prayers, alms and other good deeds could turn away wrath (Sirach 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. 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 justice 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. Later rabbis 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” (in an older version of the NIV) read a particular theological position into the translation in spite of the context. Instead, Paul probably poses two ways of approaching the “law” (NASB; current NIV): 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 (Deut 6:4). 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. Ancient writers often used transitions between preceding and following points. 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; later *rabbis also regarded him 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 section is a good Jewish *midrash, or commentary, on Genesis 15:6. Jewish and Greco-Roman 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 regularly offered 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 documents for crediting payment to one’s account.

4:4-5. Still expounding Genesis 15:6, Paul refers here to Abraham. As just judge, God was not believed to acquit the guilty (Ex 23:7), so Paul’s declaration is rhetorically provocative, calling attention to transformed status in Christ. When God the just judge “reckons righteousness” to someone, he acquits them as not guilty. But this idea is not merely legal: 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 he uses to explain what “reckons” means. Omitting the next line on moral 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; Paul now has both Abraham and David as witnesses to his case.

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 (one we also value today)—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. Abraham's faith was surely greater years later when he offered up Isaac, and presumably also at the circumcision, but he already had justifying faith before God in Genesis 15:6.

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. It was a sign of the covenant and not the covenant relationship itself. Many Jewish ears would recoil at Paul's argument, which makes Gentile Christians full heirs of Abraham without either circumcision or ethnic descent from Abraham. It is one thing to say that uncircumcised Gentiles could be saved if they kept basic Noahide laws, as many Jews believed (especially avoiding idolatry and immorality); it is quite another to put them on the same level as the Jewish people—apparently treating them as proselytes without circumcision. People often spoke of those whose ways one imitated as one's figurative ancestors.

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. Faith stronger than death (4:19) prepares for the application in 4:24.

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 Greco-Roman) often used examples to exhort their hearers or readers to think and act differently. Paul might allude here to language from Isaiah 53:5-12. The two clauses of 4:25 are rhetorically balanced, but they address different kinds of causes (the second being a goal, what some ancients considered a teleological cause).

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

5:2. “Hope of God’s glory” might imply the restoration of Adam’s “glory” (3:23; 5:12-21); it probably also evokes 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 (or climax, or sorites), 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; nevertheless, the Old Testament also includes the internal struggles of its heroes, like Abraham, Sarah, David, Elijah and Jeremiah, rather than their continual tranquility.

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 (5:6-8) 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 the Spirit is bestowed as a gift (cf. Wisdom of Solomon 9:17). On the Spirit being “poured out,” see Joel 2:28; on not being ashamed of hope, cf. perhaps Psalm 119:116.

5:6-9. Well-educated Greco-Roman 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 (especially a friend) heroic, but such sacrifice was not common; among Jewish people it was not particularly praised. Blood was not a dominant part of death by crucifixion, so its mention probably evokes sacrifice; blood propitiating a deity (to turn away wrath, 5:9) was intelligible in ancient Israel, among Jews, Greeks and others.

5:10-11. Greeks spoke of people in opposition to one another being "reconciled," being made friends again, but did not speak of people being reconciled to *God*. The Jewish members of the Roman *church could be more familiar with this sort of language (from some early Jewish texts like 2 Maccabees 8:29). Sometimes *Gentiles sought to be "reconciled" to a deity by payments or reparations, but for the offended party, especially the all-powerful deity, to initiate reconciliation was highly unusual. Jewish teachers often used the "how much more" (5:10) form of argument.

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 (4:1–5:11), 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 (where he is rarely mentioned outside Genesis).

Jewish people in this period believed that Adam's sin introduced sin and thus death into the world, and most believed that all his descendants replicated his rebellion by sinning (*4 *Ezra* 3:21; *2 *Baruch* 18:1-2; 54:15, 19). Jewish interpreters generally believed that Adam's glory, lost at the Fall, would be restored to the righteous in the world to come. Later *rabbis expounded on Adam's immense size (some even claimed that he filled the whole earth!). (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* 3:21; 7:118-26; 2 *Baruch* 18:1-2; 54:15), becoming each "our own Adam" (2 *Baruch* 54:19). Personification was a frequent literary technique, possibly applied here to Sin and Death.

5:15. Comparison of characters (not always of equal weight) and paired antitheses were familiar in ancient *rhetoric*; *as the letter was read allowed, this section would build to a rhetorical crescendo. The fivefold repetition of the term translated "transgression" or "trespass" in 5:15-20 would rhetorically reinforce the point. Biblical tradition sometimes viewed people in terms of corporate personality, one standing for many. All who were in Adam by birth became sinners; all who were in Christ by true *baptism (6:4) became righteous.*

5:16-21. On comparisons here, see comment on 5:15; comparisons were not, however, always between equals. Much of the argument of 5:15-21 is a standard Jewish argument, *qal vahomer*, an argument from lesser to greater ("how much more"). Greco-Roman 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; Dan 7:22), as Adam and Eve reigned before the Fall (Gen 1:26-27).

6:1-11

Dead to Sin

6:1-5. This passage develops the implications of corporate personality in 5:15-21. 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.

6:6-7. The "old man" ("old self" in many translations) is life in Adam versus life in *Christ (5:12-21). Ancient sages often warned against slavery to passions, false ideas and the like. Manumission, or freeing slaves, was a very common practice in antiquity; death, of course, ended all obligations (as in 7:2-3). (Some

note later rabbinic teaching that conversion to Judaism ended a Gentile's previous relationships, so that Jewish owners had to allow slaves' conversion only under special circumstances.)

6:8-10. Paul applies the implications of corporate union with Christ in 5:15-21. He might also think of the *eschatological character of faith in Christ (cf. 6:5); the end time would overthrow sin. (Later 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.

6:11. 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). Ancient philosophers often believed that the most fundamental issue was reason, knowledge or understanding. They urged people to embrace the truthful view of reality, accepting wisdom. For Paul, this true wisdom is in Christ, and efficacious not by virtue of preconversion human character but because of what Christ has accomplished. One should embrace one's identity in terms of one's destiny with Christ, not one's past in Adam.

6:12-23

Free from Sin, Servants of Righteousness

As noted above, ancient sages often warned against slavery to passions, false ideas and the like.

6:12-13. In some contexts, "instruments" (NASB, NIV) could be translated "weapons," as in 13:12 (the sense here is debated).

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. Later 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. The “free gift” contrasts with such wages.

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, most sought to keep the commandments as best they knew how, as part of their culture, and this set them apart from *Gentiles. 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 annulling certain kinds of divorce; cf. 1 Cor 7:15.) If Paul knew that some Jewish teachers envisioned the law as God’s daughter, he shifts the image here; moreover, it is the believer, not the law, who has died (6:2-5). United with Christ’s *resurrection and probably envisioned as now the bride of Christ, believers bear not physical offspring but “fruit.”

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 Jewish people felt that the full power of 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 (see Ezek 36:26-27; cf. Jer 31:31-34). 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 (or *Gentiles, or perhaps more likely, Israel*) 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), it is possible that Paul uses his own previous experience under law, viewed in retrospect, to illustrate life under law in general. What is clear is that Paul regards the law as good; the problem is human sin, and trying to make the law an instrument of self-improvement or salvation rather than a teacher of righteousness.

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 consciousness of violation would have preceded this; for example, many Jewish boys in financially secure Judean 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 (following, e.g., Deut 4:40; 8:1; Baruch 3:9; 4:1-2) that the law brings life. Paul says that the law became instead the vehicle of his death. (Some scholars think that “deceived” alludes to Eve in Gen 3:13. 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. The verb for Eve’s deception is common and differs from 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, 31). 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; a majority of scholars, however, currently demur. *Diatribic style, which Paul uses in much of Romans, was graphic, and its historical presents create vividness and Paul has been describing his past life under *law (7:7-13). A number of scholars today also argue that this passage is *prosopopoiia*, in which one rhetorically speaks with the voice of another character, “impersonating” a person or thing, in this case Adamic humanity or (perhaps more likely) Israel under the law. (For a rhetorical use of “I,” cf. 1 Cor 8:13; 10:29-30; 13:1-3, 11-12; perhaps Gal 2:18-21; “we” in Rom 6:1.) On this view, Paul could contrast the spiritual worthlessness of self-centered religious introspection (count the “I’s” and “me’s”) in Romans 7 with the life of the Spirit by *grace in Romans 6 and 8.

Many philosophers (particularly *Stoics*) portrayed a conflict between one’s reason and one’s bodily passions; they believed that proper knowledge produced change. Many Diaspora Jews believed that learning the law helped them subdue passions. Jewish people spoke of an evil impulse, and later teachers of the law insisted that learning the law enabled one to overcome the evil impulse. In contrast to all such proposed solutions, Paul replies that knowing moral truth had not freed him from sin. But Jewish people also expected sin to be eradicated in

the day of judgment. 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. The language of moral helplessness here resembles some tragic depictions of passion overpowering reason (e.g., in dramas about Medea, who wickedly killed her children). See further comment in the introduction to 7:14-23.

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

7:24. “Wretched person that I am!” was a standard cry of despair, mourning or self-reproach; it often appears in tragic laments. 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 probably 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

People of the Spirit versus People of the Flesh

In the *Old Testament “flesh” (e.g., NRSV, NASB) 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 involve “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” (Jn 1:14), though not “sinful flesh” (Rom 8:3), and we live “in the flesh” in the sense of “in the body” (Gal 2:20). (The earlier NIV translation “sinful nature,” usually corrected in the current version, was potentially 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. Although “flesh” may be connected with bodily existence, the radical bifurcation of a human being into a morally upright “spiritual” part versus an immoral “bodily” part is a Neo-Platonic or *Gnostic idea foreign to Paul.)

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. Flesh is an arena of existence, but life there should be led not by bodily passions, like animals, but by God’s Spirit.

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. 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). The expression "to deal with sin" (8:3 NRSV) probably evokes a *Septuagint phrase for "an offering for sin" (NASB), fitting the images of *atonement (cf. 3:25; 5:9) and sacrifice (cf. 1 Cor 5:7).

8:5-8. Philosophers often urged people to set their minds on eternal, heavenly or divine things rather than on the passions and transitory affairs of this world. *Philo condemned those whose minds were taken up with the matters of the body and its pleasures. Some philosophers urged their adherents to neglect bodily matters anchored in mortality, meditating on heavenly matters; for Paul, however, it is God's Spirit that enables this new framework. Philosophers valued tranquility, but Paul's wording follows Isaiah 26:3: it is the mind that trusts God that has peace (cf. also resurrection life in Is 26:19).*

Philosophers divided humanity into the enlightened and the foolish; Jewish wisdom literature and the *Qumran scrolls divided humanity into righteous and wicked. In articulating such different ideal types, the writers did not normally claim that anyone, including themselves, was *perfectly* wise or perfectly righteous. Paul here divides humanity into two classes: those who have the Spirit (Christians) and those left to their own devices. As with other such divisions of humanity, Paul is not claiming that people of the Spirit act perfectly, but rather that they belong to a different sphere than those who lack the Spirit.

The "frame-of-mind of (dominated by) the flesh" in 8:5 probably summarizes the state of the person in Rom 7:22-23. 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 a frame of mind that is merely human (and thus susceptible to sin) with a frame of mind 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 fully 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 often 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" (NASB); literally, he

claims that the “Spirit is life” (KJV, NRSV, GNT). 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). God’s Spirit would raise the dead (Ezek 37:14).

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 some 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 sometimes 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 (who in most Jewish thought and often in the *Old Testament prophets characterizes the life of the age to come*; Ezek 36:27, 37) would be resurrected by him; see introduction to 8:1-11 and comment on 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). Here the Spirit, often associated with inspiration in ancient Jewish sources, inspires the believer to experience their intimate relationship with God. On “Abba,” see comment on Mark 14:36; although only a few Roman Jews spoke *Aramaic, they probably knew Jesus’ special address for his Father as “Papa” in his time of suffering (Mk 14:36; cf. Gal 4:6). 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. Many Jewish people contrasted the present age with the *age to come, when God would reign unchallenged. Paul's Jewish contemporaries would agree with him that the righteous would be greatly rewarded for any sufferings in this world.

8:19. Following *Old Testament tradition (Is 65:17-18), 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 that the present order would perish in a cataclysmic manner). In Greek, Paul's repetition of three words beginning with *apok-* or *apek-* would be *rhetorically appealing.

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 few centuries A.D.; many people believed that decay and Fate reigned supreme.

8:21. The Greco-Roman 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, GNT), “God’s children” and probably “glory” may allude to the Old Testament exodus *narrative, which prefigures the future salvation (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. “Firstfruits” was the actual beginning, the first installment, of the Judean 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, no less eager for the new creation than 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 often 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”) idea is most prominent in Jewish sources. In Jewish thinking, Wisdom was God’s purest image (see, e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 7:26; comment on Col 1:15), but Jewish texts often also 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) need not cancel all 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.)

8:31-39

God’s Triumphant Love

Many believers in Rome had probably experienced expulsion less than a decade earlier (A.D. 49; see Acts 18:2), perhaps returning only around 54; presumably unknown to them and to Paul, many would have to give their lives in Nero’s persecution less than a decade later (A.D. 64). Before elaborating the point in 8:29-30, Paul offers an emotionally rousing climax to chapter 8. Ancient speakers could stir audiences with *rhetorical questions (8:31-35), lists of sufferings (8:35, 38-39) and repetition (in this case, an inverted parallel structure, or chiasm, in 8:35-39).

8:31. The *Old Testament often speaks of God being “with” or “for” his people (Ps 56:9; Is 33:21; Ezek 34:30; 36:9); therefore, the psalmist asks, what could anyone do to him (Ps 118:6)? 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. These verses echo Isaiah 50:8: because God vindicates the psalmist, who dares bring a case against him? 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). Jesus being at God's right hand echoes Psalm 110:1.

8:35-36. Verses 35-39 form a *chiasmus (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). Lists of hardships were common in Greco-Roman literature (especially used to show that the wise person 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. *Stoics valued remaining unbowed in suffering; Jewish people praised this fortitude in their tales of martyrs. 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 probably take "principalities" and "powers" (KJV, NASB) here 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 well simply personify the heavens above and Hades (the realm of death) below (cf. Ps 139:8); taken together, this was a good Jewish way to encompass all creation (cf. Is 7:11). Some 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 many people in the Mediterranean world of the first few centuries A.D. 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

Romans 9–11 climaxes Paul’s argument so far that individual Jews and *Gentiles must come to God on the same terms (see the introduction).

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; cf. Rom 8:39). A speaker’s or writer’s tears or sorrow was also ideally expected to move the audience or reader.

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) historically have 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. Paul’s list would please *rhetorically sensitive ancient hearers; in Greek, the pattern of feminine nouns in 9:4 end in *-thesia*, *-a*, *-ai*, *-thesia*, *-a*, *-ai*.

9:6-13

Not Saved by Ethnic Descent

It was not God’s promises (9:4-5) but the faithfulness of his people (9:1-3) that failed. Jewish people often 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), though both were blessed.

9:10-13. Isaac had two sons, but only one received the promise. This was determined before their birth (Gen 25:23; cf. Mal 1:1-3). Although God may have chosen Jacob because he foreknew Jacob’s heart (Rom 8:29), the point here is that God has the right to choose among the chosen line. Paul reminds his contemporaries that not all Abraham’s descendants received the promise, and he could have elaborated further had he so needed; 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).

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 took into account people's response to God (32:32-34), although God had initially called both Israel and Moses unconditionally.

9:16. Paul may echo biblical warnings that escape belongs not to the swift but depends on God's favor (Eccles 9:11; Jer 46:6; Amos 2:14-15).

9:17-18. God showed mercy by not destroying Egypt (Ex 9:15-16), allowing Pharaoh to remain so God could further display his power. Paul makes the wording even more emphatic: God raised up or stirred 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

Jewish hearers might celebrate God's right to harden Pharaoh (9:17), but Paul will shockingly exploit the principle to a different end: God can harden and show mercy as he wills, whether people are Jewish or *Gentile (9:24-33).

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 the application is

especially that he can choose either Jews or Gentiles, not that his predestination is arbitrary.

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 in the context of the salvation of Israel (9:1-13) and the Gentiles (9:23-29), emphasizing that because God can sovereignly choose to *elect whom he wills, 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); on some readings of this context, he can choose on the basis of (foreknown) faith in Christ (4:11-13; 8:29-30). Most ancient Jewish thinkers did accept both God's sovereignty and human responsibility to choose rightly without viewing these as contradictory.

9:22-23. God endured vessels like Pharaoh for the sake of those who would receive mercy; honoring his name throughout the earth (Ex 9:16 in Rom 9:17), he could also save Gentiles.

9:24-26. In context, Hosea 2:23 and 1:10, which Paul cites here, refer 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 (cf. Rom 11:30-32).

9:27-28. Jewish teachers often linked texts based on a common key phrase; both Hosea 1:10 and the Isaiah quotation here note that Israel was "like the sand of the sea." 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 questions why Jewish people of his own day would feel secure that their Jewishness would save them. (Paul adds "children of Israel" from Hos 1:10; blending texts was common in ancient citations.)

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

Of the two approaches to righteousness and the *law in 9:30–10:10, only the

way of faith saves sinful people. 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 depending on 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.*

9:30-31. 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).

9:32-33. Here Paul follows a common Jewish interpretive practice of blending texts together (Is 8:14; 28:16), arguing that Israel failed because they did not follow the way of faith. Because Isaiah 28:16 probably alludes back to Isaiah 8:14, Paul’s blending of the two is especially reasonable, although perhaps only his more biblically literate hearers 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). Paul returns to not being ashamed in 10:11.

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, or that people should stop using the law in the wrong way.

10:5-10

Two Approaches to Righteousness

Educated Greeks and Romans often cited classical sources to support their arguments; like other Jewish teachers, Paul cites the Jewish and Christian canonical source, the Scriptures.

10:5. One approach is based on a particular Jewish interpretation of Leviticus 18:5: those who keep the commandments merit *eternal life*. (*Texts such as these—cf. also Deut 4:1, 26, 40; 5:33; 8:1; 16:20; 30:16, 20—originally promised long life on the land. But by Paul’s era Jewish interpreters understood*

these texts as promising eternal life, apparently holding this view alongside the view that God elects Israel as a whole to be saved.) This kind of righteousness would prove difficult for *Gentiles without years of enculturation or study of the law*. Paul also established in Romans 1–3 and chapter 7 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, to bring the law down again?” (Moses ascended only to Sinai, but in Jewish tradition he ascended all the way to heaven to receive the law; in Deuteronomy, God provided the law from heaven.) “Who will descend?” in Deuteronomy 30:13 means “Who will descend into the Red Sea to cross it again?” (Although not in this text, the Septuagint often translates “sea” as “abyss,” as Paul does here.) God had redeemed his people at the 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. (Paul adapts the opening wording slightly to work in a midrashic allusion to Deut 9:4, which, with Deut 9:5-6, reminds Israel that they are not righteous.)

Table 6. Paul’s Use of Deuteronomy 30:12-14 in Romans 10:6-10

Deut 30:12-14	Paul’s application of the principles in Rom 10:6-10
Do not say, “Who will ascend to heaven?” (to bring down God’s gift of the law; 30:12)	Do not say, “Who will ascend to heaven?” (to bring down God’s gift of Christ; 10:6)
Do not say, “Who will descend into the sea?” (for salvation; 30:13)	Do not say, “Who will descend into the abyss?” (for salvation; 10:7)
The word (the law) is near you (30:14)	The word (the gospel) is near you (10:8)
In your mouth and in your heart (30:14; probably recitation of the law, cf. Deut 6:6-7)	Confess with the <i>mouth</i> that Jesus is Lord; believe with the <i>heart</i> that God raised him from the dead (10:9-10)

10:8. Deuteronomy 30:14 refers to the law; as long as it is written in the heart (cf. 30:6; Ps 37:31; Is 51:7), God’s people could live out its righteousness

(cf. Deut 30:11; 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, GNT), 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 provides a *rhetorical chain in 10:14-15 that would have appealed to ancient hearers. He 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) about one who would die on their behalf (53:4-12; cf. Rom 4:24-25).

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. Psalm 19:4 refers in context to the testimony of creation. If Paul refers to the context and is not simply making an analogy, it may be relevant that 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 1:19-20). Even Gentiles may not have heard all of Christ's message (10:17), but creation itself made them hear enough to be responsible for doing right. 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; cf. 19:24-25) 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 might 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 11:2-4: 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 blends Isaiah 29:10 (“spirit of deep sleep”) with the similar message of Deut 29:4 (“to this day . . . ears to hear”). In Isaiah, 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). In Deuteronomy, Israel failed to learn from all God’s acts on their behalf.

11:9-10. Early Christians often applied Psalm 69, a psalm of a righteous sufferer, to Jesus, the righteous sufferer *par excellence*. In Psalm 69:22-23, the 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. Paul may also incorporate one “bonus” term from Psalm 35:8.

11:11-14

Provoking Israel to Jealousy

Jewish people sometimes used “stumble” for apostasy or sin. Paul here begins to expound Deuteronomy 32:21, which he cited in Romans 10:19. Some Jewish people expected *Gentiles to recognize Israel’s God at the time of the end* (cf., e.g., Is 19:24-25; 60:3-12); *Paul wants his people to recognize that it is through Christ that this promise to Israel is being fulfilled*. Turning Israel back to God is not the only purpose for the salvation of the Gentiles (cf. the missionary purpose of *Israel* in Gen 12:2-3), but it is one purpose in relation 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. Ethnocentrism of any sort, Jewish or Gentile, opposes the message of the *gospel*. *Ancient* rhetoricians considered it acceptable to explicitly praise oneself only if one could justify it as stirring others to emulation (as here) or as defending oneself.

11:15-24

The Jewishness of the Christian Faith

Many Gentiles despised Jewish people for what they considered separatism and strange customs (see comment at Rom 14); Gentile converts to Jesus's movement needed to avoid importing these prejudices into their new faith. 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 firstfruits of the dough offering in Numbers 15:20-21, which consecrates the whole batch; 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.

Jewish sources often described Israel as a plant or a tree, whose roots were the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). (Sometimes they even used the image of an olive tree; indeed, at some point a *synagogue in Rome was apparently named the "olive tree."*) *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)—like *proselytes, but without physical circumcision. 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 polytheists 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 Greco-Roman 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 11:24—NASB).

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. Sometimes “mysteries” were previously hidden truths about the end time revealed to God’s servants (e.g., Dan 2:28-30; cf. Rom 16:25-26). 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. Jewish teachers commonly believed that “all Israel will be saved,” but at the same time could list which Israelites would *not* be saved (e.g., Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 10:1): 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; he may blend the Greek version of the passage with Ps 14:7, and may add, “when I take away their sins” based on the Greek version of Is 27:9 or Ezek 36:26).

11:28-29. Paul does not regard God’s promises to ethnic Israel as canceled—only deferred (cf. Deut 4:25-31); God still had a covenant with the ancestors (Deut 7:8). The grafting in of Gentiles (Rom 11:17) does not mean that they supplant the Jewish people (11:18), as if God has no further interest in the latter. The return of ethnic Israel as a whole to the covenant in the end time would join the grafted-in Gentiles and Jewish remnant that already participate in the covenant.

11:30-32. Ancient writers or speakers often summarized some themes of a section at its close. Gentiles and Israel exchanging roles of disobedience may allude back to 9:25-26 (cf. 10:21); mercy to 9:15-23. Paul's point here is that all peoples have sinned and all peoples must come to God through his mercy in Christ, a point the Roman *church needed to hear (see the introduction to Romans).

11:33-36

Praising God's Wisdom

Sometimes one would conclude a section with rousing *rhetoric; discussion of deity might especially invite exalted, almost poetic, rhetoric*. 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. Philosophers distinguished various levels of causation with terms such as “from,” “through” and “for”; all the levels are applicable here.

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. κτλ.]”

‘reasonable’; more to the point than ‘spiritual’—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, GNT) or “acceptable” (Ezra 6:10; Ps 20:3; Is 56:7; Jer 6:20; Mal 3:4); people also spoke of sacrifices being “holy” (e.g., Lev 6:17, 25); 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*.” The “renewed” mind considers matters from the perspective of the coming era. Philosophers lacked this *eschatological perspective, but did emphasize making all decisions based on reason. Paul here emphasizes the proper use of the mind: those who discern what is good, acceptable (v. 1) and perfect will know God’s will, which also (in 12:3) provides self-understanding.

12:3. Philosophers emphasized proper self-understanding in the context of the rest of the cosmos; Paul emphasizes it in the context of Christ’s body (12:4-5). By affirming (in 12:3) that each member has “a measure of faith” (NASB; probably not “*the* measure of faith”—KJV, 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.

12:4-5. That each class in society had a special function, like members of a body, had long been argued by thinkers defending the status quo of the state (often in support of hierarchy); *Stoic philosophers had also applied the image of head and body to God and the universe. But Paul applies the image in a fresh way, in which each member of the religious community has a special function within the one body, abolishing the priesthood-laity distinction of most ancient religions.

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 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 might suggest 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). Many ancient moralists would have agreed with most of the exhortations Paul offers here. Ancients sometimes framed a section with parallel ideas; Paul emphasizes good versus evil in 12:9 and 21.

12:9-10. Ancient hearers would have appreciated Paul’s *rhetorical repetition in Greek here: *–oi* concludes three clauses in 12:10-11; *–ontes* or *–ountes* conclude seven clauses in 12:11-13. Ancient Mediterranean men often sought their own honor, competing with others for it. 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). In antiquity “hospitality” especially 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 often 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 that God would judge justly and that believers could let

matters rest with him (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 more a Jewish virtue than a Greek one, but even Greeks valued people of status showing compassion and mercy. 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 Greco-Roman 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 admonition 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; thus, for example, the later Gentile massacres of Jews in Palestine invited bloody reprisals. Paul cites Deuteronomy 32:35 (from the same context cited in Rom 10:19 and 15:10), 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. Writing this one letter to the empire's capital, Paul may be concerned for Christians' witness to their community. He is well aware that only roughly a decade before his letter some of 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). Paul had reason for concern; probably six to eight years after Paul wrote the letter, Nero began slaughtering Christians in Rome. Meanwhile, tensions in Judea were growing and within about a decade would erupt into a tragic war.

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). Stoics stressed submission to the state and other authorities, but no one understood such submission as absolute (that is, one should not submit to demands to do evil; e.g., Christians would not worship Caesar).

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). Most Jews in Rome upheld this position and would have been embarrassed by any other. 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 decisions were 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 one 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. Particular taxes became controversial in Rome perhaps just months before Paul wrote this letter; noncitizen Jews who returned to Rome in or after A.D. 54 may have also been subject to special taxes from which Roman citizens were exempt. Officials expected and received honor by virtue of their position.

13:8-10

Fulfilling the Law

Paul reminds any Jewish hearers 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; Publilius Syrus 11); sometimes even whole essays were written on the subject (e.g., by *Plutarch, *One Ought Not to Borrow*). Judaism always stressed love of one's neighbor and sometimes recognized it as a commandment that summarized God's law.

13:9-10. No hearers, whether Greek, Roman or Jewish, would disagree with the commandments Paul cites here, except for some Gentiles who might disagree

about coveting. Many Jewish people highlighted the Ten Commandments as particularly significant. 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 Judeans, 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* (the Septuagint version of Judg 6:34; 2 Chron 24:20; *Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 27:9-10; 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. (Nero's own nocturnal revels were widely known; *Tacitus, *Annals* 16.20.) Rome's streets were not very safe at night if one traveled alone, but parties still could last late into the night.

14:1-23

Don't Be Divided over Foods or Holy Days

The issue of “pure” and “unclean” foods (14:14) prepares for the issue of Jews and *Gentiles accepting one another (15:7-12). Paul’s exhortation to unity between the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome (see the introduction) 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. (Lev 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. For Jesus’s followers called to reach the world, however, 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, addressed in 2:25-29; 4:9-12). 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 most Greeks thought delicious. (Others who abstained from pork included Phoenicians, some Syrians, Egyptian priests and the philosophic sect of *Pythagoreans*, who were vegetarian; Greeks looked down on some of these groups also.) 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. Many Gentiles ridiculed these distinctive food customs as being separatist and complained that Jews refused to dine with other peoples. Jews were not total “vegetarians” (14:2), but could resort to that when kosher meat was not available (e.g., 2 Maccabees 5:27; *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 10.190; *Life* 13-14).

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; Romans also had market days every eight or nine days. But Gentile writers often 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.) God provided the sabbath before the *law (Gen 2:2-3), but outside Jewish enclaves many Gentiles (especially slaves and employees) would lack the option of observing it. 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 self-sufficient communities in the Greco-Roman 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 Greco-Roman world; officials like *Pilate or Gallio 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 Greco-Roman 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. 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. Jews could usually obtain Kosher

food, but like a good *rhetorician, Paul calls his readers to concede his point even in the most extreme case (eg., Josephus, Life 14), 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 one should not wound the faith of those avoiding what they think could be wrong; ideally, however, one should discern what is right.

15:1-13

Christ as a Minister of Ethnic 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 early Christians often applied it appropriately to *Christ (the ultimate righteous sufferer; Mt 27:34; Jn 2:17).

15:4. Paul can say that Scripture (including the one cited in 15:3) “was written for our instruction” (NASB) because he believes, like his Jewish contemporaries, that it is God’s Word and remains relevant. 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 commentary 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 Maccabees 15:9).

15:5. Because divisiveness was rife in ancient urban Mediterranean culture, many speakers offered exhortations to unity, as here (see our introduction to Romans). 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 could be fresh in Paul’s mind; cf. Rom 15:4) and 2 Chronicles 5:13

(also elsewhere, e.g., *4 Maccabees 8:29).

15:7-12. Speakers could save a climactic, clinching argument for near the end of their speech; Paul here provides some of his strongest biblical argument for the unity of Jewish and *Gentile believers*. *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 (Writings, Law and Prophets) 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). Deut 32:43 (cited in Rom 15:10) recalls a context Paul mined also in Romans 10:19 and 12:19. His last citation (in 15:12), Isaiah 11:10, was accepted as messianic. It was also 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 or blessings 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 Ethnic Reconciliation

Often a speech's epilogue would repeat points made in the proem (opening); Paul employs such repetition in this letter (cf. 15:14-33 with 1:8-15) 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. Bold speech could be respected if it was understood as for the hearers' good. Noting that one was merely "reminding" one's hearers was a common feature of ancient moral exhortation.

15:16. Paul employs a priestly metaphor (cf. 12:1). 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. People disrespected boasting unless it could be justified as for the common good. 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-Croatia 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. Biblically literate hearers understood that "signs and wonders" occurred during the exodus (*Ex* 7:3; 11:9-10; *Deut* 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 11:3; 26:8; 34:11; *Jer* 32:20-21; *Wisdom of Solomon* 10:15-16; *Baruch* 2:11); the proliferation of the *gospel is no less a divine work, often accompanied with demonstrations.

15:20. Illyricum (15:19) may have been one of these previously unevangelized areas; Spain would be another (see comment on 15:24, 28).

15:21. Here Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15, which in its context clearly refers to Gentiles ("kings"), who contrast with the suffering servant's own people, Israel, who would not recognize him (53:1-4).

15:22-23. Ancient letters often dealt with business, including planned visits. Affectionate letters often explained why the writer had not yet been able to visit (here, because evangelizing unreached peoples had kept Paul busy, 15:19-21).

15:24. Persons of honor often avoided direct requests, but Paul indirectly suggests one here. "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. Paul also would need to speak Latin there (in the Roman colonies) or use interpreters; most would not understand Greek. At the farthest western end of the Mediterranean, Spain was counted by geographers such as Strabo as at the end of the earth (with China and 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. Some 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. Jewish men 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 (for the centrality of this issue in Romans, see the introduction).

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. Some believers in Jerusalem may have envisioned the gift as the firstfruits of the prophetic promise that the nations would bring tribute to Israel (Is 45:14; 60:6-10; 66:20); Paul may think more broadly of unity in Christ. In any case, 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.

15:29-31. That Paul’s journey to Jerusalem could involve some danger is attested by the account in Acts 21–22; see comment on that passage. Against some, it is very unlikely that the Jerusalem church rejected the gift (15:31); they had desired help (cf. Gal 2:10), and in that culture, rejecting a gift effectively declared enmity.

15:32. For the expectation of hospitality here, see comment on 15:24.

15:33. On wish-prayers, see comment on 15:13; a standard Jewish blessing was “peace,” and “peace” is relevant to a divided congregation (see introduction to Romans).

16:1-2

Letter of Recommendation for a Minister

People often wrote letters of recommendation to their peers or others who respected them, introducing or recommending someone, often the bearer of the letter, usually with reasons why the person should be helped. Jewish travelers often carried letters of recommendation attesting that they should be received by Jewish communities along the way; 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 Greco-Roman circles did not usually have high regard for women’s religious wisdom; and, as the letter’s bearer, she will need to explain to them by word of mouth anything in Paul’s letter that the hearers would not understand.

16:1. “Servant” (KJV, NASB) is the Greek *diakonos*, which is sometimes translated “deacon” (e.g., NRSV, NIV), perhaps the owner of a home in which *churches met. But Paul usually applies the term *diakonos* to “ministers” of God’s word, like Paul and his colleagues; Paul could have this meaning in view here (although ancient Judaism barely ever allowed women to teach the *law publicly to men).

Cenchrea was the eastern port city of Corinth, to its southeast. It had naturally come to host a variety of foreign religions.

16:2. “Helper” (NASB) or “help” translates a Greek term applied especially to *patrons (with NIV, NRSV, “benefactor”). 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 could exercise significant influence over it. Although most patrons of religious associations were men, a minority were women.

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; some even suggest that as many as eighty 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. Jews could also bear traditional Greek names (even named for deities).

A few years after this letter, Nero began killing hundreds of Christians in Rome, yet the church remained strong; there were thus many believers in Rome, and Paul probably lists primarily house church leaders here. It is noteworthy that although Paul greets roughly twenty-eight individuals and only about eleven are women (nearly forty percent), he specifically commends the work of six (over half) of the women and six (about one-third) of the men. This disproportion may be because, in that culture, the women needed more affirmation in their ministry (see comment on 16:1-2). Some evidence suggests that men outnumbered women in Rome.

16:3. Husbands were normally mentioned first unless the wife was of higher status, which may suggest Priscilla’s superior status in society (by birth) or (given Paul’s concerns about overemphasizing social status) in the church. “Prisca” is a Latin name, the more formal version of the informal “Priscilla” (her name in Acts), just as Paul elsewhere uses the formal “Silvanus” whereas Luke prefers the informal “Silas.”

16:4. “Laying down one’s neck” (KJV) was 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 mezzanine apartments existed above ground-floor shops in multistory tenement buildings; Aquila and Priscilla may have lived above their artisan shop. Upper-story apartments were cheaper, tinier and flimsier, with room only to sleep; tall buildings periodically collapsed. Apartment churches could have met in the long hallway connecting small apartments, or on the somewhat more spacious lower floors. 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*, which could indicate 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 contraction of Junianus is not attested, because that is a Greek form of contraction and Junianus and Junia are Latin names. 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 lower-class merchants. The majority of scholars read the Greek phrase as indicating that both were *apostles. "Kinsmen" (KJV, NASB) can mean countrymen (cf. 9:3; 16:11).

16:8-9. "Ampliatius" and "Urbanus" were common slave names in Rome; they might be freedmen.

16:10. "The household of Aristobulus" may refer to slaves (if Aristobulus remained alive) and *freedpersons of Aristobulus, Herod the Great's grandson, who spent his life in Rome. ("Aristobulus" is, however, a common Greek name, so the phrase could refer to a house church or family headed by a different Aristobulus.) Some slaves in elite households were well-educated and exercised power and influence over even free persons.

16:11. “Herodion” could be so named because he was a slave or freedperson from a Herodian family (see comment on 16:10). “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. “Persis” is attested as a slave name, especially for slaves imported from Persia, but was also used by free persons.

16:13. “Rufus” was a common slave name. It is a Roman name, sometimes born by Jews; because Paul knows his mother, presumably from the East, some commentators think this is the Rufus of Mark 15:21. 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”).

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” and “Nereus” appear most frequently for persons with slave backgrounds.

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). The kiss was normally a light kiss on the mouth, readily distinguishable from lovers’ passionate kisses. Nevertheless, 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. Some second-century letters of Fronto suggest that a letter writer could want a reader to pass on a kiss to another person.

16:17-20

Concluding Exhortation

That the letter’s concluding exhortation warns against division makes sense of the setting.

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. Moralists used “bellies” (often translated “appetites”) to refer to self-indulgence. 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 might allude 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 16:20. He may also intend a contrast with Jeremiah 4:22: “wise to do evil, but ignorant of how to do good” (cf. Mt 10:16).

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 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 God will bring triumph.

16:21-24

Greetings to the Church in Rome

It was not uncommon to attach supplemental greetings from others in one’s location.

16:21. “Lucius” was a Greco-Roman name sometimes used by Jews; its shortened Greek form is “Lucas” (i.e., Luke; if this is the author of Acts, however, he soon traveled on ahead back to Philippi; see Acts 20:5-6). For the names “Jason” and “Sosipater” (probably the same people), see Acts 17:6, 9 and 20:4 (“Sopater” was another form of “Sosipater”); Macedonian delegates had accompanied Paul to Corinth (Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 16:3; 2 Cor 9:4).

16:22. “Tertius” was a Roman name (often used for a third boy), 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. If Gaius's house accommodated "the whole church," it must have been larger than most of the house churches; but Paul could simply be emphasizing Gaius's great hospitality or that his had been the initial house church (some think that Gaius could be the praenomen for Titius Justus; cf. Acts 18:7).

"City treasurers" (NASB) were sometimes public slaves or freedmen, but they were generally wealthy. In other cases public jobs 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 general period (and this is likely), he must have been a wealthy benefactor of the city, part of the municipal aristocracy. Candidates for *aedile* had to promise significant donations to the city to gain election. *Synagogues and other associations could have patrons* who were not members; whether this is the Christian Erastus of Acts 19:22 is debated, but cf. 2 Timothy 4:20.

16:25-27

Closing Benediction

The conclusions of Greco-Roman 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. To repeat in one's conclusion themes stated early in one's speech or work, as Paul does here (cf. 1:2-5, esp. 1:5; also 1:11, 17; 2:16; 3:21; 11:25, 33, 36), was good *rhetoric.

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, esp. in 15:9-12; 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.

1 Corinthians

INTRODUCTION

Authorship. All scholars accept 1 Corinthians as Pauline.

Corinth. Corinth was one of the major urban centers of the ancient Mediterranean and one of the most culturally diverse cities in the empire. A Greek city by location, the capital of Achaia (which made up most of ancient Greece), Corinth had been a Roman *colony for nearly a century, officially resettled by Romans long after its destruction, and Greek and Latin cultures coexisted. Its citizen class, however, viewed itself as Roman and was proud of its Roman identity. Its location on the isthmus of Corinth, a short land route across Greece that spared seafarers the more treacherous voyage around the south of Greece, made it a prosperous mercantile community. Although a wide disparity between rich and poor characterized the Roman empire more generally, this problem was particularly acute in Corinth. Its mercantile character contributed to the presence of foreign religions and may have accelerated the level of sexual promiscuity, although some promiscuity was characteristic of ancient Greek urban male culture in general. Corinth was known for its prosperity, and the proverbial sexual looseness of ancient Greek Corinth seems to have continued in Roman Corinth as well.

Language. Although Latin was used for official business in Corinth, most people could speak Greek, and this was especially true of settlers from elsewhere in Greece and further east, including most Jewish immigrants. (Some Greeks had continued to live onsite after the city's destruction, but it was the Roman settlers who became the founding citizens of New Corinth in 44 B.C.) Clearly the Corinthian *church, to whom Paul wrote his letters in Greek, understood him. Later in the first century, Clement of Rome also wrote to this church in Greek, which became Corinth's official language again in the early second century.

Situation. Roles were determined by social status in antiquity, and those with wealth and power preferred religious, philosophical and political ideologies that supported their base of power. Reading 1 Corinthians in light of ancient culture generally, including conflicting status ideals, cuts through much of the

speculation of earlier commentaries; although theological errors were involved, a central issue was that people were not getting along. Once we get past the cultural and language differences, the Corinthian Christians' values were very much like those of most Christians today. They had their own social interests, which seemed natural from their own perspective, but Paul summoned them to think instead as servants.

Thus higher-status members of the community seem to have preferred a more *rhetorically skilled speaker like Apollos*; and, *sharing the values of their peers they hoped to reach with the gospel*, they rejected manual labor as a suitable occupation for a moral teacher. Manual laborers in the church, however, appreciated a voluntarily lower-status, working teacher like Paul, even if his personal delivery in speeches left something to be desired (chaps. 1–4). Philosophical ideals held by some higher-status members may have been used to justify sexual offenses (chaps. 5–7); status issues likely factor into the minor division over head coverings (11:2-16) and possibly the approaches concerning meat and communal meals (chaps. 8–11). Philosophic views, often linked to status or at least the economic access to some kinds of education, probably also inform issues regarding the body and immortality (chap. 15) and, less likely but not impossibly, some philosophical mystical currents (chaps. 12–14). Most Greeks did not envision an end of the age in the sense in which Paul emphasizes future eschatology in his letter. In other words, the conflicting values of diverse groups in the broader society had been carried over into the church as divisive issues, and on other matters as well the values of society had obscured Paul's biblical message.

Commentaries. Helpful commentaries with a focus on background include Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); Craig S. Keener, *1 & 2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); on a less technical level, C. H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987). Also helpful are general works on social relations in antiquity, such as Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); for such relations in the New Testament, see Wayne E. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983); Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early*

Christianity, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); and other works in the LEC series cited in the bibliography in the introduction to this volume. On Corinth specifically, one may sample Pausanias, *Description of Greece* Book 2; Donald W. Engels, *Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2002); Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). On the unity theme, see Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991); on 1 Corinthians 7, see chapters five and six in my earlier book . . . *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991); Will Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); for 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 14:34-36 see my *Paul, Women and Wives* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), pp. 19-100; for 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, see Wendell L. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*, SBLDS 68 (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1985).

1:1-9

Opening Greetings

These verses follow a standard ancient way to open letters; see the introduction to *New Testament letters and comments on Romans 1:1 and 7.

1:1. Letters in antiquity were not usually coauthored; thus Paul may have authored the letter and Sosthenes (cf. perhaps Acts 18:17) served as *scribe, writing it down (cf. 1 Cor 16:21); or Sosthenes may have contributed to the letter's contents or (more likely) merely concurred with Paul's message. Sometimes composite authorship claims in (normally much shorter) ancient letters simply provided greetings (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 16.1.title).

1:2. “*Saints” means “set-apart ones,” and “sanctified” means “set apart,” “holy, consecrated or separated for God.” This language was applied to Israel in the *Old Testament; it meant that God had set apart Israel to himself when he redeemed them, and they were therefore to live for God, not like the nations around them.

1:3. “*Grace” adapts a standard Greek greeting, and “peace” a Jewish one. By invoking Jesus alongside the Father as the source of grace and peace in a blessing or wish-prayer (wish-prayers for the hearers were common in letter openings), Paul presupposes Jesus’ divinity.

1:4. Thanksgivings sometimes appear in ancient letters (e.g., 2 Maccabees 1:11). As in speeches, official letters might open with a proem praising the reader, which was designed to secure the reader’s favor for the rest of the letter. Moralists who gave rebuking speeches or wrote rebuking letters also usually mixed in praise to make their advice easier to accept.

1:5. Opening sections of speeches or literary works commonly introduced some of the themes that would recur throughout the letter. “Speech” and “knowledge” were important to the Corinthians. In fact, the nearby Isthmian Games (see comment on 9:24-25) included speech contests, and knowledge was associated with philosophical wisdom or the ability to speak extemporaneously on any topic (a skill in which *rhetoricians, or public speakers, were trained). Here Paul means spiritual, not merely natural, gifts, but the Corinthians had learned to excel in these particular gifts precisely because these mattered most to them in their culture.

1:6-8. “The day of our Lord Jesus Christ” here fulfills the role assigned to “the day of *God*” in standard Jewish tradition (cf., e.g., Is 13:6, 9; Joel 2:1, 11, 31; Amos 5:18, 20; Zeph 1:7-8, 14; 2:2-3). Some elements of Judaism, especially in the *Diaspora, played down the future aspects of biblical hope; Paul wants to reverse this tendency among the Corinthian Christians.

1:9. Ancient philosophers often spoke of human “fellowship” or “communion” with other people. Paul could mean fellowship with others in Christ, or intimacy with the Lord himself, or both.

1:10-17

Christ Not Divided

Later *rhetoricians would have classified at least 1 Corinthians 1:10–4:21 (addressing unity), and perhaps the whole letter, as a letter of admonition. Paul is not defending himself against opponents (as in 2 Corinthians) but addressing the misbehavior of the Corinthians. The context shows that they are favoring specific teachers (Paul and Apollos) on the basis of their respective rhetorical or philosophical skills (1:18–4:21).

1:10. For the first three centuries of its existence, the *church met mainly in homes; those belonging to more well-to-do members of the congregation could naturally hold the most people (see comment on 11:17-34). Because the size of these homes limited the size of congregations and forced Christians to meet in different house churches, divisions could easily arise among them. A *major* basis for the Corinthian Christians' division, however, derives from differences in social status and perspectives within the congregations. One type of ancient speech (known as a *homonoia* speech) lamented divisions and called for unity; Paul's readers would immediately recognize the nature of his argument. Paul states a thesis in 1:10 and then (following the custom in ancient works) outlines the events leading up to the present situation (1:11-12).

1:11. Rivalry and enmity pervaded society, even in sports but especially in politics and public speech. Ancient urban culture, epitomized in Corinth, evaluated and compared speakers. One normally specified the source for one's information unless it could harm the source. These informants may have been agents of Chloe, a wealthy businesswoman in Corinth or Ephesus (16:8), traveling between the two cities on business. As such, they may have been high-status slaves or *freedpersons belonging to her household. Members of a Corinthian church, they brought Paul the news; news and letters were most often carried by people traveling on other business. (Had they been her children rather than servants, they would have been named by their *father's* household, even were he deceased.)

1:12. People often gravitated toward particular teachers and defended their schools' interests. Occasionally students of competing teachers even came to blows, including in Corinth. Philosophers encouraged emotional attachment to themselves as a necessary part of developing morally and intellectually. Rabbis had their own schools, and disciples normally propagated their teacher's views. Political parties sometimes took the slogans, "I am of so-and-so." Using rhetorical repetition (here *anaphora*, which takes the form x . . . /x . . .), Paul neatly caricatures the Corinthians' divisions into four groups (though "Cephas" and "Christ" might be only hypothetical; cf. 3:5-6).

1:13. Paul here uses a common technique in argument: *reductio ad absurdum*, reducing an opponent's position to its natural but absurd conclusion. Speakers sometimes piled up rhetorical questions (here, three) to drive home their point.

1:14-15. Corinth had many famous fountains and bath houses—no shortage of potential sites for public *baptisms. In some Greek *mystery cults an initiate

would reportedly call the one who had introduced him to the cult “father”; probably here Paul is simply still reducing their position to the absurd (cf. 1:13). “Crispus” (cf. Acts 18:8) and “Gaius” (a common name, but cf. Rom 16:23) are Latin names and may reflect persons of high status in the congregation.

1:16. Paul may have recalled Stephanas separately because he may have met and baptized him elsewhere (16:15). One could add an afterthought in casual or informal letters (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 8.14.4) or use it as a deliberate rhetorical correction (in this case, perhaps to underline the secondary nature of the question). A “household” normally followed the religion of the head of the household; 16:15 implies that Stephanas was a believer and a person of some means.

1:17. Judaism used “baptism” as the final act of conversion for *Gentiles; early Christians followed this pattern. But Paul refuses to emphasize the act itself; his emphasis is on the message to whose reception baptism merely bears witness. Though using rhetoric to communicate, moralists commonly denied that they used skilled rhetoric to persuade their hearers, and they pointed out that they appealed only to the truth.

1:18-25

God’s Wisdom in the Cross

Judaism stressed the importance of divine Wisdom, which God revealed in his Word; Wisdom was sometimes personified (1:30). Given popular Greek respect for philosophy and *rhetoric (the primary two disciplines in which advanced studies were possible for those with funds), it is probable that some educated members of the church are especially interested in “wise speech.” Paul mistrusts such rhetoric (cf. 1:17, 20; 2:1, 4-5) and presumably worldly philosophy as well (cf. 1:21; 2:7-8; cf. Col 2:8). Apollos may have fit their preferred speaking style better than Paul did (1:12; see comment on Acts 18:24). Though minimizing rhetoric, Paul in this section employs rhetorical devices that his critics might recognize, including antithesis (1:18); four rhetorical questions with the triple repetition of “where is . . . ?” (1:20); and shockingly paradoxical oxymorons (1:25, also using antithesis).

1:18. Romans regarded crucifixion as a death appropriate for slaves; Jews also saw it as shameful (Deut 21:23). Those viewed as “*saviors” were normally gods, kings, wealthy benefactors or miracle workers. Roman society was built

around power and status; power was concentrated in the male head of the household, in wealthy and aristocratic families, and so forth. Associating power with a crucified man—the epitome of dishonor and weakness—thus made no more sense to ancients than it does to modern people outside Christ.

1:19. Here Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14 to show that the wisdom of those living by human tradition (including Jewish tradition, Is 29:13-14) instead of by God’s revelation (Is 29:9-12) would perish; cf. similarly Jeremiah 8:9.

1:20. Commentators rightly find models for Paul’s wording in texts like Isaiah 19:12; 33:18 and Job 12:17 (cf. further the principle in Prov 21:30; Is 29:14; 44:25; 47:10; Jer 8:8-9; 9:12, 23). The “debater [or reasoner] of this age” might refer to a trained rhetorician, whom philosophers sometimes despised as devoid of genuine content. But Paul challenges the philosophers (“wise men”) as well.

1:21. In Greek comedy the hero pretended to be stupid, but he proved to be wise in the end; in contrast to this hero was the fool who claimed to be wise and wanted credit for the wise man’s triumph but was rebuffed. *Plato said that human wisdom was worthless, and people should seek God’s wisdom instead.

1:22-23. Greeks were known for their love of learning. Greeks and Jews alike might desire attesting miracles, but Paul keeps Jews and Greeks distinct here for rhetorical effect. On the foolishness of the cross to both, see comment on 1:18.

1:24-25. In antiquity, divine power was typically associated with wonderworkers (1:22); the Corinthian culture, like Roman culture in general, valued social power (1:26). Paul uses “the foolishness of God” and “the weakness of God” ironically: the least of God’s wisdom is superior to the best of human wisdom. Irony was a common rhetorical device.

1:26-31

Inversion of Status

Paul again uses limited *rhetorical devices to communicate a wisdom that transcended rhetoric: repeating “not many” three times in 1:26 is *anaphora* (x . . . /x . . .); repeating “God chose” three times in 1:27-28 is *antistrophe* (. . . x/. . . x—it appears at the end of the lines in Greek). Paul introduces three elements in 1:26 and then develops them in 1:27-28.

1:26-29. Roman social class was based on birth (“nobility”) rather than on

wealth; but by either criterion, most of the Corinthian Christians derived from the lower ranks of society, which made up the vast majority of ancient society. Paul's guarded language here ("not many"—NIV) suggests that some, however, were of higher status, no doubt including the owners of many of the homes in which the churches met (cf. perhaps especially Rom 16:23). (Many of the recently wealthy in Corinth came from lower social ranks but achieved prestige through wealth.) This passage reflects Jeremiah 9:23, paving the way for Paul's explicit quotation of Jeremiah 9:24 in 1 Corinthians 1:31. For God inverting human status, see also Isaiah 2:11, 17.

1:30. Both Jewish and Greek literature sometimes personified wisdom. *Christ as divine Wisdom (8:6; cf. Jn 1:1-18) functions as righteousness, sanctification and redemption, changing the person completely for God. The *law was considered both wisdom (Deut 4:6) and righteousness (Deut 6:25).

1:31. Here Paul paraphrases Jeremiah 9:24: one should boast in knowing and understanding God rather than in human wisdom.

2:1-5

Saved by the Cross, Not by Rhetoric

Paul here appeals to the Corinthians' own conversion (cf. Gal 3:2). It was the powerful preaching of the weakness of the cross, not humanly powerful *rhetoric, that had saved them (1 Cor 1:18).

Even most defenders of rhetoric, or skilled speech, admitted that it was sometimes abused. But they argued that it was necessary, because having truth but being unable to persuade others of it was not helpful. Philosophers traditionally criticized rhetoric, claiming that truth, not skillful speech, should be the emphasis; but these same philosophers used forms of argument developed by rhetoricians. By this period, most had surmounted the traditional opposition between philosophy and rhetoric, allowing for the use of both. Paul here disapproves of *mere* rhetoric, but his own writing, including 1 Corinthians, displays extensive knowledge and use of rhetorical forms. Although Paul may not have matched the rhetorical prowess of Apollos or the standards of Corinthian leaders, he was a skillful writer (2 Cor 10:10) in his own right.

2:1-2. Normally a new speaker in a city would announce an event where he would offer an oration; if enough people were impressed and he drew students, he would stay in that city. Paul, by contrast, did not tell people what they wanted

to hear to make himself popular. Because Paul in the context is boasting in his weakness, he does not praise his speaking or philosophical ability (cf. Ex 4:10; Jer 1:6). But this reserve need not mean—and the skillfulness of his argumentation shows that it cannot mean—that his argumentation style was weak, even if his delivery (voice quality and gestures) were inadequate (which is likely—2 Cor 10:10; possibly Paul also spoke Greek with an accent, though cf. Acts 21:37). Even the most renowned speakers (e.g., Dio Chrysostom) often disavowed their own speaking abilities in order to lower audience expectations; then they spoke brilliantly. Rhetoricians recommended this technique.

2:3. “Fear and trembling” occur together as an expression in the *Old Testament and Jewish literature*; *although the expression was formulaic, it was used in a variety of different ways. In this context, this expression suggests that Paul’s weakness was in his delivery, not in his awareness of contemporary rhetorical style. Apart from Stoics, most speakers approved of stirring emotions in speeches, but trembling would normally put off audiences accustomed to skilled speakers.*

2:4-5. In rhetoric, “demonstration” was a form of argument proved from certain and undisputed premises; Paul does not offer a mere syllogism (a form that was logical but might be based on inadequate premises) or dialectic (which *Plato treated as defining and classifying data) or rhetorical tricks.

One could also speak of rhetorical “power,” but Paul’s power is from a different source: God’s power resident in the preaching of the weakness of the cross (1:18, 24). This power might imply miraculous attestation (1:22, 24; 2 Cor 12:12; 13:4; Rom 15:19).

2:6-16

Genuine Wisdom Through the Spirit

Paul hastens to explain that he does not oppose genuine wisdom; but this wisdom is beyond human understanding and can be accepted only by those who know God’s heart through the *Spirit. The Corinthian believers’ wrong focus shows that they are missing this fundamental wisdom (3:1-4; cf. 1:18-31).

2:6. Philosophers used the term for “mature” or “perfect” (KJV) here for those who had progressed to an advanced stage in wisdom; contrast 3:1! (Its use for full initiates to the *mystery cults is less relevant here.) The contrast in 2:6-9 is between temporal wisdom of those great in this age and God’s eternal wisdom.

Cf. Wisdom of Solomon 9:6: “Even one who is perfect among people will be deemed nothing without the wisdom that comes from you.”

2:7. Judaism believed that God’s wisdom existed before the world and that God had created the world through this wisdom.

2:8. Some scholars suggest that “rulers of the age” here refers to angelic powers in the heavens (cf. 15:24; Rom 8:38; Eph 1:21). In the context, earthly rulers (cf. Rom 13:1) are more likely, however; these are the powerful people of this age, by the Corinthians’ standards (1 Cor 1:26-28). Yet the truly powerful one was “the glorious Lord”!

2:9. Here Paul quotes Isaiah 64:4, which was part of a prayer for God to intervene in history again on behalf of the remnant who hoped in him; Paul adapts the wording of the quotation slightly, as was common in ancient citations. (He may also slightly conflate this text with the *LXX of Is 65:17, which speaks of the present being forgotten in the world to come.) The point is that the things of the eternal God are inaccessible to mortals except by the means Paul articulates in verse 10.

2:10-13. Only God’s *Spirit knows what is in his heart, but because believers have God’s Spirit, they can know his heart too. In light of the possible allusion to Wisdom of Solomon 9 in 1 Corinthians 2:6, cf. here Wisdom of Solomon 9:17: Who has known God’s plans unless God has given them wisdom and sent his Spirit from above? (For God “revealing” wisdom, cf. Sirach 1:6; “those who love him” could echo the recipients of God’s wisdom in Sirach 1:10.) “Spirit” had a broad variety of meanings, including “attitude,” “disposition”; hence “spirit of the world” need not refer to any particular spiritual being (unlike God’s Spirit).

2:14-15. The spiritual person can evaluate all things, but the “natural” (KJV, NASB; “unspiritual,” NRSV; literally, something like “soulish”) person cannot evaluate the things or people of the Spirit. God’s breath made humans living “souls” (Gen 2:7), but they still needed God’s Spirit to experience him. Paul’s use of “natural” may be based on a particular interpretation of Genesis 2:7 current in *Hellenistic Jewish circles; see comment on 15:45-46. (This Hellenistic Jewish use may borrow the language of some Greek philosophers, who contrasted the “natural,” or earthbound, part of the soul with the mind. Paul’s distinction is between those ruled by their own earthly soul and those ruled by the Spirit of God. *Gnostics in the second century wrongly used 1 Cor 2:14-15 as a proof text to distinguish the human soul and spirit and to argue that they were an elite group who followed the incorruptible, immortal spirit.)

2:16. As in 2:9-10, Paul follows a text underlining the ignorance of humans apart from God with the recognition that those who receive his Spirit can understand his heart. Paul turns the rhetorical question of Isaiah 40:13 (cf. Rom 11:34) around in the light of the coming of the Spirit; he quotes “mind of the Lord” from the Greek version, but undoubtedly knows that the Hebrew has “Spirit of the Lord.” Many philosophers sought to know God’s mind by wisdom; for Paul, this wisdom comes only through the experience of God’s Spirit.

3:1-9

Do Not Follow Servants

With their partisan celebrity cults the Corinthian Christians are acting like “natural,” “fleshly” people rather than people of the *Spirit. Paul and Apollos are mere servants; God is the one the Corinthians ought to follow.

3:1-2. Ancient writers often compared the unskilled in knowledge to babes who had to start out with the basics, with milk (Philo, *Epictetus, etc.). If Paul intends the image to evoke all that it can, he portrays himself as mother or wet nurse (cf. 4:15; 1 Thess 2:7). Teachers always expected students to start with basics but also expected them to progress past basics.

3:3. “Fleshly” (not “worldly”—NIV) is slightly different from “as fleshly” (again, not “worldly”—NIV) of verse 1: it means that they were *acting* fleshly, not that they were fleshly by nature. On “flesh” and Spirit, see comment on Romans 8:1-11.

3:4. Greek culture sometimes divinized heroes into gods. Later traditions divinized philosophers, and philosophers often claimed that people could be divinized by virtue, because they considered the soul a divine part within each person. Although some Jewish writers in the Greek world adopted the language of deification, the principle of one God generally kept Jews and Christians from following this concept that far (Gen 3:5). Here Paul says: If you follow humans, then you are not only not divine; you are not even following the Spirit of God (2:14–3:3).

3:5-9. Paul uses the familiar image of sowing; at the end of verse 9 he introduces the familiar image of building, which will dominate his exposition through 3:17. Other writers like *Philo also described God as planter or builder; in the *Old Testament, most often for God planting, building or uprooting his people (cf. Ruth 4:11; Ps 28:5; 51:18; 69:35; 147:2; Jer 1:10; 18:7; 24:6; 31:4,

28; 45:4).

3:10-20

The Real Test of God's Servants

The Corinthians should follow God, not his ministers (3:1-9), because only the day of judgment would show the genuine character of ministers (3:10-15). The building on which God's servants are working is God's temple, representing God's people (3:16-17).

3:10-11. A "master builder" directed the construction; thus Paul designed strategies as well as labored.

3:12-15. A few other ancient stories highlighted the competition among substances like those Paul mentions here; further, everyone knew which substances would endure testing by fire (cf., e.g., Num 31:23). Ancient sources sometimes employed the metaphor of testing by fire; in the *Old Testament, see Proverbs 27:21; Isaiah 47:14; Zechariah 13:9. Ancient Jewish writers sometimes compared the wicked to straw that would be consumed at the judgment (in the Old Testament, cf., e.g., Is 33:11). Only the judgment would test the ultimate value of each servant's work.

3:16-17. Some ancient writers thought of spiritual temples. Some Jewish people, as attested in the *Dead Sea Scrolls (cf., e.g., 1QS 8.5-9; 9.6), portrayed God's people as a building, the temple, so the image could have been familiar to Jesus' first followers. Nearly everyone in the ancient world believed that desecrating temples warranted judgment.

3:18-20. Paul cites Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11. The former is a wise principle, even though Eliphaz, who first articulated it, used it in an evil way against Job (Job 4-5). Psalm 94:11 in context stresses that God alone teaches people rightly; human wisdom is at best folly. Paul thus continues his proof from Scripture of human folly (e.g., 1 Cor 1:19).

3:21-23

All Things Are the Corinthians' Anyway

This passage would make good sense to ancient readers. Even Paul and Apollos are given to them by God; why follow just Paul or Apollos, when they should follow the God who gives everything? God's people would take possession of

the world to come (see comment on Rom 4:13; cf. Zech 8:12); at present they are heirs of the world and children of the God who rules it.

*Stoic and *Cynic philosophers often praised “having nothing” (see comment on 2 Cor 6:10) while emphasizing that the whole world belonged to them, so they could take whatever they needed. They often cited the proverb “Friends share all property in common” and claimed that because they were friends of the gods, who owned everything, everything was theirs.

4:1-5

Do Not Evaluate Before the Real Test

A sinful lifestyle always indicated sinful motives, but a godly lifestyle could sometimes mask selfish motives. Only God knows hearts, and Christian celebrities could be accurately evaluated only in the light of the final judgment (3:5-15). Paul adapts the language of philosophers respected by the Corinthian Christians.

4:1. “Stewards” or “managers” (“those entrusted”—NIV) were often servants, as here, or freedmen. These servants and freedmen were trusted to manage the master’s estate, especially his financial affairs, and had great authority and prestige. Some philosophers saw themselves as stewards or managers of divine truths.

4:2. Because stewards were trusted to handle their masters’ finances, purchasing slaves and goods and making wise investments, it was crucial that they be “trustworthy” or “faithful.”

4:3-4. The *Old Testament speaks of the day of God’s judgment tribunal as “the day of God.” “Day” sometimes meant “court,” as Paul uses it and many translations render it here. Paul uses several legal expressions in these verses. Most philosophers, especially *Cynics, expressed disdain for what anyone else thought about them.

4:5. Jesus and other Jewish teachers spoke of God bringing secret thoughts to light at his judgment (cf. Is 29:15; *1 *Enoch* 38:3; 49:4). Ancient *rhetoric was concerned with “praise” for those to be honored; Paul says that the only honor that counts is what God will assign at the final judgment.

4:6-13

Apostles Last of All

In Jesus' *kingdom, where the greatest is the least and the King died for his people, no one is more important than anyone else. Indeed, true *apostles take the lowest role, not the greatest; they should not be objects of a celebrity cult.

4:6. Some commentators argue that speakers advocating harmony sometimes warned people not to "go beyond what is written" but to comply with a prior agreement; Paul may thus summon them to unity, reminding them of a contract implied in their acceptance of Christ. Some commentators have suggested that "not beyond what is written" refers to the learning of schoolchildren, who learned how to write by imitating what was written. Others think Paul refers to Scripture, perhaps texts he has cited so far in 1 Corinthians on the worthlessness of human folly. Whatever the case, Paul may warn against boasting beyond one's proper station.

4:7. Everything they have, God has given to them; they have earned none of it. Philosophers often liked to make this point to keep people from boasting.

4:8. Irony was a frequent rhetorical and literary device. Philosophers often claimed to be the only true kings, asserting that only they had character noble enough to rule rightly. They also claimed to possess the only genuine wealth and wisdom. Paul ironically concedes the claims of his most educated readers: "You are true philosophers; I, your teacher in Christ, am foolish."

4:9. Sages often listed their sufferings that verified their commitment to living according to their teaching. Stoic philosophers sometimes claimed that they evoked the admiration of gods and mortals as they persevered through suffering; but Paul declares that the suffering *apostles became a "spectacle," objects of scorn in the theater of the world. The person in charge of games in amphitheaters would exhibit the gladiators who would battle wild beasts there; here God himself exhibits the sufferings of the apostles. "Last of all" could mean captives led in triumphal procession before execution (2 Cor 2:14), or, with likelier reference to the arena (1 Cor 15:32), that they were the final show for the day—normally reserved for the most wretched criminal condemned to die in the arena. Corinth's theater seated eighteen thousand.

4:10. Philosophers claimed to be wise, powerful and truly honorable, as opposed to the foolish masses. They meant that their conduct was wise, they were morally strong, and they were honorable in virtue. But much of society thought the opposite, especially of the homeless *Cynics: they were foolish, weak beggars. Paul's detractors think his behavior unbecoming of true wisdom; Paul uses irony to suggest that the true wisdom is on his side.

4:11. Greek moralists sometimes presented themselves as models for others to imitate; a few philosophers, especially the Cynics, wandered around homeless and dependent on charity. Paul presents his own sufferings and sacrifices for the *gospel as a model for the Corinthians to imitate (4:9-16). Everything Paul describes in 4:11 could fit the typical ancient depiction of the wandering Cynic philosopher.

4:12. Stoics tried to show themselves unaffected by criticism; the most fundamental background for blessing those who insulted one, however, is Jesus's teaching (cf. Lk 6:22). Here Paul distinguishes himself from most kinds of philosophers and from the more aristocratic ideals of the higher-status faction within the Corinthian church. *Philosophers might beg, charge tuition or be supported by a patron*; to many of them, manual labor was the least honorable option. Because wealthy landowners also considered manual labor undignified, well-to-do people in the church might be embarrassed to invite friends of their own social circle to hear the teachings of Paul, who worked as an artisan (skilled laborer). The majority of people in the congregation, however, would not be well-to-do; artisans were often proud of their labor.

4:13. Some commentators note that Paul's words translated "rubbish" and "dregs" (NRSV) could apply to criminals or others killed as offerings to gods. The terms had wider use, however, and philosophers sometimes thought of the masses as "garbage" (GNT) and "refuse" (NIV); more often, the masses may have thought of wandering Cynic philosophers in these same terms. It was a universally disgusting image for something worthless and rejected (Lam 3:45). Following Jesus, Paul goes beyond Cynics in answering slander gently (cf. Prov 15:1; 29:8); many Cynics were happy to revile their audiences, even without provocation, to prove their independence. Stoic and Cynic philosophers believed that their perseverance in suffering authenticated them as genuine philosophers, and Paul wants the philosophically informed members of his audience to recognize that on their own terms he can compete with the best of them.

4:14-21

A Father's Threat

4:14. Except in the most extreme circumstances, philosophers preferred to admonish rather than to rebuke and thereby humiliate. Moralists generally emphasized that they admonished people only because they cared for them,

sometimes describing their concern in parental terms. For Paul as a parent, cf. already 3:1-2; fathers were responsible for their sons' education.

4:15. "Guardian" (NIV, NRSV; better than "tutor"—NASB—or "instructor"—KJV) refers to a slave who would accompany a child on his way to school; although respected by the child and responsible to teach him manners, this guardian was not a teacher per se. Students could affectionately call and treat special teachers as "fathers"; but slave aides were nothing like fathers.

4:16. Philosophers, *rabbis and teachers in general were considered models to imitate as well as to listen to. Most directly here, "imitate" fits the image of children and fathers (4:15).

4:17. A *disciple of a teacher could be affectionately called his "child" (4:15); Timothy as an imitator of Paul can become a model for Paul's "children" in Corinth. Paul's "ways" (NASB) or "way of life" (NIV) may allude to the Jewish use of "ways" to mean divine laws or proper behavior.

4:18-21. Paul continues in the role of "father" (4:14-17) in this passage. Fathers were sometimes portrayed as gentler than mothers, but they also used the rod for discipline, and in Roman political rhetoric, the proper patriarchal figure was stern and uncompromising. Others in antiquity also qualified some statements with "if God wills" (4:19; see comment on 16:7).

5:1-5

Discipline for Sexual Immorality

Paul now turns from issues of *church unity (chaps. 1–4) to sexual issues (chaps. 5–7). Although most incestuous relationships today have innocent victims (molestation is never the victim's fault; cf. Deut 22:26), in chapter 5 Paul addresses the sin of two consenting adults.

5:1. The marriage of full brothers and sisters was considered immoral throughout the Roman Empire except in Egypt; parent-child incest was universally abhorred throughout the Roman world (Greeks viewed Persians and Nabateans as exceptions, but this was probably slander). From the revulsion against the idea exhibited in the Greek Oedipus stories to slander leveled against emperors, it was one of those few crimes that virtually all cultures agreed was terrible. Its Roman legal punishment was banishment to an island. Relations with stepmothers were treated like relations with mothers—as incestuous. Here Paul uses the language of Leviticus 18:6-8. Relations between sons and stepmothers

were often strained, but because Greek and Roman fathers often remarried much younger wives, a stepmother could be within the age range of an older son.

5:2. These people may have been boasting in their spiritual freedom. Committing a crime was considered bad in antiquity, but boasting about it in addition to committing it was considered even worse (including in Scripture: Is 3:9; Jer 6:15; 8:12). Some suggest that the Christians here boast not in the sin but in the sinner—that he was a person of status belonging to their congregation. If he was of high status, even social peers who criticized him could risk enmity, and the church could also suffer if it alienated him.

Communities of resident aliens could discipline members according to their laws, so long as the disciplines did not violate Roman law and the members remained part of these communities. Synagogues, which functioned as social centers for their communities, disciplined their members, especially those whose immorality threatened to bring *Gentile reproach on the whole Jewish community. Discipline could include corporal punishment (beatings), but the ultimate punishment was exclusion from the Jewish community—spiritual banishment. This expulsion could be deemed the spiritual equivalent of a death sentence, executed only by God; but it was reversible if the banned person repented.

5:3. Letter writers sometimes expressed their intimate concern for the readers by saying that, although they were “absent in body,” they were with them “in spirit” or in mind (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 3.11.2; *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 67.2; Oxyrhynchus papyri 32). In some cases, the letter itself communicated the effect of the writer’s presence. But this expression was meant as a statement of intimacy, not of metaphysical presence.

5:4. Some Jewish sources averred that judges in Jewish courts judged cases on the authority of the heavenly court (see comment on Mt 5:22). Jewish communities seem to have used excommunication, or official exclusion from the community (attested in both temporary and permanent forms, along with other levels of possible discipline, in the *Dead Sea Scrolls* and in later rabbinic literature), to replace the *Old Testament death penalty; Christians adopted the practice from Judaism.

5:5. Some compare the long-standing pagan custom of magical execration by devoting a person to the gods of the underworld or other avenging deities; curse tablets used for this purpose were widespread. In the Old Testament, God’s servants were to place idolatrous items under the ban, devoting them to destruction; here Paul instructs the Corinthians to deliver this man to *Satan, the

agent of destruction. Paul may hope that the resultant suffering (11:30) will lead to *repentance and thus salvation. Jewish teachers often felt that suffering plus repentance would expiate sin, or that (as here) suffering could lead to repentance.

5:6-13

Removing Immorality in the Church

Immorality inside and apparently sanctioned by the church was far more likely to lead Christians astray than the immorality of nonbelievers would.

5:6. The most obvious characteristic of leaven, or yeast, is that it permeates the dough, making the whole batch of dough rise when baked. Paul uses leaven here as a symbol for sin.

5:7-8. Paul argues that the Corinthians should remain unleavened, just as bread does during the Passover season. (The Jewish people left Egypt in such haste after the first Passover that they did not have time to leaven their bread, and subsequent generations were commanded to celebrate the feast with unleavened bread in commemoration of the event.) Paul writes some time before Pentecost (16:8), fifty days after Passover, so Passover could well be fresh on his mind. Jewish people understood the Passover lamb as a sacrifice in this period (cf. *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2.312). The Jewish people were expecting a new redemption, like their first exodus from Egypt, when the *Messiah came; Paul believes that the Messiah has come, and that this Messiah was himself the new paschal lamb.

5:9-10. Jewish people typically considered Gentiles sexually “immoral” and were probably correct about most Gentile men. Both Jewish and Gentile moralists often included lists of vices (as in 5:10, 11; 6:9-10).

5:11. Jewish excommunication (5:3-5) also excluded people from communal meals, as in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

5:12. Rome allowed local Jewish communities to judge Jewish offenders of Jewish laws. This judgment and the discipline were carried out in the *synagogues, the community centers for local Jewish groups (cf. comment on 2 Cor 11:24). Paul expects the Christians of his day to follow the same model, correcting the behavior of erring fellow Christians.

5:13. The *Old Testament* often commanded God’s people to purge evildoers from among their ranks, normally by execution (Deut 13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21;

24:7); the offenses listed include sexual sins (22:21, 24). Otherwise, the unrepentant offender could remove God's blessing from the whole community and bring about the death of others (Josh 7:5, 12-13, 25). Here the evildoer is purged from the community by being banished; banishment was a common punishment in the Roman period. In Judaism, exclusion from the community was a spiritual equivalent of execution, applied in the New Testament period to capital crimes of the Old Testament (see comment on 1 Cor 5:2; actual capital sentences of Jewish courts could not be legally carried out without Roman permission).

6:1-11

Christians in Secular Courts

Having advocated that the church act as a court with regard to sexual offenses (chap. 5), Paul now argues for the necessity of church courts in his society (6:1-8) and then returns to sexual offenses (6:9, 12-20). Some think that the litigants of 6:1-8 are the father and son of 5:1 (cf. "defraud" in 6:7-8; 1 Thess 4:4-6); but it is likelier simply a digression related to the issue of courts (cf. "why not be wronged?"—6:7).

Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean world had their own courts in their *synagogues. Bringing internal disputes of the Jewish or Christian communities before secular magistrates was a luxury these minority religions could ill afford; there was already too much slander against them in the broader society. See comment on Acts 18:12-17.

6:1. Like modern North American society, Roman society was extremely litigious. Cases began to be heard at dawn and sometimes could be argued as late as sunset. Judges were always chosen from among the well-to-do, and most legal disputes revolved around money or property. Some lawsuits were simply designed to disturb enemies.

6:2. Members of the upper class received better treatment in the law courts, sometimes generating complaints of unfairness even in antiquity; indeed, this preference was eventually written into penalties prescribed in the laws. Further, social inferiors could rarely gain a hearing trying to sue those of higher status. But for Paul, even the lowliest believers are equipped to judge cases.

6:3. In many Jewish traditions, the righteous would judge the nations (Dan 7:22; Wisdom of Solomon 3:8; *I Enoch* 95:3; *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QpHab 5.4);

this judging could also imply judging the angels who were believed to rule the nations.

6:4. In ancient society, both judges and arbiters normally were of high status. This verse could be read as a command (KJV) rather than a question (so most current translations): “appoint the lowliest,” in contrast to the world (see comment on 6:2); whatever the case, the context suggests that the least of Christians *should* be more competent in justice than the wisest of pagans (cf. 2:14-15).

6:5. Family disputes such as inheritances could be settled by private arbitration, although the arbitrators were usually socially prominent landowners. A magistrate would decide whether cases should be heard by a judge or jury. Juries often judged criminal cases like adultery, murder and treason. This case may have gone before a secular jury court.

6:6. Suing literal brothers was scandalous behavior, though unfortunately quite frequent in ancient property disputes. *Stoics taught that possessions were worthless and consequently rejected legal remedies to defend them (Musonius Rufus 10, p. 76.16-17); some other philosophers also disdained submitting to courts they considered less wise than themselves. The Jewish communities outside Judea were very conscious of their minority status and did not wish to reinforce negative pagan conceptions of their morality. Consequently, they usually dealt with Jewish problems within their own community. Christians were an even smaller minority at this time and also had Jesus’s teaching on the topic (Mt 5:39-40; Lk 6:29-30).

6:7-8. Many philosophers who believed that property did not matter could advocate ignoring offenses rather than going to court. Paul prefers the Jewish method of settling disputes within the community, which serves both justice and the community’s witness to the outside world.

6:9-10. That the unrighteous would not “inherit God’s *kingdom,” that is, would not have a share in it, was standard Jewish and Christian teaching. Both Jewish and pagan “vice lists” often defined or exemplified the “unrighteous”; Paul follows this practice. “Do not be deceived” appears in ancient moral exhortation and is common in the *New Testament. Scholars have disputed the meaning of the term sometimes translated “homosexuals” (NASB), but it seems to be coined from Leviticus 20:13 and to mean those who engage in homosexual acts. These were a common feature of Greek male life in antiquity; this was one form of behavior that Jewish people regarded as virtually exclusively a *Gentile vice (e.g., *Philo, *Special Laws* 3.37-39; *Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.215;

**Sibylline Oracles 5.387).*

Like the **rabbis*, Paul engages in **rhetorical damnation*: even though in practice he has expelled from fellowship only the most extreme offender (5:1-5), those who continue in the lifestyles he mentions here will not make it into the kingdom.

6:11. Some philosophers reasoned from indicative to imperative: those who have accepted philosophy cannot (by which philosophers often meant “must not”) live by the world’s folly; Jewish teachers also called Israel to live holy because God had consecrated them to himself (cf. Lev 20:26). Still, most ancient moralists primarily simply exhorted people to behave in particular ways. Paul reasons from what the Corinthians are in **Christ* (by God’s action) to how they should live, rather than the reverse.

6:12-20

The Body Is for God, Not for Immorality

Biblical **law* forbade sex between people who were not married; the penalty for having sex with one person and then marrying another was the same as the penalty for adultery while married—death. Although this penalty was no longer strictly enforced by Paul’s day (if it ever regularly had been), it underlined the seriousness of the offense; premarital sexual immorality was adultery against one’s future spouse (Deut 22:13-29).

Many Greek thinkers, however, reasoned that sex without marriage (“fornication”—KJV, NRSV) was fine as long as it did not control a person; the more vulgar **Cynics* even relieved their sexual passions publicly. Much more commonly, for most Greek men under the age of thirty, heterosexual intercourse was most available with slaves or with prostitutes. Roman law permitted (and reaped tax profits from) prostitution, and it forbade fornication only if both parties were of aristocratic birth. Paul’s response shows his mastery of his readers’ culture and his ability to communicate biblical truth relevantly.

6:12. Philosophers used various tests for whether one should do an act, such as whether it was “lawful” or “permissible” and, more important, whether it was “profitable” (NASB) or “expedient” (KJV). Some philosophers excused relieving their sexual appetites with prostitutes or by publicly stimulating themselves, explaining that they were in complete control of their own emotions!

As is common in *diatribe* (an ancient teaching form), Paul cites the opinion

*of an imaginary opponent similar to (or an absurd reduction of) that of his hearers, and then refutes or qualifies it: “‘I can get away with anything.’ Maybe so, but ‘anything’ is not good for you.” Sometimes writers explicitly mention the interlocutor (as in 15:12; Rom 9:19); at other times, as here, they just spoke for and then responded to the interlocutor (e.g., Rom 3:1-9; Cicero, *For Scaurus* 9.18). Philosophers frequently warned against being “enslaved” (6:12d) or dominated by pleasures, false ideas and the like.*

6:13-14. Moralists often used the “belly” to represent pleasures (cf. comment on Phil 3:19). Wealthy banquets could cater to both gluttony and sexual desire. “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food” was an acceptable Greek way of arguing by analogy that the body was for sex and sex for the body. That God would do away with both reflected the typical Greek disdain for the doctrine of the *resurrection* (*chap. 15*), *because Greeks believed that one was done with one’s body at death. Paul responds to this Greek position with the Old Testament/Jewish perspective that the body is for God and he will resurrect it* (cf. also 6:20). Critics of those skeptical of the resurrection (*Sadducees) or of life after death (*Epicureans) emphasized that belief in the future provided a deterrent to immorality.

6:15-16. Here Paul argues from Genesis 2:24. Jewish interpreters normally applied this text to marriage, but because in Jewish law intercourse sealed a marriage union or betrayed it, Paul’s argument from Genesis 2:24 could make sense to Jewish hearers or to *Gentiles conversant with the Old Testament.

Prostitution was considered a business like any other, disreputable as the occupation was thought to be (for prostitutes, not for the men who had sex with them). It was readily available in inns and taverns, and the ranks of prostitutes were especially stocked with slave girls raised from the vast number of abandoned babies. Jews strongly opposed prostitution (although a few engaged in it), and *Philo said that it was a capital offense in God’s sight; but this Jewish view was hardly the pagan position. Some pagans even considered prostitution a useful deterrent to adultery. Corinth had an ancient reputation (focused on the earlier Greek city but persisting in Paul’s day) for prostitution and promiscuity, although such behavior was by no means exclusive to Corinth.

6:17. The Old Testament speaks of people being “joined” to God (Jer 50:5; Zech 2:11; cf. Num 25:3; Hos 4:17). Paul works here especially with the Old Testament doctrine that God is married to his covenant people (e.g., Is 54:5-6; Jer 3:1; Hos 2:20). Applying the analogy from Genesis 2:24, Paul cannot say that God is “one flesh” with them (the Old Testament and Judaism did not

believe God had flesh), but he can say they are “one spirit,” united in an intimate, covenant relationship like husband and wife. Thus Christians uniting themselves with prostitutes would defile the sanctity of their relationship with God, as in the religious prostitution reported in pre-Roman Corinth.

6:18. Moralists often exhorted people to flee from vices (also in 10:14; cf. Sirach 21:2; Wisdom of Solomon 1:5), including sexual immorality (*Testament of Reuben* 5:5) such as prostitution (Cato, *Collection of Distichs* 25); a *narrative example in this case would be Joseph (Gen 39:12). “Every sin [KJV, NRSV; not ‘other’ sins, against NASB, NIV] . . . is outside the body” may represent the opposing position (6:12-14), to which Paul responds, “The sexually immoral person sins against their own body.”

6:19. Compare comment on 3:16-17; but here the application to the individual Christian (and hence his or her sexual sanctity) is Paul’s own.

6:20. Glorifying God with the body ran against the Greek thinking of many of Paul’s hearers; see comment on 6:12-14. “Bought” refers to redemption from slavery (7:23; cf. 1:30); here it is possible that Paul makes a wordplay on the price of freeing a slave prostitute.

7:1-7

Fulfilling Conjugal Rights

Different views on celibacy existed in the ancient world. Most ancient writers condemned failure to marry; Augustus’s laws penalized it; and many Jewish teachers even considered it sinful, because reproduction was essential and marriage was the proper deterrent from sexual offenses and distractions. (“Replenishing the earth” was considered a biblical commandment for all Jews. Abortion and child abandonment were widely practiced in antiquity; but ancient Jews and Christians—as well as some pagan moralists—unanimously condemned both as the taking of human life. Jews and Egyptians reared all their children.)

A number of groups of philosophers and minor religious sects, however, as well as many *Essenes among the Jews, advocated celibacy or the rejection of marriage. Some philosophers rejected marriage but thought that sexual release with prostitutes was acceptable since it would not tie a person down (cf. comment on 6:12-20). Some Essenes, a Jewish sect, and members of another reported group called Therapeutae, apparently eschewed marriage; maintaining

biblical morality, however, they rejected all intercourse outside marriage.

One may divide some of the ancient opinions roughly as follows: (1) Marriage and procreation are vital for all who are physically capable of it (the majority view). (2) Marriage is a distraction and should never be undertaken by the wise man except in the rare instances where one might find a spouse equally devoted to the philosophic lifestyle (the *Cynic position*; cf. Epictetus, *Diatribes* 3.22.69-76); or some could volunteer for an end-time celibate lifestyle (some Essenes). (3) Marriage is good for most people, but one must make exceptions for those too committed to other spiritual pursuits to take time for it (an early-second-century *rabbi reported in Babylonian Talmud *Yebamot* 63b). Paul's advice combines elements of the second and third approaches.

7:1. "Now concerning" sometimes offered a transition to a new point (e.g., Coptic text *P. Lond.* 1912.52). Now Paul responds to the position in their letter to him: "It is good not to touch [not 'marry,' GNT] a woman" (contrast Gen 2:18). For quoting (or paraphrasing, or caricaturing) an opposing position (7:1) and then refuting it (7:2-5), see comment on 1 Corinthians 6:12. "Touch" was a common ancient idiom for intercourse. Some members of the *church may be following an idea common among many Greek thinkers: sex was fine as long as one did not get tied down with marriage (cf. 6:12-20). Others, whom Paul addresses here, are already married (7:2-5) and abstain from relations with their spouses. Paul says that it is too late to choose celibacy once one is married (cf. v. 5).

7:2. "Let each have" reflects a Greek idiom for "Let them have sexual relations." Jewish people (and some *Gentiles) saw married sexual intimacy as the best deterrent to sexual immorality, and Paul here agrees (see also Prov 5:19-20).

7:3. Jewish marriage contracts stipulated a number of duties for the husband and a number for the wife; one major duty required of the husband was intercourse. Paul views intercourse as a mutual obligation; the meaning of "marital duty" (NIV) here is clear (cf. "conjugal rights"—NRSV).

7:4. Greek writers sometimes portrayed submitting to sexual relations or passion as bringing oneself under someone else's control (cf. 6:12d). Many Gentiles demanded only the husband's fidelity, but Paul expects it for both genders.

7:5. *Pharisees who were trying to formulate laws in this period differed on how long a man could vow to abstain from intercourse with his wife; one school said two weeks, and the other school said one week (Mishnah *Ketubbot* 5:6-7;

Sifre Deuteronomy 213.2.1). Although Paul would not make longer abstinence grounds for divorce, as they did (7:10-13), he clearly wishes to limit even abstinence by mutual consent, leaving the specifics to the couple. For “temptation” here, see comment on 7:2, 9.

7:6. Jewish *law permitted concessions for human weakness; here Paul permits but does not require periods of abstinence, implying that it is those who wish to abstain (rather than those who do not) who are weak. Abstinence within marriage is their idea (7:1), not his.

7:7. Paul recognizes that not all are called to singleness and equipped for it.

7:8-16

Getting Married Versus Staying Married

Verses 8-9 are a *digression Paul uses to establish a contrast between single persons concerned to stay single (7:8-9) and married persons wishing to become single (7:10-16). Digressions were a standard feature of ancient writing.

7:8. Singleness has advantages; see comment on 7:32-34. But not everyone is equipped for this lifestyle; others should pursue marriage (7:9).

7:9. “Burn” (NIV, NRSV and GNT interpret correctly by adding “with passion”) was used throughout ancient romances and other sources to describe the arousal of passion, often (metaphorically) through Cupid’s fiery darts. Whereas Greco-Roman literature in general saw nothing wrong with passion, Paul believes that its proper place is only in marriage, and he advocates two alternatives: either self-control or marriage.

7:10-11. Many church members were likely remarried even before conversion; divorce was very common in Corinth. Here Paul addresses current choices, not their past. This divorce prohibition—virtually unique in antiquity—is “from the Lord,” from a saying of Jesus (Mk 10:11-12). (The terms translated “leave” and “send away”—NASB—or “separate” and “divorce”—NIV and NRSV—were often synonyms for divorce and probably function as such in this context. In 7:10-11, however, where Paul refers to Jesus’ teaching, it may be significant that a wife in Jewish Palestine could only “leave,” not “divorce”; in Roman society, either partner could divorce the other by a unilateral decision or abandonment.)

7:12-13. In 7:12-16, Paul must address how Jesus’ teaching relates to a specific situation; general statements of principle were regularly qualified for

specific situations (cf. analogous qualifications in Mt 5:32; 19:9). What about the party divorced against his or her will? (Under Palestinian Jewish law, women could be divorced by a unilateral act of the husband; under Roman law, either party could unilaterally divorce the other.) Because most first-generation Christians were converted after marriage (which was generally arranged by parents), this text is no indication that Christians knowingly chose marriages with nonbelievers.

7:14. Both Greco-Roman and Jewish law debated the status of children of socially mixed unions (e.g., Gaius, *Institutes* 1.66-92); Jewish law also debated the status of children of religiously mixed unions (Tosefta *Demai* 3:9). Here Paul argues that children of religiously mixed unions are within the sphere of *gospel influence and cannot be used as an excuse for divorce. In Roman society, the children normally went to the father in the event of a divorce; a Christian wife involved in a divorce would lose her opportunity to influence her children for God.

7:15. Paul addresses the specific situation not addressed in Jesus' general principle that he has just cited (7:10-11): the innocent party is free to remarry (see comment on 7:12-13). "Not under bondage" or "not bound" alludes to the wording of Jewish divorce documents, which told the woman, "You are free," or, when stated more fully, "You are free to remarry any man," and further applied to divorce the precise language of freedom from slavery (e.g., Mishnah *Gittin* 9:3; *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* 2:10-12, §144). Being "bound" would mean that she was still married in God's sight; not being "bound," or being "free," meant that she was free to remarry.

7:16. Although the *Old Testament stressed God's faithfulness to the families of his servants, it is also clear that godly parents could have ungodly children, and ungodly parents could have godly children (e.g., throughout 2 Chron 23-36). Paul here agrees that the conversion of the spouse is not guaranteed.

7:17-24

Be Content with Present Circumstances

Whether persons are married or single, they should accept their present lot, although this acceptance does not mean that one can never change one's lot (7:21). Paul's argument here is so similar to *Cynic-Stoic* teaching that his

educated, philosophically inclined hearers would probably concede his point respectfully.

7:17. Greek philosophers, especially Stoics, emphasized accepting one's situation (although one was welcome to change it if possible if this was more useful, 7:21-24). But whereas Stoics identified the God who directed their lives with Fate, Paul trusts God as a loving Father.

7:18-20. Greeks exercised in the nude, and both Greeks and Romans regarded circumcision as a mutilation. For two centuries some Jews, ashamed of their circumcision in the predominantly Greek culture, had opted for a minor surgical operation that could pull the remains of their foreskin forward and make them appear uncircumcised. Other Jews regarded this as an act of apostasy (1 Maccabees 1:14-15).

7:21. Slavery in the mines or gladiatorial combat constituted a virtual death sentence; work in the fields was difficult for both slaves and peasants; urban slavery, however, included a range of occupations, status and even income (cf. introduction to Philemon). With respect to the highest-status slaves, on occasion aristocratic women even married into slavery to improve their own status! Some ancient philosophers believed that slaves and masters could be moral and spiritual equals, but the philosophers also had to address the situation in which slaves lived. Even when such philosophers came to power (such as Marcus Aurelius, an emperor in the second century), they did not force their Stoic morality on society. Every attempted slave revolt had been brutally repressed, so Paul's advice is the most practical he can give. For the relevance of the slavery analogy to the present discussion, see comment on 7:15.

Some, however, were able to gain freedom, which was a better situation when possible. Slaves could save money on the side and buy their own freedom. Also, masters often rewarded slaves with freedom (or forcibly retired them from slavery when older so as to avoid the cost of supporting them; in these cases, freedom was the master's and not the slave's choice).

7:22. *A freedperson owed some continuing duties to his or her former master but was legally free. The former master remained a patron, who would help the freedperson out financially and politically; the freedperson remained a *client, who would also look out for the former master's interests and reputation. Freedpersons were still considered part of their former master's household. Many citizens of Corinth were descended from freedpersons.*

7:23-24. Slaves were expensive. They could be bought to be turned over to a temple ("freed" for service to a god) or, more often, to a new human owner.

7:25-38

Advice Especially to Virgins

Although this section addresses mainly virgins, Paul digresses here as elsewhere (7:8-9; 11:2-16), in this case to relate the virgins to groups he has just discussed (7:27-28, alluding back to 7:12-16).

7:25. The term translated “virgin” here was most often used for women, who were also normally the only ones expected to avoid premarital sex in Greco-Roman culture (outside Judaism).

7:26. Many Jewish people expected a time of great suffering just before the end of the age; in that time, marriage and procreation would be of little value (cf. *2 *Baruch* 10:13-15; Mishnah *Sotah* 9:15; Mk 13:17). In other periods of great suffering, when one was liable to be bereaved of spouse and children, the same principle applied (e.g., Jer 16:2; this was not the norm—cf. Jer 29:6).

7:27-28. In the language of ancient divorce contracts, “do not seek to be released” (NASB) means “do not seek a divorce.” “Released from a wife” (NASB; not simply “free from such a commitment”—NIV) can mean “divorced” or “widowed,” and in the immediate passage must at least include the former (its meaning in the preceding line). Paul discourages both remarriages (v. 27) and first marriages of virgins for reasons given in the context, but he permits both (v. 28).

7:29-31. The dangerous time that was upon them would affect all normal human relations; see comment on 7:26.

7:32-35. As a matter of principle, *Cynic philosophers eschewed marriage (though not intercourse) to avoid “distraction”; one could make an exception, however, if one found a wife who shared these convictions and who would thus not distract one from the Cynic lifestyle (the only recorded exception is Hipparchia, wife of Crates). The context indicates that Paul is making a general statement here, not a rule without exceptions; see comment on 9:5. Paul allows that some would be distracted more by being unmarried (7:2, 5, 9), but reiterates the value of singleness for those who can live by it.

7:36-38. Scholars debate whether this passage addresses the fathers of virgins (see NASB) or their fiancés (see NIV, NRSV, GNT); some evidence within the text can be read either way, with probably more scholars taking the latter view. Parents arranged their children’s marriages, usually with some input from the children; the father had the greatest measure of authority in the matter (cf. Sirach 7:24-25; Mishnah *Qiddushin* 2:1). “Full age” (7:36—NASB) could mean midteens

(parental arrangement of marriages allowed couples to wed at a younger age than in our culture); but the term normally means “beyond youth” and hence probably refers to a virgin older than usual. There is no evidence in this period for unconsummated “spiritual engagements,” which became common in later Christianity, perhaps through the “fiancé” reading of this passage.

7:39-40

Widows and Remarriage

7:39. On “bound” and “free,” see 7:15, 27; in discussions of divorce and widowhood, “free” always meant “free to remarry.” (Different Greek words are used for “bound” in 7:15 and for “free” in 7:27, but these are synonyms; variation was a standard *rhetorical technique and appears throughout the *New Testament.) Those who argue that the first line of this verse excludes remarriage of all divorced persons ignore not only 7:15, 27-28, but also the language of antiquity: no one considered her former spouse “her husband” after a legitimate divorce had taken place. That a widower is to marry only “in the Lord” means that Paul is against Christians’ marrying non-Christians (cf. Deut 7:3; Judg 3:6; Ezra 9:2); widows and divorcées, unlike virgins (whose parents arranged their marriages), had a great deal of say about whom they would marry.

7:40. Some people in antiquity valued a widow remaining loyal to the memory of her husband by singleness; more often, they encouraged remarriage, especially if the widow remained young enough to bear children (cf. even Roman tax legislation under Augustus). Although Paul states his “opinion” (NASB, GNT) much less strongly than he proclaims the words of Jesus (7:10-12), he does not for this reason think it lacking value. The *Spirit was normally associated with the prophets of the past, and Paul here claims that he believes he writes under inspiration as a prophet would (cf. 14:37).

8:1-13

Food Offered to Idols

Meat was offered to idols before being served in temples’ dining halls (often as part of worship); much of the meat served at the marketplace had been offered to idols. One who ate in a temple would know the source of the meat; one who ate at a pagan friend’s home could rarely be certain. Even regular banquets

including pouring a libation to a deity, but meat was most obviously consecrated to a deity when it was sacrificed at festivals before being doled out to the people. In pagan cities with large Jewish populations, Jews normally had their own markets.

Most Jews were at pains to avoid food consecrated to idols. Palestinian Jewish teachers debated what to do in many cases of uncertainty (such as untithed food), but would never have taken a chance on food that might have been offered to an idol. They believed that Jews outside Palestine unwittingly compromised with idolatry when invited to pagans' banquets for their sons, even if they brought their own food. Following such teachings strictly (as some did) would have greatly circumscribed *Gentile believers' relationships with pagan colleagues. The matter was more troubling for Christians converted from pagan backgrounds: e.g., could they meet over lunch with business associates or fellow members of their trade guild, or attend a reception in a temple for a relative's wedding?

Although Paul is theologically opposed to food known to be offered to idols (10:1-22), he frames that argument with a social one based on loving fellow believers (8:1-9:27; 10:23-33). The more educated and socially elite group, who unlike the poor ate meat regularly and not especially when it was doled out at pagan festivals, had well-to-do friends who would serve meat. They probably represent the liberal faction, who consider themselves "strong" and the socially lower group "weak."

8:1-3. For "now concerning," see comment on 7:1. Paul probably opens with the issue of knowledge bringing freedom because the Corinthians' letter to him had raised it (cf. 7:1); they claimed that superior "knowledge" about idols not being real enabled them to eat. Paul disagrees with their application.

8:4-5. Verses 4-6 constitute a good monotheistic statement that the "strong" are using to claim that idol food does not matter, hence they can eat it. Paul affirms the content of these verses but not the application of the content that these Corinthians make (8:7-13).

8:6. *Stoics and others used formulas similar to this one (many gods, but one true or supreme God), which Jewish apologists (defenders) for monotheism naturally exploited. But Paul's position differs from both the Stoic and the conventional Jewish position. The basic confession of Judaism was that there was one God, who was also the one Lord (Deut 6:4); Paul portrays both Father and Son as deity here. Some Jewish texts said that God created the world through personified Wisdom; here Paul assigns this same role to *Christ (cf. 1

Cor 1:30). Using different prepositions, ancient intellectuals often distinguished kinds of causation, including material (“from”), instrumental (“through”), modal (“in” or “by”) and purpose (“for”).

8:7. Meat was usually difficult to obtain for most Corinthians who were not well-to-do, except at the pagan festivals, when what was cooked and remained from sacrifices was doled out to the masses. Many of the socially powerless (the “weak”) thus associated meat with idolatry.

8:8. Here Paul probably states the view of the “strong,” some members of the Corinthian elite, with which he concurs except for his response in 8:9.

8:9. Philosophers generally believed that “all things” were theirs and that they had liberty and authority to do as they pleased. Some, like the *Cynics, paid no attention to social customs. But not everyone felt this way. For example, ancient Jewish *rabbis who felt certain that they were right nevertheless circumscribed their own rights and submitted to the majority opinion of their colleagues, for the sake of peace. Jewish teachers considered causing someone to “stumble” from the way of God (i.e., causing them to turn from and reject the faith) worse than killing that person, because it deprived the person of the life of the world to come.

8:10-13. The person who associates meat with idols might think that eating it was all right even if it meant participating in idolatry, misunderstanding the “strong” person’s convictions. (Some Jewish people had scruples similar to Paul’s. For example, *Pharisees said that if one saw a Pharisee accepting food from an unreligious person, that did not mean one could assume that the food had been tithed; the Pharisee might have simply committed himself in his heart to tithe on it when he got home.) Giving up “meat” (8:13) would be more difficult for the elite, who had more access to it.

9:1-14

Worthy of Support

Having called on the more well-to-do Corinthian Christians to give up their rights (chap. 8), Paul illustrates this principle by how he had given up his own rights (chap. 9), then continues the discussion of meat offered to idols (chap. 10). Ancient moral teachers commonly used examples to make moral points, and their followers observed their lives as well as their teachings to learn how to live. Jewish teachers’ lives were sometimes even used as legal precedent by later

*rabbis.

9:1-2. By “free” (cf. 9:19; 10:29), philosophers normally meant free from false values or free from property concerns and thus self-sufficient; they were also free from concern about others’ opinions of them. The idea of freedom was often bound up with “authority” or “rights” (cf. 8:9); Paul, who calls on his readers to circumscribe their “freedom” (8:9), also sacrifices his own rights (9:4-6, 12, 18).

9:3. Paul’s primary purpose here is to provide an example that will support his exhortations in chapter 8; but for this purpose also offers an “apologetic” (defense) argument. Some well-to-do members of the congregation may have been complaining about Paul’s simple artisan lifestyle, which distinguished him from most traveling teachers and would have put off their social peers (see comment on 9:6). What is a peripheral issue here later becomes central when this group’s dissatisfaction is exploited by other traveling teachers (see comment on 2 Cor 12:13-18).

9:4. Here Paul states a simple right to sustenance; see comment on 9:1-2, 6.

9:5. Jewish *disciples who went away to study under a distant teacher would not bring their wives along (*Sifre Deuteronomy* 48.2.4-6; but they were rarely gone more than a month, *Mishnah Ketubbot* 5:6); this was also true of the disciples in the Gospels (though they would rarely need to be away more than a few days at a time before visiting). But just as the rare *Cynic who found a wife willing to share his lifestyle would take her with him* (see comment on 7:32-35), so the apostles eventually took their wives as collaborators. Paul presents himself and Barnabas as exceptions to the general rule that apostles were married.

Although ancient Egyptian and Hebrew (*Song of Songs* 4:9-12; 5:1) love songs called wives “sisters” as a term of endearment (also *Tobit* 8:4, 7), the term here simply means a sister in *Christ (i.e., a fellow Christian; thus some translations have “a believing wife,” e.g., NASB, NRSV, KJV).

9:6. Philosophers supported themselves in one of several ways: by attaching themselves to a wealthy *patron, who used them for ostentatious dinner lectures; by charging fees for instruction; by begging (generally despised, but practiced by the Cynics); or, for some least desirable of all, by working as manual laborers. Some philosophers and many Jewish sages valued manual labor. Although artisans normally prided themselves on their own work, aristocrats and those who shared their values despised manual labor. The socially “strong” faction in the *church undoubtedly wish that their founder-teacher did not work.

9:7. The army paid its soldiers. If laborers in secular occupations are paid,

why not apostles?

9:8-10. Deuteronomy 25:4 may have communicated a principle that the laborer should be fed; others recognized that such laws related to more general principles of kindness (e.g., *Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.213; *Philo, *Virtues* 140, 145). Here Paul may argue in the sense of the common Jewish *qal vahomer* argument: if for an ox, how much more for a person. Some Jewish teachers felt that God's teachings about animals were only to teach people principles (cf. **Letter of Aristeas* 144).

9:11-12. Paul refuses to use the right to material support lest anyone be offended by the *gospel*. *Many traveling teachers depended on others for support, and if hearers thought that Paul was such a teacher, they might challenge his motives for preaching the gospel or view him as a client of the church's higher-status faction.* Philosophers debated among themselves whether they should be concerned about public opinion. Some *Stoics and most Cynics lived as they pleased, arguing that it mattered not what anyone thought; other philosophers felt that they should give no unnecessary cause of offense, because they wanted to draw others to the wisdom of philosophy.

9:13. Priests and Levites were supported by the tithes of the people (cf., e.g., 2 Chron 31:4) but were also entitled to certain portions of the sacrificial food offered on the altar (like priests in many ancient pagan temples).

9:14. Here Paul alludes to a saying of Jesus (Mt 10:10; Lk 10:7; cf. 1 Tim 5:18).

9:15-27

Paul Sacrifices His Rights

Far from pleasing all his hearers (9:19; cf. 10:33) here, Paul's tactic of identifying with the working-class majority (9:12-15) would offend some aristocratic-minded landowners who, like most of their peers, despised manual labor. His use of populist political imagery in 9:19-23 would further alienate this part of his constituency, which is the financial backbone of the church. Unlike some teachers who were *clients of the wealthy, Paul's priorities are reaching all people with the gospel, not catering to the elite.

9:15. Self-reliance was a basic characteristic highly extolled among philosophers. *Cynics claimed that their lack of dependence on others made them free (e.g., Crates, *Epistles* 7; 8; 29); Socrates felt that refusing to charge

fees kept him free (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.2.6). No one could charge them with accommodating their views to maintain financial support. Both Jews and *Gentiles sometimes spoke of death as preferable to some extreme situation (e.g., Jon 4:8; *Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 11.9; *Letters to Friends* 9.11.1; 9.18.2).

9:16. “Woe is me” was a common *Old Testament and Greek phrase uttered by one confronted with terrible news.

9:17-18. Stoic philosophers said that Fate imposed its will whether one accepted it or not; hence one might as well accept it. The Old Testament taught that one must submit to God’s call, even if (as in the case of Moses, Gideon, Isaiah and Jeremiah) one felt unprepared or inadequate for it. The “reward” (9:18) can be translated “wage”; by serving people freely Paul has better payment from God. His “gain” (often translated “win”) would be especially people brought to Christ (9:19-21).

9:19-23. *Rhetoric valued adapting to one’s audience, but the elite disdained those who were too flexible as fickle demagogues who tried to please the masses; they considered such demagogues “slaves.” Still, some valued being “slaves” or “pleasing” others if it kept civil stability. Paul borrows the language of populist politics, undoubtedly offending defenders of the aristocratic element in Corinth. Some Jewish teachers, like (reportedly) Hillel, similarly accommodated their hearers wherever possible, to win as many as possible to the truth (cf. also the figure in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.41).*

9:24-25. Philosophers (followed by *Diaspora Jewish sources like Philo and *4 Maccabees*) commonly used athletic illustrations to describe their striving for truth and wise living. Paul portrays the discipline and self-sacrifice necessary to live the Christian life through the analogy of races (9:24-26a) and boxing (9:26b-27). (The footrace preceded the other four athletic contests of the pentathlon in the Panhellenic Games.) The clause “but only one receives the prize” (a head wreath, which would eventually rot) emphasizes how hard one had to work to win the race. (A long period of intense discipline was mandatory for any who planned to participate in the events. For instance, participants for the Olympic games had to swear by Zeus to follow ten months of strict training beforehand.)

Corinth itself hosted major games for all Greece every two years on the isthmus; these were the best-attended Greek festivals next to the Olympic games, which were held every four years. The withered celery or pine garland was awarded at these Isthmian games (wild olive at the Olympic, parsley at the Nemean, etc.). Some others already used “crowns” (garlands) figuratively.

9:26-27. Boxing was one of the major competitions at Greek games (but not

part of the pentathlon, mentioned above); boxers wore leather gloves covering most of the forearm except the fingers, and boxing was a violent sport. The pankration further mixed boxing with wrestling, forbidding only gouging and biting. Shadowboxing or “beating the air” was insufficient preparation for a real boxing competition; a boxer had to discipline his body better than that to win. In the same way, Paul had to discipline his life to sacrifice what he needed to sacrifice for the sake of the gospel, lest he himself be disqualified from the race and fall short of the wreath of *eternal life (9:25).

10:1-13

Israel’s History as a Warning

Having established that those who eat idol meat ought to lay down their rights, Paul now proceeds to an argument from Scripture: the Corinthian Christians’ sexual immorality and associations with idolatry were no different from those of ancient Israel and in the same way invited the judgment of God. Paul’s conclusions might surprise his readers, but his style of argument would not: ancient teachers relied heavily on past examples, especially from sacred books; Judaism naturally drew its examples from the Scriptures.

10:1-2. Some later Jewish teachers also drew parallels between the Red Sea and Jewish *proselyte* baptism. Paul parallels the experience of salvation in the first exodus and salvation in Jesus to show that salvation does not render one invulnerable to falling (10:6-12). (Jewish people were awaiting a new exodus, promised by the prophets for the time of the *Messiah.) For the comparison, he employs Christian language: baptism “into Moses” recalls baptism “into Christ” (12:13).

10:3-4. Again, the Israelites in the wilderness had sacred food and drink, as the Corinthians do (10:16), but that did not save them (10:6-12). Because the rock sustained Israel in multiple locations (Ex 17:6; Num 20:8), in some Jewish traditions the well followed the Israelites in the wilderness (*Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 11:15; some *rabbis*). In Paul’s midrashic application, what the rock did for Israel corresponds to what *Christ did for the Corinthians*; Paul undoubtedly connects the life-giving rock with God as Israel’s rock in Deuteronomy 32:13 (a context still fresh in his mind in 1 Cor 10:20, 22). Other Jewish teachers compared the rock with Wisdom (Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 2.86).

10:5. Jewish teachers generally regarded early deaths as signs of God's judgment (in their view scholars of the *law, for whom God had a higher standard, could be so judged even for failing to study the law diligently enough).

10:6. The events recorded in the law were meant as a sign or warning to others (Num 26:10). The Israelites' evil desires consisted in desiring "better" food than the manna, the spiritual food God had provided (Num 11:4-6, 20, 33); they wanted meat (Num 11:18; cf. comment on 8:7).

10:7. See Exodus 32:4, 6. Just as Israel had once eaten in God's presence (Ex 24:11), so in Exodus 32:6 they ate and drank before an idol whom they called God. Later rabbis considered this the most embarrassing episode in Israel's history (eventually some even found ways to blame it on the *Gentiles traveling with the Israelites); *Josephus omits it in his account. Jewish interpreters rightly took "play" in this text to mean idolatry.

10:8. The Israelite men had unmarried sex with Midianite women, who were acting as cultic prostitutes (Num 25:1-8; 31:16), and God sent a plague in judgment (Num 25:9). Jewish traditions unanimously report that twenty-four thousand died, as does the *Old Testament text; perhaps Paul midrashically mixes this number with an allusion to the three thousand killed in an earlier judgment (Ex 32:28, the judgment for the sin in 1 Cor 10:7). But ancient writers would not have lingered or expressed concern over this sort of detail, although it has exercised modern readers (who usually suggest either a major mistake or that the other thousand died the next day).

10:9-11. Relevant to 10:3-4, Israel "tested" God by complaining about the water (Ex 17:2, 7; Deut 6:16) and food (Ps 78:18) he provided. Israel complained against God and his agent Moses (Ex 16:7-12; 17:3; Num 11:1; 14:27-29; 16:41). Jewish traditions lament Israel's complaining in the wilderness. God did not "destroy" his people during these initial tests, but after they continued to test him he pronounced judgment (Num 14:22-23), striking more directly when they complained in Numbers 21:5-6. The "destroyer" was the one who also destroyed the firstborn of Egypt (the wording in Ex 12:23; cf. Wisdom of Solomon 18:25; Heb 11:28). Philosophers also warned against grumbling, noting that one ought to accept whatever the gods and Fate would send.

10:12-13. Ancient teachers often pointed out that adversities come to everyone and that one should not be proud but submit to what comes one's way. Ancient writers often exhorted those who suffered that this experience was common to people in general. But whereas pagan writers emphasized human

will, Paul emphasizes God's faithfulness.

10:14-23

Idol Meat Supports Demons

Here Paul gives a religious argument against eating meat offered to idols. As God's temple was diametrically opposed to prostitution (6:15, 19), Christ's table was diametrically opposed to the table of idols (10:14-22).

10:14. "Fleeing" vices was a fairly frequent moral exhortation in antiquity (cf. 6:18).

10:15. Ancient speeches and letters of admonition often opened with a compliment designed to secure the favor of the audience (although Paul could be ironic here); they also sometimes appealed to hearers to judge for themselves.

10:16-17. To honor pagan gods in Greek religious ceremonies, small libations of wine would be poured out of cups before people drank from them. But here "cup" and "bread" allude to the Passover meal, which was celebrated in the Lord's Supper (11:23-26). Not only at the Passover meal but at meals in general the head of the Jewish household would say a blessing (thanks) over a cup of wine. Some commentators report that the last cup at the end of the meal was called the "cup of blessing." On the "body," see comment on 12:12-26.

10:18. The priests ate some parts of the offerings in the temple; other kinds of offerings (such as the Passover lamb, which Paul also considers a sacrifice—5:7) were eaten by the rest of the people. One must not share in offerings to the true God while also sharing in offerings to false ones.

10:19-20. Like Isaiah, Paul says that physical idols are nothing (cf. Is 44:12-20; 45:20-25; 46:1-11). But like most of the *Old Testament passages that mention* demons (at least in their Greek rendering—Lev 17:7; Deut 32:17, 37-39; Ps 106:28, 37) and most subsequent Jewish and Christian literature apart from most later rabbis, Paul believes that false gods seeking human worship are demons (e.g., **Jubilees* 1:11; 22:16-17; *1 *Enoch* 19:1; *Sifre Deuteronomy* 318.2.1-2). Paul quotes a line from Deuteronomy 32:17.

10:21. Pagans spoke of the offering tables of their gods (e.g., the table of Serapis); most ancient Near Eastern temples had been equipped with such tables. The Old Testament uses the expression "table of the Lord" for the place of offerings (e.g., Mal 1:7, 12; in Ex 25:30, the bread eaten by priests was there; cf. 1 Cor 9:13). Table fellowship connoted intimate relations. By repeating the

form, “you cannot . . . and . . . ,” Paul reiterates his point in a way that *rhetorically sensitive ancient audiences appreciated.

10:22. Paul again provides a rhetorical objection against his own position, but his readers who are familiar with the Old Testament know that the Lord is a jealous God who allows the worship of no other gods (e.g., Deut 32:17, 21; see comment on 10:19-20). “Provoking” probably alludes to Deuteronomy 32:21 (cf. Baruch 4:7, also echoing Deut 32:17, 21).

10:23. Greek teachers used criteria like “usefulness” to determine whether to undertake actions. Paul raises a rhetorical objection (“Everything is allowed”) and then answers it (“But not everything is helpful”), as was common in ancient moral teaching.

10:24–11:1

Instructions for the Sake of Others

10:24. Not only Jesus’ early followers but also many other ancient moralists would have agreed with this exhortation.

10:25. Whatever meat was left over from sacrifices was taken to the meat market in the large agora in Corinth (not far from where Paul had once worked—Acts 18:3). Not all meat in this market had been offered to idols, but some of it had. In comparatively large cities, Jewish people were often allowed to have their own markets so they could avoid such food (some scholars speculate that a recent wave of anti-Jewish prejudice could have recently closed the one in Corinth). In other cities, they would ask about the source of the meat.

Jewish teachers considered inadvertent sins “light,” though the scrupulous might not have been satisfied with Paul’s “What you don’t know won’t hurt you” here. Because most people could not afford to buy meat very often, subsisting instead on fish and grain, Paul here addresses especially the more well-to-do in the congregation.

10:26. Here Paul quotes Psalm 24:1, which extolled the majesty and greatness of God; he was the only true and living God, and everything belonged to him, not to idols or *demons. Jewish teachers, possibly as early as Paul, used this text to prove the need to give thanks at meals.

10:27-29. Most temples had their own dining halls, and people were invited to meals “at the table of Serapis” and other pagan gods. The meat at these meals would obviously have been offered to idols. But people were also invited to

banquets in wealthy homes, where they could not be certain of the meat's source. Jewish people who avoided impure foods (like pork) were virtually excluded from such banquets, but they did not look down on *Gentiles who ate pork as long as they abstained from idols. Jewish people had sometimes faced martyrdom to avoid eating impure foods, and they would expect Gentiles who claimed to believe in God at least to avoid food that had certainly been offered to idols.

10:30. Paul cites another possible objection (see comment on 10:22). Like Jewish people, Christians always offered thanks over their food before the meal (at least later, pious Palestinian Jewish homes also offered thanks after the meal).

10:31. For a believer, personal “rights” (10:23, 29) are not the highest value. Some Jewish teachers emphasized that everything should be done for the sake of God, as Paul does here; some philosophers argued that one should invest one's life only in that which is of eternal significance. In the *Old Testament, God clearly desired his people to live wholly for him (Deut 6:4-5; Ps 63:1). Paul regards such convictions as appropriate and applies them to the credibility of the *gospel (1 Cor 10:32-33).

10:32-33. Speakers and writers often recapitulated their message at the end of a section. See comment on 9:19-23. Jews and some Christians were offended by eating idol food; Gentiles would likely see the act as tolerating their gods. For seeking the welfare of the many, cf. also 2 Maccabees 4:5.

11:1. Paul had already presented himself (chap. 9) as an example of this principle, which he articulates in 10:32-33 and exemplifies in 10:33–11:1; people often cited the lifestyles of philosophers or other sages as models.

11:2-16

Head Coverings and Sexual Modesty

Paul returns to the topic of food and a deity in 11:17-34 (cf. chaps. 8–10), but here he digresses briefly to address another issue of decorum in the Corinthian *church in which the free should surrender their rights (11:10). *Digressions were standard in ancient literature.

Earlier Athenians tended to segregate women in the home; current Corinthian culture would include more contemporary Roman influence, where wives sometimes even attended banquets with their husbands. Nevertheless, in general public activity was a predominantly male sphere and homes a

predominantly female sphere; house churches intersected these boundaries, creating more ambiguous social space. Women's hair was a common object of lust in antiquity (e.g., *Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2.8; *Sifre Numbers* 11.2.1-3), and in much of the eastern Mediterranean married women were expected to cover their hair (for Jewish women, see *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3.270; *Philo, *Special Laws* 3.56; Mishnah *Bava Qamma* 8:6; Mishnah *Ketubbot* 7:6). To fail to cover their hair was thought to provoke male lust as a bathing suit is thought to provoke it in some cultures today. Head covering prevailed in Judea (where in conservative homes it extended even to a face veil) and elsewhere, but upper-class Roman women eager to show off their fashionable hairstyles did not practice it. Thus Paul must address a clash of culture in the Corinthian church between upper-class fashion and lower-class concern that sexual propriety is being violated.

Thus Paul provides a series of brief arguments, each of which relates directly to the culture he addresses. Some of his arguments do not work well in every culture (he himself seems eager to guard against them being misapplied—11:11-12), but it is the Corinthian women, not modern women, whom he wishes to persuade to cover their heads.

11:2. Letters were often written to “praise” or “blame” the recipients; sometimes these points characterized the entire letter in which they occurred. “Traditions” (NASB, NRSV) were accounts or regulations passed on orally; for instance, *Pharisees in Palestine transmitted their special traditions in this way.

11:3-4. Ancient writers often based arguments on wordplays. Paul uses “head” literally (for the part of the body to be covered, on top the neck) and figuratively (possibly for the authority figure in the ancient household). (Some commentators have argued that “head” means not “authority” but “source”—see 11:12—or most honored part—see 11:4-7—but these questions are vigorously debated and cannot be decided here.) On head coverings for women, see the introduction to this section. Women did not lead prayers in most *synagogues, and Jewish tradition tended to play down *Old Testament* prophetesses; *Paul's churches allow considerably more freedom for women's speaking. This may be partly because of early Christians' distinctive emphasis on current and pervasive prophetic inspiration; even Greeks, who often demanded women's silence, made exceptions for women speaking by inspiration, but Christians expected such inspiration regularly in their gatherings. The preference for men uncovering their heads may reflect regional culture: Greeks (the dominant custom in the eastern Mediterranean) bared their heads for worship, although*

Romans (the official culture in this Roman colony) covered them. (This custom was not divided along gender lines.)

11:5-6. Paul uses the ancient debate principle of *reductio ad absurdum*: If they are so concerned to bare their heads, why not also remove the natural covering, their hair? Paul thereby reduces their insistence to what his contemporaries would consider absurd: the greatest physical shame for a woman was to be shaved or have her hair cut like a man's. This appearance would also serve the opposite purpose of uncovered hair: it was not deemed attractive.

11:7. Paul here begins an argument from the order of creation. He cannot be denying that women are also the image of God (Gen 1:27 and 5:1-2 plainly state that both male and female were created in God's image; cf. 1 Cor 15:49; Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). But because woman was taken from man (Gen 2:21-22), he may argue that woman reflects the image via the first man (but see comment on 11:11-12). Perhaps he means that women's uncovered heads are drawing men's attention to humanity instead of to God.

11:8-9. According to Genesis 2:18 God created woman distinct from man partly so that man would no longer be alone; the phrase there translated "helper suitable" praises woman's strength rather than subordinates her. ("Helper" is used more often of God than of anyone else in the Old Testament; "suitable" means "corresponding" or "appropriate to," as an equal in contrast to the animals.) Woman was thus created because man needed her strength, not (as some have wrongly interpreted this verse) to be his servant.

11:10. Here Paul says literally, "she ought to have authority on/over her own head because of the angels"; some think Paul could mean that she should exercise wisely her right to decide whether to cover her head in a way that will honor her husband (11:8-9), given the situation with "the angels." In any case, the "angels" have been interpreted as (1) the angels who (according to ancient Jewish interpretations of Gen 6:1-3) lusted after women and so fell (see comment on 2 Pet 2:4; but they produced giants, not the likely threat here); (2) the angels present in divine worship, who would be offended by a breach of propriety or affront to the husbands (cf. *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QSa 2.3-9; 1QM 7.5-6); and (3) the angels who rule the nations but who will ultimately be subordinate to all believers, including these women (1 Cor 6:3; i.e., as a future ruler a Christian woman or man should exercise wise choices in the present, even regarding apparel).

11:11-12. Paul qualifies his preceding argument from creation (11:7-10); he wants to prove his case about head coverings, but recognizes that women and

men are mutually interdependent (cf. also 7:2-5). For men coming from women, see 1 Esdras 4:15-17 (cf. 4:14, 22). Such expressions of mutuality tend to appear among the more progressive of ancient writers on the topic of gender (e.g., Musonius Rufus 12, p. 86.33-38; 14, p. 92.38–94.1).

11:13-15. Ancient writers, especially *Stoic philosophers, liked to make arguments from nature. Nature taught them, they said, that only men could grow beards; women’s hair naturally seemed to grow longer than men’s. Like all urban dwellers, Paul is well aware of exceptions to the rule (barbarians, statues of philosophers and heroes of the epic past, and Paul would also know of biblical Nazirites); but the “nature” argument could appeal to the general order of creation as it was experienced by his readers.

11:16. Paul reserves one final argument for those unpersuaded by his former points. One philosophical group called the Skeptics rejected all arguments except an almost universally accepted one: the argument from custom—“that’s just not the way it’s done.”

11:17-34

Factionalized Fellowship

Despite Greek ideals of equality, even for banquets, ancient seating at public events was arranged according to rank, usually including at banquets. The churches in Corinth met especially in well-to-do *patrons’ homes (see comment on Acts 18:6-7). In Greco-Roman society, patrons often seated members of their own high social class in the special *triclinium* (the best room), ideally reclining about nine diners, but more would be possible depending on the room’s size and the seating arrangements. If more space were needed, others could be served in the larger *atrium* (which might comfortably seat an estimated forty persons, again depending on the size of the room and seating arrangements). Guests further from the host received (or brought) inferior food and inferior wine, and *clients often complained about where their patrons had seated them (cf. *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 4; *Juvenal, *Satire* 4.15-18, 24-25, 37-79, 146-58; Martial 3.49; 4.85; 12.28; Lk 14:8-10). (Common meals even at *Qumran included seating by rank; 1Q28a 2.21.) This societal problem spilled over into the church.

The background for the meal itself is the Jewish Passover meal, a sacred meal and celebration commemorating redemption; see comment on Matthew

26:17-30. But most Corinthian believers seem to have lost sight of this background; they treat the meal as a festal banquet such as they knew from Greek festivals or meetings of Greek religious associations.

11:17-19. Paul could praise the Corinthians on some points (see comment on 11:2) but not on this one; like division by ethnic or cultural bias (see introduction to Romans), division by social class is contrary to the *gospel. Some scholars argue that 11:18 resembles *rhetorical *dissimulatio*, that is, mock disbelief meant to shame the hearers into recognizing how terrible their behavior is.

11:20. On the “Lord’s Supper,” see the “Lord’s table” in 10:21. Paul ironically contrasts the *Lord’s Supper* (11:20) and their own (11:21).

11:21-22. Some are treated more honorably than others at the meal, and this treatment reflects the status values of the world. See the introduction to this section. Some scholars suggest that some taking their meal before others (11:21) refers to slaves and other workers who could not come as early as the more well-to-do with more leisure.

11:23. “Received” and “delivered” (KJV, NASB) were used together especially for passing on traditions (11:2; 15:3; cf., e.g., Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 13.297, 408). Some later *rabbis spoke of traditions received “from Sinai” or “from Moses”; although they believed they received them by means of their own predecessors, they meant that the tradition ultimately went back to Moses (e.g., Mishnah *Pe’ah* 2:6; *Eduyyot* 8:7; *Yadayim* 4:3). Paul probably means that earlier *disciples told him about the Last Supper. It took place at “night,” as the Passover meal always did.

11:24-25. Covenants were usually ratified by blood (cf. “the blood of the covenant,” Ex 24:8); God had promised a “new covenant” (Jer 31:31; cf. Lk 22:20). The unleavened Passover bread was normally interpreted figuratively as “the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate” in Moses’ time; Jesus had applied it to himself (see comment on Mk 14:22-24). Pagans sometimes ate funerary meals “in remembrance of” a dead person, but the sense here is as in the *Old Testament, where the Passover commemorated God’s redemptive acts in history (e.g., Ex 12:14; 13:3; Deut 16:2-3; **Jubilees* 49:15). As in the Passover ritual (cf. the principle in Deut 26:5), the “you” applied to all future generations; Jewish people believed that their commemoration/partial reenactment allowed them to share the experience of their ancestors. Greek banquets included a drinking party after the primary meal, also with entertainment, which could include music, lectures, readings or conversation; Paul speaks of the cup “after supper” and may also expect study of Scripture at that time.

11:26. “Until he comes” is the temporal limitation on the Lord’s Supper that goes back to Jesus as well (Mk 14:25). Passover celebrations looked forward to the future redemption of Israel (Tosefta *Berakhot* 1:10-11) as well as backward to how God had redeemed them in the exodus of Moses’ day. Jewish people expected an *eschatological banquet when God would reward his people (cf. Is 25:6, 8; *2 *Baruch* 29:4).

11:27-29. Associations normally had rules to prevent and discipline abuses such as drunken quarrels, but here God is the avenger. “Eating in an unworthy manner” here refers to the status-conscious eating that is dividing the church (11:21-22). By rejecting or looking down on other members of Christ’s body, the church (10:17), they also reject the saving gift of his body represented by the bread (11:24).

11:30-34. Jewish teachers stressed that in this world God punished the righteous for their few sins, but in the world to come he would punish the wicked for their many sins; thus Jewish teachers believed that suffering could free one from later punishment. Paul agrees at least that suffering *can* be the Lord’s discipline; the idea here might be that when the church does not embrace all its members, gifts of healings are inhibited (12:9). Paul distinguishes between meetings of the house congregations and, in 11:34, personal use of the home, where believers might have more freedom to follow their cultures’ traditions.

12:1-3

Qualifying the Gifts

Because Christian gifts like *prophecy are given by God’s *Spirit* (*in both the Old Testament and the *New Testament*), cultural background is less important here than in some parts of 1 Corinthians (e.g., on head coverings or holy kisses). But it can help the modern reader appreciate how the first readers might have viewed the functioning of some of the gifts in their culture.

For “now concerning,” see comment on 7:1. Paul indicates that prophesying is not necessarily a sign of godliness; pagans prophesied too, and at Greek oracular shrines possessed persons prophesied ecstatically, inspired by gods other than the Christian God. Although some reported that interest in oracles had declined in this period, oracles and other forms of divination remained a strong influence on pagan culture. Paul can thus point to some of his hearers’ former behavior in paganism as a warning that ecstatic activity *by itself* cannot

constitute proof that they are obeying God. (Verse 3 probably hypothetically contrasts two extreme examples of evil and true utterances.)

12:4-11

Diverse Gifts

12:4-6. Paul's (here proto-trinitarian) triple repetition of the same thought in three ways ("there are varieties of . . . but the same . . .") reinforces his point in a way that rhetorically sensitive ancient audiences would have appreciated (in *rhetoric, *anaphora* began successive clauses the same way). Paul emphasizes that all the gifts are different but all are useful; hence a Christian with one gift is not more or less important than another Christian with a different gift.

12:7-11. In ancient rhetoric, writers sometimes framed an important point by repeating a thought before and after it; here, 12:7 and 11 frame the list in 12:8-10, emphasizing that it is the Spirit that enables these ministries. Ancient audiences valued repetition, and often (as here) offered random lists. Given the use of "word," "wisdom" and "knowledge" (12:8) earlier in 1 Corinthians, here these terms surely refer to God's providing speaking ability and teaching (see comment on 1:5). (Some modern readers have taken these terms to refer to supernaturally revealed knowledge. Although supernaturally revealed knowledge is often illustrated by prophets in the *Old Testament and may be considered a form of the gift of prophecy, it is not likely Paul's point in mentioning "knowledge" here; cf. 8:1; 13:8-9, 12.)

Some magicians sought to perform healings and other extraordinary acts (12:9-10) and more often people sought cures at shrines of Asclepius (including at Epidauros near Corinth) or sometimes Serapis (with two shrines in Corinth). Outside the early *churches, however, there are no ancient parallels to these events as a regular occurrence within a local congregation. The gift of "discerning spirits" was particularly useful for judging prophecy (cf. 14:29; 1 Jn 4:1). Although ecstatic babbling occurs in some pagan cultures today, the ancient Mediterranean has little evidence of this phenomenon and no useful parallel to "tongues" (inspired worship in a language one does not know—14:2) or inspired "interpretation" of tongues (the term can mean either translation or communication of the general sense).

12:12-26

All Members of the Body Are Necessary

12:12. Paul adapts an image commonly used for the Roman state or for the universe and applies it to the church (as in Rom 12:3-5). When the plebeians (the lower class in earlier Rome) had proposed revolt, the aristocrat Menenius Agrippa convinced them that although they were less noticeable members (like the stomach), they were necessary; the upper and lower classes had different roles but equal importance (e.g., Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquities of Rome* 6.86.1-5; *Livy, *History of Rome* 2.32.9-12). This argument was mere aristocratic sophistry to keep the masses down; but after him other writers, especially *Stoic philosophers, borrowed the image. Many continued to apply it to the state (cf., e.g., *Cicero, *On the Republic* 3.25.37; *Orationes philippicae* 8.5.15). Stoics even said that the universe was like a body, and God's *logos*, or reason, was the mind or head that directed it (cf., e.g., *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 95.52; *Epictetus, *Diatribes* 1.12.26). Paul here refers to the unity of the body not to keep one group down but to tell all the Christians in Corinth to respect and appreciate one another. Just as a solitary eye or foot is useless, so is any member of the church apart from other Christians. Identifying the body with *Christ in 12:12 fits ancient figures of speech such as metonymy or synecdoche; it emphasizes the close connection (but does not deify the church).

12:13. Although the drinking here probably alludes to the rock of Christ in 10:4, ancient hearers might also think of drinking from Wisdom (Sirach 24:21; cf. Jn 4:14).

12:14-21. In a way pleasing for rhetorically sensitive ancient hearers, Paul reinforces his point through repetition (12:14, 18-20). In 12:15-16 and 21 he uses the graphic rhetorical device *prosopopoiia*, in which inanimate objects (here, parts of the body) speak. In some other ancient analogies, "eyes" fill a prominent role.

12:22-24. Men did not usually cover their prominent parts, such as their heads, but their private parts and perhaps (as in Menenius's fable above) their stomachs. One could argue that these covered parts receive special treatment.

12:25-26. Ancient moralists emphasized that true friends would share the other's sorrows and joys.

12:27-31

Different Gifts Again

12:27-28. Ancient speakers liked lists (cf. 12:8-10), which drove home a point by repeated examples. “First . . . second . . . third” was normally a designation of rank; most of the gifts after the first three could be listed randomly (although perhaps placing tongues last because of the abuse of them in Corinth; cf. 1 Cor 14).

12:29-30. For lists, see comment on 12:27-28. Ancient hearers outside the church would consider it extraordinary that any person in a given congregation has some of these gifts, such as *prophecy or miracles, which were considered rare. The term translated “apostles” probably means “commissioned messengers,”* backed by the full authority of the sender so long as they represented his message properly; although some philosophers considered themselves messengers of the gods and Jewish people often viewed the *Old Testament prophets in this light, early Christians respected this position as a present role in the church. See comment on Eph 4:11.

12:31. Ancient writers sometimes digressed (as in chap. 13) and sometimes framed special material by returning to a point (12:31; 14:1). The greatest gifts (also 14:1) are defined by the need of the rest of the body (chap. 13). Most Jewish people believed that only a very small number of the very pious could do miracles; the idea that any believer could seek God for whatever gifts are most useful for his people was extraordinary. Early Christians democratized the supernatural—they believed God could work actively in each believer’s daily life.

13:1-3

Nothing Without Love

Some regard this chapter as poetic; it does not have the meter of Greek poetry, but does fit a form of exalted prose (grand or sublime *rhetoric). This chapter resembles praises of various virtues elsewhere in Greco-Roman literature; one of three kinds of epideictic (praise) rhetoric was an encomium praising a person or subject, with some virtue being a common topic (cf. similarly Heb 11:3-31). That Paul chooses this particular virtue above all others is not dependent on his culture—many ancients valued love, but it is specifically in early Christian literature that it appears regularly as the supreme virtue (given Jesus’ teaching, Mk 12:30-31; Jn 13:34-35). As a brief *digression between 12:31 and 14:1 (digressions were common in ancient literature), this chapter explains the way to

evaluate which gifts are “greater.”

13:1. The varied but threefold repetition of, “If I . . . but do not have love” is rhetorical *anaphora*, reinforcing the point; the similar endings of the claims are also rhetorical reinforcement. In some Jewish traditions, angels preferred to speak Hebrew, but most Jewish people would have agreed that angels understood human languages, especially since angels were appointed over various nations. Paul could believe that there are angelic languages in addition to human ones, in which case he would be saying, “Though I be so fluent in tongues that I could speak every conceivable language . . .” (Job’s daughters at the end of the **Testament of Job* spoke ecstatically in angelic tongues as they were inspired to think heavenly things; but it is not clear whether this text is pre-Pauline or was added by a tongues-speaking Christian in the second century.) But this could also simply be *hyperbole.

Although cymbals were used in some pagan worship (as well as in Jewish worship), the point of Paul’s comparison is undoubtedly simply that, though loud, by themselves they communicate nothing (like some rhetoricians in his day). Corinth was famous for its expensive gold-or silver-colored “bronze”; bronze vases (the Greek does not specify “gongs,” as in most translations) were often used for amplifiers in the outdoor theaters of this period, though the term could apply to any bronze object that could produce loud noise.

13:2-3. “Moving mountains” seems to have been a figure of speech for doing the impossible (cf. comment on Mk 11:23; cf. Zech 4:7). Jesus spoke of moving mountains, giving up possessions and even one’s life (Mk 11:23; 8:34-38; 10:21-31); without love, however, these are nothing. The earliest manuscripts read, “that I may boast,” but the other reading, “to be burned” could allude to some Jewish traditions of martyrs (cf. 2 Maccabees 7:5; *4 Maccabees 6:26-27; 7:12; 10:14).

13:4-13

What Love Is

13:4-7. A rhetorically sensitive ancient audience would appreciate the repetition and fleshing out with examples. In Greek, many of the words (*all* of them in 13:4) end with vowels (most often *ei* or *ai*); in 13:6, “unrighteousness” and “truth” each begin and end with *a*. Most forceful is the fourfold anaphoric repetition of “all” (first in the Greek) and then a verb ending in *ei* in 13:7. The

point of Paul's rhetorically polished description of love is its contrast to what he has earlier said about the attitudes of the Corinthians. See comment on 13:1-3.

13:8-13. Writers sometimes framed sections with a special point, here that love lasts forever (13:8, which is transitional, and 13:13). Greek thinkers valued especially what was eternal. As in verses 1-3, Paul demonstrates here that love is a greater virtue than the gifts; in this case it is because love is eternal, whereas the gifts are temporary. In 13:8, Paul's rhetorically sensitive hearers would appreciate the threefold anaphoric repetition of "if there are" (NRSV: "as for") and similar closings.

In contrast to most Greeks, Jewish people envisioned a decisive, future climax to history. Some *Old Testament prophets predicted the outpouring of the Spirit* in the final time, accompanied by ability to speak under the Spirit's inspiration (Joel 2:28); but other prophecies noted that all of God's people in the world to come would know God, hence there would be no reason for exhortation (Jer 31:33-34). Paul believes that the time of the Spirit's gifts, including limited human knowledge, is the current time, between Jesus' first and second comings (cf. 13:10, 12).

Around age thirteen (at least in later Jewish tradition) or around sixteen (more often for Romans), boys would enter manhood; at that time a Roman boy would replace his childhood toga with an all-white adult toga. Mirrors (13:12) were often made of bronze, and given the worldwide renown of Corinthian bronze (e.g., Pausanias 2.3.3), would perhaps strike the Corinthians as a locally prominent product (also 2 Cor 3:18). But even the best mirrors reflected images imperfectly (some philosophers thus used mirrors as an analogy to describe mortals' searching for the deity). Other prophets saw God enigmatically, but Moses saw him face to face (Num 12:6-8; cf. Ex 33:11; Deut 34:10); the future revelation will be complete.

14:1-20

Intelligible Versus Unintelligible Speech

Because Christian gifts like *prophecy are given by God's Spirit*, cultural background is less important here than on some parts of 1 Corinthians (e.g., on women's head coverings in 11:2-16). But it can help the modern reader appreciate how the first readers might have viewed the functioning of some of the gifts in their culture.

Although Paul is clearly not against speaking in tongues (14:5, 18), he emphasizes that the value of gifts must be judged by their utility in any given setting; intelligible speech profits others in public worship, whereas unintelligible speech, no matter how inspired, is profitable only privately or if interpreted. Many believed that divine inspiration displaced rational thought (see e.g., Lucan, *Civil War* 5.97-193; throughout *Philo, *Drunkenness*), but Paul allows for inspiration to work with reason in prophecy and not necessarily to displace it in tongues. The term for “tongues” normally means simply “languages” (as in 13:1), but it is clear here (14:2, 14) that the person inspired to pray in these other languages does not know the languages; as in Acts, this gift presupposes a supernatural enabling.

14:1-3. In the *Old Testament, prophecy also served the functions Paul lists here: “edification” or building up (and tearing down, e.g., Jer 1:10, where God’s word overthrows and restores nations); “exhortation” (KJV, NASB; cf. “encouragement”—NIV, NRSV, GNT), which can include reproof; and nearly all Old Testament prophets, no matter how focused on judgment, included a message of “consolation” (NASB, NRSV) or “comfort” (NIV, KJV, GNT) and hope.

14:4-5. Paul’s wish that all could prophesy (cf. Num 11:29) is probably realistic, at least potentially; God had promised to enable all his people to prophesy once the time of the end (inaugurated by Jesus, according to the *New Testament*) had come (Joel 2:28). *If tongues were interpreted, they could also serve as a form of inspired speech useful to the church.*

14:6-7. Intelligibility is the key to edifying others (14:6-12). Paul mentions here the two primary musical instruments of antiquity: the “pipe” (KJV; most translations render this “flute”), a wind instrument that sounded like an oboe and often had two pipes from the mouthpiece and was common in religious and emotional music; the “harp,” a stringed instrument, was considered more harmonious and often accompanied singing. Although such instruments as in 14:7-8 did not have language, they could communicate meaning; for example, flute melodies could give instructions to flocks, and trumpets regularly signaled armies.

14:8-9. “Trumpets” or “bugles” were used to call armies to battle, to march and so forth; an uncertain trumpeting would confuse the soldiers (14:8).

14:10-12. Greeks traditionally looked down on non-Greeks as “barbarians” or “foreigners,” calling them “barbarians” because they spoke “strange” (i.e., non-Greek) languages, but even those who did not believe in the superiority of Greeks divided the world into “Greeks and barbarians” (e.g., Rom 1:14), often

on the basis of ethnicity but sometimes on the basis of language. (Sometimes even slips in speaking Greek or different accents were called “barbaric.”) Paul simply observes that those who cannot communicate intelligibly may each view the other as an alien (14:11).

14:13-14. The Jewish philosopher Philo described divine inspiration as God possessing his prophets and completely overwhelming their rational faculties during the period of inspiration (e.g., *Who Is the Heir?* 264-65), a view often held by *Gentiles (e.g., Euripides, *Bacchae* 298-99; Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.77-102). By contrast, Paul believes that prophetic inspiration relates to the rational faculties (as does interpretation); even with regard to glossolalia or inspired tongues, which are the prayers of a different, nonrational component of human nature, Paul does not indicate that the mind is forced to be inactive. Paul values both kinds of worship and both components of human nature. (In modern terms, these components of human nature are perhaps similar to the affective and cognitive components.)

14:15. “Charismatic” worship—that is, worship inspired by the *Spirit—was also practiced by the schools of the prophets in the Old Testament (1 Sam 10:5; cf. 2 Kings 3:15); transferred to worship in what became the temple (1 Chron 25:1-5), it generated many of the psalms in the book of Psalms (cf. 2 Chron 29:30). Although worship in tongues had not been practiced in the Old Testament, inspired worship in a more general sense had been.

14:16-17. Roman officials followed standard prayers exactly; Jewish services allowed more freedom. Paul here anticipates spontaneity in prayer and does not even object to public prayer in tongues (“by one’s spirit”), provided that it is interpreted. “Amen” was the standard Jewish response to an agreeable benediction.

14:18-19. In *synagogues*, those who prayed could not always do publicly as they did in private; Paul likewise distinguishes between private and public practice of tongues (*ten thousand is the largest number in Greek and commonly used as hyperbole for large numbers*). Even so, he clearly does not forbid it in public (14:39), as long as there is an interpreter (14:28).

14:20. See comments on 3:1-2 and 14:21.

14:21-25

Effects on Visitors of Intelligible and Unintelligible Speech

14:21. Here Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11, which in context refers to a sign of judgment; because his people could hear nothing else, God would speak to them through judgment by the Assyrians (cf. Is 33:19; Deut 28:49). The preceding context of this quotation is Israel acting like infants (Is 28:9-10), relevant in view of 14:20. (Many Jewish teachers used “*law*” loosely to refer to anything in the Old Testament; later it was even applied to earlier Jewish traditions.)

14:22. On one view, Paul here refers to tongues as a sign of judgment that causes nonbelievers to stumble (cf. 14:21); on another, Paul quotes the Corinthians in 14:22 and refutes them in 14:23-25 (cf. 6:12-14).

14:23-25. *Prophecy was a known phenomenon in the ancient world, whereas the gift of tongues was not (or at least, any parallels to it were extremely rare); ancients respected prophecy, but if they did not know beforehand to expect speaking in tongues, they would not know what was happening (cf. Acts 2:13). Perhaps Paul would not object to a whole group simultaneously worshipping charismatically under other circumstances (e.g., Acts 2:4-21; cf. 1 Sam 10:5; 19:20); but not in the Corinthian house churches where unbelievers could be alienated. Outsiders bowing and acknowledging God probably recalls Isaiah 45:14.

14:26-33

Regulations to Keep Order

That Paul had spent over a year and a half with them (Acts 18:11, 18) and had apparently not told them these rules before suggests that these rules are directed toward the specific situation in Corinth. The *rules* necessary to keep worship edifying to everyone might vary from one culture and setting to another, but the *principle* of keeping it edifying to everyone is much more universal. Some ancients acted in ecstatic frenzy when they claimed to be inspired; Paul believes that inspiration can be channeled in disciplined ways.

14:26. Although prayer in the synagogues may have been more spontaneous in Paul’s day than later, he advocates more individual participation here than would have been natural in other worship settings of his day. We should keep in mind, however, that the house churches in Corinth probably each comprised at the most only fifty members. Psalms were used regularly in Jewish worship (here Paul may mean either biblical psalms or newly composed ones; some postbiblical ones appear at *Qumran), as was teaching; but the revelations,

tongues and interpretations are distinctly Christian features of worship.

14:27. Order was very important in lecture settings and public assemblies in antiquity, as is clear from the frequent practice of seating according to rank. In *Essene assemblies*, one had to have permission to speak, and one spoke in order according to rank (Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 6.10-13; *Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.132). Paul is not so strict here, but he wishes to balance spontaneity with order; not everything that was inherently good was necessarily good for the gathered assembly. In the *Old Testament, charismatic worship was not incompatible with order (1 Chron 25:1-5; cf. also Philo's description of an Egyptian Jewish sect of worshipers called the Therapeutae).

14:28. "Speak to himself and to God" probably means "so that only he and God can hear it." It is also possible, however, that this expression implies that tongues could be used not only as prayer but also as a vehicle of God's *Spirit speaking to an individual's spirit* (cf. prophecy coming thus in 2 Sam 23:2-3; Jer 27:2; Hos 1:2; cf. Ps 46:10; 91:14), although perhaps this speaking is mainly in the form of inspired prayer.

14:29. Most Old Testament prophets were apparently trained in groups of prophets, with more experienced prophets like Samuel presiding over them (1 Sam 19:20; cf. 2 Kings 2:3-7, 15; 6:1-7). The young churches of Paul's day had few prophets as experienced or trusted as Samuel, so the experience and testing has to be "peer reviewed," carried out in the public service by all those prophetically endowed. Testing, examining and interpreting prophecies was not necessarily viewed as incompatible with their general inspiration (cf. *Plato on inspired poets, and Jewish sages answering Scripture with Scripture).

14:30. Ancient teachers practiced various customs with regard to sitting and standing; at least in later times, *rabbis would sit and *disciples stand to teach; those who read Scripture would stand. Among the Essenes, each would speak in turn; often the person speaking to an assembly would stand, while others would be seated. In general, standing to speak was customary in assemblies (e.g., Homer, *Iliad* 1.68-69).

14:31. On "all prophesying," see comment on 14:4-5; Paul here adds "teaching" to possible functions of prophecy (i.e., hearers could learn from it).

14:32. In most contemporary Jewish teaching, prophecy involved complete possession by the Spirit; one dare not seek to control one's utterance. For Paul, however, inspiration can be regulated, and regulating the timing and manner of one's utterance is not the same as quenching it altogether. On regulating one's spirit, cf. Proverbs 16:32; 25:28.

14:33. For an appeal to the conduct of the churches, see comment on 11:16.

14:34-35

Interruptions at Lectures

Because the topic changes so abruptly and some manuscripts relocate 14:34-35, many scholars see these verses as an interpolation by a later *scribe. They can also be read, however (with many other scholars), as a *digression*; *these were common in ancient literature. While addressing the topic of church order, Paul briefly digresses from his contrast of prophecy and tongues and regulations concerning them to address the interruptions of some women occurring during the teaching period of the church service.* Unless Paul changes the subject from women's universal silence (v. 34) to asking questions (v. 35a) and back to universal silence again (v. 35b), his general statement about women's silence in church addresses only the specific issue of their challenges in verse 34a. Paul has already noted that, under normal conditions, women may pray and prophesy in church (11:5). The issue here could be their inadequate acquaintance with Scripture rather than a transcultural statement about gender.

14:34. Although more progressive views existed, many traditionally held that women should not speak in public in mixed-gender company (*Plutarch, *Advice to the Bride* 32; *Morals* 142D; Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 1.21; Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 3.8.6); some would have deemed even the house-churches such a setting. (Even very traditional Greek men sometimes made exceptions for specifically *inspired* speech; cf. 11:5.) *Biblical law includes no specific text that enjoins silence or submission on women, although Paul could refer back to his creation argument in 11:8-9, to the effects of the curse in Genesis 3:16, or to the example of the matriarchs (1 Pet 3:5). But he can also use "law" generally (1 Cor 14:21), so he could refer to the generally subordinate position of women in Old Testament times to show that it is not wrong for them to be submissive in some cultural settings. (Josephus also claims that the "law" supports wives' submission, without citing a specific passage; Against Apion 2.200-201.) Some also suggest that Paul cites the Corinthians' view in 14:34-35 and refutes it in 14:36 (cf. comment on 14:22); but 14:36 seems too weak to supply a refutation for 14:34-35.*

14:35. Informed listeners customarily asked questions during lectures (Aulus Gellius, *Noctes atticae* 1.26.2; 12.5.4; Tosefta *Sanhedrin* 7:10), but it was

considered rude for the ignorant to do so (cf. Plutarch, *Lectures* 4, *Moralia* 39CD; 11, *Moralia* 43BC; 18, *Moralia* 48AB). Although by modern standards literacy was generally low in antiquity (less so in the cities), women were far less often trained in the Scriptures and public reasoning than men were. In general, they achieved a given level of education only perhaps ten percent as often as men of the same social class. Disciples of rabbis were always men (though cf. Lk 10:38-42, which is exceptional). Although Jewish women could hear Torah teaching in the synagogue, girls were generally not taught to recite it as boys were (for the boys, cf., e.g., Mishnah Avot 5:21).

Paul does not expect these uneducated women to refrain from learning (indeed, that most of their culture had kept them from learning was the *problem*). Instead he provides the most progressive model of his day: their husbands are to respect their intellectual capabilities and give them private instruction. (Plutarch, one of the minority “progressive” voices of the era, advises a husband to concern himself with his wife’s learning—but unlike Paul attributes the need for this to the wife’s irrational passion; *Advice to the Bride* 48; *Moralia* 145BE. Roman marriage taxation policy and, more importantly, the shortage of marriageable Greek women assured that the strong majority of adult women, at least in cities such as Corinth, were married.) He wants them to stop interrupting the teaching period of the church service, however, because at least until they know more, they are distracting everyone and disrupting church order.

14:36-40

Final Exhortations on Gifts

14:36-38. Some prophets in the *Old Testament* stood out as stronger spokespersons for God than their peers—Elijah, Elisha, Samuel and so forth. Most prophets in the early church were not comparable in authority to New Testament prophets like Agabus and apostles like Paul; if some prophets at Corinth appeal to their prophetic capabilities to advance their views, Paul can do so even more to *refute* their views—he claims to speak for God.

14:39-40. Here Paul summarizes the rest of the chapter; concluding summaries for sections were fairly common, though they were not always used.

15:1-11

Jesus Was Raised

Many, probably most, Judeans affirmed an end-time *resurrection of the righteous* (2 Maccabees 7:9, 14, 23, 29; 14:46; Psalms of Solomon 3:12; *1 Enoch 22:13), as taught in Scripture (Dan 12:2). By contrast, this conception was difficult for Greeks to envision. Many *Gentile intellectuals affirmed the soul's immortality without a future for the body (e.g., *Plato, *Phaedo* 64CE, 67C; *Seneca, *Dialogues* 11.9.3; 12.11.7); some (such as *Epicureans; Lucretius 3.417-977) denied any afterlife at all.

Like other skilled speakers and writers of his day, Paul starts by looking for common ground with his audience. Some of the Corinthians dispute the future resurrection of believers. They cannot, however, dispute the past resurrection of Jesus, because this is an established fact and the very foundation of their faith. Yet Paul points out that this fact is simply the first installment of the future resurrection of believers, hence cannot be separated from it (15:12-14, 23).

15:1-2. Paul follows the standard argument technique of beginning with an agreed-on premise; the Corinthians must agree with the very *gospel by which they were converted (see also 2:1-5; Gal 3:2-5).

15:3. "Handed on to you . . . what I had received" (NRSV) is the language of what scholars call "traditioning": Jewish teachers would pass on their teachings to their students, who would in turn pass them on to their own students. The students could take notes, but they delighted especially in oral memorization and became quite skilled at it; memorization was a central feature of ancient education. In the first generation, the tradition would be very accurate; some even believe that this tradition in 15:3-5 or 15:3-7 may be a verbatim citation. That Jesus died for our sins "according to the Scriptures" may refer especially to Isaiah 53:4-6, 8, 11-12 as well as the biblical pattern of the righteous suffering before exaltation.

15:4. The mention of the burial presupposes an empty tomb after the resurrection, because by definition "resurrection" meant a new body that did not leave a corpse behind; Paul's Palestinian Jewish sources could have meant the expression no other way. Unlike the Gospels, Paul does not mention the empty tomb, because the witnesses provide stronger proof of what happened to Jesus (15:5-8). "The Scriptures" probably refers to an assortment of texts, such as Psalm 16 and Isaiah 53:12. If the "third day" is also in view in "according to the Scriptures," perhaps it alludes to Hosea 6:2, Jonah 1:17 or other texts, although Paul may include the phrase simply to say, according to Jewish custom, that Jesus was raised before he could "see corruption" (Ps 16:10).

15:5. Although arguments from probability counted best in ancient law courts, eyewitness accounts were also highly valued. The ancient epiphanies (revelations) of gods or spirits were normally said to have been attested by eyewitnesses, but except for dreams and deliverances, these reports rarely stem from the era that records them. (The mystery initiation at Eleusis may have climaxed with some sort of ecstatic encounter with the deity, but this event again differs significantly from the sort of concrete, unsolicited, mass revelation Paul describes here.) Multiple revelations like this one, and mass revelations as in 15:6, especially in a sect, that risked persecution to claim them are virtually unparalleled. Because by definition resurrection meant a new body, and Christians would not have been persecuted for claiming that they saw a mere spirit (most ancient people believed in ghosts), they are making a claim no one else made. “Appeared” was used in antiquity both for visions and for actual appearances (often of God or angels); but by all Jewish definitions of resurrection, especially in a Palestinian tradition such as Paul cites here, Paul must mean a literal appearance.

“Cephas” is *Aramaic for “Peter”; for the “Twelve” and its special significance for Israel, see comment on Acts 1:13 and the introduction to Acts 1:15-26. Groups often retained titles based on the original number of members even when the number changed (e.g., the “thirty” in Athens and the “hundred” in Rome), so some would call this group the “Twelve” even after Judas’s death.

15:6. Paul’s purpose in appealing to witnesses still alive may be to invite his readers to check his facts if they doubt his words. We may safely rule out the suggestion that the resurrection appearances were mass hallucinations, because such a mass hallucination of a demonstrably physical person is virtually unparalleled in history. (Were this evidence being cited for a war, about which we often take the word of a single ancient author, or any other event in history, few today would think to deny it.)

15:7. “The *apostles” clearly includes a larger group than the “Twelve” (15:5); see comment on 12:29-30.

15:8. “One untimely born” (NASB, NRSV) or “one abnormally born” (NIV) usually meant a dead fetus, by either abortion or miscarriage. Paul may be calling himself a freak compared to the other apostles (15:9); he is probably deprecating himself in some manner. This expression could refer to his being born at the wrong time (here, *postmaturely* rather than *prematurely*), after Jesus’ initial resurrection appearances were complete; other commentators have suggested that Paul was chosen from the womb, but his persecution of the

*church had been annulling that purpose, making him like an aborted person till his conversion.

15:9-11. Greeks did not mind boasting, provided that it was not too conspicuous; Jewish piety emphasized the need to thank God for one's goodness or status. Judaism and most ancient religion believed in retribution for sin; Paul believes that God exalted him despite his sin simply because of God's loving heart.

15:12-19

Resurrection of Christ and of Believers

15:12-17. Paul again reduces the opposing position to the absurd (a common *rhetorical technique): if there is no *resurrection*, then *Jesus did not rise (against their own beliefs and the evidence in 15:1-11) and other logical consequences that the Corinthians reject would also follow. Speakers would sometimes "dwell on a point," as Paul does here, using rhetorical repetition to underline his point with seven "if . . . then" statements in 15:12-19. With the exception of the Sadducees and some Jews greatly influenced by Greek conceptions, most Judeans believed in the future resurrection of the body (Dan 12:2). Jesus's resurrection was not intelligible or fully meaningful apart from that teaching. As here, Jewish teachers also often used the particular to prove the general principle that it presupposed.*

15:18-19. These verses suggest that Paul rejects the Greek idea of an immortality of the soul without a bodily resurrection; if there is no resurrection, the *Epicurean denial of an afterlife also follows (15:32). (Despite a view of judgment, the common Greek view of most people's afterlife as shades below the earth was dreary and unhappy to begin with, providing little of the incentive Paul found in the resurrection. Some other Greeks in this period believed in a heavenly destiny for the soul, and yet others would have agreed with the Epicureans that there was no afterlife.) Paul could believe in the resurrection *and* in an intermediate existence for the soul, as many *Pharisees did. But if God had not provided future hope for the whole person, Jewish people like Paul, who acknowledged the bodily nature of human existence, would have doubted that he had provided any future hope at all (cf. *2 Baruch 21:12-13).

15:20-28

God's Plan for History

15:20. The firstfruits were the beginning of the Palestinian harvest (Ex 23:16, 19; 34:22, 26; Lev 23:10, 17), guaranteeing the imminent ingathering of the remainder of the harvest.

15:21-22. See especially comment on Romans 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:44-48. Paul may here play on or respond to a *Diaspora Jewish tradition (attested in Philo), possibly adopted by some of the Corinthian Christians, that the ideal, spiritual man formed in Genesis 1:26-27 differed from the natural man Adam formed in Genesis 2:7.

15:23-24. Some find here belief in an intermediate messianic era between the present age and the *age to come, a view held (in various forms) by many Jewish writers of his day; see comment on Revelation 20. But the intermediate kingdom here may refer to the present era (1 Cor 15:25-27). On “firstfruits,” see comment on 1 Corinthians 15:20.

15:25. Paul begins expounding Psalm 110:1, which he will link with a more explicit passage in 15:27; Jewish teachers often connected texts based on key terms or concepts common to both (“feet” and probably the idea of reigning).

15:26. Many philosophers refused to grieve or to view death as an enemy (cf. *Epictetus, *Diatribes* 1.27.7). Jewish writers generally portrayed death as an enemy, sometimes as an angel sent by God, but never pleasant. Paul sees death as the final enemy to be subdued; the *resurrection of believers would thus be the final event preceding Christ's kingdom*.

15:27-28. Paul quotes the Greek version of Psalm 8:6 (for the connection with his argument, see comment on 15:25). The context of the verse identifies the ruler as the “son of man” who is “a little lower than God” (Ps 8:4-5, though the Greek version differs); thus the Son will reign over all else as God's viceroy but remain subordinate in role to the Father (cf. Ps 110:1; Is 9:6-7; Dan 7:14). This psalm probably alludes to God granting authority to the first human (Gen 1:26-28); Paul undoubtedly is thinking of restoration in the new Adam, which he addresses in this context (1 Cor 15:22, 45-49). Were Paul a *Stoic, God's being “all in all” (which is rhetorically emphatic) could mean that all things would be absorbed back into the primeval fire, being part of his being; but when Jewish writers like Paul used such language, they meant merely that God is creator and ruler of all (Sirach 43:27).

15:29-34

Suffering in Hope of Resurrection

The early Christian witnesses of the *resurrection were so convinced of the truth of their own claims to have seen Jesus alive from the dead that they were not afraid to seal their witness with martyrdom.

15:29. Paul appeals to a practice, which the Corinthians affirmed, as inconsistent without belief in resurrection (cf. 2 Maccabees 12:43-45). Here “baptized for the dead” may mean that a Christian friend was baptized for symbolic effect on behalf of a new convert who had died before being able to be baptized. (Although there is no evidence of vicarious *baptism in ancient Judaism*, *posthumous symbols could be employed*. For instance, if someone was to be executed, Jewish teachers said that his death could atone for his sins; if he died before he could be executed, however, the people placed a stone on the coffin, symbolically enacting his stoning so that his execution would still count with God; cf. Mishnah *Eduyyot* 5:6.) Or this expression may refer to washings of the dead before burial, a standard Jewish custom; religious groups in the ancient Mediterranean supervised the burials of their own members. It could also be a roundabout way of saying “baptized so as to be able to participate in *eternal life with Christians who have already died,” hence baptized in the light of their own mortality as well. Or people may be baptized for the sake of their own future resurrection, in view of the sentence of death already in their mortal bodies (cf. Rom 8:10). To whatever practice Paul alludes, it is not clear whether he agrees with the Corinthian practice; even if he does not, however, he can use it to make his point.

15:30. For the language of continual opposition, cf. Psalm 44:22 and 119:109 (cf. danger every hour in *4 Ezra 7:89).

15:31. In this context, “die daily” (KJV, NASB) is *hyperbole for Paul’s proleptic experience of martyrdom in his repeated sufferings for the gospel.

15:32. Romans were often entertained by watching criminals, prisoners of war or slaves mauled by wild beasts in the arena (*Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 14.210; *Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 10.29), much as many Westerners today enjoy the violence of the entertainment media (although ancient Christians refused to attend such events except when they themselves were forced to be the victims). Roman gladiatorial shows were also held in the theater at Ephesus during many festivals (as well as in Corinth). It is unlikely, however, that Paul was *literally* cast to beasts in that arena. The victims were not supposed to survive the maulings, and as a Roman citizen Paul would have been exempt

from this punishment. Philosophers employed the image of battling such beasts (usually irrational people), and Paul here probably describes his opposition in similarly graphic terms (cf. similarly Ps 22:6, 12-13, 16, 20-21; 74:19). “In human terms” in verse 32 may mean “figuratively” (contrary to most translations; cf. 9:8; Rom 6:19; Gal 3:15).

But if Paul had no future hope, instead of facing affliction, he may as well have simply indulged his passions, a sentiment often attributed (with some distortion) to *Epicurean philosophers but lived out by many Greek and Roman men at wild parties. The same perspective was attributed to others who denied an afterlife (Wisdom of Solomon 2:1-20; *1 *Enoch* 102:6-8). He quotes Isaiah 22:13 (with its context about judgment on the wicked); cf. Sirach 14:16; Luke 12:19. (The *Old Testament often uses the language of eating and drinking in a neutral way—Eccles 2:24; 5:18-19; cf. 3:12—but without God it is never enough for life—Is 22:12-14; Eccles 11:7-12:14; cf. 7:2, 14.)

15:33-34. Here Paul cites a popular proverb, first attributed to the comic playwright Menander but in common circulation by Paul’s day. It was the common advice of Greco-Roman moralists and Jewish wisdom teachers to avoid morally inferior company (e.g., Sirach 13:1; in the Old Testament, Ps 119:63; Prov 13:20; 14:7; 28:7). Paul perhaps refers here to those who do not believe in the future resurrection and hence do not have the basis for morals that those who believe in a final judgment of God do; other Jewish teachers who believed in the resurrection associated disbelief in that doctrine with immorality.

15:35-49

The Nature of the Resurrection Body

Ancient Judaism taught the *resurrection of the body, not just the immortality of the soul; Paul agrees but defines the nature of the new body differently from many of his contemporaries.

15:35-38. Ancient writers often raised *rhetorical objections from imaginary opponents; Jewish teachers presented questions like the one Paul raises here as the standard objections nonbelievers raised against the doctrine of the resurrection. (For imaginary interlocutors, see comment on 6:12.) For instance, what happened if someone died at sea, or the body was completely destroyed by fire? Later *rabbis decided that the body would be resurrected from a particular bone in the neck which they held to be indestructible. Paul more reasonably

argues that, regardless of what physical material remains, at least the pattern of the old body will always remain as the seed for the new body. His argument from analogy, a standard argument, is effective, and later rabbis also used the “seed” analogy. “Fool!” (15:36) was a standard rhetorical insult, Jewish as well as Greek, for someone who raised an ignorant or immoral objection.

15:39-41. Paul’s argument here appeals not to modern astronomy but to ancient cosmology. Even in the present, not all bodies were made of flesh; some were made of glory. Heavenly bodies, which *Gentiles often viewed as divine and Jewish people often identified with angels, were thought to be made of fire. Many Gentiles believed that immortal souls ascended into the heavens like stars; many Jewish people compared the resurrection body to angels (*2 *Baruch* 51:10) or stars (Dan 12:2-3; cf. 1 *Enoch* 43). Paul describes the different kinds of glory that various earthly and heavenly bodies have to explain how the resurrected body will come in glory, yet each person will remain distinct from other people. Thus there is continuity between the old and new bodies as well as discontinuity. *Midrashically*, cf. also eschatological “glory” for God’s people in Isaiah 60:1-2, 19; 61:3; 62:2.

15:42-43. Paul’s rhythm in 15:42-44 would stir rhetorically sensitive ancient hearers: he combines antithesis (contrasts) with fourfold *anaphora* (x . . . x . . . ; here: “it is sown . . . it is raised). Some Jewish teachers believed that the body would be raised in exactly the form in which it had died, even if maimed, and only then be healed; this belief was meant to prove the continuity between the old and new body (2 *Baruch* 49:2–50:4; *Genesis Rabbah* 95:1; 100:2). But Paul clearly sees the resurrection body in different terms. Present “dishonor” and “weakness” in 15:43 challenge the status-conscious Corinthian believers (cf. 2 Cor 12:5, 9; 13:4).

15:44-45. Both Paul’s “natural” and “spiritual” bodies might shock ancient hearers. A “natural” or “physical” body is literally a “soulish” body, in contrast to a “spiritual” body. Paul does not teach a future body made out of “spirit” (although the *Stoics taught that spirit was a material substance*), *any more than a present body made out of “soul.” Rather, the present body is adapted for current natural existence, and the future body for the life even now ruled by God’s Spirit.* In verse 45 Paul cites Genesis 2:7, where God made Adam a soul, a natural man; but many Diaspora Jews thought that Genesis 1:26-27 referred to a different, ideal man, the pure form and model for humanity, and Paul may play on this tradition here. The two kinds of body belong to the contrast between humanity’s legacy in Adam and believers’ destiny in Christ.

15:46-48. Some ancient thinkers viewed the body as earthly but the soul as heavenly. The Diaspora Jewish philosopher *Philo contrasted the incorruptible “heavenly man” of Genesis 1 with the later “living soul”/“earthly man” of Genesis 2; the former represented the ideal spiritual state of the mind seeking heavenly things, the latter the carnal person devoted to temporal things (*Allegorical Interpretation* 1.31-32; 2.4-5). Paul reapplies the language of this view, which the Corinthians had probably adopted, to the resurrection body, switching the order (natural then spiritual). In Jewish thought, both the full experience of the Spirit and the resurrection were eschatological expectations.

Jewish teachers often explained that Adam’s sin brought sin and death into the world for everyone (*4 *Ezra* 4:30; 7:118; 2 *Baruch* 23:4; 48:42-43), and his descendants reenacted his sin in their own sins (4 *Ezra* 3:21, 26; 7:119; 2 *Baruch* 54:15, 19; see comment on Rom 5:12-21).

15:49. Jewish teachers often taught that Adam had incomparable glory and power before his sin, and that this glory and power would be restored in the world to come. God created humanity in his image (Gen 1:26-27; cf. 1 Cor 11:7). For Philo, it is the first, heavenly man, not the soulish physical man, that bears God’s image (*Allegorical Interpretation* 2.4; cf. 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15); for Paul, God’s image is restored in *Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10).

15:50-58

The Resurrection Hope

To inherit the *kingdom, people must share the image of the heavenly person (15:45-49).

15:50. “Flesh and blood” was a common figure of speech for mortals.

15:51. Some Jewish people considered end-time “mysteries” (Dan 2:28-30, 47; *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 3.23). “Sleep” was a common euphemism for death.

15:52. *Old Testament prophets often employed the image of the trumpet, which was used to assemble people for convocation or war; here, as in a daily Jewish prayer of the period, it refers to the final gathering of God’s people at the end (cf. similarly Is 27:13). Paul undoubtedly takes the image from Jesus (Mt 24:31).

15:53-54. Paul continues using rhetorical antithesis (e.g., perishable, imperishable). Here Paul quotes Isaiah 25:8, which refers to God’s triumph over death at the time of the end, at Israel’s final restoration; the context fits

*resurrection in Isaiah 26:19. For “put on,” see comment on 2 Cor 5:4.

15:55. Jewish interpreters often linked different texts together on the basis of a common key word; “death” occurs in Isaiah 25:8 and also in Hosea 13:14, which Paul may therefore apply to the resurrection as well. Although the latter passage is in the context of judgment, it may imply the same thing as Isaiah 25:8 (unless read as a question); cf. restoration imagery in Hosea 14:4-7. “Victory” also occurs in one Greek version of Isaiah (though not the *Septuagint); Jewish expositors normally selected whatever translation best suited their needs, which here allows Paul to make a good *midrashic wordplay with Hosea 13:14: Paul changes the Greek version’s “punishment” (*dike*) to “victory” (*nike*).

15:56. Jewish teachers typically expounded points of a text once they had cited it. Paul explains the meaning of “sting” and “victory” (“power”) in Hosea 13:14 here (cf. comment on 15:55).

15:57-58. In 15:42-56, Paul has accumulated stirring rhetorical devices that reach their emotional peak in 15:57. As in 14:39-40, Paul concludes with a sort of summary; here it is a closing exhortation. Just as Judaism often linked failure to believe in the future world with immoral living, and faith in future judgment with perseverance, Paul encourages believers to hold to the truth of the resurrection and so to right living.

16:1-4

Paul’s Collection

Many ancient letters involved business, a topic to which Paul turns in his closing comments. Most ancient associations had membership dues, but gifts among believers were voluntary.

16:1-2. That one should give “as the Lord has blessed” (lit., “as one may prosper”) indicates that Paul is applying the teaching on serving the poor in Deuteronomy 15:14 (cf. also 16:10, 17). Setting aside resources on the week’s “first day” may signify giving to God first (cf. Ex 23:16; Lev 27:26), though most wage-earners were paid daily or by the job. On possible meetings on the “first day” of the week, see comment on Acts 20:7.

16:3-4. When Jewish people from around the world were ready to send the required annual temple tax to Jerusalem, they would choose respected and trustworthy members of their own communities as representatives to take the money to Jerusalem (for guarding against accusations, see comment on 2 Cor

8:17-23). Jewish travelers often bore letters indicating their authorization, which would allow them to receive hospitality wherever they went; Christians seem to have continued this practice.

16:5-9

Paul's Travel Plans

16:5. The easiest way to travel to Corinth from Ephesus was to cross over by boat from Troas in Asia Minor to Philippi in Macedonia, then to take the westward road and turn south into Greece (as in Paul's second missionary journey in Acts; see Acts 16:7-9). Paul later delayed this planned visit partly to avoid having to confront them forcefully (2 Cor 1:15-23).

16:6. The seas were closed for travel in the winter; if Paul were in Corinth once the seas closed, he would stay there until they opened in the spring (cf. later Acts 20:2-3). Paul is writing in the spring (16:8), many months before the next winter. Warm letters between friends often discussed plans to spend time together (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 1.9.1; 7.15.1; 8.15.2). Hospitality was important in antiquity, and the Corinthians would feel honored to be able to provide hospitality to a prominent teacher (especially the founder of their *church). "Send me on my way" (NASB, NRSV) means that the church will provide for Paul's travel.

16:7-8. Others also offered the necessary caveat, "If God wills" (e.g., Homer, *Iliad* 8.142; *Epictetus, *Diatribes* 1.1.17). On Pentecost, see comment on Acts 2:1; perhaps Paul plans to observe the festival.

16:9. An "open door" (or "wide door"—NASB, NRSV) was sometimes used figuratively for freedom of movement or choice; here Paul refers to his ministry.

16:10-18

Recommendations and Exhortations

16:10-11. Persons of high status often wrote letters of recommendation, using their status to advocate the needs of those for whom they wrote. See comment on 2 Corinthians 3:1. One should receive a person's agent the way one would receive the person himself (Mishnah *Berakhot* 5:5); sending one "in peace" means that the host has received him well.

16:12. Even when others viewed them as rivals (3:4), leaders were

sometimes friends (e.g., *Cicero, *Brutus* 1.2-3).

16:13. Some of Paul's exhortation here would be suitable in a military setting. "Act like men" (NASB) usually meant "be courageous" (NRSV); the expression did not necessarily connote masculinity, although it was used for courage because most people in antiquity associated courage with masculinity.

16:14. Skilled speakers often summarized toward the end of a work. Although ancient writers often stressed virtues, the supreme place of love (chap. 13), emphasized repeatedly throughout early Christian literature, is unusual in antiquity and especially characterized Christianity.

16:15-18. Here Paul makes another recommendation (cf. 16:10-12). "Firstfruits" (literally, in 16:15) was the beginning of a larger harvest; Achaia was the province that made up much of Greece, and of which Corinth was the chief city. (As a free city, Athens was technically excluded from the province in this period; cf. Acts 17:34.) Because mail in antiquity had to be carried by travelers, and these people are returning to Corinth from Paul, we may safely assume that they brought the letter we know as 1 Corinthians back to Corinth.

16:19-24

Closing Greetings

16:19. The Corinthians knew Aquila and Priscilla and that they had moved to Ephesus (Acts 18:2-3, 18, 24-27). Churches met in homes, as many pagan religious associations did; this was a matter of convenience, economy and eventually of safety.

16:20. Letters often closed with greetings (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 5.9), because travelers visited relatively infrequently and greetings had to be included whenever a letter was being sent out. Family members and close friends used light kisses, usually on the lips, as signs of affection (e.g., 1 Sam 20:41); see comment on Romans 16:16.

16:21. Most letters were written down by amanuenses, or *scribes, and usually signed by the author. Writing something in one's own hand could communicate affection. A signature authorized the letter, as it does today.

16:22. Ancient people, including Jewish people, used curse invocations (here the *Aramaic *anathema*) as the opposite of blessings. "Marana tha" (GNT) is an Aramaic prayer, "Come, our Lord." That the Corinthians would understand it means that it is part of common tradition carried over from the early

Palestinian-Syrian church, which already recognized Jesus as “Lord” and as the one who would come (cf. Rev 22:20). (Thus Christians described his coming in the way that Jewish tradition expected God’s coming for judgment.)

16:23-24. Greek letters often included the greeting *chairein*, “greetings”; Paul consistently transforms this to *charis*, “*grace.” This is a blessing, an implicit prayer for them.

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. As in speeches, Paul may save the most controversial material for the final section (cf. also, e.g., Oxyrhynchus papyri 1837); one could also save an emotional climax for the end (Demosthenes, *Epistles* 2). The eloquent could vary their tone within a single work (e.g., Pliny, *Epistles* 2.5.7-8). Most elements from earlier in the letter appear at least sometimes later, and vice versa. (I discuss this question much more fully in my Cambridge commentary. See below under “Commentaries.”)

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. 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. That is, their being Jewish does not require us to identify them with Paul’s opponents in Galatia; Paul himself was Jewish. Part of the division here is apparently over views of ministry: 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. They also claim to be more rhetorically skilled than Paul (11:5-6).*

Purpose. Paul wishes to reestablish his converts’ trust in him and their role

of intimate friendship. He thus writes a letter of self-commendation, 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*. This practice has disturbed higher-status members of the congregation; their peers would expect the community to pay its teachers, who should not be self-supporting artisans (the well-to-do typically despised ordinary artisans).

Commentaries. Helpful commentaries with a focus on background include Frederick W. Danker, *II Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989); Craig S. Keener, *1 & 2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995); in heavier detail, see Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB 32 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984); and especially Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1994–2000). Of more technical and specialized works, see, e.g., John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel*, SBLDS 99 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988); Peter Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians* (Tübingen, 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. Corinth was the chief city of Achaia, and about forty settlements (such as Cenchrea) existed on Corinth's own outskirts.

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 GNT 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 comfort in this verse is especially 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 some commentators have naturally read “we have a share in Christ’s many sufferings” (GNT) in these terms (Paul seems to have meant this also in *Rom* 8:22-23). Other commentators emphasize corporate personality; 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.

1:6-7. In Greco-Roman tradition, the way a sage endured the sufferings sent by God helped others by setting an example of virtuous conduct. Through prayer, the Corinthians are also involved in Christ’s mission being carried on by Paul and Christ’s other witnesses (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 conventional type of letter in later handbooks 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 substantive 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 most prominent city 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 later climaxing in the riot of Acts 19:23-41.

1:9-10. “We had the sentence of death within ourselves” (NASB) is presumably figurative (see comment on 1 Cor 15:32); psalms depicted deliverance from death graphically (e.g., Ps 30:3). Jewish daily prayers celebrated God’s power by noting that he was “mighty to raise the dead.” Paul can view his escapes from death as a *proleptic* experience of the power of *resurrection as well as of martyrdom; 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. The ancient world emphasized gratitude for benefaction. Many ancient pagans tried to barter with the gods through sacrifices and offerings; Paul instead trusts God.

1:12-22

Paul Had a Reason for Not Coming

Various *genres in antiquity prefaced their argument or teaching by narrating the events that had led to the present situation. 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. Correspondents sometimes affectionately protested failure to come or write more often (e.g., Cicero, Letters to Atticus 1.9; Letters to Friends 2.10.1), but the Corinthians seem more genuinely offended. *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. Some 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 *Praising Oneself Inoffensively*), which was acceptable in a situation such as self-defense (like here). Paul’s boast (1:12a —NIV), however, is in his *hearers*. 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. Well-to-do benefactors were greatly extolled for bestowing gifts on persons of less means, but unlike worldly benefactors (or the opponents of chaps. 10–13), Paul 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. Ancient sources frequently praise people who kept their word despite hardship; these sources also frequently condemn fickleness, especially in leaders. When someone had to change already noted plans, they had to (and sometimes did) supply good reasons and show that they were not fickle. Paul's flexibility may have drawn criticism earlier (cf. 1 Cor 9:19-23), but now he 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. Far from being unreliable (as some apparently insinuated), he remained 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. 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. Business documents used the term translated "stand firm" (NIV) or "establish" (NASB, NRSV) or "confirm" for confirming a sale; if such a nuance is present here (it is not in most other uses of the term by Paul), it could connect with "down payment" ("deposit"—NIV) in verse 22. In any case, both 1:21 and 1:22 signify that God attests to Paul's integrity.

1:22. Documents and jars of merchandise could be sealed with the owner's identity marker, or to certify that no one had tampered with their contents. The stamp of the owner or the person witnessing a document would be pressed into the hot wax, which then dried over the string tied around the rolled-up

document. (Perhaps one might also figuratively “seal” a pledge; Xenophon, *Anabasis* 2.2.9.) 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 believers 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

One could explain that one’s reason for not writing or visiting was consideration for the other person (e.g., Fronto, *Ad M. Caesarem* 3.13.3). 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; though he will still come harshly if they force him to do so; 2 Cor 13:2, 10).

1:23–24. If his hearers refused to accept Paul’s “Yes, yes” (1:17; cf. Mt 5:37), Paul would invoke the most dependable witness. 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.

2:1–3. Affectionate letters sometimes spoke of sharing the reader’s emotions, including sorrow (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 13.1.1). Any ambiguity, at least in the beginning, may be diplomatic, especially about the chief conflict addressed later in chapters 10–13; because of honor concerns, conciliatory communications sometimes avoided the primary point that had caused conflict (cf., e.g., Pliny, *Epistles* 1.5.11).

2:4. Even orators often showed affection with tears during speeches, and letters of friendship often emphasized deep love (e.g., Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 2.4.2). 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, as most church fathers believed; 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. On the analogy of similar wording in the *Dead Sea Scrolls and some Greek texts, many commentators argue that “the majority” refers to the community of believers as a whole. 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. One of Judaism’s most basic convictions about *Satan was that he was a deceiver and could come in various disguises.

2:12. From Titus, Paul received good news about their compliance and the man’s *repentance* (2:12-13; 7:5-16). *Troas is Alexandria Troas, a significant and sizeable Roman colony, 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 on 1 Cor 16:9); at some point Paul stayed in Troas long enough to leave some possessions there (2 Tim 4:13).

2:13. Both travel and communication were difficult to coordinate in antiquity, so that people sometimes ended up waiting for each other in different locations (e.g., Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 3.8). 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 and elsewhere. For example, at one point Homer digresses for seventy-five lines, just repeating a verb to summon his audience back to the previous point. Paul has also used this pattern to frame some sections in 1 Corinthians (6:1-8; chap. 9; chap. 13). Paul begins a digression here defending the sincerity of his ministry—a common topic of

Greco-Roman moralists—that lasts through 7:4. The Corinthians should receive Paul as an ambassador of Christ’s new covenant, a revelation fuller than the one given to Moses.

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 of this sort. 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”; in this period, only the emperor was allowed to lead triumphs. *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. Most of the captives were executed after the triumph. 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, who identifies with Christ’s death in the following chapters, 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 (cf. Ps 141:2), and the same would have been true at Roman triumphal celebrations. (Sirach 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 (in Scripture, cf. Jer 6:13-14; 8:10-11; Micah 3:5, 11). (Critics sometimes declined to name their opponents, thus refusing to grant them even explicit notice, but Paul may have his opponents in mind; cf. 2 Cor 11:4-5, 22.) Thus many philosophers and moralists felt the need to repudiate the charge, as Paul does here.

3:1-6

Adequacy from God

3:1. Self-commendation was considered inappropriate unless justifiable, but acceptable when necessary to defend oneself or to make a point (see comment on 5:12). Jewish travelers often carried letters of recommendation indicating that Jewish householders could trust them and give them lodging on their journey. In Greco-Roman 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). Many philosophers disdained others' recommendations, both because they despised human opinion and because character was directly evident without letters (e.g., *Epictetus, *Diatribes* 1.9.27, 33-34; 2.3.1-2).

3:2-3. Others also understood the concept of matters written on human hearts, but Paul evokes Scripture here. 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" (v. 5 KJV; cf. 2:16).

3:6. Greco-Roman 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 here 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

Paul naturally infers that the glory of the new covenant would be greater than that of the old (3:6), and therefore articulates here the ways in which it was greater. Writers and speakers could “dwell on a point” that was important at length, as Paul does here; Paul also employs antithesis, rhetorically contrasting the earlier glory with the greater one. Ancient speakers could contrast good and bad, but as here could also contrast good and better (the comparison with what was good honoring what was better all the more).

Anyone in the Roman Empire who knew much about Judaism knew that Moses had been an important Jewish leader. But the glory revealed in *Christ is much greater—though more subtle—than that revealed to Moses*; thus apostles like Paul are in some sense in a position superior to that of 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*. But Moses could see only part of God’s glory, since seeing God’s glory brought death (Ex 33:10)—in contrast to the *Spirit that brings life (2 Cor 3:6).

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 (Ex 34:30, 33-35)—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 (Ex 33:9, 11, 19; 34:5-6, 34) corresponds to "the Spirit" today.

3:18. Greeks told many stories of people who became "metamorphosed" or "transformed," but many 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 hearers in such culturally relevant images (minus Greek divinization), the basis of his image is simply how Moses reflected God's glory, as is clear in this 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. In Platonic philosophy, the mind could envision the deity as pure reason, stripped of all passion; the glory revealed to Moses, by contrast, was full of love and faithfulness, revealing the biblical God's heart (Ex 34:6-7). On the "mirror" (NASB, NRSV), see comment on 1 Corinthians 13:12; for divine Wisdom being God's image and a mirror that reflects God's glory, see Wisdom of Solomon 7:26. On Christ as God's image, see comment on 4:4.

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 (contrast real treasure in 4:7); philosophers often accused professional speakers of doing the same, because

they were more concerned about speaking ability than about correct content. Greco-Roman teachers often distanced themselves from such charges.

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). Diaspora Jews sometimes argued that God stamped his image on people by his *logos*, his “word,” or Wisdom (cf., e.g., *Philo, *Creation* 25, 31; *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.96; *Confusion of Tongues* 146-47; *Special Laws* 1.81; 3.207). Christ fills the place assigned to preexistent, divine Wisdom in Jewish tradition; for Paul the divine image and glory obscured in Adam are restored in Christ. 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 Greco-Roman 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 may use 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. Contrast was a frequent *rhetorical device; Paul contrasts unbelievers in 4:4 with believers in 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 (thus he uses here wording from Is 9:1-2). 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.

4:7-15

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. (Paul’s audience would be very familiar with these; evidence suggests that Corinth abounded in frail pottery lamps.) 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. Some others portrayed people as weak vessels (e.g., Ps 31:12; *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 11.22; in images of judgment, Is 30:14; Jer 19:11), and wisdom or similar virtues as treasures (e.g., Prov 2:4; Sirach 20:30; Wisdom of Solomon 7:14; Philo, *That the Worse Attacks the Better* 59; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 4.2.9).

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. In 4:8-12, Paul develops *rhetorical antithesis (cf. *Testament of Joseph* 1:4-7).

4:10-12. On Paul’s proleptic experience of Christ’s death and *resurrection, 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 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 dominant Greek translation of the *Old Testament) in Paul’s day. In the psalm’s context, a righteous sufferer praises God’s deliverance. Jewish teachers accepted arguments based even on short phrases; Paul establishes 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. People in the Greco-Roman world honored benefactors; more people receiving the good news would yield more thanks to God. 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).

4:16–5:10

The Present and Future Life

4:16. Following *Plato's lead, some Greek thinkers (and a number of 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. Some others also understood that the future reward would be greater than present sufferings (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 3:5; *1 *Enoch* 103:9–104:2; *4 *Ezra* 7:14-16). 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 (cf. even Wisdom of Solomon 9:15), 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).

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 (see 5:1-10). Like the Greek sages, Paul is ready to face death; unlike them, he has a hope of future bodily 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. Paul apparently likewise accepted both the soul's continuance after death and bodily resurrection (cf., e.g., Phil 1:21-23 with Phil 3:20-21).

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 (he can use the present tense because of the secure down payment; see 5:5). A *Hellenistic Jewish work depicts the body as a tent (Wisdom of Solomon 9:15).

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. Some described the body as clothing (*Epictetus, *Diatribes* 1.25.21), death as disrobing (e.g., Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 2.56) and/or the resurrection body as clothing (cf. *1 Enoch* 62:15). Although Greeks regularly exercised in the nude and Romans had adopted nude bathing from the Greeks (probably including at the many baths in Corinth), all Jews except those who had surrendered to Greek custom abhorred nakedness in public. (Others also disliked nakedness in some social situations.) 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) 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). Some sages who listed their sufferings (cf. 4:8-12) also emphasized their willingness to surrender life (cf. *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 120.12-15). Some expected greater vision of God at death (e.g., Maximus of Tyre, *Orations* 10.3).

5:10. Corinth had a magnificent "judgment seat," the raised platform where governors would pronounce judgments and decrees; the Corinthians know that

Paul had appeared before it (Acts 18:12). Paul's allusion here, however, is especially to the standard Old Testament and Jewish image of the day of judgment, in which God's throne became the ultimate judgment seat (Christ here filling the divine role; cf. Rom 14:10). 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, self-commendation was generally offensive (see also 3:1; cf. Prov 25:27; 27:2); one needed a good reason to employ it, like defending oneself (here; 3:1), for his audience's good (10:8), responding to charges (10:10), challenging others' arrogance (11:12), necessity (12:1) or compulsion (12:11). Bringing pride to a group of people who should identify with the speaker would also count. Paul here employs the inward-outward contrast of 4:16-18 against his boastful opponents and borrows some terms from 1 Samuel 16:7 LXX (as well as continuing the "uncovered face" theme from 3:12, 18).

5:13. Both philosophers (Diogenes Laertius 6.3.82) and prophets (2 Kings 9:11; Jer 29:26; Hos 9:7) were sometimes thought "insane" (GNT here; the standard meaning of "beside oneself"—KJV, NASB, NRSV). Greek sages often acknowledged this erroneous perception of themselves, 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. The Greek term contrasted with being "sober" or "of sound mind," as here. 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).

5:14-17. 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). The new identity included an entirely new framework for thinking, including about Jesus. Judaism applied the language of

“new creation” in various ways. For example, for divine Wisdom spiritually “making all things new” in the present, cf. Wisdom of Solomon 7:27. 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 (cf. 1 *Enoch* 72:1; *Jubilees* 1:29; 4:26; *2 *Baruch* 44:12). 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; 66:22). 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; 5:5).

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 presumably presupposes *repentance and *atonement by blood sacrifice (here by Christ’s death).

5:20–6:10

A Plea from Christ’s Suffering Ambassadors

Ancient *rhetoric sometimes used shocking words to grip people’s attention. 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, and in ancient Mediterranean life (and especially in Roman party politics, well known in Corinth), one should be friends of one’s friends and enemies to their enemies. If the Corinthians welcomed Paul’s opponents, they were rejecting him; if they rejected Paul, they rejected the one who sent him.

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 ultimate King; emperors normally took action against unrepentant client states that had offended them, and no one took such warnings lightly.

5:21. Paul might blend the idea of unblemished sacrifices with that of the scapegoat that embodied the sin of God's people (Lev 1:3; 16:21-22). Here Paul could mean 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, reconciliation and peace for God's people (52:7), a time that Paul says has arrived in Christ (5:17). His argument would also be quite relevant to his readers: Greek sages sometimes discussed appropriate moments for speaking, especially for bold speech. They often also spoke boldly about and stressed urgency for 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. (Orators also sought to establish a person's *character* as a central part of arguing for guilt, innocence or reliability.) Some of Paul's words are essentially synonyms; as in ancient *rhetorical style, they are repeated for effect. The list in 6:4-10 is the sort an orator would have composed (cf. *Cicero, *In Catalinam* 2.10.25; *For Scaurus* 16.37; *For Caelius* 22.55; *Orationes philippicae* 3.11.28; 8.5.16): prefaced by the Greek *en*, nine sufferings (6:4-5) and eight virtues (6:6-7); prefaced by *dia*, three antitheses regarding weakness (6:7-8) followed by seven more structured by "as . . . yet" (6:8-10). One can also read this as three sets of nine elements (cf. nine in 1 Cor 12:8-10; Gal 5:22-23; two sets in 2 Cor 11:23-25, 26).

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 Greco-Roman society. Paradox, contrasting apparently irreconcilable opposites, was a standard literary and rhetorical technique. Sages often liked to jar audiences with oxymorons (cf., e.g., Musonius Rufus 9, p. 74.10-12 Lutz). Some philosophers (particularly *Cynics) used paradox and the similar technique of irony for turning the comments of their accusers (insane, foolish, shameful) against them, proclaiming themselves truly wise and rich (see comment on 1 Cor 4:8). Radical sages 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 the language of Psalm 118:17-18 (familiar to many Jews from the Hallel, Psalms 113–118, sung at Jewish festivals; cf. Ps 116:10 in 2 Cor 4:13 and possibly Ps 119:32 in 2 Cor 6:11).

6:10. Although better off than most 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

Orators often climaxed arguments with an intense emotional appeal, as here (letters, which were less formal than speeches, could also give free play to emotion). 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. It is they and not Paul who are hindering proper reconciliation. 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 (cf. Gal 4:20). Letters often expressed deep affection (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 1.9.1; 2.1.1; 2.1.2; 2.2.1; 2.3.2; 12.12.1); sometimes they also affectionately protested that the other should show more love. Affection, writers sometimes urged, ought to be reciprocated (e.g., Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 6.15.1; 7.14.2; 12.30.3; 15.21.3). Of course, these speakers and writers 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; he frames it like some of his other digressions and uses antithesis in a striking emotional climax to the preceding section. Perhaps he summons the believers to choose between him (as Christ’s agent) and the rival teachers; ancient Mediterranean values required one to befriend one’s friends and oppose their enemies.

“Unequal yoking”(cf. KJV) here might evoke Leviticus 19:19 (cf. Deut 22:10); the principle would reinforce the *law’s prohibition of marriage with nonbelievers* (cf. Deut 7:3; Ezra 9:12; Neh 13:25) *but need not be limited to marriage*. The Dead Sea Scrolls contrast the people of light and the people of darkness (e.g., 1QM 1.1, 11).

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. Others offered similar contrasts (Sirach 13:16-19, using one of the same verbs as here). 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* (e.g., *Jubilees* 1:20; Dead Sea Scrolls CD 4.13-16; 1QM 1.1, 5, 13; 13.2, 4, 11); some passages demanded a choice between God and Beliar (*Testament of Naphtali* 2:6; 3:1).

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 (listing together various texts, as early Jewish sources sometimes did): verse 16 cites Leviticus 26:11-12 (apparently correcting the usual Greek translation where necessary), probably echoed in Ezekiel 37:26-28 (esp. v. 27). Verse 17 adapts 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. “I will welcome you” uses a *Septuagint rendering of God’s promise to gather his people in a number of texts, perhaps especially Ezekiel 20:34, 41.

6:18. God’s people were his sons and daughters (e.g., Deut 32:19; Jer 3:19), who would be restored to their special relationship with him in the time of the end (Is 43:6). Paul blends the language of several texts (probably including 2 Sam 7:14, in the immediate context of building a temple), as Jewish writers sometimes did; here he may also blend his own prophetic insight (cf. 1 Cor 14:37-38).

7:1. The promises of 6:16-18 were confirmed in *Christ (1:20), applicable to those consecrated to God. Jews often spoke of pure and undefiled hearts; undefiled flesh usually referred to ceremonial purity (hand washing or ritual immersion). Purity in body and spirit here (see comment on 5:10 and on 1 Cor 6:20) invites abstention from sin.

7:2-3. *Rhetorically, the Greek of 7:2 uses *anaphora* (three times beginning with “no one”) and *homoiopiton* (three verbs ending the same way); 7:3 is full of pathos (emotional appeal). Speakers often followed shocking or offensive statements with more welcome words; writers often indicated the end of a digression by returning to the point. Paul uses language of great affection; see comment on 6:11-13. A writer could clarify that he stressed a point not for other

reasons but to show love (*Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 2.4.2). The greatest expression of friendship in Greco-Roman 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. Moralists felt that true friends should speak frankly (cf. KJV, ASV: “boldness of speech”). Greco-Roman 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

7:5-6. Paul resumes here the *narrative introduction that he suspended in 2:13; even in speeches, where the *narratio* was normally at the front, it could also appear later when needed. *Old Testament texts often emphasized God’s comfort for his people (e.g., Is 40:1; 51:3; 52:9), including, as here, God comforting the “humble” (NRSV, “downcast”; see the *Septuagint of Is 49:13; 54:11); 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.

7:7. Rhetorically sensitive hearers would appreciate the repetition of three qualities of the Corinthians in quick repetition.

7:8-9. Writers sometimes had reason to be anxious how recipients would understand their letters (*Cicero, *Letters to His Brother Quintus* 2.16.5) or to apologize when a letter inadvertently inflicted pain; more relevant here, moralists often regarded themselves as physicians inflicting pain only to restore the patient. When gentle warnings failed, harsher words were deemed appropriate. Frankness could bring *repentance, and a writer would not regret it if it benefitted the reader (Fronto, *Ad Verum Imperator* 1.4.1). 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. The sixfold repetition of “what” in 7:11 is rhetorical *anaphora* (cf. similar patterns in, e.g., Fronto, *Ad Antoninum Imperator* 2.6.2); piling up related terms was an acceptable expression of Greek rhetoric and simply added emphasis to the point of the terms. Others understood zeal to recoup what was lost (Diogenes Laertius 4.16).

7:13. Titus received great hospitality; hospitality to travelers was emphasized in antiquity, especially in Jewish and Christian circles.

7:14. Whereas self-commendation 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. Expressions of confidence could prepare hearers for (or even be shared during—Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 13.44.1) a request (coming in chaps. 8–9).

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 must 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), some could 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 low-status 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. Civic rivalry was common, and 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. When it appears in business documents, the term usually translated

here “*grace” (8:1, 4, 6-7, 19; 9:14; cf. 8:9; 9:8, 15) can also refer to benefactors’ generosity, to the gift or to gratitude (cf. 8:16; 9:15).

8:2. Some Greco-Roman aristocrats ridiculed those who lived simply, but other writers praised the simple lifestyle that enabled its followers to give generously. Philippi in Macedonia was prosperous, but the prosperity had not filtered down to the poor, who often were unemployed; further, 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 (Ex 35:24; Deut 15:14; cf. Ezra 2:69; Tobit 4:8, 16), but the Macedonians went beyond this rule. Greco-Roman sources used phrases like “according to their means” and “beyond their means” (NRSV) for benefaction.

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; because Titus has now reported back to him, Paul’s concern as to whether the Corinthians were ready (9:3) probably indicates that they were not. Inscriptions often praise benefactors for “completing” a project to which they had pledged.

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. One could appeal to a reader’s love for the writer to urge some action for the reader’s good (Fronto, *Ad M. Caesarem* 5.1). If Paul means his circle’s love for the Corinthians, superlative claims of love expressed affection (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 2.3.2; 13.1.5; 13.45.1).

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). Ancients could respect someone who remained poor to enrich others (cf. *Plutarch, *Lysander* 2.4; 30.2).

8:10-15

Give According to What You Have

8:10-12. "Eagerness" (NRSV) appears often in inscriptions about benefactors. 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 may have 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). It was widely understood, however, that one could give only according to what one had (e.g., Tobit 4:8, 16; Sirach 14:13; Mishnah *Pe'ah* 7:8; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquities of Rome* 11.27.7).

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" (including in some *Diaspora Judaism*; *Letter of Aristeas* 228, 257, 263, 282), 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. A famine was an emergency (Acts 11:28). Jewish wisdom writers

exhorted their readers to remember famine when they were prospering (Sirach 18:25). Benefaction in antiquity involved reciprocity (often honor is what benefactors achieved in return). Although Corinth was extremely prosperous and the Christians there might not envision their own poverty, Paul encouraged them that if *they* were ever in need, someone else would 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). (Other writers, such as *Philo and Josephus*, taught equality from this Exodus passage.)

8:16-24

Envoys for the Collection

8:16-18. Here Paul provides a letter of recommendation (3:1) for Titus and his companion. Using the ancient technique of literary bracketing, Paul might bracket 8:16–9:15 with thanksgiving.

8:19. Just as *synagogues throughout the Mediterranean would send their annual tribute to the Jerusalem temple via local representatives of high reputation (Philo, *Special Laws* 1.78; cf. Mishnah *Sheqalim* 3:2), this offering is also to be administered in an irreproachable manner: envoys would be “appointed by the churches.” The term for “appoint” often involved elections, as was common in Greek administration. Ancients expected generosity to be repaid with honor—here (and in 8:21, 23) to the chief benefactor, God.

8:20-21. In a culture obsessed with shame and honor, Greco-Roman 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. The term in 8:21 translated “intend” (NRSV), “providing for” (KJV) or “have regard” (NASB) applied in inscriptions to benefactors’ foresight; sometimes this involved sending honorable representatives.

8:22. Both Jewish and Greco-Roman 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; sometimes one could use an epithet instead of a name if a person were well-known (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.31.42). Messengers usually traveled at least in pairs; sensitive matters could merit a larger delegation (see 8:23).

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. Displaying affection, one could ask for proofs of love (e.g., Fronto, *Epistulae Graecae* 6; *Ad M. Caesarem*, 3.2.) One could invite a benefactor to demonstrate to the recommended how effective the recommender’s recommendation was (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 3.1.3; 13.19.3, 20.1, 26.4). Asking a reader to prove their affection for the writer by granting the latter’s request revealed confidence in the friendship (Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 12.18). Calling one the “glory” of something could mean that one brought honor to it (Fronto, *Ad M. Caesarem* 2.3.2; 2.7; 5.3).

9:1-5

Boasting in Advance

In 9:1-5, Paul employs here the *rhetorical techniques of endearment (by boasting about them) and comparison. The terms translated “undertaking” (9:4, NRSV), “blessing” (often translated “gift,” 9:5) and even “case” (“matter,” “part,” 9:3) appear in ancient documents referring to financial matters.

9:1. Against those who think that 9:1 is disconnected from the preceding context, the first three words of 9:1 usually refer to preceding context; 9:1-2 may be a *digression (a common ancient literary form) between 8:16-23 and 9:3-5, which involve the delegation.

9:2. 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).

9:3-4. By boasting about the Corinthians (possibly before the rise of recent conflicts with them), 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 (despite politely expressing confidence, 9:1; cf. especially 12:16-18)! Similarly, *Cicero can assure a benefactor of the requester’s confidence, but simultaneously urge him not to disappoint that confidence (*Letters to Friends* 3.1.3).

9:5. Inscriptions show that the public held benefactors to their promises. Paul acts from “necessity,” a commonly cited reason for actions (e.g., Hermogenes, *On Issues* 77.6-19).

9:6-15

Sowing and Reaping

Jewish tradition recognized that God rewards the generous (Prov 11:24-26; 22:9).

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; Sirach 7:3; *Cicero; *Aristotle); the specific image of sowing and consequently reaping sparingly seems to have also been in general circulation. Using a familiar rhetorical device (*symploche*), Paul structures the principle with repetition (x . . . y/x . . . y).

9:7. Paul here cites standard Jewish wisdom; willingness may evoke Exodus 25:2, 35:5, 21-22 (cf. 1 Chron 29:6-9; Ezra 2:68), suggesting that Paul had a fairly developed theology of giving based on the *Old Testament. “Not reluctantly” (NRSV) echoes Deuteronomy 15:10 in the *Septuagint. “God loves a cheerful giver” is from an addition to Proverbs 22:8 in the Septuagint (“God blesses a cheerful and giving person”; cf. Sirach 35:11). The term rendered “cheerful” often applied in Jewish texts to gifts for the poor.

9:8. Greeks appreciated repetition of sounds; Paul here uses seven words beginning with *p*, including using “all” five times (three of them in succession). Philosophers applied the term translated “sufficiency” (KJV, NASB; “enough,” NRSV) to the sage’s contentment in all circumstances (e.g., *Epictetus, *Diatribes* 1.1.27); others also appreciated this virtue (e.g., Prov 30:8 LXX; *Psalms of Solomon 5:16). Although some Greek traditions emphasized that one could be self-sufficient 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 self-

sufficient. For views on possessions and wealth in antiquity, see comment on 1 Timothy 6:3-10. Ancient business documents often used the term here often translated “abundance” (8:2, 7, 14; 9:8, 12), applying it to profit margins.

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 (the supreme benefactor) 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. God provides enough overall and then invites those with abundance to share with those in need (Deut 15:4-11).

9:11-15. In Greco-Roman antiquity, recipients of gifts were expected to reciprocate by publicly honoring the benefactor. 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 honor 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 include his strategic provision to the Corinthians by which they can benefit the poor of Jerusalem.) The term translated “service” (NASB) or “ministry” (NRSV) in 9:12 can apply to priestly service, but also applied to year-long roles as public benefactors (frequently assigned to the wealthy, sometimes as an involuntary obligation, but Paul insists on voluntary contributions, 9:7).

10:1-18

Not Like Paul’s Opponents

Paul’s change in tone here, from generally cautious affection to often 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. Writers could dictate longer letters in stages (e.g., Fronto,

De Feriis Alsiansibus 4), sometimes added something after receiving news (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 12.12.5), or composed an additional letter for the same traveler to carry (Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 8.6). But the letter can also be read as a planned unity (see introduction). Defenses usually went on the offensive against opponents and could reserve the most controversial elements until near the end, after establishing rapport.

10:1-2. One sometimes opened a section with the opponent's charge. 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. Because of love and in order to spare them, Paul had sent a firm letter rather than coming in person (1:23–2:4); but some, who valued forceful speech, mistook his affectionate strategy for weakness (10:9-11). In most contexts envisioned by his critics, “meekness” was considered base, weak and low status (cf. 1 Cor 2:3); yet Paul knew that people respected a “meek” ruler, that is, a merciful and benevolent one. Christ's “meekness and gentleness” probably alludes to Jesus' saying later recorded in Matthew 11:29—a good reply to the Corinthians' complaint.

10:3-5. Far from being weak (10:1-2), Paul wages war. Greek sages sometimes described their battle against false ideas as a war, in terms similar to those Paul uses here (e.g., *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 109.8-9; 117.7, 25; Diogenes, *Epistles* 10; Diogenes Laertius 6.1.13; *Philo, *Abel* 130; *Conf.* 129-33). Like those sages, Paul claims to be doing battle with false ideas. (Orators also employed such images; e.g., *Cicero, *On the Orator* 3.14.55; *Brutus* 2.7; *Letters to Friends* 4.7.2; *Tacitus, *Dialogue on Oratory* 32, 34, 37.) “Arguments” (NIV, NRSV, GNT) 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. Sieges, hence siege imagery, were common (e.g., Prov 21:22; 1 Maccabees 8:10). 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. Some wealthier Corinthians assail Paul 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.

Paul's (literally) "bodily presence" (KJV, NRSV) was unimpressive; socially respectable speakers were strong in their appearance, gestures and intonation, as well as having the right Greek accent (e.g., Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Demosthenes* 54; *Arrangement of Words* 11; Cicero, *Brutus* 55.203; 91.316; *Plutarch, *Demosthenes* 7.2-3; 11.1-2; *Cicero* 4.3). Unfortunately, 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. Paul's "some" may follow the ancient literary practice of obscuring opponents with anonymity. "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; self-commendation 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. Ancients despised boasting beyond one's appropriate class, but in the matter of the Corinthians, Paul plainly outclasses his critics (cf. 3:1-2). Ancients often considered as hubris

failure to “know oneself,” including one’s limits as a mortal.

10:17. On Jeremiah 9:23-24 see comment on 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.

10:18. Applying Jeremiah 9:23-24, Paul notes that self-commendation 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 self-commendation but recognized that it was offensive (*Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory* 11.1.15; Plutarch, *Cicero* 24.1-2; Prov 27:2) 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 ancient conventional form of 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. Speakers often prefaced shocking statements with warnings (professional *rhetoricians called this practice *prodiorthosis*). In Greek literature “madness” (here, “foolishness”) was sometimes a divine punishment for insolent arrogance; philosophers considered the “ignorant” masses insane, and some people considered the most radical philosophers insane. Paul may simply imply 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; 34:14) 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. biblical depictions of God marrying Israel or Israel being corrupted, e.g., Is 54:5; 62:4-5; Jer 2:32; 3:1-2; 31:32; Ezek 16:32; Hos 2:19-20; later Jewish depictions of God marrying his son Israel to the *law).

11:3. Fathers had to protect their daughters from men who would prey on them sexually (Deut 22:15-21; Sirach 42:9-12). Some Jewish traditions highlighted Eve being deceived or (unlike Paul) even considered her primarily

responsible for Adam's fall (e.g., *Life of Adam and Eve* 25:35; 38:1-2; 44:1-5), but Paul need not allude to such ideas here. In some Jewish traditions, *Satan, disguised as a good angel (cf. 11:14), deceived Eve sexually (*Life of Adam and Eve* 9:1-2; *Apocalypse of Moses* 17:1-2). 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 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 his hearers' acceptance of this bad treatment (cf. also 11:19-20), using the common ancient device of satire.

11:5-6. Rhetoric was important in Greco-Roman society, including in Corinth (see comment on 1 Cor 1:5). By skilled rhetoric a speaker showed that he was educated and truly worthy of being heard by the well-to-do. Philosophers, however, stressed their genuine knowledge rather than others' persuasive speech; Paul appeals to the ideal of knowledge to defend himself. Speakers would sometimes concede a secondary weakness to emphasize a more important strength.

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 (e.g., Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 12.15). 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. Refusing a gift often signified refusing friendship, hence choosing enmity (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 14.3.1). Paul claims to be an amateur: sophists not only valued rhetorical skills over one's message (11:6), they also could charge fees (a practice to which Socrates and some other thinkers objected). 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. (Some had likewise charged that Socrates did not accept money

because he was not worth any; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.6.12.) 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; he was not their employee (see comment on 1 Cor 9:15-27). Except when they meant it as kindness, Greeks saw humility as “humiliation” and considered it appropriate only to those of very low status. Paul’s question is sarcastic; their culture demanded honor and gratitude for benefactors who gave services freely.

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; 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.)

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 was mixed with praise of one’s audience; one could also use it to remove others’ excuses for failing to heed one (Isocrates, *To Nicocles* 47). As in 11:11, writers sometimes reminded readers of their love (cf. 7:3; Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 2.4.2).

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 regarding Satan and Eve, 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

If his critics have denigrated him as ignorant (11:6; cf. 10:10), he can justifiably adopt, for *rhetorical purposes, the alleged role of fool (speaking in the role of

another was a familiar rhetorical device, *prosopopoiia*). Implicitly, however, he attacks his opponents' boasting as foolish (returning charges against opponents was conventional rhetoric). Paul's way of boasting parodies and thus mocks self-boasting, and therefore a central feature of the Greco-Roman valuing of masculine competition and self-promotion. He walks the tightrope of answering fools as their folly deserves without being truly like them (Prov 26:4-5).

11:16-18. Because appearing to boast was otherwise offensive, speakers had to cite justification for their boasts (see *Plutarch, *Praising Oneself Inoffensively*). Such justifications included refuting criticism (Demosthenes, *On the Crown* 299-300), challenging opponents (Demosthenes, *False Embassy* 174; 2 Cor 11:12), competing against a less fit rival (*Cicero, *Against Caecilius* 12.40), for one's hearers' good (2 Cor 12:19), offering a positive role model and the like. Even autobiographers had to come up with ways to decrease the potential offensiveness of their own claims. Paul, however, boasts in weakness, in contrast to most of his contemporaries. Paul's boastful opponents had apparently laid themselves open to Paul's attack—indicating their own lack of rhetorical skill.

11:19-20. Irony, including mock respect, 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). 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. Complaints that the hearers were putting up with what was inappropriate implicitly invited hearers to stop doing so (Sallust, *Bellum jugurthinum* 31.11).

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. Confessing what was not an offense was a common rhetorical strategy; so was returning criticisms and depicting the critics as the true exploiters (11:20). Paul uses again the rhetorical technique of "comparison" to mock the boasting self-appointed *apostles who have come to Corinth.

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. For example, the

emperor Augustus boasted at length of his exploits (in his famous *Res Gestae*), though never his setbacks. 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., generals boasting of what they suffered for the state; in romance novels, lovers recounting what they had suffered for their beloved.) 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 honor.

11:22. *Rhetoric often used point-by-point comparisons of virtues and other matters (11:22-23; cf. e.g., Menander Rhetor 2.3, 381.31-32; 386.10-13; 2.10, 416.2-4; 417.5-9); as is the case here, elements in such comparisons could even include homeland (2.3, 379.6-8). Matching critics in sets of three claims (including home city, Josephus, Life 198), or posing and responding to three rhetorical questions (Cicero, For Sextus Roscius of Ameria 1.2), was good rhetoric. Even in Greco-Roman 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" probably means the same thing (rhetoric valued repetition with synonyms), although it might apply especially to Palestinian Jews (see comment on Phil 3:5).*

11:23. Paul's comparison escalates from his equality (11:22) to his superiority (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 11:1; when reducing an opponent's argument to the absurd, one could acknowledge the parody as "insane" (Aelius Aristides, *Defense of Oratory* 339, §112D). Paul begins by boasting in the very cause of the Corinthians' reproach: his low-status "labors" (see comment on 11:7). Imprisonment was typically a matter of shame. Some philosophers boasted in ignoring beatings; Jewish people praised those beaten and martyred for their faith.

11:24. People sometimes enumerated accomplishments, as in 11:24-25; for example, the emperor Augustus, boasting of his exploits, numbered some of them, such as three gladiatorial games he sponsored for the Roman people (*Res Gestae* 22.1). 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. Within reason, Romans allowed Jews to execute nonlethal discipline in their own community; Paul could have escaped such discipline had he renounced connection with his people, but clearly he proved unwilling to do so.

11:25. Roman citizens were not supposed to be beaten with rods, but ancient reports demonstrate that 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 belief 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. To ancient hearers, surviving multiple times could suggest divine protection.

11:26. Expanding on "frequent travels," Paul uses the rhetorical device *anaphora* (repeating an opening word or phrase) with the eightfold, "in dangers from." 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; more likely, Paul could refer here to the danger of crossing swollen rivers or how they flooded nearby roads, especially in winter and early spring. 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 but remained a potential danger; more generally, mercantile Corinth knew well the perils of sea travel. The climax of Paul's "dangers," however, is probably ironically pointed at his opponents: "perils among false brethren" (KJV).

11:27. Sleeplessness could stem from difficult sleeping conditions during travel, potentially dangerous night travel, or nocturnal ministry (Acts 20:31; though that would be limited at night because most people were asleep); insomnia is possible (though likelier at 11:28-29). One traveling to the interior of Asia Minor would face "cold"; particularly 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' position. It was honorable, though, to share others' sufferings (Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 14.3.1; *Seneca, *Natural Questions* 4.pref. 15).

11:32. Paul supplements the list with a humiliating example. Aretas IV controlled Nabataea, including many Nabatean Arabs in the region around Syrian Damascus. Some argue that he may have controlled Damascus itself about A.D. 34–39 (he died about 39–40), but it is sufficient here to think of his ethnarch as the representative of the significant Nabatean community in Damascus. Damascus had a Nabatean quarter, and the Nabatean community in Damascus had its own rights. (Similarly, though Jews were usually treated as resident aliens, the community leaders who spoke for them might wield significant local influence.) If Aretas 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. Windows were sometimes large enough to fit through, but generally too high for intruders to climb into; a window in a house on the wall would be high enough to be dangerous if something went wrong. 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. Some commentators contrast a particular prize for heroism in the Roman army, for the first soldier to scale an enemy wall; here Paul instead escapes from a wall secretly.

Revelations and Weakness

12:1. Ancient Mediterranean culture viewed boasting negatively, unless it could be justified by particular reasons, one of which was “necessity.” Like many *Old Testament prophets, Paul experienced visions and revelations. Some Jewish writers of Paul’s day diligently cultivated visionary experiences with fasting and sleep deprivation, but Paul, however, was simply “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 (e.g., *1 *Enoch* 71:1-6), 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* 39:3). (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 [cf. Tosefta *Hagigah* 2:3-4]. 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 3 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" (cf. also in Philem 19). To avoid boasting, one could also appeal to what others see in one.

12:7-8. "Flesh" here need not indicate a physical ailment (like the one in Gal 4:13), as is often supposed (so GNT); 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 (e.g., Job 1:6-2:6) and most Jewish thought, God is here sovereign even over Satan and his angels.

12:8-10. Philosophers spoke of self-sufficiency, but Paul emphasizes the sufficiency of God's *grace. Miracle reports in pagan temples sometimes 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 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 (cf. e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 5.12.8). Calling himself a "nobody" now rejects boasting.

12:12. "Signs and wonders" were miracles (e.g., Deut 6:22; 7:19). 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.) It was appropriate to honor benefactors but not to pay them.

12:16-18. Speakers sometimes challenged their detractors to prove any wrongdoing on the speakers' part (e.g., 1 Sam 12:3-5; *Cicero, *Pro Sestio* 21.47). 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 Greco-Roman moralists was “harmony”; they commonly attacked strife, envy and so forth. Ancient moralists also attacked

anger, among other attitudes. The Corinthians cannot defend their behavior even on the basis of their own culture's ethics.

12:21. If the powerful members of the Corinthian church despised Paul's humility (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).

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. Because the Corinthian Christians, like their surrounding culture, valued rhetorical power that drew attention to speakers rather than to the supreme God, Paul often drives home God's power revealed in the weakness of the cross to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:18–2:8).

13:5-10

True Power and Weakness

13:5-6. Corinthian culture evaluated speakers (cf. 13:3); Paul turns the question of evaluation back to them. Many philosophers urged self-evaluation or testing. Paul, their spiritual father, has *Christ in him (13:3-4), but the Corinthians must decide whether Christ is in them.

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 Greco-Roman "harmony" speeches well enough that even nonbelievers in Corinth would agree with its moral message.

13:12. Very light kisses on the lips 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 from Paul.

Type of Letter. Formal divisions of letters by type occurred later and categories overlapped, but some consideration is helpful. 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, the argumentation in Galatians is more like “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 what later Greco-Roman composition handbooks called “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) probably suggests that he had already completed his first missionary journey (Acts 13–14) and thus that the Council may have taken place (Acts 15). Galatians may thus date to the latter half of the fifties, probably some time before Romans.

Situation. Paul is clearly battling opponents who have settled in Galatia (for the location, see comment on 1:2; given the likely South Galatian theory for the location of Paul’s readers, accepted also by archaeologists of Asia Minor, 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, or followed the levitical requirements for strangers in the land, 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 become a or even the 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 Jesus-follower, 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: those who submit to Israel's *Messiah and receive the Spirit* belong to the covenant and already have what circumcision merely symbolized.

Commentaries. Among the useful commentaries on Galatians are those by Donald Guthrie, *Galatians*, NCB (1973; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990); and Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013). Helpful specialized works include George Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography: Toward a New Understanding*, SBLDS 73 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985); Aliou Cissé Niang, *Faith and Freedom in Galatia and Senegal* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). Hans Dieter Betz, *A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), offers helpful insights, although his specific model of judicial (courtroom) rhetoric for the book is questionable (see George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984]). Some of my primary sources appear in Craig Keener, "The Pillars and the Right Hand of Fellowship in Galatians 2:9," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 7 (2010): 51-58; and Craig Keener, "Three Notes on Figurative Language: Inverted Guilt in Acts 7:55-60, Paul's Figurative Vote in Acts 26:10, Figurative Eyes in Galatians 4:15," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 5 (2008): 41-49.

1:1-5

Introduction

Like many polite ancient letters, Paul's letters characteristically include a thanksgiving at the outset, but Galatians lacks one. In extreme circumstances, a speaker could challenge wrong behavior angrily, especially when the speaker was trusted enough to get away with it; this also fits the way of framing a letter of blame.

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. His opponents may 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. Writers sometimes included greetings from others as if coauthors even though they may have contributed little beyond greetings (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 16.1.title); here perhaps their inclusion strengthens Paul's authority. Scholars dispute whether Paul here addresses those in North Galatia (a region in Asia Minor settled by Celts, not mentioned in Acts and only slowly Christianized) or more often the South Galatian region (which some scholars call Phrygia-Galatia). If Paul uses the term especially for ethnic Galatians (Celts), he presumably means North Galatia (which includes Ancyra, Tavium and Pessinus). Given his frequent reference to provinces in his letters, it is much more likely that Paul refers to the province of Galatia, like some other ancient writers. In this case, 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. Jewish people frequently 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 Jesus' followers are already citizens of the future age of God's unchallenged reign.

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 (noticed at least as early as Origen). This literary convention is found only among the harshest of ancient letters.

1:6. Ancient letters, including often harsher letters of blame, sometimes used the expression “I am amazed” (NASB; cf. Demosthenes, *Epistles* 3.11, 23). Paul replaces his usual thanksgiving with this claim.

1:7. Speakers sometimes corrected themselves with a starker claim to reinforce the point. Paul might possibly know more than he says; sometimes critics refused to dignify their enemies by naming them. Messengers who distorted the contents of their message were subject to legal penalties. In the *Old Testament those who distorted the divine message were false prophets (e.g., Jer 23:16), for whom the penalty was death (Deut 13:5; 18:20).

1:8-9. One could repeat a statement for *rhetorical effect. Some Jewish mystics of the period claimed revelations from angels (especially in *apocalyptic literature*; e.g., *1 Enoch* 1:2; 74:2; *3 Baruch* 1:8), though Paul might use *hyperbole here*. Oaths and curses were familiar in ancient religion, magic and everyday life. Paul might allude here to the curses of the covenant leveled against those who failed to keep Moses’ law (*Deut 27–28*); more clearly, this same word for “curse” appears in the Septuagint of Deuteronomy 13, where false prophets and those who listened to them were to be destroyed.

1:10-17

Not Revealed by People

Argumentative speeches, treatises and other works often included a long *narrative section, normally in chronological order*. In a defense, the narrative of events (e.g., Cicero, *For Quinctius* 3.11–9.33) could precede a statement of the case (10.36) and the proofs (which can include events, but not normally chronologically; 11.37–27.85). A letter is not a speech, but Paul may draw on conventional argumentative patterns to build his case. Narrative could sometimes be autobiographical, and autobiography could be used apologetically (see, e.g., Josephus, *Life* 336-67). 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 (and of course Scripture; cf. Ex 15:26 LXX; Deut 6:18; 12:8, 25). Many criticized demagogues who flattered the masses. 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. Paul refers here to his experience recounted more fully 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 student of Jewish teachers. Students often competed (frequently in friendly ways) with fellow students, normally their age peers. The Palestinian Jewish emphasis on “zeal” was commonly 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 thus 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, human beings (see “any human being”—NRSV, NIV, NLT).

1:17. “Arabia” refers to Nabatea, 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 Nabatean Arabs, and Bedouins traveled through the land. Damascus was next to Nabatea; some think that it was controlled during this time by Nabatea's king, Aretas IV, but more likely Nabateans wielded influence because of their numbers (a Nabatean quarter there) and mercantile prosperity (see comment on 2 Cor 11:32). Most Nabateans spoke their own dialect of *Aramaic, although Greek was also known and later (by the early second century) became dominant.

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” years can mean two. Hospitality was important in Jewish homes. “Peter” (*Petros*) was the Greek translation of *kefa*, *Aramaic for “rock” (not yet used as a personal name).

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 (some prefer Acts 11:30); the issues addressed in Galatians 2:3-9 correspond to the issues addressed 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 (cf. 1:18); 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. Because reckoning could include parts of years, however (fourteen could represent as few as twelve), the conversion could possibly be a few years later.

2:2. Paul sought first the support of the Jerusalem leaders for his revelation (cf. 1:12, 16), 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 believers wanted to force circumcision on Titus is thus not surprising (cf. Acts 15:5). Paul graphically describes the other side as “spies” (GNT), infiltrators who seek to betray the Christian camp and finally enslave them as prisoners of war. Paul's incomplete sentence (in the Greek of Gal 2:4) may reflect the passion with which he was writing, and which was expected in passionate letters or speeches (for rebuke, forensic intensity or expressing anxiety).

2:6-8. Those of “reputation” (2:2, 6—NASB) 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 Gentiles. Many later Jewish teachers considered the majority opinion of the sages normative, to be weighed more heavily than a direct voice from heaven; but Paul

circumvents an appeal to such valued tradition by appealing instead to the standard Jewish doctrine that God is an impartial judge. In 2:7-9, even the “pillars” themselves recognized Paul’s equal (but different) task. Ancient sources sometimes report friends disagreeing or even competing.

2:9. Ancient writers often used “pillar” as Paul does here, for prominent or important persons, as in our English idiom, “pillars of the community.” Receiving another’s right hand usually connoted greetings, welcome or assurance; 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 majority of Jewish believers 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

Paul extends the *rhetorical technique of comparison (used positively in 2:7-8), contrasting Peter’s refusal to comply with the Jerusalem Council’s agreement 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.

2:11. Jewish tradition, also supported by Jesus, warned that one should initially reprove a person privately to avoid causing undue shame or loss of face; Paul thus treats this situation as an extreme case. Antioch was the largest city of Syria-Palestine, over three 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 Gentiles (Acts 10:28; 11:3). The Jerusalem Jewish leaders may have agreed with Paul in theory, but they also had to keep peace within their own Jerusalem constituency and maintain their witness to their culture, with its recently 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 Paul would have seen the qualitative difference as 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 ethnocentrism, they accommodated it on what they saw as minor points to keep peace, whereas Paul felt that any degree of ethnic 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.

2:15-21

Paul’s Case in Antioch

Paul seems to summarize the substance of Galatians here. (Betz even views this as the thesis statement of the book; it seems long, however, for such a statement.) Paul’s response to Peter might continue even as far as 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; later *rabbis taught 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 a *rhetorical objection 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*. Ancient speakers sometimes used dramatic contrasts—here, both dying and living. 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 often 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

In 3:1–4:31, Paul employs an argumentative style popular in his day, with vivid images, *rhetorical questions and intense reasoning. Multiple rhetorical questions can hammer home a point, often challenging the hearer.

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, GNT). Here Paul may mean that he acted out the crucifixion through his own lifestyle (2:20). Calling someone "foolish" was harsh (cf. 1 Cor 15:36). The term translated "bewitched" refers to the evil impact of spells (see GNT) or the "evil eye," a jealous look with magical efficacy.

3:2. Speakers often used antithesis (contrasting opposites, as in 3:2-3, 5) in forceful argumentation. Some ancient 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. Many Jewish teachers believed 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. Circumcision was done in the "flesh" (6:12-13; Gen 17:11; **Jubilees* 15:26, 33).

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. Sometimes speakers would hold attention by presenting and then correcting a statement.

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. For Paul it involves dependence on God's favor rather than counting as meritorious.

3:7. Jewish people (and sometimes others) used "descendants" or "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, GNT) 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. Jewish teachers sometimes spoke of Scripture "speaking." 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. Many Jewish people believed that the righteous (Israel) were chosen and 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 frequent Jewish method of interpretation. Paul thus gives the verdict on righteousness sought by the "works of" (KJV, NASB) or by "obeying" (GNT) 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 ancient Jewish teacher would often do, 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. (Some of Paul's contemporaries understood faith here as law-obedience; 1QpHab 8.1 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls*.) *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 another 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 approach (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 (cf., e.g., *Sifra Aharé Mot* par. 8.193.1.10); hence he responds: "This is the works approach." 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). Deuteronomy spoke of hanging corpses, but the punishment had long since been applied to living persons being executed.

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. perhaps 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), but the *Septuagint had used this term for “covenant” and Paul expects his audience to be familiar with this biblical usage. Although Paul means “covenant” in the biblical sense rather than as “testament,” he can play on the legal nuances of the latter (wordplays were common in ancient argumentation, and Scripture spoke of Israel’s “inheritance”). 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. Once a Greek will was sealed, one did not open it to make changes, since this would require breaking the seals (cf. also Roman practice in Pliny, *Epistles* 5.7.1-2). Once the testator died, the will was final. Adoption was also permanent (although even a birth child could be disinherited). One kind of will divided the property immediately, the testator, however, retaining the right to use it until death. When replaced by a subsequent will, the new will might be strongly contested by the original heirs (e.g., as a forgery or the product of unethical influence). 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. (Under Roman law, a later will nullified an earlier one; Gaius, *Institutes* 2.144.) As in most analogies, one does not press all points; God did not need to die for Israel to receive its promised

inheritance.

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 of the primary sense of most of the most relevant Genesis texts [Gen 13:15-16; 17:8; 22:17-18; 24:7, 60], 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; Paul would agree that this 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 might explain how his argument for them can move in principle from Christ as the heir to all who are in Christ.

3:17-18. Many Jewish teachers argued that the *law existed before the creation of the world (though many held that its period of influence in the world started with Moses; some others believed that the patriarchs observed it before it was officially given). 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 and thirty years” comes from Exodus 12:40. Scripture promised Israel an inheritance, and Jewish tradition spoke often of “inheriting” the coming world (e.g., *1 Enoch 5:7; *Jubilees 32:19; *4 Ezra 7:96).

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 (cf. comment on Acts 7:53), 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; *Dead Sea Scrolls CD* 3.16; *Psalms of Solomon* 14:2-3; *4 *Ezra* 7:20-21; *Mishnah Avot* 6:7). 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 (in one tradition, chaos prevailed for two millennia, then the Torah for two millennia, and then the messianic era for two millennia); Paul likewise divides history, viewing the law as a temporary guardian till the original promise was fulfilled.

3:24. A key element in the passage is the term translated "tutor" (NASB) or, better still, "guardian" (NIV, ESV, NLT). 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 (usually 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; some, however, such as the Eleusinian mysteries, welcomed a range of initiates). 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. (The allies included some philosophic groups, but their views rarely proved widely influential on social mores.) Some Greeks thanked the deity for not making them animals, women or non-Greeks; some Jewish teachers thanked God for not making them Gentiles, women or ignorant people (in some versions, slaves).

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 all believers.

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 practice and in household codes, which explained the proper relations of all

members of a household with the head of the household, minor children, like slaves, were subordinated; only after leaving the home did a child achieve fullest freedom. 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 (at least regarding property; cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 3.211).

4:2. Minors were required to be under legal “guardians” if their father was deceased (e.g., Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 31.73); this guardian was normally chosen from the father’s will, or, if this was 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. Heirs under the testator’s authority could inherit only at the time specified by the latter (Gaius, *Institutes* 2.87) or at puberty (1.196; later in some places, Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 1.13). In antiquity people considered it unwise to give a minor heir access to the resources prematurely (e.g., *Sifre Deuteronomy* 11.1.2).

4:3. In their previous, pagan state, the Galatians had revered the elements of the universe as deities (e.g., wind, fire and other aspects of nature such as the sea; Judaism had long since demythologized them as angels who ruled over nature, like those implied in Ps 148:2-4; cf. *1 *Enoch* 20:2; 60:12-22; 66:1-2; **Jubilees* 2:2; *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QM 10.11-12). In late antiquity growing numbers 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 (e.g., *Jubilees* 1:26; *4 *Ezra* 7:74; *Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 3:10). (Some commentators have compared “the fullness of the time”—NASB—to how ripe Greco-Roman culture was for the spread of Christianity; some are more reticent, citing the difficult 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 witness 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, undoubtedly borrowed from Jesus (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. Speakers sometimes deliberately "corrected" themselves to make a stronger point. As was fitting in *rhetorical rebuke, Paul uses harsh language: he is not sure that the Galatians "know" God even now. As in 4:3, the "elemental things" (NASB), "forces" (NIV) or "principles" (ESV, NLT) to which they are returning are presumably the "spirits" (cf. NRSV, GNT) of nature they used to worship as gods (4:8). Foremost among these would be the astral spirits (stars and other celestial bodies), associated with special days and seasonal rituals (4:10; cf. angels of nature and seasons in *1 Enoch* 72:1; 82:10-20). South Galatians were known for their strict and moralistic religion; in addition to Greek imports, Phrygians had indigenous cults, including the mother goddess (contrast perhaps Gal 4:26).

4:10. *Gentiles had unlucky days, special festivals, and so forth. 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 (including regarding calendars, *Jubilees* 6:35). 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 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 resembles 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. Often they intensified their arguments by adding intense emotional appeal, especially toward the end of their case. 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). Reciprocity was important (cf. 1 Kings 22:4); in ancient ideals, friends shared everything in common, so what belonged to one belonged to the other (e.g., Pliny, *Epistles* 1.4.2-3; 6.30.1).

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 likely 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) 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, attested in various sources. 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. Letter writers sometimes appealed to the recipients' love for them (e.g., Fronto, *Ad M. Caesarem* 5.1-2; Symmachus, *Epistles* 1.95.2). Likewise, letter writers sometimes affirmed their affection by protesting the recipients' lack of or decline in comparable affection.

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). Speakers would sometimes ask what crime they committed against their hearers (e.g., Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 45.8) or would rhetorically confess a noncrime

(cf. Acts 24:14). Speakers could complain if someone treated them as an “enemy” without good cause (*Cicero, *For Sestius* 52.111) or could ask why accusers treated the speaker as an enemy when he has loved them so much (Sallust, *Letter of Gnaeus Pompeius* 1).

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. Some others in antiquity borrowed the metaphors of pregnancy, midwifery and birth pangs for their arduous work.

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. (Pretending such distress that one could not decide what to do was called *aporia* by rhetoricians.) 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 could include 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 this promise. Unlike the interpretations of Philo and some other interpreters of his day (and not a few modern sermon illustrations), Paul's "allegory" (a term with a wider sense in the first century) is an analogy controlled by the biblical text, not merely by what he wants to say. Some think that Paul replies to an opposing argument that only Jewish people and circumcised converts can be Abraham's children.

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). (Scholars have often 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 and 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" (e.g., 4 Ezra 10:7; cf. Is 66:7-10 with 65:17-18). Others spoke of the Jerusalem "above" (4 Baruch 5:35). (*Gentiles often spoke of earth as a "mother," and the mother goddess was particularly popular in Phrygian Galatia;*

but Gentiles also spoke of their “mother city” and would understand that Jerusalem was Judeans’ mother city.) 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. Isaiah 54:1, following Isaiah 53, depicts the restoration of God’s people in terms of Jerusalem as a mother giving birth (relevant for Gal 4:26). 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. Perhaps Isaiah himself intended such an allusion (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). Circumcision was a sign of the covenant, but a greater proof of the new covenant is the gift of the Spirit (Ezek 36:24-27), which makes the lesser sign unnecessary; the Messiah’s coming 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, who resist the real point of the new covenant, 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* (regarding Cain and Abel); 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 that it is instead the opponents who are. 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 lest Ishmael have a legal right to Isaac’s inheritance. 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 Book of Galatians

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 basic 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.* Stoics believed that all transgressions were equal (Pliny, *Epistles* 8.2.3); many others rejected this idea (e.g., *Cicero, *On the Ends* 4.27.74-75).

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 more fully 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 “hindering” (cf. NASB), possibly meaning “cutting in” (NIV, fitting the term’s etymology, though it can refer to any sort of interrupting or hindering), which throws the runners off balance and perhaps out of the race. *Rhetorically skilled persons liked to play with words, and Paul here alludes to circumcision (which involved cutting), as in 5:12 (“cut off,” KJV).

5:9. 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.

5:10. Letter writers urging a course of action sometimes expressed confidence in their readers (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 2.4.2).

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 accommodated themselves (6:12-13). (If his readers are in South Galatia, Acts 13–14 records some of the persecutions.)

5:12. “Cutting themselves off” (cf. KJV) could mean to cut themselves off from the community, but most commentators take the words as meaning “mutilate” (NASB), “emasculate” (NIV) or “castrate” (NRSV, GNT) themselves: while they are circumcising others, they ought to make a full sweep of themselves and remove the entire 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. (Many people also ridiculed some self-castrated followers of a Phrygian goddess.) 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; Ezek 34:3; Mic 3:2-3) used the metaphor of being eaten by others as a grotesque description of a horrible fate or inconceivable wickedness, such as exploitation (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 and so on (e.g., Lev 26:3; 1QS 3.9; 5.10 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls); it meant “behaving” in these ways. Jewish teachers described their moral laws derived from the Old

Testament law as *halakhah*, which literally means “walking.” Although this expression was not as common in Greek, Paul’s hearers (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”—GNT), and suggests the best (or worst) anyone can do in himself or herself. Philosophers and Jewish teachers sometimes spoke of an internal conflict between reason and passion, but some argue that the point here is that, 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). (Where such binary language appears in ancient sources, it speaks in principle rather than claiming perfection; although the Dead Sea Scrolls recognize that all humans are imperfect in themselves, they speak of humans being ruled either by the spirit of truth or the spirit of error.) See comment on the introduction to Romans 8:1-11.

5:18. Philosophers often said that the wise person 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 (cf. Ezek 36:25-27) 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 most Gentile writers (who often said one merely needed to avoid excess in most vices). Ancient moralists also could use lists of virtues (5:22-23; Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 4.3; in the Old Testament, cf. Ps 15). Some writers, like here, laid vice and virtue lists side by side to contrast them. 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 challenged throughout the letter (2:16; 3:2, 5, 10, 12), but "of the flesh" (KJV, NASB, NRSV) 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); Greek sometimes employed the term figuratively. 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). *Philosophers sometimes contrasted positive and negative emotions (Peripatetics trying to rule the latter, and Stoics rejecting the latter wholesale); some of their positive ones correspond with much of Paul's fruit of the Spirit, although his concern is moral more than emotional (e.g., "peace" may be at least partly relational, Rom 12:18; 14:19; 2 Cor 13:11).*

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; Stoics (the most popular philosophic school of the era) spoke of all passions (negative emotions) being eradicated in the (ideal) wise person, although generally not claiming to have attained this themselves. Paul speaks here not of controlling or overcoming passions, however, but of a completed death with *Christ in principle (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" 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 and patient reproof for the other person's good, and often stressed examining oneself before correcting others. Judaism 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; others argue that 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. Philosophers also warned about the ignorant thinking themselves to be someone when they were nothing (*Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.24.19; Diogenes Laertius 2.38).

6:4-5. Greek literature includes some maxims similar to "each one shall bear his own load" (6:5, NASB), which usually stress self-sufficiency. This could relate

here to supporting oneself and others (6:6), but in the context of stressing humility in dealing with others (6:1, 3-4), bearing one's own load (6:5) might mean answering to God himself for what one has done (6:7-8).

6:6-10

Providing for Others

This passage may have a financial emphasis (6:6, 10), although it need not be limited to the collection for the Jerusalem *church (1 Cor 16:1), as some scholars have suggested.

6:6. Many teachers charged fees for their instruction; some philosophers insisted that they and their students should share all things in common, and some groups of teachers and *disciples lived communally. 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), as did some other ancient authors; thus here he might continue the thought of 6:6. “Do not be deceived” was a familiar phrase in ancient moral exhortation (e.g., Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.20.7; 2.22.15).

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 (cf. Ezek 37:5-14).

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, some suggest, 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 expresses (as it often did) special affection, his literary competence and/or the special importance of what he writes.

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 may speak of these culture-bound missionaries as if they want to show the Galatians’ foreskins to their senders. See comment on 4:29 and 5:11.

6:14. Paul boasts in a wounding (cf. 6:17) far more severe than circumcision: crucifixion. He is thus unafraid to face persecution from hostile Jewish leaders; cf. 5:11.

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 *halakhah* (see comment on 5:16). The phrase “peace be with/on” someone was a common Jewish expression; 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. (The blessing of “mercy upon” someone was also familiar; e.g., Jubilees 1:20; 22:9; *Psalms of Solomon 4:25.) Scholars dispute whether “Israel” here means the faithful Jewish remnant or all believers as spiritual heirs of Abraham (3:7, 29).

6:17. Soldiers or others often displayed their wounds as signs of loyalty or to invite sympathy for their claims. Some slaves (cf. *Philo, *That Every Good Person Is Free* 10), 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, 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), who was flogged

and nailed to the cross; the evidence was Paul's "scars" (GNT) from his past persecutions (5:11; 6:12-13).

6:18. The term often translated "brothers" here 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 often addressed one another in this manner; see comment on Acts 9:17. For a blessing of *grace, see comment on Galatians 1:3; Romans 1:7.

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 some basic philosophic language to communicate to his hearers (Acts 19:9). That Paul could adapt his language to his audience, including those to whom the occasional sort of *Stoic language in Ephesians appealed, is evident elsewhere in his writings (e.g., Rom 1; 1 Cor 8); such language is more common in Ephesians and Philippians, with some 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). Rhetoric could expand statements, sometimes to underline their force; cf., e.g., “power” and “might” in Ephesians 1:19 (also Col 1:11; 2 Pet 2:11; but also, e.g., 1 Chron 29:12). Some compare this more flowery rhetorical style of repetition in Ephesians to what

ancient writers called the Asian rhetorical style, which would be appropriate in and around Ephesus. 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. To the extent that we can speak of rhetoric in letters (which were usually nonrhetorical, but also usually did not include argumentation as Paul's letters do), the rhetoric here is mixed: 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 Roman custody, 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). Ethnic and 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 struggle of some of the believers with their 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 Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, AB 34, 34A, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974); and A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990). Less technical but useful commentaries include PHEME Perkins, *Ephesians*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997); Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); G. B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison*, New Clarendon Bible (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); George Johnston, *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon*, Century Bible (Greenwood, SC: Attic, 1967). Some of my primary sources for my treatment of Ephesians 5:18–6:9 appear in Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* (Grand Rapids:

Baker Academic, 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 Ephesus (the province’s most prominent city) was one of the cities addressed, and 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 and blessings from deity; 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 believers that whatever their ethnic or cultural background, they are all one people in *Christ and must work together for God’s purposes (cf. 2:11-22).

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. Salvation was God's initiative, because of his love (Deut 7:7-9). The Old Testament declares that God "predestined" or (literally) "chose" Israel (e.g., Deut 14:2) 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 and what God has done, 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 Old Testament also connected forgiveness with the blood of animal sacrifices. Paul blends these images here. Closely related terms such as "wisdom" and "insight" were often paired in biblical language (e.g., Ex 31:3; 35:31; Prov 1:2, 7; 2:2, 6).

1:9-12. Jewish people sometimes spoke of the secrets or mysteries of God's plan, now revealed (e.g., Dan 2:27-30; *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 4.6; 11.19). 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 Scripture suggested that the *Spirit would be made especially available in the time of the end (cf., e.g., Joel 2:28), 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). Writers sometimes repeated a refrain, as here (for God’s praise in 1:6, 12, 14); the repetition of “in whom” (1:7, 11, 13; cf. 2:21-22; 3:12) also reinforces the point (similar to *rhetorical *anaphora*, repeating an opening phrase).

1:15-23

Prayer for Revelation

Ancient letters often included prayers or mention of prayers for the recipients, though these were typically brief.

1:15-16. Like pious Jews, pious Christians apparently had a time set aside for prayer each day. Many pious Jews prayed several times 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” (cf. 1QS 4.3 in the Dead Sea Scrolls; *4 Ezra 5:22; the Old Testament especially emphasizes this: e.g., Ex 28:3; 31:3; 35:31; Is 11:2; cf. Deut 34:9). For blessings about enlightening, see, for example, Numbers 6:25; Psalm 19:8; for enlightening with wisdom, see, e.g., 1QS 2.3 in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

*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 begun: 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 yet been destroyed (Ps 110:1). The piling up of closely related words (such as power, strength and might; cf., e.g., 1 Chron 29:12; Is 40:26; Jer 16:21; 1 Enoch 1:4; 60:16)* fit Jewish praise and also the sort of flowery rhetoric valued for praise in Asia Minor; God’s power was experienced through the Spirit (Mic 3:8; Zech 4:6; cf. Eph 1:17). On “heavenly places,” see comment on 1:3.

1:21-23. The subordination of these powers beneath *Christ in this age and the coming one express the confident exaltation above enemies in Ps 110:1 (linked with Ps 8:6; cf. 1 Cor 15:27). 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 spirit-powers being invoked and could not be exploited.

By Paul’s day Jewish people commonly recognized that demonic and/or angelic powers were at work behind the political structures of the world; these powers were thus thought to direct the earthly rulers and peoples (v. 21; see Deut 32:8 LXX; **Jubilees* 15:31-32; 35:17; Dead Sea Scrolls 1QM 15.13-14; *1 Enoch* 61:10; esp. Dan 10:13, 20; for angelic ranks, *1 Enoch* 69:3).

A growing view among some in Paul’s day was that the world was run by Fate, which was usually expressed by the stars (which were viewed as heavenly beings). Some *mystery cults, such as the cult of Isis, later gained popularity by claiming power to free initiates from Fate. Jewish people often believed that these powers ruled all the nations except Israel (*Jubilees* 15:32; *Sifre Deuteronomy* 315.2.1; cf. Dan 10:21; 12:1); later, by the third century, some teachers explained that Israel had been lifted above those heavenly powers in Abraham their ancestor (*Genesis Rabbah* 44:12; 48:6). 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). Some may have expected *eschatological exaltation to the heavens (**Testament of Moses* 10:8-10; cf. Dan 12:3).

Jewish teachers came to speak of these heavenly powers that guided earthly rulers as “angels of the nations.” 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 (see introduction to 1:3-14). 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). Rhetoric liked repetition for emphasis, thus the repetition of both filling and “all” here (for two “all” words together for emphasis, cf., e.g., *Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 118); rhetoric also liked alliteration, and in Greek these repeated words begin with *p*. Such language was common in expressing praise for gods or rulers.

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 (cf., e.g., 1QS 3.20-21; 1QM 17.5-6 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls*). “*Ruler with authority over the realm of the air*” was a natural title for his dominion; it was commonly believed that evil spirits circulated especially in 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. Some spoke of nonphysical death: for example, Pythagoreans considered apostates “dead,” Philo regarded those who neglected their soul as “dead,” later rabbis called the wicked “dead,” and so forth.

2:3. Many Jewish people sought to explain all sin as the direct result of demonic activity (cf., e.g., *Jubilees* 10:8; 12:20; especially the “spirit of error” in the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, e.g., 1QS 3.19, 24-25). 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 ethnic division—1:21-23); one is not delivered from this influence by one’s Israelite ancestry but (vv. 4-6) through faith in Jesus. “Children of wrath” is a Semitic construction indicating people destined for judgment.

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, the stars, *magic or spirits: 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 spirits, 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), and did not choose them because of their righteousness (Deut 9:5-6); 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 apparently agreed in principle 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. Most ancient Jewish people believed that 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. That done “by hands” evokes a negative phrase in the Greek version of the *Old Testament (usually associated with idolatry; e.g., Lev 26:1).

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 the specified 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(*Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.194; 6.124-26). 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* (cf. 2:20-22). *Paul’s message would have been difficult for believers in many cities; a few years after this letter, the Gentile residents of Caesarea (where Paul had recently stayed, Acts 23:23) slaughtered thousands of its Jewish residents (Josephus, Jewish War 2.457-58); Jews retaliated and attacked other cities (2.458-60); and Syrians then slaughtered thousands of Jews (2.461-68). For “He is our peace,” cf. perhaps 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. In many cities, foreigners who settled could remain “resident aliens” for generations, lacking voting rights and other privileges that belonged to citizens. Paul can play on the different senses of “house” in Greek: both “household” (as here) and a building (the temple as God’s house; see 2:20-22).

2:20-22. 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 or capstone from Ps 118:22, probably via Jesus’ teaching; see comment on Mk 11:10.)

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, multiethnic, interracial people in all its glory.

3:1. Being a Roman prisoner was normally a mark of shame but, like wounds (see comment on Gal 6:17), could arouse sympathy among loved ones. Paul's refusal to compromise the mission to the *Gentiles had precipitated his captivity (Acts 22:21-22; cf. 21:28).

3:2. Instead of immediately finishing the sentence begun in 3:1, Paul digresses concerning his mission for the Gentiles in 3:2-13; *digressions were common in ancient writings. "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. In the *Dead Sea Scrolls* 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. The content of his teaching would also be striking because of the frequent conflict between Jew and Gentile and frequency of anti-Judaism in antiquity. The "reading" (literally, 3:4) refers to the public reading of his letter in the worship service, necessary because most people could not read.

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.

3:8-9. When writers formed an unusual expression, as Paul does here (literally, "leaster"), it reinforced the point. For "stewardship" (NRSV: "administration"; NASB: "plan"), see comment on 3:1-2; for "mystery," see

comment on 3:3-5.

3:10-11. 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 ethnic unity of the church (3:6-8) displayed the rule of God, whose authority transcended that of the angels and all earthly boundaries. 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); 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, but in Jewish circles also for prayer; 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. Roman detention was normally a matter of shame; Paul inverts this to honor in view of the reason he is detained. Paul also 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, and some viewed ideal leaders as acting or being used by God for the sake of their people.

3:14-21

Prayer for Empowerment

3:14. Paul returns to the point begun in 3:1 (writers often repeated some wording to signal that they were returning to their point after a *digression). 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). Gentiles sometimes knelt to pray but this was not their usual posture for prayer except in extreme circumstances; 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 (i.e., each group descended from a common progenitor; see notes in NIV, NRSV) reflect God’s own fatherhood over the world (cf., e.g., *Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.11.5); 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 in the sense of creator (*Gentiles often spoke of “the father of gods and people”) 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 (“inner person”) from the Greek world (see comment on 2 Cor 4:16), his ideas here are not specifically Greek, and other Jewish people had already adapted this language. 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; apart from Qumran texts* (depending on the same biblical themes, esp. Ezek 36:25-27), 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 probably applies the language of divine Wisdom (e.g., Job 11:5-9; cf. Job 28:12-28; Sirach 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

Despite exceptions, most ancient letters simply addressed business or personal

issues; many of Paul's letters, however, "preach." 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 an element characteristic of persuasive rhetoric (as the *exhortatio*, or exhortations) and more generally found in the advice of moralists and philosophers. Exhortation 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 even for rulers, Greek writers often 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.

4:3-6. Many Jewish teachers praised the virtue of peace. Paul drives home the point by repeating "one" multiple times (though in Greek it appears in varied forms). 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 (on the "body," see comment on 1 Cor 12:12). 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 much the same way that he does). This psalm refers to God's "going up" at Mount Sinai, as Jewish interpreters recognized, and Paul applies the principle 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). Jesus's exaltation positions him to distribute gifts (listed in 4:11) to his people.

4:9-10. Paul interprets and applies the text just cited, the way a good Jewish teacher would. "Lower parts of the earth" probably means the realm of the dead, hence that Jesus had died (Ps 63:9; 86:13; Ezek 32:24; *Prayer of Manasseh* 13), 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 seminal 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; a common image for leaders throughout the ancient Mediterranean world), elsewhere in the New Testament identified as overseers of local congregations (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet 5:1-2; cf. Tit 1:5, 7); they were called to shepherd God’s people, at least partly by declaring his message accurately (cf. 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 is not firmly attested until the early second century (although the translocal networking of churches certainly is). 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 sometimes used in the Greek world to describe training or discipline, including in the work of philosophers and teachers.

4:13-16. The images of a person growing into maturity and a person in trouble as a ship being tossed about by waves were common in Paul’s day. The image of growing to maturity was not usually applied to an entire 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 may

therefore refer 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. Ancient thinkers sometimes depicted moral ignorance as blinded or darkened minds. 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. earlier 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 considered typically Gentile sins from which nearly all Jews abstained; they expected *proselytes to Judaism to reject this former lifestyle. By contrast, Greeks were raised with this lifestyle; for example, many Greek men had intercourse or affairs with boys on the verge of puberty or with adolescents. “Walk” (KJV, NASB) means “behave”; see comment on Galatians 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 presumably 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 (cf. comment on Rom 5:12-21). Thus, he points out, one should live accordingly. “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. They even understood conversion to Judaism or philosophy as adopting a new way of life. 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. Failures in these areas 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 one must speak truth to one another and 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. (For taking care of matters before nightfall, cf. Deut 24:13, 15.) Learning to speak in the most helpful way (4:29) was also stressed.

4:27. The image here might be one of warfare, and that the one who sins surrenders ground to the devil’s side (cf. 6:10-20). Following the Old Testament, Jewish tradition understood the devil (*Satan, Belial) as deceiver, tempter and accuser.

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 Israel’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 or document, see comment on

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). Piling up related terms reinforced a point.

4:32–5:2. Other moralists, including Greek and Roman non-Christians, appealed to the imitation of God for a standard of ethics. But non-Christian 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.) Earlier Scripture also urged imitation of God (Lev 11:44-45; 19:2), a theme elaborated in Jewish tradition (e.g., **Letter of Aristeas* 188, 190, 192, 208, 209, 210, 254, 281; **Philo, Special Laws* 4.73; *Decalogue* 98, 100; *Virtues* 168; *Allegorical Interpretation* 1.48; *Sifra Qedoshim* par. 1.195.1.3).

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 pleasing 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 **Gentile* society as they are in many societies 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. Sexual humor was highlighted, for example, in mimes used for entertainment; Paul would not have approved of finding them

humorous. 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 that were regarded as a mark of local loyalty.

5:8-13. Jewish texts (most prominently the Dead Sea Scrolls) often used “light” and “darkness” to contrast good and evil, and Paul milks this image here. Taverns often doubled as brothels upstairs, exploiting slave prostitutes; deeds that people wished to perform in secret were often performed at night. Some Greek religious groups known as “*mystery cults” emphasized night initiations, and some of them also developed a reputation for sexual immorality; because some Roman critics of all foreign religions associated Christians with immoral cults, Paul would have 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 suggested 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). Also possible is 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. Psalm 90:12; **Letter of Aristeas* 256; the idea may resemble “seizing the opportunity.” The *LXX of Daniel 2:8 uses the phrase for trying to gain a delay (“buying time”). (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 participles of verses 19-21 flow out of Paul’s command to “be filled with the Spirit” and express the nature of *Spirit-filled living. Jewish tradition regarded drunkenness as scandalous behavior (cf. Prov 23:20-35).

Drunkenness was associated with loss of self-control and was common in the

late-night banquets of the rich and the taverns of the poor. Sometimes people also associated it with a sort of inspiration, madness or possession by Dionysus, god of wine. In some settings, Dionysus's most active worshipers had a reputation for being possessed by him and performing sexual acts or acts full of sexual symbolism (often to the distaste of conservative Romans). Being controlled by drink was a far cry from inspiration by God's Spirit.

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" may refer to Spirit-inspired songs (cf. 1 Chron 25:1-6; Eph 5:18), possibly spontaneous, which would clearly distinguish Christian worship from nearly all worship in antiquity (cf. 1 Cor 14:15).

5:20. The 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"; ancients used such codes to express what their culture regarded as virtuous relations within the family. 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 could undermine traditional Roman family values. Members of these minority religions often tried to show their support for those values by using household codes, 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 often break down into discussions of husband-wife, father-child and master-slave relationships. Paul borrows this form of discussion from standard Greco-Roman moral writing. Paul is probably concerned with outsiders' views of Jesus' movement (cf. 1 Tim 5:14; Tit 2:5). But unlike most ancient writers, Paul undermines a basic premise of these codes: the male head of the house's assumption of absolute authority.

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 (cf. Mark 10:43-45) was unheard of. A minority of ancient writers did express the value of mutual concern and sensitivity.

5:22-24. Wifely submission remained the ideal (see e.g., *Philo, *Creation* 167; *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.255; Marcus Aurelius 1.17.7). 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, sometimes early teens).

In this passage, however, Paul differs from the usual conventions, which normally addressed only the male head of the household. The closest Paul comes to *specifically* defining submission here 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). Note also the difference in 5:25.

5:25. Although it was assumed that husbands should love their wives, ancient household codes typically told husbands not how to love their wives but how to rule them. Although Paul upholds the ancient ideal of wifely submission, 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 some cultural values by going far beyond them. Both husbands and wives must submit and love (5:2, 21).

5:26. This “washing” might allude 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 (5:26).

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 head-body 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.

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. Household codes (and thus this passage) particularly addressed minor children.

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 may be among the minority of ancient writers who 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

Household codes (see comment at 5:21-33) told the male householder how to rule his wife, children and slaves. Of these, slaves more often faced the worst abuses, though household slaves could often become free (see comment on 1 Cor 7:21-22).

The slaveholding class had various stereotypes of slaves, for example that they 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.

Given Christians' tenuous social situation (cf. 1 Tim 5:14; 6:1), Paul urges Christian slaves, like wives, to 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 because against nature, 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); almost no one discussed the question in his day. In the Roman Empire even slave revolts were meant to free particular slaves, not to end slavery, and these were brutally suppressed anyway. But the way Paul deals with the issue leaves no doubt where he would have stood had we put the question of slavery's abolition to him: people are equals before God (6:9). Apart from groups that eschewed ownership of everything, others who might have agreed with Paul in principle did not carry the practical advice as far as he (mutual submission). 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 could resemble a *peroratio*, a rousing conclusion to his case. Philosophers and other speakers 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. Some compare aspects of Paul's conclusion to 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 hearers 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*) and dagger. (Usually soldiers had two *pila*; they could imbed the first into an enemy shield, making it unwieldy, and then strike with the second.) Paul probably has no particular purpose in correlating specific strengths of the Christian with specific armor body parts (cf. 1 Thess 5:8); rather, he wants his readers to know that they need all these strengths to be victorious.

6:10-11. Ancient exhortations regarded retreat and wounds in the back as disgraceful (note that none of the following armor covers the back). 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 in the heavens (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 (see comment on Eph 1:21-23); "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 (cf., e.g., Amos 5:13; 6:3; 2 Maccabees 1:5; Sirach 51:11-12; Eph 5:16), though 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 some scholars believe Paul elsewhere 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 over the tunic 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 most commonly 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 deemed 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 sexual desire 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 or iron 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 double-edged 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. It is not clear that prayer for one another (v. 18) continues the figurative image of warfare in the preceding context, but if it does 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 considered 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). In Greek, the alliteration of multiple *p*- words could appeal to Paul’s hearers as rhetorically sensitive.

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. Chains were normally deemed a mark of great shame.

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. Given the personal allusions and style, 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 (more common in the past than today). The division of Philippians is not impossible: short letters were often sent in antiquity, and Paul maintained regular contact with the Philippians. Conversely, letters often had multiple subjects, especially when they were as long as 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 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, as a majority of scholars think), 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). Exhortations to unity were commonplace in antiquity, but usually corresponded to genuinely present and no less common divisions. At least part of the division here 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. Useful commentaries for background include Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, WBC 43 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983); and Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). On a less technical level, see, e.g., Ben Witherington III, *Friendship and Finances in Philippi* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1994).

1:1-2

Introduction

1:1. The title “servants” is not necessarily demeaning in either a Jewish setting (the prophets had been called “servants of God”) or a Greco-Roman one (slaves of the emperor and other high officials wielded far more power than independent free persons). On “overseers” and “deacons,” see comment on 1 Timothy 3:1, 8, where these terms also occur together. Some letters opened by naming multiple authors, yet continued as if written only by the first one (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 16.11.1).

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 may mean that he thanks God during his regular prayers for the Philippians (cf. Phil 4:6). Letter writers often remarked that they had joy when thinking of or hearing about the recipient.

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. Writers or speakers of

exhortations or requests often expressed confidence that the recipient would do well; Paul's confidence in their perseverance is based on 1:5, 7.

1:7. Letters of friendship often mentioned sharing one another's feelings (including sorrows). Given his imprisonment and legal situation, Paul also naturally uses language common in legal proceedings: the "defense" and "confirmation," or vindication, acquittal. His situation was relevant to their own (see comment on Phil 1:19). People often abandoned their friends if the latter were imprisoned or otherwise shamed, but loyalty was respected.

1:8. Letters of friendship often displayed affection and mentioned the writer's longing for his friends. 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 often filled in readers on recent news; public documents and speeches usually included a narrative component leading up to the circumstances of writing.

1:12. *Stoic philosophers argued that imprisonment, like death, was not a bad thing; Jewish faith recognized that God was sovereign even in sufferings (cf., e.g., Joseph's imprisonment).

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 detention in Rome 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 several thousand free Italian soldiers in twelve cohorts of as many as a thousand each. They were the emperor's elite bodyguard under the praetorian prefect. Viewed as *clients of the emperor (thus part of his extended 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).

1:14-17. Despite the disapproval of some philosophers, competition for honor was a central value for men in much of society, including, conspicuously, Rome and its colonies. 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. Ancient writers and speakers sometimes outlined alternatives (1:15) before elaborating them (1:16-17).

1:18. "What then?" was a common phrase for furthering an argument or transitioning to a conclusion. One could repeat a word or phrase for emphasis (thus here Paul's rejoicing, though he varies the verb tense and voice; ancient hearers also appreciated variation).

1:19. "This will turn out for my deliverance" precisely echoes Job 13:16 in the *Septuagint, although Paul, unlike Job, sees God as his defender here. "Salvation" (KJV) often meant physical "deliverance," sometimes from prison, and in this context it must have this meaning. Not all residents of Philippi were citizens, but those who were Philippian citizens (who would often be the most prominent members of the *church) were also Roman citizens (see comment on 3:20) and as such enjoyed certain legal protections. 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. Ancient speakers sometimes contemplated their options in front of their audiences (though the choice here is not really Paul's). Philosophers often argued that death was neutral, not evil; it was either annihilation or the migration of the soul from one place to another. They contended that it could be either advantageous or not, and that one could choose accordingly. Paul sees death as an evil (1 Cor 15:26) and not something to be chosen, but also, when it comes in God's plan, as a way to pursue *Christ undistracted (2 Cor 5:4-10). Most Judeans 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 Greco-Roman writers expressed a desire to die and so be free from sufferings; Old Testament writers did not usually take this position (Ps 30:9), but some became discouraged enough to express this sentiment (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. Ancient thinkers sometimes argued that one should use reason to determine whether it was more profitable to die or to continue to endure suffering for the good one could accomplish (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to His Brother Quintus* 1.3.1-2; Pliny, *Epistles* 1.22.9-10). Although Paul's death, if it happened, would not be voluntary, he reasons nonetheless; his remaining would help them by virtue of his continuance as a teacher, and perhaps also for legal precedent: see comment on 1:19. Speakers commonly cited "necessity" as a reason for a choice; a writer who affirmed that he clung to life for another's sake (Phil 1:24) thereby also demonstrated love for them (e.g., *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 104.2-3; Fronto, *Ad M. Caesarem* 5.33/48).

1:25-26. "Progress" was commonly used for educational or moral advancement. (Although Stoics viewed people as either perfect or not, according to ideal types, on the practical level even they emphasized "progress" toward virtue.) Nero was not particularly interested in legal questions, and in A.D. 62 he freed Jewish prisoners that the procurator Felix had previously sent him (Josephus, *Life* 16). 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 Greek terminology sometimes applied to 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; 2 Maccabees 6:1; 3 Maccabees 3:4; 4 Maccabees 2:8; 5:16). On the athletic image (here undoubtedly implied in the Greek word that KJV and NASB translate "striving together"), see comment on 1:30. Exhortations to unity commonly included calls to be "of one mind" or the like.

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. Cf. Wisdom of Solomon 5:1-2; Baruch 4:24-25.

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. Although the term had also developed a more generic use, Paul probably applies the language of ancient athletic competitions (“contest” or “conflict”—KJV, NASB) to the life of the moral person, as do many Greek moralists. 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. Despite its *rhetorical patterns, the material need not be a hymn per se; ancient writers and speakers often used exalted prose, sometimes even with rhythm, to describe deities.)

2:1-4. Competition for honor was heavy in Roman society, a behavior if anything more pronounced in Philippi. Paul borrows language commonly used

in Greek *homonoia* speeches, which advocated harmony and unity among the hearers. Most philosophers advocated preferring the larger good to one's own. Jewish teachers also had maxims such as, "Value your fellow's honor no less than your own" (cf. Mishnah *Avot* 2:10; *Avot of Rabbi Nathan* 15, 19 A; 29, §60B). One could urge a person to act on the basis of affection, e.g., sometimes for the exhorter (Fronto, *Ad M. Caesarem* 5.1: "If you have any love at all for me . . .").

2:5-6. Some intellectuals urged being of "one mind" with the gods, having the correct, divine perspective. 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. Also and probably 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; cf. comment on Col 1:15). (One might contrast Jesus' voluntary surrender of status with the emperor during Paul's time, Nero, who aspired to divinity.)

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 uses a more specific Greek word for "slave" [so NRSV] here than appears for the servant in the *LXX of Isaiah 53; elsewhere, however, cf. Is 49:5, 7.)

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. Writers and speakers sometimes repeated a word (here "death") to reinforce the point.

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 more than glory (Is 52:14–53:11), Paul either does not refer to it here (the term in Isaiah is very common in the *Septuagint) 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 including the rebellious angels who rule the *Gentile nations (see comment on Eph 1:21-23). 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 at best rare in pre-Christian literature outside *Old Testament teachings on the *Spirit*; see comment on Galatians 2:19-20. "*Fear and trembling*" appear together often in the Old Testament and Jewish sources (cf., e.g., Ps 55:5; 4 Maccabees 4:10; *1 Enoch 14:13).

2:14. "Grumbling" and "disputing" (NASB) had characterized Israel in the wilderness and were condemned in the Old Testament; philosophers who emphasized the wisdom of the gods did not approve either. See comment on 1 Corinthians 10:9-10.

2:15. "Crooked and perverted generation" closely echoes Deut 32:5, which complains that rebellious Israelites are not God's children; here, by contrast, believers are God's children. 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). The expression "labor in vain" was not uncommon; on athletic metaphors, see comment on Phil 1:30; 3:12-14.

2:17-24

The Examples of Paul and Timothy

Paul continues to model the servant lifestyle by examples.

2:17-18. Israel had drink offerings (e.g., Lev 23:18, 37), and other ancient religions also regularly poured out libations to the gods, usually wine but sometimes water or another substance. *Gentiles also poured libations at the beginning of banquets and could pour them in memory of person who had died. 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. Travelers regularly carried news and letters.

2:20-21. 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 recommendation,” 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. Those writing letters of recommendation often offered such superlative praises (occasionally for more than one person). Thus Cicero can claim, “There is no one like him” (e.g., Letters to Friends 13.1.5; 13.18.2; 13.26.1); or “This is the most special recommendation” (Letters to Friends 13.32.2; 13.34.1; 13.35.1).*

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 an available traveler and otherwise by a 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

People often wrote letters of recommendation, often supporting the carrier; Paul includes this recommendation in his larger letter. 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 firm conclusions about his ethnic origin may be drawn from it, but the context suggests that he was from Philippi. Soldier metaphors (2:25) appear elsewhere, and military images were common (see comment on Rom 13:12).

People often reported on theirs or others’ health in personal letters, as well as expressing concern for others’ health. We cannot know the cause of Epaphroditus’s ill health, but malaria, for example, was very common, and typhoid existed. *Gentiles 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.” “Risked” (in “risked 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*; on this view 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 *digression. Some scholars have suggested that it was a different Pauline letter accidentally inserted into the middle of Philippians (though in papyri such accidents must have been extremely uncommon), or one combined with several other Pauline letters to the Philippians. But digressions were common in ancient speaking and writing, and literary connections with the rest of the letter strengthen the suggestion that it is part of a unified letter.

3:1. The expression often translated “finally” here sometimes indicated the end of a letter (cf. GNT: “in conclusion”), but just as often functioned as a transition device within a letter (cf. 1 Thess 4:1; 2 Thess 3:1; cf. *Testament of Reuben* 5:5). (Less relevantly, “ending” twice also could fit the casual nature of some letters; cf., e.g., apparent plans to end in Pliny, *Epistles* 3.9.26-27, 37; *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 119.9, 16.) One might also say again a point that bore repeating (and even say so, e.g., *Cicero, *On Friendship* 22.85). Reminders were common in moral exhortation.

3:2. The threefold repetition of “beware” is *rhetorical *anaphora*, opening repetition to highlight a point. The opponents here are not Jewish persecutors, who would be unlikely in Philippi, which apparently had a very small Jewish community (cf. Acts 16:13). Rather, they are like the traveling Jewish Christian teachers Paul had encountered in Galatia who want to circumcise *Gentiles. Scholars debate whether they have already visited Philippi or are simply traveling about; if the latter, Paul is warning that they may come there.

“Dog” was a familiar insult, sometimes implying dogs’ vulgar public sexual, excretory or (cf. 3:8, 19) dietary habits. *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. Philosophers called those ruled by passions “beasts.” Probably more to the point, Jewish teaching considered dogs unclean and sometimes sexually immoral; the *Old Testament might apply the title to male cult prostitutes (Deut 23:17); especially to enemies in Psalm 22:16. 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. Plays on words were common; cf. mutilation (katatome) here and circumcision (peritome) in 3:3.*

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 for the *church that confirms the *Messiah’s arrival and that most of his Jewish contemporaries (possibly excepting other “fringe” groups such as the Qumran sectarians) 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. Gentile lists of praises (cf. Menander Rhetor 2.3, 385.5-9) could begin with nature and nurture (cf. Phil 3:5) and proceed to accomplishments and actions, the latter including the four cardinal virtues (which included justice; cf. 3:6). Gentile lists of a person’s 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—in practice 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 Judea 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 Paul’s opponents now claimed to be.*

3:6. “Zeal” for the law did not always or necessarily 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 “gains”—NIV; or “profit”—GNT) and “loss” are marketplace terms, like other terms later in the letter (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” (ESV, NASB, NRSV; “garbage”—NIV) 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, but Paul understands that this is found in Christ.

3:10. The ultimate revelation in the Old Testament was to “know” God (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. On the imitation of God, see comment on Ephesians 5:1.

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), though Paul speaks here of his own sufferings (Phil 3:10-11).

3:12-13. In the language of athletic competition—often used metaphorically by ancient moralists (e.g., *Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.17.29; Diogenes Laertius 6.2.34) and Greek-speaking Jews (e.g., **Testament of Job* 4:10; *Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.217-18)—Paul describes his striving for the future hope of 3:11. Greco-Roman sages generally admitted that they were not yet “perfect” (in contrast to the *ideal* sage) but were making progress. Nevertheless they sometimes spoke of themselves as the “mature,” the wise, as opposed to those who were still novices. (Older 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 often 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). (“Above” or “upward” also alludes to Christ in heaven, 3:20; cf. Col 3:1-2.) In Paul’s metaphor, the prize is the full revelation of Christ at the resurrection (3:10-11).

3:15. In philosophy, those who were advanced in learning, as opposed to novice students, could be described as “mature” (NIV, NRSV; “perfect”—KJV, NASB). (This was, however, mostly “in principle”; *Stoics depicted the ideal so starkly that even sages did not claim to have attained it themselves.)

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) or “keep to a straight line”; possibly here Paul adapts his

race metaphor from 3:12-14 (races were often in straight lines and back), although this is by no means 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. *Disciples often learned by imitating their teachers; examples were important for learning. (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, both expressions of outrage (3:2) and “weeping,” which often invited audiences to feel the same. Letter writers could also mention their tears (e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to His Brother Quintus* 1.3.3; Pliny, *Epistles* 5.21.6). “With tears” (NIV, NRSV, GNT) or “weeping” (KJV, NASB) indicates his love for his opponents.

3:19. Greco-Roman 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”—GNT). This would be a serious insult to those who thought they were zealous for the *law (*Diaspora Jews emphasized how the law enabled them to master passions); 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 some of the church, especially owners of many or most of the 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.

Philosophers sometimes declared themselves citizens of the world rather than any mere city-state. Citizenship in heaven was more important than descent from a tribe in Israel (3:5). (“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 (e.g., Is 45:21), it provides a stark contrast with the paganism Christians outside greater Judea 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, but many Jews valued the whole person; see comment on 1 Cor 15). Many Jewish conceptions of the resurrection body differed from the current body (cf. Dan 12:2-3). 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. Letters often expressed longing to see the recipient in person. That the Philippians are Paul’s “crown” indicates that they are in some sense his prize (potentially fitting his recent athletic metaphor; 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 in 4:4-9 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. Macedonian and Roman women had more freedoms than women in more traditionally Greek areas, and

inscriptions indicate heavy involvement of women in the religious activities of this city.

4:3. Ancients appreciated mediators who could reconcile estranged parties (see, e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 1.3; also 1.5; 1.10; *Tacitus, *Histories* 2.5). 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 CD* 20.19; *Jubilees* 36:10).

4:4. One could repeat a word or phrase for emphasis (see comment on Phil 1:18). Constant rejoicing, like constant gratitude (cf. 4:6), reflects confidence in God (see comment on Eph 5:20).

4:5. “The Lord is near” could refer to the Second Coming (3:20-21; cf. Is 13:6; Ezek 30:3; Joel 1:15; 3:14; Zeph 1:7) or that the Lord is close to his people and hears their cries (see Deut 4:7; Ps 34:18; 145:18).

4:6-7. “Peace” (v. 7) could indicate tranquility (vs. the anxiety in v. 6), a trait valued by many philosophers, although in the context of unity it may also have its usual meaning of peace with one another (as in Greco-Roman *homonoia* speeches; cf. 4:2). 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 6:24-26) often asked God to keep his people from harm and grant peace. On the mind, cf. 4:8 and 2:5.

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 traditional Jewish hearers. (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 (which could portray him as a dependent on the *church’s benefaction*) while expressing his appreciation. Paul acknowledges their gift graciously, without sounding as if he is requesting more. (*Gratitude may have been particularly valued 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, often opened with a statement of joy about receiving that friend’s letter (e.g., Oxyrhynchus papyri 1676.4-5). Writers also often assured letters’ recipients that the writers trusted the readers’ intentions.

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 closer to the dominant philosophic school of his day [Stoicism] rather than to the Peripatetic [Aristotelian] school. Unlike such philosophers, 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 normally 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, GNT), “what may be credited to your account” (NIV), is literally “fruit” (KJV), but because many business transactions involved crops this was a natural extension in ancient documents. Paul trusts that God will reward the Philippians with interest for their sacrifice on his behalf.

4:18. “I have received” was very common, perhaps 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,” GNT; “acceptable”; sacrificial language was sometimes applied figuratively); 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 mere “wishes” (as some readers take it today). “In glory” (KJV, NASB, NRSV) can be translated “in a glorious way” or “glorious riches.”

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 (in this case probably believers in Rome), 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 any case the probable date of the letter was in Paul's lifetime (see "Situation," below).

By the time Paul wrote Philippians (the likely period also for Colossians), he was increasingly borrowing popular philosophic language (cf. Acts 19:9). But 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 probable 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. Because an earthquake devastated or destroyed Colossae around A.D. 60–64 and it was never completely restored, it is unlikely that a letter would be written even purportedly addressing the *church there after that date; nor could a forgery have gone undetected during Paul's lifetime (which probably lasted till at least A.D. 64).

Colossae. Colossae was in Phrygia, where religion was practiced with intensity. 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); perhaps some received similar letters. As noted above, the city was severely damaged or destroyed by an

earthquake around A.D. 60–64 and never completely restored, 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 strictly limited geographically to Judea, 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 possible.*

That some Jewish Sibylline oracles may issue from that region and the activity of later Christian Montanists there might 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 popular-level Greek philosophy and also some of the popular philosophical ideas that permeated both Gentile and Jewish thought in mid-first-century Asia Minor.*

Commentaries. J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (1879; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), is still helpful; Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, NCB (1974; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), is also helpful; see now also Marianne Meye Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). For more advanced work, important and useful scholarly commentaries include James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, trans. W. R. Poehlman and R. J. Karris, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); Douglas Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Pillar (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC 44 (Waco, TX: Word, 1982); Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982). Some of my primary sources appear in Craig Keener, "Heavenly Mindedness and Earthly Good: Contemplating Matters Above in Colossians 3.1-2," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 6

(2009): 175-90.

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 (cf. comment on Rom 1:7).

1:3-14

Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Fruit Bearers

Thanksgivings to God or gods were fairly common 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 in speeches, 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. Paul’s mention of thanks is not merely conventional, for the purposes of the letter.

1:4. News was often carried by travelers. 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). Speakers and writers often started on a positive note, even if they planned to offer some correction.

1:5. Jewish texts spoke of future rewards already reserved for the righteous (the rewards sometimes depicted as treasures in heaven), 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; comment on Col 1:10).

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 and relational sense of the terms (e.g., Prov 1:2-7).

1:10. On fruit bearing and growing, see Genesis 1:28 (“growing” appears especially in the *LXX), immediately after speaking of humanity being made in God’s image (Gen 1:26-27; cf. Col 3:10); and see comment above on 1:6. On “walk” (literally; KJV, NASB) or “live” (NIV, GNT), see comment on Galatians 5:16. *Gentiles sometimes spoke of people behaving “worthy” of God. Likewise, in Jewish tradition, “worthy” could mean “appropriate to” (2 Maccabees 6:23-24, 27), “deserving of (reward)” (2 Maccabees 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). The Old Testament spoke of knowing God relationally, in covenant with him (Jer 24:7; 31:34; Hos 2:20), an idea developed also in the *Dead Sea Scrolls.

1:11. Paul groups closely related terms here (“power,” “might”); *rhetoric could pile up terms with related meaning to dwell on a point, and such combinations also appear in the Old Testament, especially for praises of God (e.g., 2 Chron 20:6).

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 (see comment on Eph 1:14). 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). Perhaps relevant to Colossians 1:13-14, Jewish people on the Passover described their deliverance from Egypt as a call “from darkness into great light” and redemption from slavery (Mishnah *Pesahim* 10:5). (Some scholars have suggested that the image of transferral from one kingdom to another here recalls the many peoples in the ancient Near East uprooted by powerful rulers and settled elsewhere. But if any image from human kingdoms was intended, the image of a provincial achieving Roman citizenship or Gentiles accepting the yoke of God’s *kingdom in Judaism might have been images more natural to Paul’s audience; see also comment on 1:14.)

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 (cf. also Wisdom of Solomon 18:15); but this Logos background might be more relevant if it were mentioned as part of 1:15-17.

1:15-23

The Supremacy of Christ

Some of those in error at Colossae want to emphasize intermediate spirits and the forms of rigorous human spirituality found in their culture (see comment on 2:16-23); Paul insists that Christ is enough (cf. 2:6-15) 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. Speakers sometimes employed exalted and even rhythmic prose, especially when praising deities.)

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 (cf. Prov 3:19; 8:27-30; Wisdom of Solomon 7:26-27; 8:1, 5-6; 9:1-2, 9; 10:1). This emphasis is particularly evident in *Philo*, a then-recent Diaspora Jewish philosopher who may reflect or represent some wider Diaspora Jewish ideas. He describes God’s Logos, his Word, as his image (e.g., *Flight and Finding* 101), through whom the cosmos was formed (e.g., *Creation* 25, 31; *Special Laws* 1.81).

“Firstborn” could refer to the position of authority and preeminence given to the firstborn son in the Old Testament (Gen 49:3-4; cf. the “chief” in 1 Chron 5:12 and its *Septuagint translation). (Jewish texts most commonly applied the term to Israel. Ancient Near Eastern kings were sometimes acclaimed as sons of gods at their enthronements.) This term could also be another title for God’s

“Son” (Col 1:18; see Ps 89:27, although David was the youngest of eight sons). Both Greek and Jewish religion sometimes describe God or supreme deities as “First” and occasionally called some deities “the firstborn”; the emperor also claimed to be “first” among equals, the “equality” part being a rhetorical fiction. In Philo, the Logos was also God’s “firstborn” (*Birth of Abel* 119; *Agriculture* 51; *Confusion of Tongues* 146; *Dreams* 1.215), though Philo could not have imagined the Logos becoming human.

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. (Following *Plato, some Greeks emphasized in addition to the visible world the invisible patterns or images on which it was based.) Many Jewish writers, including Philo and even some Judean sources, 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.) Using different prepositions, ancient intellectuals often distinguished kinds of causation, including material (“from”), instrumental (“through”), modal (“in” or “by”) and purpose (“for”); Paul employs three of these for Jesus here.

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 the 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. Some suggest that "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; cf. Col 2:9-10).

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. (In imperial propaganda, for example, the emperor was said to establish "peace" by subjugating his enemies.) Paul denies not their continuing activity in the world (2:8) but their real power to challenge Christ's *kingdom. (One might 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 ("everywhere" and "all the world" frequently appear in ancient *hyperbole), 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. Others connect it with sharing Christ's sufferings as part of union with Christ (a*

concept with fewer non-Christian parallels). A speaker could appeal to hearers who would think favorably of one who suffered on their behalf (e.g., Cicero, *In Catalinam* 4.1.2). (Paul suffers “for their sake” [NASB, NRSV], apparently meaning as their representative, because they are part of the church; it is not, however, 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”; less relevantly, except to how some recent converts might hear Paul, some philosophers spoke of divinity or a deity within humans). 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; 1 Corinthians 2:6 and 3:1-2; 2 Corinthians 11:2 and comment on Philippians 3:12-13. (Stoics viewed the ideal wise person as complete, but rarely believed that they attained that ideal.) Thus teaching Christ would lead to the hearers being prepared for the final day (1:22-23). “We” presumably includes Epaphras (1:7) and other proclaimers as well as Paul; “every person” again probably implies 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 very limited ancient parallels apart from Old Testament texts about the *Spirit’s enabling God’s servants; Paul’s language here would have impressed ancient hearers 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 common element of ancient “letters of friendship.” Colossae was in the Lycus Valley and not on an easy route from Ephesus. Like Colossae, Laodicea was in Phrygia; it was roughly ten miles west of Colossae.

2:2-3. Ancient sages (including *Gentiles but also common 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 often served as a surrogate for one’s presence while one was absent, as ancient writers sometimes pointed out (cf., e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 1.7.1; *Letters to Atticus* 12.53; Dio Chrysostom, *Epistles* 3; Symmachus *Epistles* 1.84). 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 1 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 most often 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"—*Against Apion* 2.4, 47—and describes the different Jewish movements as philosophical sects. The **Letter of Aristeas*, *Philo and even *Justin Martyr'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) translates a term that can refer to the personified forces of nature, spirit beings or "spirits" (NRSV, GNT; cf. NIV, ESV), 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. (Philosophers also addressed cosmology, debating the universe's basic "elements.")

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; 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 might 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; decrees were often posted in public locations. 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. (Crucifixion did not require nails, but these were used in Jesus’ case; Jn 20:25; cf. Acts 2:23.)

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 (in this period normally the emperor) 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. (Ironically, though Paul was in Roman custody, the spiritual rulers behind the earthly ones were Christ’s captives.)

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. *Gentiles sometimes associated local Judaism with asceticism (even linking the sabbath with fasting, although the forms of Judaism we know about would not have permitted fasting 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. Those with the reality did not need to depend on the shadows whose function was to point to the reality. Paul’s term for “substance” is also his term for “body,” perhaps pointing to the embodiment of new values in Christ’s physicality (1:22; pace Platonism and the ascetics in 2:23) and in the *church (1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:15).*

2:18. Jewish literature often conjoined “humility” (“self-abasement,” NASB, NRSV) in a positive way with fasting. But when taken to an extreme, “humility” included 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 they have seen” (NIV) may be the language of visions (NASB, NRSV). It suggests that the erring people in Colossae may have been like the Jewish mystics, known from other sources, 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 heed 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). It appears that in Colossae, some were venerating angels; although this veneration violated the teachings of some Judean sects such as 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 might approve of joining heaven's worship, 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, GNT) may be Jewish “regulations” (NRSV), as with the cognate term in 2:14. (Although the language with which Paul describes them in v. 21 has been compared to descriptions of *Pythagorean asceticism, 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 (e.g., Lev 11:39; 15:5; Num 19:11; but cf., e.g., Mt 9:25).* (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 the Greek translation of Isaiah 29:13, which Paul’s hearers might also 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 (cf. 2:17) 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. Philosophers thus became known for meditating on heavenly things (many repeated the joke about the philosopher who fell into a ditch because he was staring at the heavens). 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 may have been seeking these upper realms through mystical experiences (2:18). For Jewish mystics, the goal was vision of God's throne; for some philosophers, the goal was vision of the ultimate deity, who was pure mind and separate from the world of matter. For Paul, by contrast, the object of heavenly contemplation is Christ. In the context, this includes Christ's character or heavenly values centered around Christ (3:10-17), available because those who died and rose with Christ were also exalted with him (cf. 2:20; 3:1, 5, 9-10; 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 might emphasize their "earthly" body because the erring people influencing church members had adopted a popular Greek view in which one's soul was heavenly and eternal but one's body earthly, perishable and sometimes thus viewed as unimportant. Paul uses their own language 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." (The body was not evil, but indulging all its desires without observing God's restrictions was. *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.) 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, Diogenes Laertius 2.93) 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*, although Paul could also 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 baptisms in Jewish ritual baths were normally 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 1:5]—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 "human" 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 with the messianic era 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 often 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 (e.g., 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. Neither line of argument is adequate by itself, however, 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). *Scribes were sometimes tasked with drafting material in documents based on already available material.

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 (e.g., for some "wisdom" was the dominant virtue, or *Aristotle's four cardinal virtues dominated). "Peace" (v. 15) probably especially 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, by 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 (though less in Colossians than Ephesians). See the more detailed discussion on Ephesians 5:22–6:9.

3:18. All ancient moralists insisted that wives should “submit” to their husbands, though few would have stopped short of using the term “obey,” as Paul might do 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 treated slaves as property as well as treating them as people, and their obedience was expected. Many, however, considered slaves generally lazy (an attitude easy to understand in some cases, 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 pleasing people” 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. Keep in mind that Paul is in Roman custody. Most prisoners lacked access to washing or haircuts, though Paul may be in a lighter form of custody here (see comment on Acts 28:16).

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 (cf. the common ancient depiction of pleasant speech as “honeyed”). 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. Personal news from custody or during war was sometimes dangerous to put in a letter, entrusted instead to a discreet traveler who could supplement the letter.

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, but we cannot be certain 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. "Fellow prisoner" could mean that Aristarchus was also a captive, but it might be figurative, simply meaning that he accompanied Paul, who was in custody (cf. Acts 27:2).

4:11. "Jesus" (which can also be translated "Joshua"—GNT) 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 that can designate conflict or athletic competition signifying great exertion; philosophers and others 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. Recommendations could speak of another's fondness for the letter's recipients (e.g., Pliny, *Epistles* 7.31.1). The three largest cities of the Lycus Valley in Phrygia were Colossae, Laodicea and (six miles from Laodicea) 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 (most often but not limited to midwives) are known. Empirically valid observations existed alongside folk traditions, superstition and guesswork; there were no board-accredited physicians, and different schools of medical thought existed. Pagan healing cults (such as that of Asclepius) allowed for medical practice alongside prayers to a deity; views varied somewhat in Judaism, but later hospitals evolved especially from the eventual Christian practice of caring for the sick in late antiquity. Although I deem it unlikely (based on the geographic distribution of “we” in Acts), some have suggested 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. Papyri attest that some Jews did bear the Greek name “Demas” (cf. 2 Tim 4:10), but in this context (Col 4:11) Demas 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, giving her a position of influence in 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 (contrast comment on Eph 1:1; but the circular letter could have gone to Laodicea, the nearest location it went to Colossae); like Ephesians, it may have been similar to Colossians. Nearly all reading was done aloud, and letters to groups would naturally have been read to the whole group by one person, because even in urban areas 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 often closed with a signature in their own handwriting.

1 Thessalonians

INTRODUCTION

Authorship. The vast majority of scholars acknowledge 1 Thessalonians to be Pauline, the majority 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; cf. "kingdom" in 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 1:5). *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. Technically, the handbooks that mention letter types are later, and divide letters into types merely to provide examples for composition; nevertheless, they may provide some sensitivity to ancient ways of thinking about important themes in letters. 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 (which is unlikely); thus they characterize this as a "letter of thanksgiving." Others categorize 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 (to the extent that they existed as such) without concern for formal categories; its closest parallels, however, are to parenetic letters. It has deliberative elements.

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 some similar letters), 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. Among commentaries helpful for background are Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, AB 32B (New York: Doubleday, 2000); I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); note also F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, WBC 45 (Waco, TX: Word, 1982); and Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NICNT, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). Among other helpful studies, see Karl Paul Donfried, *Paul, Thessalonica, and Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); 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 might function like a proem, the customary opening designed to secure the hearers' goodwill, although Paul also wishes at the same time to encourage them; he is lavish in praising them (a skill emphasized in antiquity most extensively in epideictic *rhetoric). 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. Students often imitated their teachers, and invitations to imitation were normal in parenthesis; 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. Achaia, 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. Geographical *hyperbole ("every place") was not uncommon.

1:9. Statues of deities were pervasive; some Gentile intellectuals (as opposed to the masses) viewed them as merely reminders of the deities, but Jews rejected them as idols. 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 and the Roman cult of the emperor; some of the upper class sponsored the cult of the Cabiri 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

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 criticisms have been raised against him in his absence). Wandering sages 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 “mistreated” (NASB, NRSV), “treated outrageously” (NIV) or “shamefully treated” (ESV) 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 might allude to the philosophical idea that one should use reason to purify one’s mind from its slavery to human lusts. Given the complaints about Judaism and eastern cults seducing women away from their husbands’ religions, it is also possible that charges of sexual impurity [cf. 4:7] could have been raised against the sponsors of Egyptian, Jewish and Christian religious associations in Thessalonica; cf. Acts 17:4.) 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. Selfish sages were often guilty of flattery, which could earn them more money by begging or employment; 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. Openly seeking honor for oneself was seen in a negative light, although competition for honor was rife.

2:7. 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; other thinkers, 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 hearers 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.

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.)

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. Others expressed affection in saying they loved their hearers as themselves or wishing to be able to die for them. 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 mostly 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 (cf. Acts 17:2, though Paul may have remained in Thessalonica longer than he spoke in the *synagogue). 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 public man, 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" (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 3:5; 6:16). 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 greater 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 common feature of ancient 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 non-Christians (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 (Neh 9:26), 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, GNT). 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 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 might say, "My heart is with you.") Paul goes even beyond these conventions by protesting (literally), "We were orphaned without you" (see NRSV); though emphasizing gentleness, many 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 may 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 Greco-Roman 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, sometimes even grief over being separated. Even when the expressions were formulaic, they were usually no less genuine (compare modern greeting cards for various occasions). Timothy and possibly Silas rejoined Paul in 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, while the divergences indicate that Luke probably did not derive 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. Letters often displayed affection by reporting the author's sorrow over not being together (e.g., Oxyrhynchus papyri 528.6-9). 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, 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. Letter writers sometimes showed affection by emphasizing that they were well if only their addressees were (*Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 12.12.1; 12.13.1; 13.6a.1; 14.8.1; Pliny, *Epistles* 5.18.1).

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 (e.g., Ps 22:2; 42:8; 63:6; 77:2, 6; 119:55, 148). "What is lacking" in their faith (3:10) might 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; cf. *1 *Enoch* 1:9); 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 proverbially immoral Corinth. Unmarried Greek men (i.e., Greek men below the age of thirty) commonly indulged in intercourse with prostitutes, slaves and other males; non-Christian Greek religion and culture did not provide any disincentive for doing so.

4:1-2. Paul here uses ancient Jewish and Christian language that sometimes designates the passing on of 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. Speakers often invoked deities when they urged others (e.g., Isaeus, *Meneclēs* 47: “I entreat you by the gods”), as Paul here exhorts by Jesus.

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 ancient sources indicate 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 is as sinful as adultery after the wedding (under the law, a capital offense; Deut 22:13-29).

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 debated. Proper treatment of one’s sexuality was a matter of serious honor and shame (among Greeks and Romans, especially for women).

4:5. Adopting more *ascetic Greco-Roman 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 even argued that one could not assume the virginity of a Gentile woman over three years and one day old); some other groups also viewed outsiders as immoral, though by biblical standards, most Gentile men *were* immoral. Although many of Paul's hearers are ethnically Gentiles, he expects them to recognize that they are spiritually non-Gentiles by virtue of their conversion to the biblical faith (cf. Rom 2:29; 4:12).

4:6. Adultery, or "wife stealing," as it was often considered, was shameful and 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 Roman 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 many temples in ancient culture, intercourse made one ritually impure for a time. This impurity could be extended metaphorically, however, to spiritual impurity in the case of sexual sin (cf. also the *Septuagint of Lev 20:21; *Testament of Joseph* 4:6; perhaps *1 Enoch* 10:11). "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 major 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. 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

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 also one family and the ethics of familial love should apply. Many extended the title “brother” to intimate friends or members of a committed in-group (see comment on Acts 9:17). Thessalonica was a prominent city of Macedonia. One who offers advice could graciously add that it was superfluous to offer it, because the person would surely do it anyway (e.g., Galen, *Avoidance of Grief* 79b).

4:11. On working with the hands, see comment on 1 Corinthians 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 benefactors (Acts 17:4, 9), Paul seems not to have encountered there the opposition to his views on manual labor that arose in Corinth.

Minding one’s own affairs and clinging only to one’s own philosophical community were central to *Epicureanism but also came to characterize a number of other 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 such as *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 hearers to be inconspicuous, not monastic.

4:12. Treating outsiders appropriately (“behaving properly toward outsiders”—NASB, NRSV) may mean that Paul does not only not want them destitute but also (given cultural attitudes) not known for dependence on wealthy benefactors. Many poor people lived in Thessalonica, and unemployment was high there. Begging on the street normally characterized only the poorest, often propertyless persons (and *Cynic philosophers; cf. comment on 2 Thess 3:11-12).

4:13-18

Comfort for the Grieving

People in antiquity often wrote letters 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. Table 7 shows some parallels between 1–2 Thessalonians and Jesus' teachings reported elsewhere.

Although a number of these motifs appear in other early Jewish sources, none appear with such frequency together in one book (much less one chapter) as to leave any doubt that Jesus' teachings are Paul's direct source here. (Likewise, many conventional Jewish end-time motifs, such as mutant babies, are absent.) 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 (as martyrs or dying otherwise), 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 non-Christians grieve, because Christians have hope. Most Gentiles believed in a shadowy afterlife in the underworld and did not share the philosophers' optimism or neutrality toward death. Most Gentiles 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 here the Lord descends from “heaven,” meaning the highest heavens (4:16), and meeting his people in the “air,” the lower

atmosphere (4:17; cf. comment on Eph 2:22).

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 may 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).

Table 7. Parallels Between 1–2 Thessalonians and Jesus’ Teachings

Themes	Jesus’ teachings in the Gospels or elsewhere	1 Thess 4	2 Thess 2	Sources before these documents
Temple destroyed	Mt 24:2; cf. 23:38; 24:15; Mk 13:2; Lk 13:35	–	–	Some traditions; views on Dan 11:31; 12:11

Temple desecrated	Mt 24:15; Mk 13:14	—	2:4	—
False prophets	Mt 24:5, 11, 24; Mk 13:6	—	2:9	One common motif in end-time woes
False prophets' signs	Mt 24:24; Mk 13:22	—	2:9	—
Eschatological "distress"	Mt 24:21, 29; Mk 13:19, 24	(3:3)	(1:4, 6)	Dan 12:1
Birth pangs	Mt 24:8; Mk 13:8	5:3 (though probably applied differently)	—	Possibly eschatological idiom (cf. e.g., 1QH 3.3-18)
Lawlessness	Mt 24:12	—	2:3, 7-8	One common motif in end-time woes
Apostasy	Mt 24:10, 12; Mk 13:12	—	2:3	One common motif in end-time woes
Parousia	Mt 24:3, 27, 37, 39	4:15; cf. 2:19; 3:13; 5:23	2:1, 8 (cf. 2:9)	—
Coming on clouds	Mt 24:30; cf. 26:64; Mk 13:26; cf. 14:62	4:17	—	Dan 7:13
Trumpet for gathering	Mt 24:31	4:16 (also 1 Cor 15:52)	—	Familiar image (e.g., Is 27:12-13; cf. *Psalms of Solomon 11:1-4; Shemoneh

				<i>Esreh 10)</i>
Gathering	Mt 24:31; Mk 13:27	(4:15-17)	2:1	Familiar Jewish expectation
Unknown time	Mt 24:36; Mk 13:32	5:1-2	–	A strand in Jewish expectation
Unknown “times and seasons”	Acts 1:7	5:2	–	–
Unexpected destruction	Mt 24:38-41; Lk 17:26-30, 34-35	5:3	–	–
Coming like a thief in the night	Mt 24:43; Lk 12:39	5:2-4 (cf. 2 Pet 3:10)	–	–
Stay alert (in explicitly eschatological context)	Mt 24:42; 25:13; Mk 13:33-37; Lk 12:37-38; 21:36	5:6	–	–
Asleep	Mk 13:36	5:7, 10	–	–

Table 7 is adapted from Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 366-71.

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 God’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 (mentioned in, e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 13.20) sometimes urged their readers to “comfort” (KJV, NASB; or “exhort,” “encourage”) themselves and others with their words. (Funeral speeches especially praised the deceased, but often also offered comfort to the bereaved.) 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 Maccabees 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 of God’s people, 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 Jewish writers, 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; cf. Joel 2:9, but there is no close parallel in Jewish sources before Jesus). “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; cf. Ezek 30:3; Joel 3:14; Obad 15). Jewish *apocalyptic literature 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 initial or age-long ones of Matthew 24:8, but the final pangs of destruction in the day of the Lord (cf. Is 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 given the other echoes in the context 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 falsely 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 hearers in Thessalonica, however, could 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. "Children of" (KJV, NRSV, NIV) 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) the Thessalonian Christians can refer to oversight more generally, but was also sometimes applied in the Greco-Roman 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, GNT) 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” (NRSV) or “those who are idle” (NIV) who can work but refuse to do so (cf. 4:11; 2 Thess 3:7-8). The word for “faint-hearted” (NASB, NRSV, NIV) or “timid” (GNT) 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 (1 Thess 5:17-18).

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 them all" (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 especially as a whole, with body and soul separated at death, and distinguished various components only as needed. (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. Some philosophers advocated a form of trichotomy [three parts], although they did not tend to use Paul's wording here.)*

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 Thessalonians

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, or even than one sometimes finds in passages within a single apocalypse. 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 around A.D. 64). The majority of commentators today accept it as Pauline.

Relationship to 1 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 or numbered, 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 *chairein*, 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, including in apocalypses, 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). God’s coming to judge the world appears in various texts (e.g., Zech 14:3-5), including destruction by fire (e.g., Is 66:15-16, 24; *1 *Enoch* 91:7-9). Fire burning one’s adversaries was a common image in the Old Testament (e.g., Num 11:1; Ps 97:3; Is 26:11; cf. Jer 4:4; 15:14; 17:4; 21:12; Ezek 21:31; 22:20; Nahum 1:6; Zeph 1:18; 3:8) and continued in Jewish expectations (e.g., **Sibylline Oracles* 3.760-61; 4.43, 161, 176-78). 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. The wording here is particularly from Isaiah 66:15 (presumably envisioned as belonging to the same era as the new world and new Jerusalem, Is 65:17-18). The “mighty” angels are

envisioned as the Lord's army (cf., e.g., 2 Kings 6:17; *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QM 12.8).

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* (roughly, "from the face of the fear of the Lord and the glory of his strength"). 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* (e.g., 1QS 2.15; 1QM 1.5; 9.5-6) and elsewhere (e.g., *Psalms of Solomon* 2:31; 3:11-12; 15:10) 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. For future glory in ancient Jewish texts, see, e.g., *4 *Ezra* 7:98; *2 *Baruch* 51:3.) "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 day of the Lord had been so "imminent" that it 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' return to judge the world. Many texts, both in the *Old Testament* (e.g., *Is* 27:12-13) and *later Jewish literature* (*Psalms of Solomon* 8:28; 11:2-5; 17:26; 4 *Baruch* 3:11), 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 and Mark 13:27 (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 indeed 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, GNT) 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).

In Jewish sources the figure of a general future antichrist (as he is commonly called) seems to occur mainly later, 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 Judean 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 seen as an example of deferred eschatology. The way that some count (and in the first century counted) the period of Daniel 9:24-27, the anointed prince (whom some held to be the *Messiah) was to be “cut off” around the time that Jesus died; the destruction of the city followed forty years later, again indicating a delay of at least forty years. Christian 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, any and all of which ways may be 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). Ancient works sometimes refer to information shared between writers and their designated readers but obscure to subsequent readers.

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 sometimes suggest 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. But Claudius’s name resembles more Latin terms for lameness, and most of Paul’s Greek-speaking audience in Thessalonica, not a Roman *colony, would not have caught the pun in any case.) 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 traditional dispensationalism), 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. Mk 13:22; 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's 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 humans' finite reasonings.

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 (see the introduction to 1 Thess 4:13-18).

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 grammatically, such blessings 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 clients or parasites dependent on wealthier patrons, or a mistaken belief that the day of the Lord had come and canceled the need for such labor (2:2). Alternatively, they may have pursued a philosophic, specifically a Cynic, lifestyle* (see comment on 3:11-12). More certainly, idlers were known to pass their days in the marketplaces of Greek cities (including Thessalonica—Acts 17:5), sometimes easily stirred by demagogues. Some may have been genuinely converted but not given up their previous lifestyle.

3:7-9. Students commonly imitated their teachers. On the labor of Paul and his companions, see comment on 1 Thessalonians 2:9. As some commentators point out, to “eat bread” seems to have been a Jewish figure 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 known 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 GNT), or to both. Some Christians may have decided to justify their idleness by citing the lifestyle of traveling sages, such as 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.” Alternatively, they may have followed other models for idleness (see comment on 2 Thess 3:6).

3:13. “Doing good” (NASB, GNT) 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 (1QS 7.1-20 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls).

3:16-18

Conclusion

3:16. This verse and 3:18 are final “wish-prayers”; see comment on 2:16-17.

3:17-18. Forged letters did exist (e.g., *Livy 40.55.1). In law courts, orators often had to argue that documents were forgeries (so *Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory* 5.5.1), 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 (or sometimes added brief comments, e.g., *Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 8.1), 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 the letters attributed to Paul in the *New Testament*, it is the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus) that is the most disputed, although they were widely viewed 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 that Paul rarely employs in his earlier letters (e.g., lists of qualifications), significant differences in vocabulary, 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 many 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. Others suggest that these letters were compiled based on oral memory of Paul's instructions or letters to Timothy and Titus. In any case, all agree that one may speak of "Paul" and his *disciples within the letters'* narrative world. Most individual details of vocabulary and style have some parallels in Paul's earlier letters, although their cumulative effect is different.

Pseudepigraphic letters (letters falsely ascribed to a great teacher of the past) were a common literary or pedagogic device but were rarely written close to the author's lifetime. Pseudepigraphic epistles and forgeries rarely exhibit the number of personal allusions that appear in 2 Timothy. 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, perhaps because they are more personal and institutional than directly theological. (Some language similar to that of popular philosophers and moralists remains.)

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). Certainly church offices are far less developed than in the early second-century letters of Ignatius. In 1 Timothy, 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. Some who date these letters later than Paul date them late enough to allow for the reuse of Paul's name pseudonymously, sometimes as late as the mid-second century (although the Muratorian Canon assumes them to be Pauline not long after that date). Others suggest that the material is Pauline but was organized into its current form more quickly after Paul's death.

Commentaries. Among technical commentaries that provide much background are Benjamin Fiore, *The Pastoral Epistles* SP 12 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007); Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, AB 35A (New York: Doubleday, 2001); I. Howard Marshall with Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999); William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000); Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); and Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*,

NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). Very valuable commentaries on a more popular level include Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988); Jouette M. Bassler, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, HNTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981); Luke Timothy Johnson, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1987); and George T. Montague, *First and Second Timothy, Titus*, CCSS (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). I provided some of my primary sources on 1 Timothy 2 in Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992), pp. 101-32; for 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and chapter 5 in Craig S. Keener, . . . *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 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, CA: 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; Is 43:11; Hos 13:4).

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. (*Patrons often sent letters of recommendation on behalf of their *clients, or political dependents. Timothy’s letter, however, could be publicly read in the house-church gatherings, reinforcing Timothy’s apostolic authorization.) Some suggest that “true child” (NASB) echoes 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). “Genealogies” 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 most 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 or were developing 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. Jesus often 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; or “men who sleep with men” see comment on 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. “Kidnappers” (NASB, GNT) 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, though infants were available without cost, abandoned on trash heaps by (sometimes destitute) parents. Perjury was a special form of lying that involved the violation of a divine oath, thus showing disrespect to the deity. *Stoics and others described reasonable teaching as “sound” (healthy, wholesome).

1:11. Only the “faithful” (1:12) were to be entrusted with money, given 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 yet was subsequently 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). Some suggest that 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 did not absolve 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 Greco-Roman 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. 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 in some circles 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. Early Jewish sources (including the *Dead Sea Scrolls*) attest a range of levels of excommunication, including full exclusion from the community (for extended periods or even permanently; here, apparently until repentance). Some contend that official synagogue excommunication included a curse or execration against the person being banned from the community; it could be viewed as 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). A “ransom” could be a price for others’ freedom (Ex 30:12; Num 3:12; Mk 10:45).

2:5-7. Both Christ’s mission and Paul’s mission testified to God’s purpose, his wish to save all (2:4). 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 intermediaries for the gods, just as they believed in many gods.

2:8-15

Proper Demeanor for Public Worship

The passage addresses women (2:9-15) in considerably more detail than men (2:8) here, perhaps 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. Hands were normally lifted or outstretched for both praise and supplication in the *Old Testament, Judaism, the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman 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 apparently quarreling (2:8), many women appear to have been violating a different matter of propriety in public prayer: seeking to attract attention by their appearance. Most Jewish teachers allowed wives to adorn themselves for their husbands, but both Jewish and Greco-Roman moralists ridiculed women who decked themselves out to turn other men’s eyes. This was a common theme in ancient moralist literature: Jewish writings warn especially of the sexual temptation involved in such adornments; Greco-Roman writers also condemn wealthy women who show off their costly array. Hair was sometimes braided with gold, which Paul might have in view here (among the wealthy); 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. Greco-Roman 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). Although exceptions were made for elite women (for example, *Philo praised the empress as “almost male” in her intellectual capacity; *Embassy to Gaius* 320), and some intellectuals praised the ability of women (or particular women) to learn, most men considered intellectual activity a predominantly male exercise. Women were less likely to be literate than men (sometimes estimated at ten percent as often as men of the same social class), were trained in philosophy far less often than men, were trained in *rhetoric almost never, and, more importantly here, in Judaism were far less likely to be educated in the *law*. *Boys were raised to recite the Torah; girls were not, although they could listen in synagogues and remember what they heard at home. 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 more countercultural. (Women did occasionally 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. Although some women had opportunities to learn, women became teachers only extremely rarely; in all of antiquity, only a tiny proportion of respected sages (such as Aspasia, Sosipatra and Hypatia) were women who could also teach men. (In Jewish circles, Beruriah, second-century wife of Rabbi Meir, was instructed in the law, but she was a rare exception.) Many accused those they believed to be false teachers of targeting women because they were more vulnerable. Given women's usual lack of training in the Scriptures (see comment on 2:11), the error 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), the prohibition here

fits the situation (the prohibition in fact appears in the only set of letters that specifically reveal that false teachers were targeting women; though cf. comment below). His short-range solution is that these women should not teach; his long-range solution is “let them learn” (2:11). Many believe that 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. The argument from the order of creation is the same argument Paul used to support women wearing head coverings (1 Cor 11:7-12). Some writers take the argument here as universal, for all circumstances, even though most OT scholars do not view that as the most natural reading of the Genesis text to which he alludes (Gen 2:18 in Hebrew suggests a complementary partner, and Genesis repeatedly shows that God sometimes blessed the younger over the older). 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. Paul sometimes applies Scripture in an ad hoc manner (see, e.g., comment on Gal 3:16), although he more often employs it universally (see, e.g., Rom 5:12-21).

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 (perhaps sometimes thinking of the Greek story of Pandora). 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 apply this illustration to all women in all times, as some have thought, is more debated. Some argue that if Paul compared *all* women with Eve, he would be implying that all women are more easily deceived than men (at least if he were excluding all women from teaching; indeed, the local false teachers themselves were men—1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17). (Empirically, assuming female deceivability is problematic; from years of teaching biblical interpretation to hundreds of students of both genders, even the author of this commentary can testify that, at least today, gender does not affect performance scores in biblical interpretation courses.) Similarly, his illustration in 2 Corinthians 11:3, comparing Eve’s deception to the entire church, might lose its force if Eve necessarily represents all women here. Scholars thus continue to debate the point of Paul’s analogy.

2:15. Some scholars argue 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. Alternatively, Paul could mean "saved" or "delivered" in a different sense—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 for particular qualifications 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 and with a long history in Israel.

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 might be equivalent to the synagogue leaders responsible for the synagogue service, although probably in less formal house churches. 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 errors circulating 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 (hence is not likely the point here), though illegal bigamy and certainly adultery were. “Husband of one wife” no doubt means a faithful husband and probably presupposes marriage. If it expresses a preference for marriage, it might be helpful in standing against the false teachers who opposed marriage (4:3), although this preference might not apply to all situations (cf. comment on 1 Cor 7:8.) “Husband of one wife” (NASB) refers to one’s current marital status and behavior (cf. NIV: “faithful to his wife”; see fuller comment on 5:9); validly divorced people who remarried were considered married to one spouse, the second one, not to two spouses.

“Hospitality” included taking in trustworthy travelers as guests. Welcoming strangers and visitors 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. Ideally, eating together at table was supposed to form a permanent bond of friendship.

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, especially over children still living in the home. 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 assumes a premise of generally 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 now 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), possibly similar to the office of the *chazan* in the synagogue. This synagogue attendant was responsible for the synagogue building, so an analogous role could have been filled by the owner of the home in which a house synagogue or church met. Unlike elders (3:2), this sort of “deacon” may have fulfilled an administrative function without as much public teaching.

3:9. The qualification that the “deacon” keep “hold of the deep truths of the faith” (NIV; see, literally, “mystery”) is all the more critical given the prevalence of severe error 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 (apparently female deacons) by A.D. 112 (Pliny, *Epistles* 10.96.8, as usually understood). 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 (given social expectations and association of wives with neighborhoods) 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. Letters sometimes announced one's coming and often communicated a fond desire to see the recipient in person.

3:15. 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). (A prominent and important member of a community was often called a "pillar," so the image here may emphasize the church's strength and indispensability.)

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 (cf. the same term in Mk 16:19; Acts 1:2, 11, 22). "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 False Teachers

4:1. Ancient Judaism associated the *Spirit especially with* prophecy (speaking under divine inspiration), and Paul here either essentially prophesies 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 (e.g., Acts 2:17) because the *Messiah has already come.

4:2. The "branding iron" was especially used on livestock (but apparently at least theoretically could be used also to identify some criminals); 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 Greco-Roman paganism, and although most teachers (both Jewish and *Gentile*) *advocated marriage, the value 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. Faith rather than something intrinsic to the food made the latter pure (Tit 1:15; cf. Mk 7:19; Rom 14:14).

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 Greco-Roman moralists and philosophers. Like them, Paul speaks of moral, intellectual and spiritual discipline rather than physical training, although he apparently does accept the physical value of exercise (and undoubtedly experienced plenty of his own during his travels). 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).

Men sometimes ridiculed older women (e.g., Menander, *Dyskolos* 580-83), sometimes as idle (cf. Pliny, *Epistles* 7.24.5) or chatterers (Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* 1.25.541). Philosophers and others commonly demeaned the tales of old women as fit only for children, and they mocked irrational views as those suited only to old women (cf. *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 94.2; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 5.14; *Joseph and Asenath 4:10). (For example, in *Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.20.55, an *Epicurean* mocks a Stoic’s view of fate as a

belief fit only for ignorant 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 simply uses the current figure of speech (v. 7; but cf. 5:2).

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 (on the letter’s Pauline dating) Paul is writing in the early sixties, Timothy is at least in his late 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. (It may involve youth comparative to elders here.) Despite the valuing of youthful vigor, many regarded youth (albeit especially adolescence) as less responsible, more violent, sexually uncontrolled and impetuous. Those who were not elders were often considered inappropriate for leadership positions (cf. 1 Sam 17:33), and many offices became available only at age thirty; even in Jewish tradition many others became available only at age forty. Some stories about the appointment of young men were made up later to extol prodigies (e.g., postbiblical stories about Daniel, Solomon or several *rabbis), but others were the boasts of young achievers (such as Cicero); Timothy’s appointment was thus a rare privilege in his culture. 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 (both in Palestine and in the *Diaspora), public reading of Scripture was central to the service (e.g., *Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.175; *Jewish Antiquities* 16.43; *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum* 2:332-35, §1404); although the practice of specified readings may have been only beginning to develop, 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. (For reading and then exposition in the synagogues, see *Philo, *That Every Good Person Is Free* 81-82, esp. 82; *Special Laws* 2.62; *Life of Moses* 2.215-16; *Dreams* 2.127; cf. already Neh 8:8. This Jewish practice would be intelligible in a Greco-Roman context; in Greco-Roman 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 best available 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). (On elders as leaders, see comment on Acts 14:23. The elders here may be those appointed by Paul in Lystra; cf. Acts 14:21-23; 16:2-3.) 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); the prevalence of error (4:1-3) reinforced the importance of this demand.

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 would refer 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 husbands 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 (and relatively little potential income by other means, e.g., selling produce from their garden) 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 probably 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 Greco-Roman 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). In some Jewish traditions, "sixty" was the figure for the beginning of old age (see comment on Lk 1:7; age for elders in Mishnah Avot 5:21). Some scholars think that the "wife of one man" may allude to the ancient ideal of remaining faithful to one's former husband after his 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 (so, e.g., NIV: "faithful to her husband"). 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 humble posture of a servant or a subordinate (cf. 1 Sam 25:41 and comment on Jn 13:3-8).

5:11-12. Groups expected members to be faithful to their commitments. For example, *Pharisees became upset with those who reneged on their Pharisaic vows (Tosefta *Demai* 2:9), and the *Essenes were even more angered by those leaving their way of life (1QS 7.22-25 in the Dead Sea Scrolls); 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 cultural expectations and probably limited education (which Paul seeks to remedy in 2:11), idle gossip commonly characterized women's daily lives, and even moreso stereotypes about them. Jewish and Greco-Roman 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 banished (1QS 7.16-17 in the Dead Sea Scrolls). The language here depicts women spreading false ideas; the false teachers (cf. 1 Tim 1:6-7) may have targeted widows (cf. 2 Tim 3:6) because (1) women were usually less educated and (2) widows were the women who most often owned their own homes, useful for meeting places for new congregations.

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. (Ephesus was in Asia Minor, but was originally a Greek *colony there, and Greek culture had pervaded the urban east by this period in any case.) "Keep house" (NASB) is better translated "manage their homes" (NIV); although subordinate to her husband, the Greek wife otherwise "ruled" her home. Although the division was less strict in practice, people generally treated public as the male sphere and private, or domestic space, as more often the female sphere. Paul here upholds some

societal values for the sake of the gospel's witness (avoiding "reproach").

5:15. "Turning aside" (KJV, NASB) is used in the Dead Sea Scrolls for apostasy; see comment on 1:20 regarding *Satan.

5:16. Some women were well-to-do enough to become benefactors and *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 GNT 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 Greco-Roman 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 an exhortation 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” (cf. NASB) on their *disciples to “ordain” (NRSV) 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 could be used to disinfect water). Some restorative diets recommended water (e.g., Fronto, *Ad Antoninum Pium* 8), others wine; medicines could be delivered with either.

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 (household slaves were considered part of the household). This advice was important because a movement 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 Error of Materialism

Those spreading error were using the *gospel to accumulate wealth*; 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” can mean “healthy”; Greek and Roman writers often used medical imagery to describe the spiritual state of people’s souls or beliefs, though the figurative use was so common that the metaphor may be a dead one. 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 recognized 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 Greco-Roman 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 Greco-Roman 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. Different cultures understand material “wealth” differently. For example, 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 (e.g., *Theon, *Progymnasmata* 3.91-92; **Sibylline Oracles* 3.235). 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 fairly rare occurrences in subsequent Jewish literature (e.g., *Life of Adam and Eve* 41:2; 51:2; 2 *Enoch* 7:4; cf. **Letter of Aristeas* 140) are probably dependent on the Old Testament usage, as is Paul’s use here. (Some later Jewish sources, such as the *Targum, sometimes change “man of God” to “prophet.”)

6:12. Greco-Roman 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 another image the moralists equally exploited in a figurative manner: the wrestling match or athletic contest.

6:13. A charge with gods as witnesses (as also in 5:21) was considered especially binding.

6:14. “Without stain or reproach” (NASB) was a natural image for virtual perfection, for example in the requirements for pure sacrifices to God as unblemished (e.g., Lev 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6; 4:3, 23, 32) or reports of “undamaged” merchandise and so forth. 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. Especially in the East, 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 a 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 did the *Cynics, in some ways the *Essenes*, or (in the most extreme sense) later Gnostics; 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.

6:19. 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's letter to Rhesus), but they rarely had many, whereas 2 Timothy is full of them. Pseudepigraphers had little reason to include these details. Some scholars believe that a Pauline *disciple wove together Paul's material in this letter, but often in the disciple's words.

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. Second Timothy has in view this second imprisonment.

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 has also been compared with 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 could give 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 Judeans 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.)

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 advanced, i.e., rhetorical and philosophical, training for men.) Until the age of seven a Roman boy’s mother was his main formative influence. For those with access to it, Jewish Scripture education ideally 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 sons’ 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 and some other early Jewish sources 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 (cf. 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). In context, “all” excludes at least 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. Chains and imprisonment were normally matters of shame, and people were often embarrassed to be associated with those so stigmatized. “Onesimus” (Philem 10) could be a contraction for Onesiphorus, but the person Paul describes here does not sound like a recently freed slave. Because Paul speaks of a whole “household” of believers, the Onesiphorus to whom he refers may have 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 benefactor 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 (Acts 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; probably over half usually 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. Ancient philosophers and moral writers commonly used examples in moral exhortation (cf. 2:8).

2:11-13. Although God's character is immutable, his dealings with people respond to 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 withdraw from the covenant's protection (see comment on Rom 3:3).

2:14-26

Persevering Versus Deceived 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 a worker. 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. In antiquity the difficulty was greater in the sense that most people could not read and copies of the Scriptures were scarce and expensive, being copied by hand.

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, a meaning that 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 false teachers' 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). Many in antiquity indulged and excused young men’s passions; by contrast, Paul respects Timothy’s ability for self-control.

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, GNT; “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

Ancient Jewish sources (except perhaps the most Hellenized, such as Philo) generally characterized the end time as one of turmoil, apostasy, and increased sin and oppression. This view was widespread despite a 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” (cf. Is 2:2; Mic 4:1; Dan 2:28; 10:14) 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 (for end-time suffering, see, e.g., 4Q162 2.1 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls; for sin and evil, e.g., 4Q390 f1.8; *1 *Enoch* 91:7; *4 *Ezra* 14:16-18; **Sibylline Oracles* 5.74; for apostasy, e.g., *Testaments of Dan* 5:4; *Issachar* 6:1, 6; 7:3; and *Naphtali* 4:1). (The length of this period varied nearly 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. (In today's terms this would refer to narcissism, not appropriate self-esteem.) Love and obedience toward parents was one of the most central virtues of antiquity (see comment on Eph 6:1-3). Many deemed ingratitude the greatest offense against benefactors (see comment on Rom 1:21).

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 nearly as influential as their Stoic competitors. *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 less educated, 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. (With regard to Judaism, they also lacked the male disincentive of the pain of male circumcision.)

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. The women who owned their own homes were most often widows, so widows may have often been targeted (1 Tim 5:13) to gain access to homes where the false teachers could establish or influence congregations. 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 (presumably dependent on Jewish tradition). 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 eventually expose this false movement (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; *Diogenes, Epistles* 12; **Jubilees* 22:19). 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 here 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 (for the language 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 appears from the listing in Josephus (Against 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, it was undoubtedly widely read and probably often drawn on.*

At least in pious Palestinian Jewish homes with access to sufficient resources, 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 often expressed amazement 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 (originally something like putting someone under oath) 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 about Jesus, which was the divine message, as 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, even assign atoning—hence in some sense sacrificial—value to the deaths of martyrs; but it is not clear that this idea is present in this image.)

4:7. Paul’s first image is the athletic contest; 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 (cf. 2 Tim 4:8). “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 important to Paul that especially Timothy be with him before he died; compare, for example, those friends who spent Socrates's 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; in any case it had an established church. Apparently Demas (probably an abbreviation for Demetrius, but the name that Paul always uses for him) expected to find less suffering there than he would have faced had he remained with Paul the prisoner.

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." (With some church fathers it is possible, though much less likely in view of Paul's usage elsewhere, 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 Paul had arranged to meet him earlier (Tit 3:12). If Timothy came over land 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. Prisoners' friends could supply their needs, but only if permitted by prison officials and guards, who sometimes demanded bribes. 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 it is not clear that certificates took this form 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 popularized them, using them for the Scriptures. Some suggest that Paul might have notebooks for Scripture study in view; the other "books" could 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).

4:14-15. 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). Paul had earlier faced conflict with many metalworkers in Ephesus (Acts 19:24-29).

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). Grammatically, 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 Maccabees 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 7:2; 10:9; 17:12; 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. Persecution in Rome may have invited their relocation. 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 potentially risky periods as well. Some ships took the risks, even in winter, for the sake of profits, but finding passage in winter would be very difficult. 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 would also be difficult. If Timothy delayed, he would not be able to come until spring—and Paul might not still be alive then. If Paul sent this letter by Tychicus in summer, Timothy would have 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); about half of Roman Jews had Latin names. That three out of the four names are 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. Second-century 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, this 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 early 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." Many Jewish people believed that they were chosen for salvation by virtue of their corporate participation in Israel; as usual, Paul applies the term to all believers in Jesus (possibly to help ideas mentioned in 1:10).

1:2-3. Jewish sources traditionally employed the phrase "*eternal life*" to mean 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 and prayers than most of Judaism did. By contrast, in Greek myths, deities readily deceived mortals, but such a view of divinity was rejected by most 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 Diaspora synagogues were called “elders.” Although their exact role may have varied from one place to another, often a group of elders provided leadership for a synagogue (in Judea, cf. 1QS 6.8-9 in the Dead Sea Scrolls)*. 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 (see further discussion at 1 Tim 3:2). 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 can mean overindulgence but often 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 (adulthood being reached in the mid-teens). 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). But avoiding drunkenness was also important for other reasons (Prov 20:1). Those “given to wine” (KJV, NASB) were also often recognized as abusive and given to fighting as well.

1:8. “Hospitality” included housing, feeding and treating graciously travelers needing a place to stay. (Christian travelers, like Jewish ones, would have 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 especially 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 ethnically 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. The Jewish community in Crete was sometimes exploited by charlatans (e.g., *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.327).

1:11. “Upsetting whole families” (NASB) could mean that, by gaining entrance to families, these false teachers were disrupting entire households (cf. 2 Tim 3:6-7), or 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 and more dishonest than any other people.

1:12. Outsiders complained that Cretans lusted for wealth, leading to violence (Polybius 6.46.9) and were deceptive (8.19.5). (When convenient, Romans sometimes complained that Greeks more generally used falsehood; *Cicero, *For Flaccus* 4.9-10; 5.11-12; Pliny, *Natural History* 37.11.31.) 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*. As was widely known, Crete claimed to possess both the birthplace and grave of Zeus; the latter claim drew outsiders’ scorn and charge of falsehood. 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 not impossible that Paul knew the works of Epimenides; it seems much more likely, however, that he knew only the attributed saying or at most an anthology containing sayings attributed to Epimenides (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 *haggadoth*, 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 false 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 male heads 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 quickly extended to categories of relationships in the church.

Early Christian adaptation of Roman social relations was valuable 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, 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 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). Some caricatured older women as drunken and as sexually desiring younger men; many men resented drunkenness especially in women.

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 to help her to please 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, GNT) or disciplined, one of the central Greek virtues; when applied to women, it entailed "modesty," which included virtuously avoiding any connotations of sexual infidelity. In the traditional Greek ideal (far more than in actual practice, especially by this period), 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 were expected to obey their husbands in everything (Paul's "submissive" [NRSV] may be weaker 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). On seeking to forestall false accusations, see the introduction to 2:1-14.

2:9-10. Although masters legally held absolute authority over household slaves (the sort of slaves addressed in this household context), 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 slaveholders, 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 the Jewish emphasis on God's special redemption of Israel 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. Two ethical terms Paul employs here were among the four cardinal virtues of ancient Greek philosophers and moralists. A similar 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.

Jewish sources frequently 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 fully; *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; although some Jewish circles thought of semidivine beings (often particular exalted angels) or images (especially Wisdom), Judaism did not portray any other human figure as literally divine (or, from recent history, even figuratively divine, as *Philo did with Moses based on Ex 7:1).

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 sometimes associated with Jewish revolutionaries (some of whom were or came to be called *Zealots*) *in this period, more often it simply meant uncompromising zeal for the law or for God.* (Although unlikely, it is possible that the Jewish colony in Crete was affected by the same revolutionary 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 about A.D. 72 [Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.437-50] and into a full revolt about four decades later. These revolutionary sentiments had been stirred by surviving revolutionaries 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 should 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 noun related to the term translated “fictious” (NASB) or “divisive” (NIV) came to designate different sects of philosophers, and *Josephus used it to designate different schools of thought within Judaism. But the adjective here is normally negative, as here (also Gal 5:20; cf. 1 Cor 11:19), for sectarian or divisive tendencies. Paul might refer 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 may have 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 “Apollos,” taken from the name of the Greek god Apollo.)

3:13. “Lawyer” could refer to a Jewish legal expert, but in the *Diaspora it could also refer to a jurist of Roman law. Legal cases were more the domain of trained *rhetoricians (like Apollos; see comment on Acts 18:24) than jurists, but the latter could also be 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 name cannot settle his ethnicity; perhaps both he and Apollos were from the educated Jewish elite in Alexandria. (If so, he was likelier an expert in Jewish law, though an elite Alexandrian Jew could also have studied Greek laws.)

This verse constitutes a miniature “letter of recommendation” to provide hospitality to Zenas and Apollos (see comment on 1:8), who may 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 you” (here 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 other slave laws, Roman law - addressed the dual status of slaves: by nature they were persons, but from an economic standpoint they were treated as property. The head of a household could legally execute his slaves, and they would all be executed if the head of the household were 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. Male household slaves generally had life better, though female household slaves (and sometimes boys) were vulnerable to sexual exploitation by slaveholders. Household slaves were the only kind of slaves addressed in Paul's writings.

But urban 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 estimate that as many as half of household slaves may have had the opportunity to become free at some point in their lives (at least if they lived long enough). Some freed household slaves became independently wealthy; at least in Roman custom, their former holders became their *patrons and were supposed to help them advance in society. Economically, socially, and with regard to freedom to determine their future, many of these male household slaves were better off than average free persons in the Roman Empire; many—scholars commonly say most—free persons were rural peasants working as tenant farmers on the vast estates of wealthy landowners.

Some philosophers said that slaves were equals as people, but in this period they never suggested that masters should free their slaves. (Earlier *Stoics were more radical, but the movement eventually became more mainstream. *Cynics invited prospective followers to abandon everything because they needed nothing, not to free slaves because slavery was wrong.) Nearly everyone took the

institution of slavery for granted, except early Stoics who said that it was “against nature.” Paul’s message to Philemon goes beyond other documents of his time in not only pleading for clemency for an escaped slave but suggesting that he be released (to continue working with Paul in ministry) because he is now a Christian. So powerful was this precedent that many of the earliest U.S. slaveholders did not want their slaves to be exposed to Christianity, for fear that they would be compelled to free them; the Christian message had to be domesticated (like early Stoicism) to become neutral or supportive of slavery. Cf. 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, slaves were normally permitted to control the money themselves); still, a few 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. Recapture normally meant severe punishment.

Such theft may be the point of verse 18, but Paul might there account for the possibility that Philemon wants repayment for Onesimus himself. From the standpoint of ancient slaveholders, 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. Slaves could cost between 750 sesterces (187.5 denarii) and 700,000 sesterces (175,000 denarii), with 2,000 as an average. (Keep in mind that a denarius was close to a day’s wage for many farmers in this period.)

*Old Testament *law required harboring escaped slaves (Deut 23:15-16; contrast Josephus, *Jewish War* 3.373), 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, 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. Some compare it more specifically with a letter that Pliny the Younger later wrote a friend on behalf of an estranged freedman who had pleaded for Pliny's intercession. Somewhat differently, Pliny allowed that the slaveholder had a right to be angry; the principle of a friend's intercession, however, is similar. If one classified Paul's letter rhetorically, it would be "deliberative rhetoric," the type of speech or writing educated persons in antiquity used to persuade others to change their behavior or attitudes. Letters were not speeches, but the form of argumentation in speeches can help us appreciate Paul's approach to persuasion here: his *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; additionally, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Letter to Philemon*, AB 34C (New York: Doubleday, 2000). For Paul's views on slavery, see S. Scott Bartchy, *First-Century Slavery and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:21*, SBLDS 11 (Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973); compare also Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 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.) "Fellow soldier" (v. 2)

reflects the military imagery common in Paul's letters (see comment on Rom 13:12; Phil 2:25).

4. Many pious Jews observed times of regular prayer; 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 the way speakers might use 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, GNT) or "sharing" (NRSV) or "partnership" (NIV) 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 often use it loosely for anyone no longer "young." On the basis of other New Testament evidence, Paul may be around fifty-seven, 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 most 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" (cf., e.g., Oxyrhynchus papyri 32).

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. Letters of recommendation could urge the recipient to count any favor toward the recommended as a favor toward the recommender (cf. Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 13.5.3).

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.

Hebrews

INTRODUCTION

Style. Along with Luke-Acts and some of the other “General Epistles,” this document displays the most sophisticated Greek style in the *New Testament*; *its author must have had sophisticated rhetorical training and literary skills.*

Date. Because Timothy was recently freed (Heb 13:23) and the work was apparently written from Italy (13:24), we may guess that Timothy was arrested in Rome during the Neronian persecution (probably some time after he came to see Paul—2 Tim 4:21) and freed when Nero (and his policy) died in A.D. 68. The mention of Timothy but not Paul, who died about A.D. 64, also would make sense about A.D. 68. At this time, when the outcome of the Roman war in Judea would have been assured from Rome’s vantage point, it would be quite appropriate to speak of the old temple system as “passing away” (8:13), even literally—a process completed in A.D. 70 with the destruction of the temple. That the writer cannot declare that temple sacrifices are no longer offered (which could have clinched his case if he could have claimed it) suggests a date before A.D. 70.

Authorship. From a stylistic perspective, it is impossible to attribute the letter to Paul; of other New Testament writers, it is closest to Luke’s literary abilities, but the style is not Lukan. The writer seems to be an influential person traveling in the same circles as Timothy (13:23) and well heeded by this audience, who are probably in the eastern Mediterranean. Silas would thus be a natural candidate (cf. Acts 16:37, in Rome about 64) and probably a *scribe* (1 Pet 5:12) *would have the educational level necessary for such a letter. It is more commonly suggested that the writer is Apollos, whose Alexandrian rhetorical and possibly philosophical training would have suited him especially well to write such a letter; he was certainly respected as Paul’s peer in the Pauline churches.* (He seems to have been moving from Rome toward the east or south a few years before Hebrews was written—Tit 3:13—but he could have returned.) Other suggestions, like Barnabas or Priscilla, are possible but have less evidence to commend them than the proposals of Silas and Apollos.

Audience. Although some scholars question this, the audience seems fairly

obviously predominantly Jewish; they are apparently under pressure to give up their Christian distinctives (either from the *synagogue* or from Gentile persecution of Christians). Although the *Hellenistic Jewish thought in the letter* would fit a number of locations including Corinth and Ephesus, the actual seizure of their property in earlier days (10:34) does not fit Corinth or Ephesus (against one commentator, who perhaps fancifully but nevertheless quite skillfully constructs a case for this letter being written to Corinth and 1 Corinthians responding to some features in it). But 13:23 suggests an audience in the Pauline circle (i.e., not in Alexandria, though Apollos was from there). The early persecution fits Thessalonica and possibly Philippi in Macedonia, although a community in Asia Minor or Syria with more ethnic Jewish representation might fit better. (Some have suggested a Roman audience on the basis of 10:32-34 and 13:23-24; the quality of Greek may fit an audience more to the east, but this argument would hardly be decisive. If we read 13:24 as suggesting a Roman place of origin, however, a Roman audience is unlikely.) Wherever the readers are located, they resonate with the intensely Greek rhetoric and interpretation of Judaism that come naturally to this author; the closest parallels are with Philo of Alexandria. (That the letter also has parallels with the *Dead Sea Scrolls* in Judea and apocalyptic motifs should not be surprising; we must construct a composite picture of ancient Judaism based on as many diverse sources as possible. But the clear Philonic parallels point to *Hellenistic rhetorical training. The writer is not on the level of Philo but is clearly a *Hellenistic Jew*.)

Genre. Some scholars have suggested that this document is a homiletic *midrash on Psalm 110 (see Heb 13:22); one cannot deny that the interpretation of this psalm dominates the work. (The narrower suggestion that it was specifically a midrash on the readings for the Feast of Pentecost is not strictly impossible, but evidence for the triennial readings later adopted in Mediterranean synagogues is lacking in this period.) It is more like a treatise than a normal letter, apart from concluding greetings. But one ancient letter-writing form was the “letter-essay,” which in early Judaism and Christianity would naturally have resembled a written homily or sermon; Hebrews could be such a “letter-essay.”

Structure. Comparison was a central feature of much ancient argumentation. *Christ is greater than the angels (1:1-14) who delivered the law (2:1-18)*; this contrast contributes to the writer’s argument that Christ is greater than the law itself. He is greater than Moses and the Promised Land (3:1–4:13). As a priest

after the order of Melchizedek, he is greater than the *Old Testament priesthood (4:14–7:28) because he is attached to a new covenant (chap. 8) and a heavenly temple service (9:1–10:18). Therefore, his followers ought to persevere in faith and not go back, regardless of the cost (10:19–12:13). The writer follows his theoretical discussion, as many letters did, with specific moral exhortations tied into the same theme (13:1–17). Interspersed throughout the letter is the repeated warning against apostasy, noting that the penalty for rejecting the new covenant is greater than that for rejecting the old had been (cf. 2:1–4; 3:14; 4:1–2, 11; 6:1–8, 11–12; 10:26–31; 12:14–17, 25; though cf. expressions of confidence with reasons in 6:9–10; 10:39).

Argumentation. The writer argues from Scripture the way a good Jewish interpreter of his day would; his methods have parallels in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the *rabbis and especially the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher-interpreter Philo. His arguments sometimes confuse or fail to persuade modern readers, but he is making a case first of all for his original readers, who would be accustomed to the kinds of arguments he makes. Given the forms of argumentation he must use to persuade readers in his own cultural context, he argues his case brilliantly, although some of the arguments would have to be restructured to carry the same conviction in our culture. Because the writer's arguments are often complex, this volume's comments on Hebrews are necessarily more detailed than the comments on many other New Testament books.

Commentaries. Commentaries useful for background include William Lane, *Hebrews*, WBC 47 (Waco, TX: Word, 1991); Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989); F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); James W. Thompson, *Hebrews*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). On a less technical level, see, e.g., D. A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, NIBC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990); Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997).

1:1–14

Christ Greater Than the Angels

Christ's superiority to the angels made him greater than the *law, which was said to have been mediated by angels (2:2–3). The writer may also offer this

comparison to argue against toning down Christ's divinity to mere angelic status, a position the readers may have been allowing to appease non-Christian Jewish critics.

1:1-2. These two verses represent some of the most articulate, Atticizing Greek prose in the New Testament and include literary devices such as alliteration (five Greek words beginning with *p* in v. 1). The author also appears to model some of his language on the opening of the prologue to Sirach, a Jewish wisdom book in wide circulation by this period and almost certainly familiar to his readers (also called Ecclesiasticus and available to modern readers in what is usually called the *Apocrypha).

Christ is probably presented here as the ultimate Word of God; ancient Judaism identified God's Word with his Wisdom (cf. Sirach 24:1, 23; Baruch 3:28–4:1). That God had created all things through Wisdom or his Word was noted in the Old Testament (e.g., Prov 8:30; Ps 33:6, alluding to Gen 1) and developed further in Judaism. As the fullness of the Word, Christ was superior to the authentic but partial revelation of God in the law.

“Last days” was Old Testament language for the time of the end (Is 2:2; Ezek 38:16; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:1; cf. Deut 4:30, 32; 8:16), now inaugurated in Christ. An “heir” held title to the property of the one who appointed him heir; cf. comment on “inherit” in verse 4.

1:3. The term for his “brightness” appears elsewhere in the *New Testament* or Septuagint only at Wisdom of Solomon 7:26, describing Wisdom as reflecting God's light, a mirror revealing his image (the term applies to the Logos in *Philo, *Creation* 146). Jewish authors writing in Greek sometimes said that divine Wisdom was the exact “image” (so KJV here) of God, the prototypical stamp by which he “imprinted” (cf. NRSV here) the seal of his image on the rest of creation (the way an image was stamped on coins). Sitting down at the right hand of the supreme king was an image of the ultimate honor and alludes to Psalm 110:1, cited explicitly in Hebrews 1:13. “Purification” of sins was the work of priests; mention of it here anticipates a theme that appears later in the book.

1:4. Some *Diaspora Jewish writers attributed to the angels a role in creation, but early Christian writers routinely denied them such a role (Col 1:16), as did many Judean teachers. Here Jesus' exaltation grants him a title that entitles him to much more status than the angels: Son (1:5). (Although some Jewish teachers said that God honored Israel more than the angels by giving Israel the law, something greater than comparison with Israel is in view here,

because Jesus himself is identified with the divine Word in 1:1-3, and is “son” in a sense in which the angels are not; the title is applied to angels generally [e.g., Job 1:6], but Jesus is distinguished as *the* Son. Those original hearers who wished to compromise their divine view of Jesus but to retain him as superhuman may also have wished to identify him as an angel, as some second-century Jewish Christians did, but if this is the case, the writer rejects this compromise as inadequate—2:5-18.)

1:5. The author cites Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14, contexts that had already been linked in speculations about the coming *Messiah* (4Q174 f1 2i11, 18-19 in the Dead Sea Scrolls). Jewish interpreters often linked texts on the basis of a common key word; the word here is “Son.” Like several other messianic texts, Psalm 2 originally celebrated the promise to the Davidic line in 2 Samuel 7; the “begetting” referred to the royal coronation—in Jesus’ case, his exaltation (cf. similarly Acts 13:33). The repetition of this verse’s *rhetorical question in verse 13 suggests an *inclusio*, or framing device, that brackets off verses 5-14 as a united thought (though Diaspora Jews often introduced quotations from Scripture with rhetorical questions).

1:6. “Firstborn” specified further the inheritance rights of the oldest son, who received double the portion of any subsequent son (Deut 21:17); it is a title of the Davidic king of Psalm 89:26-27. To Jesus’ coronation as king and consequent superiority to the angels the author applies a text from the Septuagint of Deuteronomy 32, a favorite mine for texts among early Christian writers and a text Diaspora Jews used for worship alongside the Psalms. (Although these words are not in the Hebrew manuscripts preserved in the later Masoretic text, their presence in a *Qumran Hebrew copy of Deuteronomy shows that the line was in some Hebrew manuscripts, from which the Greek translation may have derived it.)

The author might read the text according to Jewish interpretive practice: attending to grammatical details, he might distinguish “God” from “him.” (Some of his hearers might have also recalled a Jewish tradition in which God ordered his angels to honor Adam at his creation, because he was God’s image.)

1:7. Although Psalm 104:4 could mean that God uses winds and fire as his messengers, Jewish writers in the first century commonly took the text the other way and often thus suggested that angels were made of fire (for angels and fire, cf., e.g., *1 *Enoch* 17:1; 2 *Enoch* 1a5 [Rec. A]; 20:1; 29:3 [Rec. A]; *3 *Enoch* 47:4; *4 *Ezra* 8:22). (This notion also fit some Greek speculations about the elements. For many, the soul was made of fire—like the stars—or breath; for

*Stoics, the whole world would be resolved back into the primordial fire from which it had come.) The writer's point is simply that angels are subordinate to God in character, in contrast to the Son (1:8).

1:8-9. Psalm 45 may have been composed for a royal wedding celebration, but part of it speaks of God's blessing on the king and probably (certainly in the Greek version cited here) addresses God directly. Jewish interpreters read as much literal significance into a passage as they could, hence the writer of Hebrews invites his fellow Jewish-Christian readers to recognize the plain language of this psalm. Because God is addressed in Psalm 45:6 (cited in Heb 1:8), it is natural to assume that he continues to be addressed in Psalm 45:7 (cited in Heb 1:9). (Later *rabbis applied this text to Abraham, and a later targum applied an earlier verse to the Messiah*; but probably neither tradition was known to the writer of Hebrews, and the former one may have represented anti-Christian polemic.) But Psalm 45:7 distinguishes this God from a God he worships, so that one may distinguish God the Father from God the Son. The writer of Hebrews explicitly affirms Christ's deity in this passage.

1:10-12. Both Jewish and Greek writers sometimes separated quotations with "And he said" or "and." Interpreters often linked texts by means of a common key word or concept, and the writer cites Psalm 102:25-27 on the basis of God's throne being "forever" in Hebrews 1:8 (in context this Old Testament passage also promised God's faithfulness to his covenant people, even though individuals were mortal).

1:13. It is natural for the author to cite Psalm 110:1 because God's "right hand" is envisioned in terms of a place beside his throne (1:8; cf. possibly Wisdom of Solomon 9:4; 18:15). The full citation also includes God addressing the priest-king (see comment on Heb 5:6) as Lord, similar to the citation in 1:8-9. The writer shows himself a master of Jewish exegetical technique.

1:14. He already proved to his readers that angels were "ministering spirits" in 1:7. That they minister not only on behalf of the one who inherited a greater name (1:4) but also for those who inherit salvation (v. 14) would resonate with Jewish readers, who would be familiar with the concept of guardian angels assigned to the righteous by God (e.g., Tobit 5:22; *Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 59:4; Tosefta *Avodah Zarah* 1:17).

2:1-4

Rejecting Christ's Word

According to common Jewish thought, any Israelite who willfully rejected the *law was excluded from the world to come; according to some teachers, this sin was even unpardonable. In Judaism, deliberate acts always carried more liability than inadvertent ones.

In a widely recognized Jewish tradition, God had given his law through angels (Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19; *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15.136; and *Jubilees 1:27). (The rabbis preferred to emphasize Moses's mediation and the great number of angels present for the Israelites.) The tradition may have some basis in the interchange between God and his angel in Exodus (cf. Ex 3:2), the association of Psalm 68:17 with the Sinai tradition, and especially Deuteronomy 33:2 (more so in the *LXX, which declares that his angels were with him on his right).

Because *Christ is greater than the angels (Heb 1:1-14), rejecting his word is a more serious offense than rejecting the word said to have been mediated through the angels (2:2). This is a natural Jewish *qal vahomer*, or “how much more” argument: if the lesser point applies, then how much more does the greater point apply. Some scholars have suggested a nautical image (a drifting ship) in verse 1, as well as significant juridical language in verses 2-4.

2:5-18

Christ Human, Not an Angel

Recognizing Jesus as suprahuman but not wishing to offend their Jewish colleagues who protested that God's oneness disallowed Jesus' divinity, some second-century Jewish Christians portrayed Jesus as a chief angel. The temptation to such a path was probably already present among the audience of this letter (see comment on Gal 1:8; 4:14), so the writer warns forcefully against such a view. *Christ was divine and became human as well; but he was never an angel.

2:5. The *Old Testament and Jewish teaching declared that God's people would reign with him in the world to come, just as Adam and Eve had been designed to reign for him in the beginning. The writer proceeds to prove this point by appealing to a specific Old Testament text, Psalm 8:4-6, in Jewish *midrashic style.

2:6-7. “One has testified somewhere” (NASB) does not mean that the writer has forgotten what part of Scripture he is quoting; this was a way of expressing

confidence that the important issue was that God had inspired the words. *Philo used similar phrases in this manner. The writer can introduce Psalm 8:4-6 naturally on the basis of the Jewish interpretive rule, *gezerah shavah*, the principle by which one was permitted to link key words or phrases. This text speaks of everything subdued under someone's feet, as had the text he had cited most recently (1:13).

Psalm 8:4-6 declares that although humanity is nothing in itself, God appointed humans as rulers over all his creation, second only to himself (alluding to Gen 1:26-27). The *Septuagint interprets this passage as "a little lower than the angels" instead of "a little lower than God" (the Hebrew word used there, *'elohim*, sometimes did mean angels instead of God). That angels were more powerful than people in this age was true, but the writer of Hebrews is going to make a different point. In the verses that follow, he expounds the version of this passage with which his readers are familiar in traditional Jewish interpretive style. ("*Son of Man" was simply a Semitic way of saying "human being," and the writer here does not seem to try to get more out of it than this, although he could have had he wished to do so, because he applies the whole text to Jesus. Some scholars have also connected this passage with the binding of Isaac, the tradition known as the *Aqedah*, but the evidence cited may be too sparse and late for the points of contact here.)

2:8. Jewish interpreters often established that a text could not mean what it seemed to mean on face value (or could not mean only that) before proceeding to argue what they believed that it did mean. Here, because the creation is not currently subject to humanity, the author can argue that God's original intention in Adam will be fulfilled again for all the righteous only in the *age to come (2:5)—a doctrine shared with the rest of Judaism. But he can also argue that one representative man has already gone ahead for all humanity, as a sort of new Adam (2:9).

2:9. In Jewish thought, angels ruled the nations in this age. Jesus had obviously been made lower than God and the angels, but after death he was crowned with glory (1:13); therefore this text was not only true of the past Adam and God's people in the future but also had been fulfilled in Jesus. (The author may read "a little lower" as "for a little while lower," which was an acceptable way to read the *LXX of Ps 8; he also distinguishes "a little lower" from "crowned with honor," though the lines are parallel in Hebrew. Ancient Jewish interpreters generally read passages whatever way fit best with their views.)

2:10. That Christ had been made lower but then exalted shows him as the

forerunner of the righteous who would inherit the coming world (1:14; 2:5). The term *archegos*, translated “pioneer” (NIV) or “captain” (KJV), means “pioneer” (NRSV), “leader” (cf. GNT), “founder” or “champion.” The term was used for both human and divine heroes, founders of schools or those who cut a path forward for their followers and whose exploits for humanity were rewarded by exaltation. “For whom . . . and through whom are all things” was a phrase *Stoics used to describe the supreme God, but the idea fit Jewish thought about God and divine Wisdom and was widely used by Diaspora Jewish writers*, including Paul (1 Cor 8:6). The Septuagint uses the author’s term for “perfect” for the consecration of a priest; some contemporary Jewish texts also speak of a righteous person’s life crowned with martyrdom as being “perfected” thereby.

2:11. Again the idea is that the text has been fulfilled in Jesus, who has gone on ahead, but will yet be fulfilled in the rest of the righteous; he is the “firstborn” (1:6) among many brothers.

2:12. To prove the thesis of verse 11, the writer cites Psalm 22:22, which can be applied to Jesus the one who suffered because it is a psalm of the righteous sufferer (the Gospels apply some of its verses to Jesus’ crucifixion).

2:13. Here the author cites Isaiah 8:17-18. Isaiah 8:17 refers to the Lord who was a sanctuary to the righteous and a stumbling block to the rest of Israel (8:14-15), a text that, when linked with other “stone” texts by the Jewish interpretive principle *gezerah shavah* (linking of texts with the same key word, e.g., Is 28:16; Ps 118:22), could apply to the *Messiah. In Isaiah 8:18 the prophet explains that his own children have symbolic names to signify things to Israel. The writer can cite it because it immediately follows 8:17 and perhaps because its wording matches his point (see comment on Heb 2:12). He may also make the link, however, because one of Isaiah’s children pointed toward Immanuel, God with us (Is 7:14-16; 8:1-4; cf. 9:6-7), and this text declared the other children brothers.

2:14-15. Jesus had to become part of humanity, as in Psalm 8:4-6, to become a forerunner, a new Adam for humanity. Ancient literature often spoke of the terrors of death, although many philosophers claimed to transcend this fear. Jewish literature had already connected the devil and death, especially in the Wisdom of Solomon (which this author and his audience probably knew well; here Wisdom of Solomon 2:23-24); some later texts even identify *Satan with the angel of death. Like Heracles in the Greek tradition and perhaps God the divine warrior of Jewish tradition (cf. Is 26:19-21; 44:24-26), Jesus is the “champion” (see comment on Heb 2:10) who has delivered his people.

2:16. Still expounding Psalm 8:4-6, the writer reminds his readers that Christ acted as forerunner for the world to come for God's people ("Abraham's seed"; cf. perhaps Is 41:8-9), not for the angels. (The Old Testament called Abraham's chosen descendants "children of God"—e.g., Deut 32:19; Hos 11:1; the writer is addressing Jewish Christians, members of a people who have long believed that a great destiny awaits them in the future.) Christ is already exalted above the angels (2:7, 9), as his people will be in the age to come (2:5).

2:17-18. The writer here gives a reason for Christ's becoming human to redeem humanity: identification of the sort that had to characterize a *high priest (see comment on 5:1-3). Such an image might have intrigued many people of antiquity, whose agendas were generally low on the aristocracy's list of priorities; in the cities, the aristocracies merely kept them pacified with gifts of free food, public games and so forth. On "faithful," see comment on 3:2 and 5.

3:1-6

Christ Greater Than Moses

3:1. The mention of a "heavenly" calling would have appealed to philosophically minded Jewish thinkers like Philo, who regarded earthly reality as only a shadow of heavenly reality. The writer of Hebrews probably presents Jesus as superior to Moses, who was *not* a *high priest. (*Samaritan writers saw Moses as an "apostle," and some Jewish writers saw the high priest as such, although rarely. The author of Hebrews sees Jesus as an "apostle," a commissioned messenger of the Father, in a way greater than Moses or an earthly high priest [for a commissioned "agent," see "apostle" in the glossary]. Philo regarded Moses as a high priest of sorts, but the *Old Testament and most of Judaism recognized that Aaron filled that role, and the writer of Hebrews probably assumes only the Old Testament perspective on the part of his readers.)

3:2. In verses 2-6 the writer constructs an implicit *midrash on Numbers 12:7-8, expounding the familiar text without directly citing it (cf. also 1 Chron 17:14 LXX). In this passage, God honors Moses above Aaron and Miriam, claiming him to be greater than a normal prophet and noting that "he is faithful in all my household." Jesus is thus this special kind of prophet "like Moses," of whom there were no others (Deut 18:15-18).

3:3-4. Comparison (*synkrisis*) was central to much ancient argumentation; comparing one favorably with another who was already honorable would

increase one's honor further. In many Jewish traditions Moses was the greatest person in history, and in others he was certainly one of the greatest (i.e., next to Abraham). Jewish and Christian writers used the argument that the builder was greater than what was made (v. 3) to note that the Creator was greater than his creation (as in v. 4). This writer identifies Jesus as the Creator. Ancient writers often developed arguments based on wordplays; this writer plays on two senses of "house": God's "household" (3:2) and a building (3:3-4).

3:5. Past symbols could testify to future realities in Jewish *apocalyptic literature*, the way that earthly "shadows" testified to heavenly realities in writings by Philo and Jews influenced by Platonism. Jewish readers may have recalled the tradition that Moses foresaw and testified of the messianic era (on his special visionary abilities see Num 12:8). A first-century reader could understand Numbers 12:7 the way later rabbis also did: God was owner of the house, but Moses was the manager of the estate, and like many managers, was a servant.

3:6. A firstborn son was naturally heir and lord over the house, acting on his father's authority while the father lived and becoming master when his father died. In the Old Testament, God's household was Israel; here it is the faithful remnant, those who have submitted to God's truth in Christ.

3:7-19

Rejecting Christ Like Rejecting Moses

Here begins an explicit *midrash* (commentary) on Psalm 95:7-11, which continues until 4:14, where the midrash on Psalm 110:4 begins. Like other Jewish writers, this author gives attention to the details of the text. Israel was to have "rest" in the Promised Land, but the writer points out that this means not only in this age—when the promise was never completely fulfilled (4:8)—but in its completion in the age to come.

3:7. Ancient Judaism most often associated the "Holy Spirit" with prophecy, and later rabbis and some others particularly associated this prophetic Spirit with the inspiration of Scripture (among other activities; e.g., *Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 8:16*; 4 Ezra 14:22).

3:8-11. The author cites Psalm 95:7-11, a text that later became familiar through its regular use in the *synagogue liturgy, but that would have been already known to most first-century Jews who recited the Psalms. This psalm

refers to Israel's rebellion in the wilderness and calls on its hearers not to be like their ancestors. Later Jewish teachers debated whether the wilderness generation might have inherited the life of the world to come, even though they did not enter the Promised Land (Tosefta *Sanhedrin* 13:10-11); these rabbis believed that God's people could *atone for their sins in this age by suffering. But the psalmist's words seem like firmer rejection, without ethnicity offering the privilege of salvation; the writer of Hebrews thus contends with good reason that they did not enter the world to come.

3:12-13. Like many ancient Jewish interpreters, the writer points out that the psalmist's exhortation for "today" was still valid in his own generation.

3:14-15. The psalm states that God's people could be cut off from the covenant if they refused to heed it; thus the writer warns his readers that they become sharers in Christ's *kingdom (2:5-16) only if they persevere to the end.

3:16-19. Following Greek argumentative practice, the writer produces a series of *rhetorical questions and their obvious answers, reinforcing his point.

4:1-13

Only the Obedient Enter His Promise

4:1-2. The Israelites rebelled in the wilderness because they did not believe the word Moses gave them; those who rebelled against the word of *Christ were acting like Moses' generation had.

4:3-5. The writer now attends to grammatical details as Jewish interpreters in his day normally did. What could the psalmist mean by "my rest," since God had already rested from his works on the seventh day of creation? (Linking texts by a shared key word was a common Jewish exegetical technique; Jewish liturgy later linked these two texts similarly.) Perhaps he uses this text to point to the future too; some Jewish writers (cf., e.g., *Mekilta Shabbata* 1) believed that the world to come would be the ultimate sabbath rest, the final stage of creation.

4:6-7. All of Moses' generation failed to achieve "rest" (3:16-19), settlement in the land. Indeed, all subsequent generations from Joshua on, with the notable near-exceptions of David and Josiah, failed to subdue all the land promised to Abraham. Thus the psalmist (Ps 95:7-8) could warn his own and subsequent generations to obey God's word or the same thing would happen to them. (By the *New Testament period, with Judea under Rome's authority and no end of the Roman Empire in sight, most Jewish people agreed that the restoration of

their *kingdom and consequently rest in the land would come only in the end time, which most hoped was soon.)

4:8-9. “Joshua” and “Jesus” are the same name (these are anglicized forms of the Hebrew and Greek, respectively); perhaps the writer thus intends the first Joshua to point to his later namesake. But his main point is that Joshua was not able to subdue the whole land (4:6-7; Josh 13:1-2); the promise is thus yet to be fulfilled.

4:10-11. Because the *Messiah, the *Spirit and other events that had arrived in Jesus were normally relegated in Judaism to the age to come*, early Christian writers could say that believers in Jesus experienced a foretaste of the future world in their present relationship with God (see comment on 6:5).

4:12-13. God’s word, received by Israel through Moses and by the readers of Hebrews in Christ (4:2), left those who heard it no excuses. Judaism recognized the ability of God to search out every detail of one’s heart and thoughts (e.g., Ps 139:23), and it was natural to apply this property to his word or wisdom.

The Alexandrian Jewish philosopher *Philo spoke of the power of the universal, divine “Word” (the Logos, divine reason that permeated the universe) to subdivide the soul into smaller and smaller units, especially into its rational and irrational components; but he sometimes identified spirit and soul, as the New Testament writers usually do. The point here is not an analysis of human nature, but that the Word searches the heart in such detail that it is like a sharp sword that divides even what is virtually (but not absolutely) indivisible, whether soul and spirit or joints and marrow.

4:14–5:10

Christ the High Priest

Although *Philo portrays the Logos, the divine Word or reason, as God’s *high priest, this is probably not in the mind of the author of Hebrews. (Indeed, the emphasis on Christ’s participation in people’s humanity contrasts with Philo’s attempt to circumvent the high priest’s full humanity when he interceded for Israel.) Instead, a more obvious source lies at hand: his interpretation of Psalm 110:4, which becomes explicit in Hebrews 5:6. His citation of the first verse of this psalm in 1:13, applied by Jesus to himself (Mk 12:35-37), may have already called Psalm 110:4 to his biblically informed readers’ minds.

4:14. See Psalm 110:4, cited in Hebrews 5:6. *Apocalyptic traditions portray

heaven as a place of worship; the imagery of a heavenly temple is especially prominent in the book of Revelation. In later *Samaritan tradition*, Moses (*who in some Jewish tradition had ascended to heaven to receive the law*) served as heavenly high priest; but the Christian portrait of Jesus fulfilling this role is probably earlier than the Samaritan tradition about Moses.

4:15. The writer continues the theme that *Christ had experienced humanness without compromising his obedience (2:14-18). In the unlikely event that his readers were familiar with the abuses of the high priesthood in Jerusalem, they might have recognized here a contrast with the high priestly aristocracy.

4:16. The ark of the covenant symbolized God's throne in the *Old Testament (e.g., 2 Sam 6:2; Ps 80:1; 99:1; Is 37:16; cf. Ps 22:3) and in the ancient Near East (where kings or deities were often portrayed as enthroned on winged figures). But the ark was unapproachable, secluded in the most holy part of the temple, which even the high priest could approach only once a year. Christ has opened full access to God to all his followers (10:19-20).

5:1-3. While continuing the theme of 4:15-16, the author also shows Christ's superiority over other *high priests, who sin (Lev 9:7; 16:6).

5:4. The writer follows the Old Testament law on the high priestly succession; in Palestine in his own day, the office of high priest was a political favor granted by the Romans. Outside Judea, however, this was not an issue; the writer speaks of the system God had appointed in the Bible.

5:5. Citing again Psalm 2:7 (see comment on Heb 1:5), the writer proves from it that Christ's royal coronation was God's initiative. In the next verse he links this kingship with the high priesthood.

5:6. Although the Romans had a powerful high priest too (the *pontifex maximus*), the writer's model for this high priesthood and all its nuances derive unquestionably from the Old Testament and Jewish tradition. Melchizedek was a Canaanite priest-king (Gen 14:18); to speak of a "priest like Melchizedek" was thus to speak first of all of a priest who was also king. Israel had known a dynasty of priest-kings only in Hasmonean times, after they threw off the Syrian yoke and before they were subdued by Rome; some Jews opposed this combination. The *Dead Sea Scrolls came to separate the anointed high priest from the anointed king *Messiah, which was a necessary distinction so long as one was from Levi and the other from Judah (cf. 7:14). But Melchizedek was not Levitical; one like him would be a priest-king without being descended from the Jewish priestly line.

Rabbis later contended that Psalm 110:4 meant that God transferred Melchizedek's priesthood from Melchizedek to Abraham; they may have argued this point to counteract Christian claims that it referred to Jesus. Melchizedek appears in some other Jewish traditions (in the 11Q13 Dead Sea Scrolls) as a heavenly figure, perhaps Michael, and is sometimes associated in Jewish literature with the end time. The writer does not appeal to this extrabiblical tradition, however, which could play into the hands of those wishing to reduce Christ to angelic status (Heb 2:5-18); the plain statement of Psalm 110:4 is sufficient for his case.

5:7. Judaism stressed that God heard the pious; God answered Jesus' prayers by the *resurrection, however, not by escape from death. Although the writer's source here could be Psalm 22:5 and 24, it is more likely that he and his readers are acquainted with the tradition of Jesus' struggle and commitment in Gethsemane (Mk 14:36, 39).

5:8-10. Discipline, including beatings, was a standard part of most Greek education. Classical Greek writers stressed learning through suffering, and the Old Testament and later Jewish wisdom traditions portray divine chastisement as a sign of God's love. The Greek paronomasia here, *emathen aph' hon epathen* "learned from the things he suffered," was already a common play on words in ancient literature. But the writer here challenges the Greek philosophic idea that the supreme God (with whom the writer in some sense identifies the Son—1:9; 3:3-4) was incapable of feeling, pain or true sympathy. Jesus' participation in human suffering qualified him to be the ultimate high priest; the *Septuagint applies the word used here for "made perfect" to the consecration of priests (v. 9).

5:11–6:12

Press Deeper or Fall Away

The writer complains that his readers' knowledge of the Bible is inadequate to follow the rest of his argument. But he insists that they must become more biblically informed if they wish to persevere—and he proceeds to give them the rest of his argument anyway (6:13–7:28).

5:11-12. Many Greek writers used "much to say" to indicate how important their topic was. Even philosophers agreed that one must begin with simple matters before leading students to the more difficult; but they were not above

complaining about their pupils' slowness to learn. Greek moralists also used "milk" and "solid food" figuratively, contrasting basic and advanced instruction. The "elementary principles" (NASB) or "elementary truths" (NIV) are the rudiments or basics (summarized in 6:1-2); Greek writers often applied the term to the alphabet. Some writers frequently reproved their readers in similar ways ("You should be teachers by now!") to stir them to learn what they should already know.

5:13. Some philosophers, such as Pythagoras, distinguished between elementary and advanced students, calling them "babes" (NASB, KJV) and "mature" (cf. v. 14; "perfect"—KJV) respectively.

5:14. Whereas Platonists disparaged mere sensory knowledge and Skeptics (another philosophical school) valued it even less, *Stoics believed that one's senses (of which there were five, as in *Aristotle*) *were useful, and* Epicureans in particular trusted them. Those who thought the senses at all reliable, like *Seneca and Philo, wanted them trained for moral sensibility. The ability to differentiate critically between good and bad, i.e., between truth and falsehood, was important to Greco-Roman writers in general, although the specific application to moral sensibilities is more often Jewish (2 Sam 14:17; 1 Kings 3:9; Ezek 44:23). The writer borrows the language of Greek ethics, which would impress his Diaspora Jewish readers, and uses it to call them to study the Bible more thoroughly.*

6:1. They had to get past the basics to biblical maturity (5:11-14), or they would fall away (6:4-8). The writer probably chooses these items as the "basics" because they were the basic sort of instructions about Jewish belief given to converts to Judaism, which all the author's readers would have understood before becoming followers of Jesus. These items represented Jewish teachings still useful for followers of Christ. Judaism stressed *repentance as a regular antidote for sin, and a once-for-all kind of repentance for the turning of pagans to Judaism; Judaism naturally stressed faith as well. Although "dead" works could echo the common Jewish denunciation of idols as dead, that specific an allusion is unlikely in this context; cf. 9:14.

6:2-3. "*Baptisms" probably refers to the various kinds of ceremonial washings in Judaism, of which the most relevant to Christianity was *proselyte baptism as an act of conversion washing away the former impurity of a pagan life. Jewish worshipers laid hands on certain sacrifices, and Jewish teachers laid hands on disciples to ordain them; the latter was more relevant to Christian practice. The *resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment were standard*

Jewish doctrines, though embarrassing to some Hellenized elements in Judaism.

6:4. Early Judaism severely limited possession of the *Spirit. The *Dead Sea Scrolls* limit the activity of the Holy Spirit to the congregation of the children of light, that is, those who agree with them; but besides these and Christian texts, others viewed the Spirit as even rarer. Later rabbis most emphasized the Spirit's rareness; they generally report that the Spirit was so rare that even when someone was worthy to receive it, the unworthiness of his generation prevented him from doing so.

"Illumined" or "enlightened" clearly means converted, as in 10:32; the Dead Sea Scrolls similarly speak of their teachers as the "illuminators" and their adherents as "children of light." "Tasted" also normally meant "experienced" (2:9), and both the use of "heavenly" in the letter (cf. 3:1; 8:1-5) and the limitation of the *Holy Spirit to Christians in early Christian literature also indicate that this person was genuinely converted.

6:5. Most of Judaism regarded the present age as under sin, but believed that God would rule the coming age unchallenged, after he raised the dead and judged them. Christians recognized that they had begun to experience the life of the future world; they were the vanguard of the future *kingdom (see comment on 4:10-11). On the "word," see comment on 4:2 and 12.

6:6. God had a higher standard for those who should have known better (Num 14:22-23). Judaism generally believed that some people could rebel against God so brazenly, aware that they were doing so, that they would become unable to repent; the offense had to be extremely serious, however. (Later rabbis were not unanimous; Rabbi Meir is said to have insisted that the notorious apostate Elisha ben Abuya could repent, for example. But the majority opinion seems to have been that some could go too far, including King Manasseh. The Dead Sea Scrolls also attest that one who had been part of the community for ten years—and thus knew full well what he was doing—and then turned away was never allowed to return. But as some writers have pointed out, this verse refers to intentional apostasy, not a single sin or drifting away that can be addressed by repentance; drifting away may be covered under Jas 5:19-20.) The point here is not that God does not accept the repentant, but that some hearts become too hard to consider repenting, because they refuse to acknowledge Christ, the only means of repentance. By willfully choosing the kind of belief that nailed Jesus to the cross, they accept responsibility again for killing him.

6:7-8. Others had also used ground choked with thorns and thistles as an image for the wicked and their spiritual destination in barrenness and death (e.g.,

Is 5:6). Judaism treated apostates as spiritually dead, as did *Pythagoreans and some other groups.

6:9. Greco-Roman moralists often presented their exhortations as reminders, thereby toning down the possible harshness of their words and making them more palatable: “We know, of course, that *you* would never do something like that.” When they did think that their readers were likely to pursue such a course, however, they would state matters more harshly, rebuking them. The writer has some reason for confidence in his hearers, stated in 6:10.

6:10. “Ministry to the *saints” (KJV, NASB) probably refers to financial help. Some suggest that it might refer to a continuing effort to help the poor Jerusalem Christians that Paul had initiated (Rom 15:25); by A.D. 68, however, with Jerusalem surrounded and the Christians having escaped safely to the wilderness, such monies would have to be sent elsewhere, even if in Judea. On charity see, for example, comment on Matthew 6:2-4.

6:11-12. Ancient moral exhortation often emphasized imitating positive role models (some of whom this writer will list in chap. 11). As Israel “inherited” the land, so Judaism said that the righteous would “inherit” the world to come.

6:13-20

The Unbreakable Oath to Jesus

The writer compares the promise (continuing the theme of 6:12) God made to Abraham with the promise he had made to one who would be *high priest after the order of Melchizedek. Although he does not quote here Psalm 110:4, which states this promise, he expects his readers to understand this point presupposed by his exposition (cf. Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21).

6:13-17. God swore this “by himself” (Gen 22:16; Ex 32:13), just like the promise to the one who would be high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4).

This oath is one of several by God in the *Old Testament. God had sworn an oath to David (Ps 89:35, 49; 132:11), which Jewish people expected to be fulfilled in the *Messiah*; *he swore to judge Israel for their sins, and he did so (Ps 106:26). But the greatest human oaths were oaths sworn “by God,” and when God swore “by himself” his words were guaranteed, especially in the few instances where the oath included a promise not to change his mind (Ps 110:4; Is 45:23). God swore by himself and would not change his mind that everyone*

would have to acknowledge him in the day of judgment (Is 45:23); he likewise swore by himself judgment on the royal house of Judah (Jer 22:5), on the Jewish refugees in Egypt (Jer 44:26), on Israel (Amos 4:2; 6:8), on Edom (Jer 49:13) and on Babylon (Jer 51:14). (Philo claimed that God alone was worthy to bear witness to his own veracity, although he also decided that any of God's words had the force of an oath, hence he had not literally sworn by himself.) The accumulation of standard legal terms in this context is not surprising, given the legal force and common courtroom use of oaths.

6:18. Although God swore more than these two promises, the writer emphasizes here the two he has just mentioned: the one to Abraham and the one to the priest like Melchizedek. Greek philosophers believed that the gods were immutable, unchangeable; most Jewish people believed that their God was absolute and unchangeable in his character, yet he dealt with human beings as they were (Ps 18:25-26). The oath is thus important, although both Jews and Greek philosophers believed that the one who was truly God (as opposed to the mythical antics of Greek gods) did not lie.

6:19. The “anchor” was a frequent metaphor in Greco-Roman literature, often for the secure hold on hope which moral qualities produced. “Inside the veil” means that believers have a secure hope in the “holy of holies” (cf. Lev 16:2), which only the high priest could enter once a year. (Later rabbinic texts also portray God as “behind the veil,” from which he utters his decrees. Although this parallel may illustrate that the readers of Hebrews would have caught the author's Jewish expression for God's presence in heaven, the Old Testament is his direct source.) The writer means not the earthly but the spiritual holy of holies, in the heavenly temple (see comment on 8:1-5).

6:20. Jesus appears as forerunner often in the book (compare the idea in 2:10; 5:9); the term could be applied to a military vanguard, to firstfruits, to the first-place runner and so forth. It always signifies that the rest of the company is coming afterward.

7:1-10

The Nature of Melchizedek's Priesthood

Because Scripture declares David's lord to be a priest like Melchizedek (Ps 110:4, in Heb 5:6), a Jewish interpreter would naturally ask, In what ways is he like Melchizedek? The writer's point is to show that Jesus' priesthood is greater

than and so supersedes the Levitical priesthood of contemporary Judaism. Psalm 110 invites the reader to look for traits of the ultimate king in Genesis 14.

7:1. Here the author summarizes Genesis 14:17-24, in which the Canaanite priest-king of the city that later became Jerusalem blessed Abram. (The identification of Salem with Jerusalem is corroborated by Ps 76:2 and Egyptian execration texts, and assumed in *Josephus*, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the *rabbis.)

7:2. *Philo and others commonly interpreted *Old Testament names allegorically. Jews like Philo and Josephus also interpreted Melchizedek's name as the writer of Hebrews does (as *melek*, "king," plus *tsedeq*, "righteousness").

7:3. One Jewish interpretive principle (used when convenient) was that what was not mentioned did not happen. (Philo especially, though not exclusively—cf. the rabbis—exploited this technique. Thus, for instance, Philo argued that the wise man's family consisted of his virtues, because at one point Moses listed virtues instead of listing all ancestors. Similarly, because Cain's death is not mentioned, Cain did not die [for Philo, Cain represents deathless folly]. This technique of arguing from silence was applied selectively, of course, because *most* possible details were not mentioned in a text.) The writer of Hebrews can thus argue that Melchizedek, for the purpose of the comparison, was without parents, because Genesis 14 does not mention them, and Genesis supplies parentage and genealogy for other important representatives of God. To Greek readers, to be without beginning or end was to be divine (e.g., an argument by the philosopher Thales).

7:4. Tithing was already an ancient Near Eastern custom before it was mandated in the Old Testament, and a form of it is also attested in Greco-Roman literature. Here the author refers to Genesis 14:20, its first occurrence in the Bible.

7:5-6. Under Old Testament *law, the tithes went to the descendants of Levi, who was a descendant of Abraham (e.g., Num 18:26; 2 Chron 31:4-6; Neh 10:37-38; 13:5, 12); but Abraham tithed to someone else.

7:7-10. The writer's point is that Melchizedek (and thus the one who has inherited his priesthood—5:6) is greater than Abraham and thus greater than Levi, for Abraham is greater than Levi. Seeking to get around this argument, later rabbis said that God withdrew the priesthood from Melchizedek (for blessing Abram before blessing God) and gave it to Abraham in Psalm 110:4; but Psalm 110 clearly refers to the ultimate priest-king who would rule over the nations, not to Abraham. Like Philo, the writer of Hebrews believes that the

perfect priest is eternal; but this writer can prove his case from Genesis 14 (or even better, from Ps 110 on Jewish premises about the future *Messiah and the resurrection of the dead*).

7:11-28

The New Priesthood Supersedes the Old

The writer of Hebrews had a difficult task. Although history was ultimately on his side—as the destruction of the temple not long after proved—he wanted all the Bible on his side too, and the Bible said that the Levitical priesthood was “perpetual” (e.g., Ex 40:15). Although some *narratives in Scripture could undermine a literal construal of that phrase (e.g., Ex 32:10), and one could interpret the old priesthood allegorically (as some Jewish people in the writer’s day did) or recognize eternal principles merely expressed in transitory, culturally relevant forms (as do many interpreters today), the writer of Hebrews had a more useful approach for his own audience. For him, the new and superior priesthood clearly promised in Scripture makes the old priesthood obsolete.

7:11-19. The *Dead Sea Scrolls eventually recognized two “anointed” figures: a warrior *messiah descended from David, hence of Judah, and an anointed priest from the tribe of Levi. But Psalm 110 allows this writer to view both roles as fulfilled by one future figure; a priest “like Melchizedek” need not be descended from Levi, and was, in fact, greater than Levi (7:4-10).

Philo spoke of the “perfection” of Levi as a model of the perfect priesthood; the author of Hebrews disagrees. Like *Plato and his successors, this writer notes that what changes is imperfect, for the perfect by nature does not need to change. Yet God had promised another priesthood, an eternal and hence changeless one (7:17; cf. 7:3), which renders the first, imperfect one obsolete. (The term for “setting aside” in v. 18 was even used in business documents for a legal annulment.)

7:20-21. This priesthood is also greater than the Levitical priesthood because, unlike the latter, it is guaranteed with a divine oath (see comment on 6:13-18). This point constitutes a partial answer for any possible appeal to the *Old Testament claim that the Levitical prescriptions were perpetual ordinances; God changed some points in the law when such changes were necessary to accomplish his original, eternal purpose in the law* (e.g., Jer 3:16; cf. 2 Kgs 18:4), but in this case he had sworn and promised not to change his mind.

7:22-25. On the eternal priest's superiority to temporal ones, see also 7:11-19. In the unlikely event that his readers are familiar with the politics of the Jerusalem aristocracy, they would think of the Romans' appointing and deposing of priests. More likely, however, the only issue here is the priests' mortality. The term for "guarantee" (NASB, GNT) or "surety" (KJV) in verse 22 was used in business documents for a deposit, a security guaranteeing that one would carry through on one's word or obligation, or someone who made such a guarantee.

7:26. Levitical priests were to avoid defilement, and special precautions were taken to avoid the *high priest's defilement before the Day of Atonement. This was the one day a year on which the high priest would enter the holy of holies (although he may have entered several times on that day; cf. Lev 16:13-16). Even though later rabbis' views may be stricter than the actual practice of the Jerusalem high priests, their elaborate care to avoid the high priest's defilement is instructive (he was secluded for the week preceding that day; precautions were taken to avoid a nocturnal emission the night before; etc.). But such earthly high priests could never compare with the heavenly high priest, just as the earthly tabernacle was only a shadow of the perfect one in heaven (see comment on 3:1; 8:1-5).

7:27. High priests did not directly offer up the daily offerings, but they were responsible for the priestly service that did offer them. Fire was to burn on the altar continually; Israel's sacrifices were offered day after day; priests offered daily morning and evening sacrifices on behalf of the whole nation in the temple. The writer may be conflating the duties of the whole priesthood with the duties of the high priest on the Day of Atonement, thus stressing the necessity of repetition in the Levitical cultus. Or he might mean "daily" hyperbolically for "continually," year after year. Under the law, only on the Day of Atonement did the high priest make an offering for his sins and then for those of the nation (Lev 16:6, 11, 15-16).

7:28. By Jesus' *resurrection he naturally qualifies for the "eternal" priesthood like Melchizedek in Psalm 110:4 (Heb 7:17). Many ancient thinkers accepted only what was eternal as "perfect." (The writer cites the promise given after the law, hence a statement that the law could not supersede. Addressing a different line of reasoning in Gal 3, Paul speaks of a promise that came *before* the law and that the law cannot annul. Thus Paul and the author of Hebrews assert promise over law from different directions.)

The Heavenly Tabernacle

Parallels between the heavenly and earthly were common in some Jewish sources (e.g., the heavenly and earthly court or Sanhedrin), as elsewhere in ancient thought (e.g., the heavenly temple corresponding to the Babylonian temple of Marduk, called Esagila, and the Canaanite temple of Baal). (Some ancient Near Eastern temples and later *Mithraea* were also designed to reflect the structure of the whole cosmos, signifying the deity's universal rule. *Philo naturally applied the principle of heavenly prototype and earthly copy even more broadly, following Platonic models. When specifically comparing the heavenly and earthly temples, Philo allegorized in great detail, regarding the ideal heavenly temple as virtue, its altar as ideas, its linen as earth, etc.) Given the ancient Middle Eastern setting, correspondences between heavenly and earthly temples were probably intended even in Exodus 25:8-9, part of which is cited in Hebrews 8:5.

Much of Judaism, from Hellenized wisdom traditions (Wisdom of Solomon 9:8) to *apocalyptic visionaries and writers and later *rabbis, spoke of the earthly temple as an imitation of the heavenly one. The eternity and value of the old temple are relativized by comparing it with the true temple in heaven.

8:1. Jesus' seat at God's right hand was proved by Psalm 110:1 (Heb 1:13), which clearly addressed the same person as the priest like Melchizedek (Ps 110:4, cited in Heb 5:6; 7:17).

8:2-5. See on the introduction to 8:1-5. Like followers of *Plato (including, on this point, Philo), the writer of Hebrews sees the earthly as a "copy and shadow" of the heavenly reality (8:5). (The word for "copy" means "sketch" [NRSV] or "plan, outline," as in the *LXX of Ezek 42:15, which deals with the temple of the world to come; many of its details the author of Hebrews might interpret symbolically, an approach not necessarily out of harmony with the symbolic language of Ezekiel elsewhere, e.g., 31:2-9.) Unlike Plato, the writer of Hebrews does not see the heavenly reality only as an ideal world to be apprehended by the mind: Jesus really went there. Jewish apocalyptic writers sometimes also spoke of the future *kingdom (which generally included a magnificent temple) as a present reality (at least as a prototype) in heaven.

8:6-13

The New Covenant

The writer produces here an extended citation from Jeremiah 31:31-34 to demonstrate his case that the Bible itself predicted a change in the *law*. *This text was also stressed by the* Qumran sectarians who probably wrote the *Dead Sea Scrolls; they saw themselves as the people of this “new covenant.” But they interpreted Moses’ law more strictly, whereas this writer would have been considered a more liberal Jew on this point than Philo was (13:9), valuing the principles as eternal but the forms as cultural and temporary.

8:6-7. The author picks up a hint he dropped in 7:12: the old priesthood was tied with the old law and its covenant, and both were shown to be imperfect if they were superseded.

8:8-9. The phrase generally rendered “new” covenant in Jeremiah 31:31 could also be translated “renewed” covenant. The first covenant was meant to be written on people’s hearts (Deut 30:11-14), and the righteous actually had it there (Ps 37:31; 40:8; 119:11; Is 51:7); but according to Jeremiah, most of Israel did *not* have it in their hearts (cf., e.g., Deut 5:29). The difference between the former and the new covenant would be precisely that whereas the Israelites broke the first covenant (Jer 31:32), the new law would be written within them, and they would know God (Jer 31:33-34).

8:10-12. Jeremiah echoes the language of the first covenant: “I will be their God, and they will be my people” (e.g., Lev 26:12). “Knowing” God was also covenant language, but on a personal level it referred to the sort of intimate relationship with God that the prophets had.

8:13. The writer undoubtedly says “about to disappear” because the temple service had not been directly discontinued by Jesus’ exaltation, but it was at that time on the verge of disappearing. If, as appears likely, this letter was written in the late 60s A.D. (see introduction), many in the *Diaspora recognized that the Romans might soon crush Jerusalem and the temple. Apart from a few groups not very dependent on the Jerusalem temple (such as the *Essenes), most Palestinian Jews were forced to make major readjustments in cultic practice after the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70.

9:1-10

The Old Tabernacle

On the principle of correspondence between the heavenly and earthly tabernacles, see comment on 8:1-5. The writer follows the *Old Testament

carefully in his description in 9:1-10, not conforming it at all to the modifications of his day. (Verses 4-5 were no longer true in his own day, elements having been removed. In many Jewish traditions, they would be restored in the end times.) The altar in 9:4 is connected grammatically to the holy of holies; even though some traditions favor the view that the incense altar was inside the holy of holies, the author probably means instead that it belonged to the holy of holies but was not inside, as the ark was. The Old Testament text plainly places the altar of incense in the sanctuary outside the holiest place. The Old Testament itself elsewhere—the Hebrew of 1 Kings 6:22—can put the matter ambiguously, however; but the author of Hebrews says that these items “belong to” it, not “are in” it.

Most of the details of the original tabernacle were meant to communicate something within its ancient Near Eastern culture. Some features simply informed the Israelites that this was a “temple.” The three-part structure of the tabernacle, with the holy of holies in the back approached in a direct line from the front entrance of the tabernacle, was the standard design of Egyptian temples in Moses’ day. The placement of the most expensive materials (such as pure gold) and dyes nearest the ark was an ancient way of glorifying the holiness of the deity and signifying that one must approach this deity with awe and reverence. Some other features of the tabernacle signify merely that God was being practical: whereas the later temple was built of cedar wood (like normal Canaanite temples), the tabernacle was built from acacia wood—the only wood available in the Sinai desert. Tent shrines were also known among nomadic peoples.

But the greatest teachings of the tabernacle lay in its contrasts with the shrines of surrounding cultures. Like most ancient Near Eastern temples, God’s temple had an altar of sacrifice, an altar of incense (to overpower the stench of flesh burning from the sacrifices), a table and so on. But pagan temples often had a bed and similar apparatus for the image of the god, which was dressed, “fed” and entertained each day. Yet God’s house had none of this—he was not an idol. Similarly, larger Egyptian temples often had shrines on either side for tutelary deities, but this feature is missing in God’s temple—he was the only true God. The holiest place in ancient Near Eastern temples was what corresponded to the ark, on which would be mounted (sometimes enthroned on winged creatures like the cherubim) the image of the deity. But the climax of God’s temple is that, where one would expect an image, there was none, because nothing could adequately represent his glory.

In suggesting that the details of the present, earthly tabernacle are significant (he believes they point to a heavenly tabernacle), the writer of Hebrews is not distorting the text. His modest suggestions are quite in contrast with the allegorizing of Philo, who explains each detail as a symbol of something that none of Moses' original readers would have guessed (linen as earth, dark red as air, the seven-branched candelabrum as the seven planets, etc.). Unlike the writer of Hebrews, however, some popular readers of the Old Testament today follow Philo's more fanciful method of interpretation.

9:11-22

The Final Blood Offering

Under Old Testament *law, sin could technically be expiated—God's anger appeased by substitution—only by bloodshed.

9:11. In typical first-century thought, the heavens were pure, perfect and changeless; the heavenly tabernacle, then, would be the perfect prototype for the earthly and the only one that was ultimately needed. On the temple “not made with hands,” see comment on Acts 7:40-41 and 48-50.

9:12. The *high priest on the annual Day of Atonement brought the blood of a bull for himself and that of a goat for the people (Lev 16:6, 11, 14, 15-16). According to the *Qumran War Scroll, “eternal redemption” arrives only at the time of the end, after the final battle; here it is inaugurated through the permanently satisfactory offering of the eternal high priest (cf. Dan 9:24).

9:13-14. Had the author wished to cite a particular proof text for a priest offering himself up, he might have compared the one who sprinkles (as the *Old Testament priests did) the nations in Isaiah 52:15 with the following context of this person carrying the sins of Israel (Is 53:4-6, 8-12); but he is content to argue instead on the basis of his comparison with the Levitical offerings. He reasons by means of a “how much more” argument (a standard argument especially used by Jewish interpreters): if the blood of sacrifices on the Day of Atonement can remove sin (hypothetically; cf. 10:4), how much more effective is the blood of Christ.

9:15. Here the author brings together the “new covenant” (see comment on 8:6-13), redemption and an “eternal” inheritance (as opposed to the temporal inheritance their ancestors had sought in the land—chaps. 3-4; the Old Testament image of “inheriting” the Promised Land was applied in ancient

Judaism to inheriting the world to come).

9:16-17. “Covenant” (NASB) can also be translated “testament” (KJV) or “will” (NIV, NRSV, GNT), and ancient writers often argued their points by plays on words. “Testaments” were sealed documents, opened only on the testator’s death; “covenants” were agreements between parties or imposed by a greater party on a lesser one. (Some scholars have drawn a connection between the two in terms of the suzerain-vassal treaty form reflected in God’s covenant with Israel. Because these covenants would be maintained in force dynastically—the suzerain’s son would execute it after his father’s death—the covenant could perhaps be understood in some sense as a testament. But this connection involves a different cultural world from the one in which the author of Hebrews usually moves, and it is not likely that he would have this connection in mind.) Regardless of the play on words (puns were used in antiquity for argumentation as well as wit), his point makes good sense: ancient covenants were normally inaugurated with blood (e.g., Gen 31:54).

9:18-20. See Exodus 24:6-8. One of the writer’s minor changes in wording is attested elsewhere (Philo), but that may be only coincidence; ancient interpreters normally felt free to modify the text in minor ways to make more intelligible its relation to the writer’s point. A more significant change is the addition of water, bright red wool, and hyssop: the writer apparently *midrashically connects Exodus 24 with Leviticus 14:6 or Numbers 19:6, to arouse the association of purification—in the latter case, from sin (Num 18:9).

9:21-22. See, for example, Exodus 29:37, Leviticus 8:15 and 16:16-20. To the Old Testament *Josephus added that even the priests’ garments, the sacred utensils and so on were cleansed with blood; while the writer of Hebrews may not go this far, the whole cultus was in some sense dedicated through sacrifice. Blood was officially necessary for *atonement under the law (Lev 17:11); ritual exceptions were permitted for the poorest Israelites (Lev 5:11-13), but the general rule established the principle. (Jewish tradition also interpreted the sprinkled blood of Ex 24:8 as blood for atonement.)

9:23-28

A Sacrifice Sufficient for the Heavenly Sanctuary

9:23. The writer returns to the parallel between earthly and heavenly tabernacles (see comment on 8:1-5; 9:1-10): if the earthly sanctuary could be dedicated only

by blood (9:11-22), so also the heavenly sanctuary. But a perfect sacrifice was necessary for the perfect sanctuary.

9:24-26. The “eternal” priesthood of one like Melchizedek (7:17; Ps 110:4) was not based on annual sacrifices; had “eternal” involved perpetual sacrifices, they would have had no beginning as well as no ending. But his priesthood is based on a once-for-all, finished sacrifice on the cross. Jewish people frequently divided history up into many ages (they proposed a number of different schemes), but the most basic was the division between the present age and the *age to come. The “consummation of the ages” (NASB) thus refers to the goal of history, climaxing in the coming of God’s reign; in the decisive act of Christ, the writer recognizes that the future age has in some sense invaded history (cf. 6:5).

9:27-28. The author’s point here is that just as people die only once (a commonplace even of Greek classical literature, though *Plato taught reincarnation*), Christ had to offer himself for sin only once. When he appears (cf. v. 24) again, it will be to consummate the future salvation (just as the emergence of the priest into the outer court traditionally assured the people that the sacrifice had been accepted and their sins forgiven; cf. 1:14). “Bear the sins of many” is from Isaiah 53:12.

Although Josephus and probably some other Jewish thinkers dabbled with the language of reincarnation in Plato’s writings (in Josephus’s case, seeking to make the Pharisaic belief in *resurrection intelligible to Greeks*), *the vast majority of first-century Judeans expected instead one death, then resurrection and judgment (the sequence of the latter two varied in different Jewish accounts)*. Like the Old Testament (Ezek 18:21-32), Jewish people often felt that death was the cutoff point for judgment. (Thus a late-first-century *rabbi warned* disciples to repent one day before death; those being executed should say, “May my death *atone for all my sins” [but cf. Ps 49:7-9, 15]; those who were dying often expected to be judged immediately—e.g., the story of Johanan ben Zakkai’s pious fear when he was on his deathbed; one tradition said that the righteous were escorted by good angels and the wicked by evil ones; *etc.* But other Jewish traditions did allow for temporary punishments that expiated one’s remaining sins: the view that the corpse’s decomposition helped atone for sin, the placing of a rock on a coffin to symbolize the execution of one who died before being executed, and the view that no Israelite could spend more than a year in *Gehenna. These views of posthumous expiation have no clear parallel in the Old or *New Testament.) This writer follows the frequent Jewish and unanimous New Testament consensus (among those sources that comment on

the question) that death ended one's opportunity for reconciliation with God.

10:1-18

The True Sacrifice of the New Covenant

Only *Christ could be a sufficient sacrifice for the heavenly sanctuary (9:23-28).

10:1. *Plato spoke of the earthly world, perceived by sensory knowledge (by the earthly senses), as consisting merely of shadows of the real world, apprehended by reason alone. By the first century, even many Jewish writers (in the Diaspora) spoke of the heavens above as pure and perfect, and the earthly as bound by corruption. Such writers often spoke of the need of the soul to escape back to the upper regions from which it originally came. Without adopting a thoroughgoing Platonic worldview, the writer of Hebrews agrees that the earthly tabernacle, at least, is a shadow of the heavenly one (he has scriptural proof for this thesis—8:5), but he also echoes the view of Jewish *apocalyptic writers: heaven reveals what the world to come will be like. For this writer, however, the first stage (9:24, 28) of that future time had already invaded history (6:5).*

10:2-3. The author again plays on the idea that what is perfect need not be changed or supplemented. *Rhetorical questions were commonly used in ancient reasoning. “Reminder” may mean that the annual Day of Atonement sacrifices remind people of their sins the way Passover reminded them of God's redemptive acts (Ex 12:14; cf. Lev 16:21)—in contrast to the policy of the new covenant (8:12).

10:4. Palestinian Judaism argued that the Day of Atonement, conjoined with *repentance*, was necessary for the forgiveness of most violations of the law.

Many philosophers had revolted against the idea of blood sacrifice, which they felt was unreasonable in a perfect temple focused on the mind. That is not the premise of this writer, however, who like people in a wide range of cultures in human history recognized the need for blood sacrifice (10:19); he merely felt that animal sacrifices were inadequate for human redemption in the heavenly sanctuary (9:23), and thus unnecessary now that Christ had come. He has plenty of *Old Testament precedent for relativizing the actual value of animal sacrifices (e.g., 1 Sam 15:22; Ps 51:16; Prov 21:3; Is 1:11; Jer 11:15; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21-27), as he points out in his sample citation (Heb 10:5-7).

Before A.D. 70, many Diaspora Jews and some Palestinian Jews emphasized the spiritual, figurative use of sacrificial imagery, but only a few denied the

necessity of sacrifices altogether. Everyone in the ancient world, whether they had visited Jerusalem's temple or not, was familiar with animal sacrifices, which were a standard part of religion; some philosophers opposed it, but most ancient temples included it. This writer saw their past value as symbolic, pointing to the perfect sacrifice of Christ (9:23).

10:5-7. Here the author cites Psalm 40:6-8, following a common Greek version.

10:8-9. The author proceeds to expound the text he has just cited. Not only has God not desired sacrifices, but the offering of sacrifices can be distinguished from God's actual will; the latter is what the psalmist came to do.

10:10. Although the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and some *Aramaic, most first-century Jews scattered throughout the Roman world read the Old Testament in its Greek translation. Where the extant Hebrew text says "you have opened my ears," most Greek versions read "you have prepared me a body" (to do God's will). Jewish interpreters generally chose whichever reading they needed to make their point (some interpreters even changed readings slightly to make their point); both the writer of Hebrews and his audience are using the Greek version here. Consequently he expounds: "Not sacrifices, but rather a body to do God's will"—the ultimate sacrifice of Christ's body. Such argumentation fit ancient Jewish exegetical standards and is carried out quite skillfully.

10:11-14. The author returns to his basic text, Psalm 110:1, presupposing also 110:4. An eternal priest like Melchizedek (Ps 110:4) who was to remain seated until his enemies were put down (and the enemies were yet to be put down—Heb 2:8), must have already offered his once-for-all sacrifice; priests did not offer sacrifices in a seated position.

10:15-17. Like Christians, Jewish writers attributed the inspiration of Scripture to the "*Holy Spirit*," who was viewed in most circles of ancient Judaism as the Spirit of prophecy. The author returns here to one of his earlier texts, Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Heb 8:8-12), a practice commonly used to expound more recently cited texts.

10:18. If the new covenant (8:6-13) involves forgiveness of sins and sins being remembered no more (8:12; 10:17), then there is no longer a need to *atone for sins. The writer does not address the image of sin offerings or guilt offerings in Ezekiel's future temple (Ezek 40:39; 42:13; 43:18-27; 44:29). He would presumably have interpreted it symbolically, in view of the sufficiency of Christ's death (Is 53, etc.), Christ offering even more than Ezekiel's vision of

hope.

10:19-25

The New Worship

10:19-20. The sanctuary was reserved for the service of the priests, but the most holy place (the Semitic expression is “holy of holies”)—which is probably in view here—could be entered by the *high priest alone, and even he could enter only one day a year. But Jesus the forerunner (6:20; cf. 2:10; 5:9) had dedicated the heavenly sanctuary (9:23-28), so that his followers could join him in the full presence of God (cf. comment on Rev 21:16). The veil (see comment on 6:20; cf. Mk 15:38) had separated even the priests from the full holiness of God symbolized by the most holy place, but now believers in Jesus had complete and perfect access to God’s presence (Heb 4:16). God dwelling among his people in the tabernacle had pointed to a personal relationship available to those who sought him even then (Ex 33:11), despite some limitations (Ex 33:23; 34:30-35).

10:21. This verse alludes to Jesus’ superiority over Moses (Num 12:7); see comment on Hebrews 3:6.

10:22. “Drawing near” could be sacrificial or moral language in the *Old Testament; here it means entering the presence of God (10:19-20) and into relationship with God (7:19, 25) through Jesus the great high priest. “Hearts sprinkled” (9:13; see, e.g., Lev 14:7; cf. Ex 24:8 quoted in Heb 9:19-20) and “bodies washed” (e.g., Lev 14:9) are imagery from the Levitical order, but the writer has a spiritual cleansing in view (Ezek 36:25-29).

Like many other *Diaspora Jewish writers, the writer of Hebrews may accept the need for both inner and outer cleansing; but the bodily cleansing here is apparently initiatory (a perfect participle here in Greek) and thus presumably refers to *baptism*. Gentile converts to Judaism were baptized to free them from Gentile impurity; the *Qumran sect required everyone to be baptized (as the first of many washings) to forsake former worldly impurities; Christians baptized new believers as a mark of initiation into a wholly new life. The symbolic value of Christian baptism would not have been lost on Jewish observers.

The conjunction of faith, hope and love as the primary virtues (10:22-24) appears to have been a specifically Christian formulation (e.g., 1 Cor 13:13; Col 1:4-5; 1 Thess 1:3).

10:23. This exhortation to “hold fast” is important given the opposition the

readers face. Their critics insist that they return to the ritual observances practiced by other Jews in their city and compromise the absolute sufficiency of Christ. (Paul was not opposed to Christians engaging in sacrifices as a means of cultural identification, worshiping by thank-offerings, etc.—see, e.g., Acts 21:26; but like this author he would no doubt deny that sacrifices were necessary for *atonement—Rom 3:24-26. Because these readers were Diaspora Jews who probably could go to the Jerusalem temple only rarely, and no one in their community had gone to the temple since the war had started in A.D. 66, it is more the principle than the practice that is at issue here anyway. The issue is whether they will regard Jesus as an appendage to their Judaism or as its fulfillment who supersedes previous mandatory forms of practicing the *law.) As the Israelites of old should have trusted God to bring them into the Promised Land, so should this author's hearers. The "faithful" one in this case might be not God the Father (11:11) but Jesus (3:2, 5).

10:24. Some ancient groups like the *Epicureans engaged in mutual exhortation; it was a standard practice of early Christianity (Rom 15:14; 1 Thess 5:14).

10:25. Greek moralists often lectured on "concord" or "harmony," warning against individualism. Jewish teachers also warned against a spirit of separatism, and even Jewish separatists (such as the *Essenes*) *stuck together among themselves*. *Diaspora* synagogues functioned as community centers, and Jews gathered there especially on the Sabbath to read Scripture and to pray together. Those rarely in attendance would thereby exclude themselves from the active life of their community; given the hostile reception most Jews in many places received from the Gentile community, community cohesion was an important coping response.

Religious associations in the Greco-Roman world met together at various intervals, normally about once a month. Jewish people in the Diaspora could use their synagogues at any time, but especially gathered on weekly sabbaths (e.g., Acts 13:14, 42; 16:13). Christians seem to have gathered at least weekly (cf. the "fixed day" in Pliny, *Epistles* 10.96, an early-second-century description of Asian Christians from a pagan governor). But persecution (cf. Heb 10:32-39; 12:4) may have dissuaded some people from attending even relatively private house *churches; the Romans were suspicious of private meetings, although they would not be investigated in the East unless brought to the authorities' attention by a *delator* (accuser).

10:26-31

The Danger of Apostasy

Those who do not engage in the true worship, who do not continue to persevere (10:19-25), would ultimately fall away and be lost.

10:26. Judaism had long distinguished intentional and unintentional sin (Num 15:29-31; cf., e.g., Lev 4:2, 22); one who knew better would be punished more strictly than one who was ignorant. Sacrifices *atoned for sins of ignorance, but Judaism taught that no sacrifice availed for the person who knowingly rejected the authority of God's law. (*For such persons, many Jewish teachers insisted that* repentance, the Day of Atonement and death were all necessary. Jewish teachers also observed that those who sinned presuming that they would be automatically forgiven were not genuinely repentant and hence were not forgiven.) In the *Dead Sea Scrolls, slight transgressions required temporary penance, but deliberate rebellion against God's law demanded expulsion from the community. The sin in this context is unrepentant, thorough apostasy (10:29).

10:27. Here the author borrows the language of Isaiah 26:11, referring to the day of the Lord (for which believers hoped to be prepared—Heb 10:25). The context in Isaiah includes the raising of the righteous (Is 26:19).

10:28. The law of witnesses is Deuteronomy 17:6-7 and 19:15; apostasy from obedience to the true God is addressed in Deuteronomy 13:6-11 and 17:2-7. Jewish teachers recognized that everyone sinned in some ways; but a sin by which a person declared "I reject parts of God's Word" was considered tantamount to rejecting the whole law and was reckoned as apostasy.

10:29. Compare 2:2-3; here the author uses a "how much more" argument. Garbage could be "trampled down," but what was sacred was to be approached only with reverence, and trampling it underfoot was the ultimate disrespect (e.g., Is 63:18; Mt 7:6). It was a great sin to treat the holy as merely profane or as unclean; Christians had been sanctified by Christ's blood (see comment on 9:19-22), but other Jews would simply regard Jesus' dead body as an unclean corpse (Deut 21:23). Insulting the *Spirit invited judgment (Is 63:10).

10:30. The author cites Deuteronomy 32:35-36, reading the first line of verse 36 with verse 35 instead of with what follows, to reinforce the contextual point that God had promised this vengeance against his own people. Unlike most of his citations, this one is closer to the original Hebrew form than to that of the extant Greek versions.

10:31. David had preferred falling “into God’s hands,” depending on his mercy, but the mercy was preceded by severe and rapid judgment (2 Sam 24:14-16; this was the prescribed judgment of the law in Ex 30:12). “Falling into [someone’s] hands” and “living God” were both regular Jewish expressions.

10:32-39

Confidence in Their Perseverance

Although apostasy was a genuine possibility (10:26-31), the writer is confident that his readers, who have already endured much, will not apostatize (cf. comment on 6:9).

10:32-33. The athletic language of “conflict” (v. 32 NIV) or “struggle” (NRSV; see comment on 12:1-3) conjoined with “being made a public spectacle” (v. 33 NASB) or “publicly exposed” (NIV) could imply that the readers were subjected to the gladiatorial games. Although the writer probably does not mean this reference literally (since they were still alive—12:4), the image suggests the intensity of their struggle. It is not possible to identify the specific persecution involved without identifying the location of the letters’ recipients (a difficult task; see introduction).

10:34. The confiscation of Christians’ goods might match a situation presupposed in Macedonia (2 Cor 8:2), where both the Thessalonian and Philippian Christians were persecuted; but we do not know where the particular persecution described here occurred. That it could happen in the Roman Empire is beyond dispute: Jews were expelled from Rome under Tiberius and Claudius, although (apart from those drafted by Tiberius) they could have taken moveable property with them. Disputes over the equality of some elite Alexandrian Jews as citizens led to a Jewish revolt in the early second century, a massacre of the Jewish population there and confiscation of their property; in the first century, many Jews there had been driven out or killed and their homes looted during urban violence. Still considered a small Jewish sect, Christians were even more susceptible to public hostility.

The readers had remained faithful despite this persecution (cf. Tobit 1:20; 2:7-8). On the “prisoners” (no doubt fellow Christians detained in jails), see 13:3; cf. 11:36. For the “better possession,” see comment on 11:10.

10:35-36. Both Judaism and Christianity (11:26) spoke of the reward for perseverance for God. On the promise, cf., e.g., 6:13-20; 11:9, 13 and 39-40.

10:37. This is a citation of Habakkuk 2:3, the wording slightly adapted to apply more specifically to the writer's point about the return of *Christ (possibly reworded by combination with part of Is 26:20, from the context of which the author took words in Heb 10:27).

10:38. Here the author quotes Habakkuk 2:4, on which see comment on Romans 1:17. He follows the *Septuagint (which speaks of drawing back) almost exactly, except that he reverses the order of clauses, mentioning the righteous first. (Also, like Paul, he omits the "my" in front of "faith," joining it instead to "righteous one." Although the most common Greek version had "my" faith, i.e., God's faithfulness, the Hebrew had "his" faith, presumably that of the righteous, as Paul and this writer take it.)

10:39. The writer expounds Habakkuk 2:4 (quoted in the previous verse) in inverse order, to end (as was normal in ancient rhetoric) on the desired note: perseverance by faith rather than apostasy. In the following chapter he defines genuine persevering faith.

11:1-31

Heroes of the Faith

After defining faith in 11:1 and introducing his thesis in 11:2, the writer surveys biblical history for samples of the kind of faith he is addressing. Faith as defined by this chapter is the assurance in God's future promises, an assurance that enables one to persevere (10:32-39).

In form, the chapter is a literary masterpiece. It follows the frequent literary practice called historical retrospective, a summary of Jewish history to make a particular point, as in texts like Acts 7, 1 Maccabees 2:49-69 and Sirach 44-50. (Ancient moralists often used examples of people who embodied the virtue they advocated, and sometimes wrote entire biographies for this purpose.) The writer builds the chapter around a literary device called *anaphora* (repetition of an opening word or words), beginning each new account with the same Greek word, "by faith."

11:1. The author defines faith in terms of future reward, as in 10:32-39 (the Greek word often translated "now" in this verse is literally "but" or "and"). Jewish people defined ultimate "hope" in terms of the future day of the Lord. This hope is, however, an unshakable conviction in the present: "assurance" (NASB, NRSV; "confidence"—NIV) appears in Greek business documents with the

meaning “title deed.” To the Greek reader, what was “not seen” was what was eternal, in the heavens; here it also means what was yet to happen, as in Jewish *apocalyptic expectation (11:7; cf. 11:27).

11:2. “Gained approval” (NASB) is literally “gained testimony,” as in 11:4, 5 and 39: the evidence of their lives and God’s advocacy guaranteed that they would be declared righteous on the day of judgment.

11:3. The *Old Testament often taught this principle (e.g., Prov 3:19-20), but because the writer starts at the beginning of biblical history, here he refers to the creation in Genesis 1. In Greek cosmology (e.g., Hesiod, Empedocles), as opposed to many of the Jewish sources (e.g., 2 Maccabees 7:28), the universe was formed out of preexisting matter in a state of chaos; *Plato* and Philo believed the visible universe was formed from visible matter. Yet Philo and many Jewish teachers believed that the material universe was formed according to God’s invisible, ideal pattern, embodied in his “word” or his “wisdom.” Although this view may betray some Greek philosophical influence, it was also rooted in and defended by means of the Old Testament (e.g., Prov 8:22-31).

11:4. Jewish literature praises its martyrs and offers Abel as the first example of martyrdom. (See, e.g., *4 Maccabees 18:10-19; Mt 23:35. In the *Testament of Abraham*, a *pseudepigraphic work of uncertain date, Abel even replaces the Greek Minos as the human judge of the dead [the role belongs to Enoch in **Jubilees*]. The *Ascension of Isaiah* and the *Apocalypse of Moses*, also Jewish works of uncertain date, extolled Abel among the righteous. In Philo, Cain’s love of self leads him to eternal corruption; other early Jewish traditions, e.g., *Jubilees* and *1 *Enoch*, provide him with other punishments.) That he still speaks is evident from the writer’s implicit use of Genesis 4:10 in Hebrews 12:24.

11:5. Jewish tradition came to be divided on Enoch. The most Hellenized Jews identified him as Atlas or other figures. More prominently, *Essene and other traditions glorified Enoch as the most righteous saint and one who had never died (e.g., Sirach, 1 *Enoch*, *Qumran’s *Genesis Apocryphon*, *Jubilees*). Reacting against this consensus, many *rabbis eventually interpreted “God took him” as “God killed him” so he could die in a righteous state, since (they claimed) he alternated between righteous and unrighteous behavior.

The writer of Hebrews follows the most common Jewish interpretation, which was also the most natural interpretation of Genesis 5:21-24: God took Enoch alive to heaven, because he “walked with him”—i.e., was pleasing to him. Like some writers (such as *Pseudo-Philo), the writer of Hebrews follows

the biblical account here exactly, omitting later elaborations.

11:6. Moralists characteristically drew morals from the examples they cited; here, if Enoch was pleasing to God, it is clear that he had faith. The moral that the author of Hebrews draws from the Enoch story (v. 5) is well adapted to the context in his own letter: besides faith, cf. “draws near” (10:22), “reward” (10:35; 11:26) and possibly “seeks” (13:14; cf. 12:17).

11:7. Noah was likewise a renowned hero of early Judaism, although later rabbis emphasized him less than early storytellers did, transferring the stories about his miraculous birth to Moses.

11:8. Judaism always extolled Abraham’s faith (see the introduction to Rom 4:1-22). Historically, Abraham may have been part of a larger migration (cf. Gen 11:31-32), but his own obedience to God’s call, leaving his home and relatives behind, was an act of faith (Gen 12:1, 4). Abraham’s obedience was applied as a model of faith as early as the writing of Genesis, when Moses called his people to turn their backs on Egypt; the writer of Hebrews calls his readers to be ready to forsake the favor of their own families.

11:9-10. *Diaspora Judaism often described God as “architect” and “builder” (cf. 3:4) of the world. Like philosophers who could compare the cosmos with a city, Philo saw heaven (or virtue or the Logos, the divine Word) as the “mother city,” designed and constructed by God; one could not look for the heavenly Jerusalem on earth. Other Jewish people saw the new Jerusalem as the city of God for the future age (Dead Sea Scrolls, etc.; see comment on Gal 4:26); on its foundations, see comment on Revelation 21:14. Compare also Hebrews 13:14. Old Testament texts like Psalm 137:5-6 and *New Testament texts like this one suggest that Christians’ future hope is inseparably connected with Israel’s history, and Christians do biblical tradition a great disservice to cut it loose from its historical moorings in ancient Israel.*

11:11. Sarah was a woman of faith in the Old Testament just as Abraham was a man of faith; subsequent Jewish texts also came to extol her greatness as a matriarch.

11:12. Here the author quotes Genesis 22:17, often echoed subsequently in the Old Testament.

11:13-16. The Jewish people in the Diaspora saw themselves only as “sojourners” among the nations; the language here has Old Testament precedent (especially Gen 23:4; cf. Lev 25:23). Like Philo, this writer believes that earth is not the home of the righteous; heaven is. But he envisions this idea in more traditionally Jewish terms than Philo, looking for a *future* city (see also comment

on 11:9-10; cf. Rev 21:2).

11:17-19. The offering of Isaac, after years of waiting for the promise of this son, was Abraham's ultimate test of faith (Gen 22), and is often stressed in Jewish sources. This act was regarded as a model of faith to be emulated when necessary (see 4 Maccabees 14:20; 15:28; 16:20). Although Jewish tradition also noted Isaac's willingness to be sacrificed (as early as Pseudo-Philo), the writer of Hebrews does not add to the biblical *narrative, except to expound the nature of Abraham's confidence (that God would raise him from the dead if need be; God's power to raise the dead was celebrated daily in Jewish prayers). "Only" son (cf. Gen 22:2, Hebrew text and Jewish traditions) was sometimes used, especially with regard to Isaac, to mean "specially loved" (*LXX, other Jewish traditions), even though Isaac was never Abraham's only son.

11:20. Jewish readers recognized that Isaac's blessings were inspired and that they included predictions of the future (Gen 27:28-29, 39-40).

11:21. Genesis 49 was also regarded as prophetic, and Jewish writers later expanded the predictions (also writing testaments for each of the twelve patriarchs to the patriarchs' children).

11:22. See Genesis 50:24-25. Joseph's faith provided a hope in a promise that transcended his own mortality.

11:23. The writer of Hebrews follows the biblical account here (in its LXX form—the Hebrew mentions only the mother's decision to rescue him—Ex 2:2-3), but many Jewish writers expanded the story of Moses' birth, especially his beauty, into reports that his glory illumined the room at birth and so forth. These stories became very popular as time went on.

11:24-25. Although the author here draws a moralist application, he does not go beyond the biblical account. Many Jewish stories of this period, especially Diaspora Jewish stories, portrayed Moses as an Egyptian military hero and stressed his great learning and knowledge (see comment on Acts 7:22). Yet the writer of Hebrews might allow the view affirmed by Philo—that Moses as son of Pharaoh's daughter was his heir. If this is the case (following a Roman understanding of adoption), Moses' rejection of this status to maintain his identification with his oppressed people (11:26) is all the more significant. (Of course, his sacrifice is significant enough in any case.) Greek philosophers and moralists commonly stressed the superiority of enduring hardship over succumbing to the rule of pleasure, as Jewish tradition stressed honoring God above all else.

11:26. Forsaking riches for something greater, like piety or wisdom, was a

common moral in Jewish and Greco-Roman stories, and the biblical story of Moses' life certainly illustrated that motif.

11:27. Exodus 2:14-15 indicates that Moses was afraid of the king; if this text refers to Moses' first flight from Egypt after slaying the Egyptian, perhaps the writer means a particular kind of fear (i.e., Moses was not afraid enough to deny his people), or perhaps he relativizes that fear by emphasizing Moses' faith in the unseen God (other writers, like Philo and *Josephus, minimize or eliminate fear as the cause of Moses' escape). But he may refer to Moses' second departure from Egypt, with Israel following him; verse 28 also speaks of him (singular) keeping the Passover, although it is clear that all Israel kept it. Diaspora Judaism often called God "the Invisible."

11:28. Compare Exodus 12, with which all Jewish people were familiar, especially from the annual Passover celebration. Because the nature of his account is biographical, the author yields only reluctantly to describing the general experience of Israel, as opposed to Moses (v. 29).

11:29. Compare Exodus 14:29 and Nehemiah 9:11. Exodus reports the completion of Israel's faith after the miracle (Ex 14:31), but Moses and his people had to act in some faith to enter the basin (cf. Ex 14:10-22). Jewish teachers debated the immediate cause of the exodus, some affirming Israel's faith but many attributing the miracle to the faith or merit of their ancestors (see, e.g., *Mekilta Pisha* 16.165-68; *Mekilta Beshalach* 4.52-57).

11:30. Compare Joshua 6. Some scholars have complained that the site of Jericho was uninhabited in Joshua's period, because, in the areas excavated, little remains of the city from that time. But the excavator reasonably attributed the loss of this level of the city's ruins to erosion; mounds are normally formed, and ruins preserved, only when city walls exist. If Jericho's walls fell down, one would expect most of that stratum of ruins to have eroded away.

11:31. Later Jewish literature often praises Rahab's beauty and sometimes sees her as a prophetess and as a model convert to Judaism; but although Josephus speaks favorably of her, Philo and most earlier Jewish literature comment little on her. Hebrews, like James 2:25, follows the biblical account.

11:32-40

A Summary of Other Exploits of Faith

11:32. The writer's theme is still "by faith," but like Philo, *Seneca and other

*rhetorically trained writers, he remarks that he could go on but will not do so, settling instead for a quick summary. This remark gives the impression (in this case quite accurate) that he could provide much more evidence or many more examples; but he determines not to strain the readers' patience by continuing long after he has made his point (as some ancient rhetoricians were known to do even in law courts, displaying their eloquence for several hours without a break). By mentioning what he protests he cannot describe, however, he outlines what he would have covered. This too was a standard rhetorical device, allowing him to hurry while mentioning what he claims he cannot mention.

He names several of the judges (commanded to shepherd Israel—1 Chron 17:6): David, the ideal king; Samuel, founder of the schools of the prophets and overseer of the transition from judges to monarchy; and he mentions other prophets. That Barak replaces Deborah in the list fits later rabbinic tradition's tendency to play down biblical prophetesses (contrast Pseudo-Philo 30-33), although the *Old Testament mentions neither Deborah nor Barak outside Judges 4–5. From the perspective of some first-century readers, Barak would be official victor even though Deborah was the main leader of faith.

11:33. The first three statements in the verse are general, but the fourth applies specifically to Daniel (Dan 6:16-24; cf. 1 Maccabees 2:60); although this story was amplified in early tradition (Bel and the Dragon 31-32), the writer of Hebrews follows the biblical account. Other Jewish writers also presented the endurance of Daniel and his friends before the lions and the flame as models to be emulated (for martyrs see *4 Maccabees 13:9; 16:3, 21-22).

11:34. Quenching the power of fire refers especially to Daniel's three friends (Dan 3:23-27; 1 Maccabees 2:59; *3 Maccabees 6:6; cf. Is 43:2), although Jewish tradition also transferred elements of that story to Abraham (*Pseudo-Philo and later rabbis). "Were strengthened from their state of weakness" may refer particularly to Samson's regaining his strength (Judg 16:28-31), or it may be a general statement like several that follow. Much of the language of this verse comes from 1 Maccabees, which contains much historical material about pious Jewish defenders of the *law after the Old Testament period and before the New Testament period. It was widely known among Jewish people throughout the ancient world.

11:35-36. Women received their dead back to life under Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:21-24; 2 Kings 4:35-37). "And others" marks a transition: faith does not always bring deliverance (cf. Dan 3:18), as the author's readers already knew (Heb 10:32-39) and might learn further (12:4). Nearly all Jews knew the stories

of Maccabean martyrs, who were tortured in various ways: scalded to death, having skin flayed off, stretched on the wheel and so on. Regular torture practices of the Greeks included fire, thumbscrews and (what is probably meant by “tortured” here) stretching on a wheel to break the person’s joints, then beating the victim to death (sometimes pounding the stomach as if it were a drum) in that helpless position. The Maccabean martyrs were scourged, a punishment that the Romans had continued to use as well. All Jewish sources that addressed the issue agreed that martyrs would receive preferential treatment at the *resurrection, and 2 Maccabees declares that this was the hope that enabled the martyrs to endure.

11:37. “Sawn in two” fits a Jewish tradition that was popular in the second century A.D. and later but probably already known in the writer’s time. According to this story, when Isaiah hid in a tree the wicked king Manasseh had it—and Isaiah—sawed in half. Those stoned to death include a prophet named Zechariah (2 Chron 24:20-22; Mt 23:35); some Jewish traditions added Jeremiah. Prophets who lived outside society sometimes wore coarse animal skins (see the *LXX for Elijah’s “mantle”); Elijah and similar prophets also wandered in the wilderness, and the *Maccabees were later forced to live in such circumstances.

11:38. The Maccabean guerrillas hid out in caves in the Judean mountains, as David’s band had in the time of Saul long before. Elijah and other prophets were sometimes forced to live in the wilderness. The idea of righteous persons of whom the world was unworthy has many partial parallels, although this formulation appears to be the author’s own.

11:39. This verse is the concluding summary of 11:3-38, part of it rehearsing the author’s thesis in 11:2. Concluding summaries of one’s thesis were standard *rhetorical practice.

11:40. “Made perfect” here refers to the consummation of salvation (1:14), the resurrection of the dead (11:35). All the righteous would be raised together at the very end of the age (Dan 12:2, 13).

12:1-3

The Ultimate Hero of Faith

The image in 12:1-3 and possibly in 12:12-13 is that of runners disciplining themselves for the race. Athletic contests were a common image in Greco-

Roman literature, often used for the moral battle waged by the wise person in this world; the *Hellenistic Jewish work *4 Maccabees sometimes applied the image to martyrs. This passage (Heb 12:1-3) is the climax of the narration of past heroes of the faith (chap. 11).

12:1. “Witnesses” can function as those watching a race (“cloud” was often applied figuratively to a crowd), but the particular witnesses here may be those who testified for God or received his “testimony” that they were righteous (the Greek of 11:2, 4, 5, 39). (The image could be that of a heavenly court made up of faith heroes of the past, who would judge those now vying for the same honors; the image of the heavenly court appears elsewhere in ancient Jewish sources. The idea does not correspond to the picture sometimes found in some writers such as, for example, the second-century *Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius [cf. Philo], where souls of the departed floated around for awhile after death before being resolved into the fire.) “Laying aside weights” (KJV) may refer to removing artificial weights used in training but not in races, but more likely it refers to the Greek custom of stripping off clothes to run unencumbered. The image would represent anything that would hinder his readers from winning their race (ancient writers sometimes used “weights” figuratively for vices); this encouragement is significant, for like Israel of old in the wilderness, they may be tempted to turn back.

12:2. On “author” or “pioneer,” see comment on 2:10; for “perfecter,” see 9:9, 11 and 10:14. Like most ancient moralists, the writer uses human models to illustrate his chosen virtue, but his climactic illustration of the virtue of faith is the initiator and fulfiller of faith, who suffered in the hope of future reward, as these readers are to do (10:32-39). Maccabean martyrs were said to have “looked to” (same word as here, NRSV) God, thus enduring tortures to the point of death (4 Maccabees 17:10). The cross was an instrument of “shame” in both Roman and Jewish (cf. Deut 21:23; Josh 10:26-27) thought.

12:3. The verbs translated “grow weary” and “lose heart” were sometimes used for the exhaustion a runner could face. (The call to endurance in 12:1 reflects the language of long-distance races.)

12:4-13

Accepting Suffering as God’s Instruction

Rather than questioning their faith when they are persecuted, the readers are to

embrace the suffering as a gracious opportunity to learn God's heart better.

12:4. Although some Jewish teachers said that one could violate most biblical laws if necessary to save one's life, provided that one did not profane the name of God, the earlier martyrs felt that compromising the commandments to save one's life constituted public profanation of God's name. Jesus, the ultimate hero of their faith, had shed his blood (12:2-3; cf. 9:12); his followers have to be prepared to do the same. The ultimate test of Greek athletic contests (12:1-3) was boxing, which often drew blood; but the language here indicates the ultimate test that Jesus portrayed as an expected part of Christian discipleship (Mk 8:34-38): martyrdom.

12:5-7. This quotation is from Proverbs 3:11-12 but has many biblical (e.g., Deut 8:5; Ps 94:12) and postbiblical (e.g., **Psalms of Solomon* 3:4; 7:3; 8:26; 10:1-3; 13:9-10; 14:1-2; 18:4) Jewish parallels; **Philo and some rabbis used Proverbs 3 similarly. In the context of Jewish wisdom literature, discipline was a sign of a father's love for his children, his concern that they would go in the right way; some Jewish teachers felt that God purged the sins of his children by sufferings designed to atone and to produce *repentance. Although this writer would deny that any person's sufferings could have atoning value, except for those of God in the flesh (7:25-28; cf. Ps 49:7-9), he undoubtedly agrees that they can help lead one to repentance or to a deeper relationship with God (Ps 119:67, 71, 75).*

In the Greek world, the term translated "discipline" (NIV, NASB) was the most basic term for "education" (although this usually included corporal discipline), so the term naturally conveyed the concept of moral instruction. Some philosophers like **Seneca* also used the image of God disciplining his children for their good, just as Jewish writers did.

12:8. In antiquity, calling someone an "illegitimate child" (not born from a married union) was a grievous insult; "illegitimacy" negatively affected one's social status as well as one's inheritance rights. Fathers were more concerned for their heirs and usually invested little time in sons unable to inherit.

12:9. God was often called "Lord of spirits" (i.e., Lord over the angels); here he is called "Father of spirits" in contrast to "earthly fathers." Jewish people developed the **Old Testament* image of God as Israel's father (e.g., Ex 4:22), often speaking of him in these terms. This argument is a standard Jewish "how much more" argument: if we respect earthly fathers, how much more should we respect the superhuman one?

12:10-11. Jewish teachers recognized that God's discipline, even the

suffering experienced in martyrdom, was temporary, and that he would afterward reward the righteous greatly (e.g., in the *Apocrypha: Wisdom of Solomon 3:5; cf. 2 Maccabees 6:13-17; 7:18, 32-33). They also believed that whereas he disciplined his people, he punished the wicked more severely (Wisdom of Solomon 12:22) or would do so in the time to come (most rabbis, *apocalyptic visionaries and writers, etc.).

12:12. “Weak hands” and “feeble knees” were common descriptions of weakening and slackness (cf. Is 13:7; 35:3; Jer 47:3; 50:43; Ezek 7:17; 21:7; Zeph 3:16), applied to moral or religious concerns in the *Dead Sea Scrolls, in Sirach 25:23 and elsewhere. It may apply to the imagery of the race in Hebrews 12:1-3.

12:13. “Make straight paths for your feet” suggests the quickest course in a race; the words are taken from the *Septuagint of Proverbs 4:26 with few changes.

12:14-29

Rejecting the Greatest Revelation

Turning away from Jesus was worse than Esau’s shortsighted apostasy (12:16-17) and more serious than rejecting the revelation of God at Sinai (12:18-21), for Jesus is greater than Moses and greater than Abel (12:24)—he is the true and rightful leader of Israel (12:23). The vast majority of ancient Jews sought to keep the *law and were embarrassed by the rebellion of many of their ancestors in the wilderness; the writer warns that if his readers turn their backs on Christ, they are even worse than their ancestors.

12:14-15. The image of a bitter root that can spread to infect many is from Deuteronomy 29:18, although many texts use similar images (1 Maccabees 1:10; a *Qumran hymn; the rabbis). The text in Deuteronomy is quite appropriate, for it refers to apostasy, as the writer of Hebrews does.

12:16. Here the author refers to Genesis 25:31-34. Philo regarded Esau as enslaved by sensual and temporal desires because of actions such as this one. Esau did not act as if he viewed life from a long-range perspective, much less an eternal one (the rabbis inferred from this text that he denied the future *resurrection of the dead). “Immoral” here is literally “sexually immoral” (NIV; cf. “fornicator”—KJV), the view of Esau that prevailed in Jewish tradition, undoubtedly based on his initial preference for *Gentile wives (Gen 26:34-35;

cf. 28:9), which dismayed his parents (26:35; 28:8).

12:17. Despite the “tears,” which reflect Genesis 27:38, Esau was unable to persuade his father Isaac to change his mind, probably because the first blessing could not be annulled. (One commentator points out that the expression “place for *repentance” was used in Roman legal documents as “an occasion to reverse a previous decision.” Although neither the author nor his readers would be thinking in terms of legal terminology, it might reflect a more general idea, which could apply to Isaac’s choice [although the commentator applies it to Esau].) Esau’s disinheritance from the promise (cf. Heb 6:12-18) was settled. (According to one nonbiblical Jewish tradition, Jacob later killed Esau in a war [**Jubilees* 38:2], but the writer of Hebrews does not go beyond the biblical account.)

12:18. Here the author describes Mount Sinai at the giving of the law (Ex 19:16; Deut 4:11-12).

12:19. In Exodus 20:18-21, when God had given the Ten Commandments, the people were afraid of God’s awesome holiness. They wanted Moses to mediate for them, fearing that if God spoke to them directly, they would die (Ex 20:19; Deut 5:25-27), for he came as a consuming fire (Deut 4:24; 5:24-25). But God’s purpose was to scare enough sense into them to get them to stop sinning (Ex 20:20).

12:20. Here the author uses Exodus 19:12-13. God was so unapproachably holy that violation of his command not to approach the mountain from which he gave the law was punishable by death, even for animals that happened to wander that way unwittingly (cf. Num 17:13).

12:21. When God became angry at Israel for violating his prohibition of idolatry, even Moses was afraid of God’s anger (Deut 9:19).

12:22. Mount Zion (Jerusalem or the Temple Mount in Jerusalem), as opposed to Mount Sinai, was to be the place of the giving of the new law in the end time (Is 2:1-4). On the heavenly Jerusalem see comment on 11:9-10; everyone in antiquity would regard a heavenly place of revelation as superior to an earthly place, no matter how glorious (12:18-21) the latter was.

Jewish tradition stressed the vast number of angels present at the giving of the law (eventually claiming thousands per Israelite); the writer of Hebrews probably takes the angels from Deuteronomy 33:2 or Psalm 68:17, a text that probably refers to the giving of the law, as later Jewish tradition also understood it.

12:23. Long before the first century, the *Septuagint* applied the term

translated “church” to the “assembly” (NRSV) or “congregation” of Israel in the Hebrew Old Testament; thus the writer of Hebrews here contrasts the congregation led by Jesus with the one led by Moses (12:19). (On the “firstborn,” see comment on 1:6; because the reference is in the plural, it may refer to God’s people as a whole here—e.g., Ex 4:22). “Enrolled” (NASB, NRSV) means that their names were “written” (KJV, NIV, GNT) on the list in heaven; the Jewish images of heavenly tablets and the book of life were common (see comment on Phil 4:3; Rev 20:12). In *apocalyptic texts such as 1 Enoch*, “spirits” or “souls” referred to the righteous dead in heaven (various texts apply it even more commonly to angels, but that connection would not make sense in regard to “spirits of righteous men,” which was a usual designation for the righteous dead, not for guardian angels). Many *Diaspora Jews believed that the righteous finally attained perfection in death (or in resurrection; cf. Heb 11:40; it has been suggested that the righteous of 12:23 include the heroes of chap. 11).

12:24. Moses was considered mediator of the first covenant. As mediator of a new covenant (9:15; see comment on 8:6-13), Jesus had to inaugurate it through the sprinkling of blood (see comment on 9:15-22). Abel’s blood spoke, bringing condemnation against his murderer (Gen 4:10; cf. Prov 21:28; see comment on Heb 11:4). (In rabbinic tradition, the blood of all the descendants who would have been born from Abel cried out to God against Cain, and Cain thus had no share in the world to come. Blood crying out is also found in the **Sibylline Oracles*, 2 Maccabees 8:3 and elsewhere; cf. Deut 21:1-9. See comment on Mt 23:35 for the traditions about Zechariah’s blood testifying; other rabbinic stories also suggested that they believed the blood of a murdered person kept seething till it had been avenged.) Jesus’ blood, dedicating a new covenant of forgiveness, thus speaks “better things” than Abel’s blood.

12:25. The comparison between Mount Sinai and a heavenly Mount Zion returns to the writer’s standard *qal vahomer* or “how much more” argument (a fortiori arguments, “from lesser to greater”—here worked in converse—were common, especially in Jewish argumentation, but also appear in Greco-Roman and other argumentation; cf. Prov 15:11). If the law was glorious, and profaning it was something to fear, “how much more” to be feared is profaning the more awesome glory of the new covenant given from heaven (12:25-29).

12:26. The land quaked when God came to give the law on Mount Sinai (Ex 19:18; cf. *2 *Baruch* 59:3); later Jewish tradition amplified this point to say that God shook the whole world. The idea of a great end-time earthquake has Old Testament (Is 13:13) and later Jewish parallels (e.g., 2 *Baruch* 32:1), but the

writer quotes Haggai 2:6 (cf. 2:21) directly.

12:27. The author expounds the text he has just cited. Because Haggai 2:5 mentioned a promise God made when he brought Israel out of Egypt, and “once more” in 2:6 refers to a particular previous shaking, it was natural to read the first shaking of 2:6 as what happened at Sinai. The second shaking was clearly the future one when God would subdue the nations and fill his temple with glory (2:7). The writer of Hebrews adds to this text an interpretive perspective he shares with his readers, a perspective stressed in Greek philosophy but not incongruent with the Old Testament: what cannot be changed is truly eternal.

12:28. Like many Jewish writers, the author of Hebrews uses the language of sacrificial offerings figuratively for the appropriate attitude of worship (cf. 13:15; see comment on Rom 12:1). For the unshakable *kingdom, cf. perhaps Psalm 96:10 (especially in the *LXX, numbered 95:10).

12:29. The author takes over Deuteronomy 4:24 directly; cf. also Deuteronomy 9:3 and Exodus 24:17. Deuteronomy 4:24 goes on to call God “a jealous God”; Hebrews 12:29 is clearly a warning against taking his ultimate revelation for granted.

13:1-17

Closing Exhortations

Parenesis, an ancient *rhetorical and literary style especially consisting of moral exhortations loosely fitted together, could be conjoined with other literary elements. Moral exhortations often followed argumentation, as in many of Paul’s letters (e.g., Rom 12–14; Gal 5–6; Eph 4–6).

13:1. See comment on 10:25; cf. 12:14. The bonds of Christian community would also hinder apostasy from that community.

13:2. Hospitality normally involved housing and caring for travelers; the greatest example of this virtue cited in Jewish texts was Abraham, who welcomed the three visitors (Gen 18). Because at least two of them turned out to be angels, this account is the most natural referent of the present exhortation. (Other stories, like the early Jewish story of Tobit or Greek stories about gods visiting people in disguise, are of more secondary value, but illustrate how readily ancient readers might have received the exhortation.)

13:3. By the second century, Christians were known for their care for the imprisoned. Some philosophers regarded visiting those who were in prison as a

virtue, although Palestinian Judaism was largely silent on the issue, compared to its emphasis on visiting the sick or helping the economically oppressed (except for visiting Jews captured or enslaved by pagans). “The prisoners” probably refers to some Christians imprisoned for their faith or for practices related to it (as in 13:23). Roman law used prison as detention until punishment rather than as punishment itself; sometimes prisoners had to depend on outside allies for food.

13:4. Many ancient writers spoke of honoring the “(marriage) bed” (the “bed” was a euphemism for intercourse); one story goes so far as to emphasize a virgin’s purity by noting that no one had ever even sat on her bed. Male sexual immorality was rife in Greco-Roman society, which also accepted prostitution. Pedophilia, homosexual intercourse and sex with female slaves were common Greek practices until a man was old enough for marriage. A few Greek philosophers even thought marriage burdensome but sexual release necessary. The writer accepts not typical Greek values, but God’s values represented in Scripture and also upheld by Jewish circles in his day.

13:5. The author draws this quotation especially from Deuteronomy 31:6, 8 and Joshua 1:5, although the idea was common in the *Old Testament* (cf. 2 Chron 15:2; Ps 37:28). *Moses spoke it to all Israel in the third person, but the writer, who regards all Scripture as God’s inspired Word, uses Joshua 1:5 (an assurance oracle, one form of Old Testament prophecy, to Joshua) to adapt it to the first person.* The reference to love of money is characteristic of general parenesis (moral exhortation) of the day but may be particularly related to the economic consequences of following Jesus in a hostile culture (Heb 10:34; 11:26).

13:6. Here the author cites Psalm 118:6; cf. Psalm 56:11. The author may add this quotation to Deuteronomy 31:6 and 8 as an implicit *gezerah shavah* (linking of texts with a common key word or phrase), because Deuteronomy 31:6 and 8 say that the hearers should not be afraid (although the writer of Hebrews does not quote that line).

13:7. Public speakers and moralists generally cited examples for imitation, especially those most closely known to both writer and readers. The past tense of the verbs here may suggest that some of them have died (though apparently not by martyrdom in their location—12:4). “Led” probably refers to local leaders rather than someone like Paul, who was likely martyred a few years before this letter was sent.

13:8. *Philo and probably many* Diaspora Jews particularly emphasized the

Old Testament picture of God's changelessness (Ps 102:27; Mal 3:6; cf. Is 46:4), because they had to communicate the truth about God to Greeks, who felt that only what was changeless was truly eternal.

13:9. Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14:3-20 listed "unclean" foods that Jewish people were to avoid, thus differentiating them from the nations around them. Philo allegorized these food laws but argued that one should still keep them literally; at the same time, he also testifies that some extremely Hellenized Jewish people in his day viewed them as only symbolic and did not practice them. The writer of Hebrews does not reject them by interpreting them nonliterally; he simply believes that a new time has come, and the foods previously forbidden did not directly benefit those who abstained, making the prohibitions no longer necessary.

13:10. Now the author addresses a special kind of food in the Old Testament: the priests' portion in the tabernacle/temple (see comment on 1 Cor 9:13). Believers, he says, serve as priests (13:15) at a different kind of altar (cf. 7:13).

13:11. Burning sacrifices outside the camp was part of several different rituals (cf. Lev 9:11; Num 19:3; the phrase is common in Leviticus and Numbers and appears in the *Dead Sea Scrolls), but the reference here is to the Day of Atonement, when the priest went into the holy of holies with the blood of the sacrifice (Lev 16:27). This is the sacrifice Jesus fulfilled for the heavenly altar mentioned previously in Hebrews.

13:12-13. Blood was sprinkled to "sanctify" (set apart as holy) or "cleanse" things under the *law (9:22). (That Jesus could cleanse by his own blood may indicate his superiority to the Old Testament *high priest, who had to wash himself before returning to the camp after the sacrifice—Lev 16:28.) That Jesus was crucified and buried outside Jerusalem's walls fits both the Gospel accounts and the Jewish requirement that the dead be buried outside the city (so as to avoid contracting ritual uncleanness caused by contact with graves; cf., e.g., Lev 24:14; Num 15:35-36; Deut 17:5; 22:24). Roman law also required that crucifixions occur "outside the gate." (Some commentators have also noted that the sin offerings of the Day of Atonement were burned outside the camp—Lev 16:27—but it should be observed that they were also sacrificed in the temple or tabernacle—Lev 16:5-19.) Leaving the camp for these Jewish-Christian readers may imply being willing to be expelled from the Jewish community whose respect they value, to follow the God of Israel wholeheartedly (cf. Heb 11:13-16).

13:14. See comment on 11:10 for the hope of the eternal Jerusalem in

ancient Judaism.

13:15-16. The Dead Sea Scrolls often use sacrificial language for praises, as do other ancient writers (see comment on Rom 12:1); Hebrews is probably especially dependent, however, on Hosea 14:2 here (cf. also the Hebrew text of Is 57:19). For spiritual sacrifices, cf. also Psalm 4:5; 27:6; 40:6; 50:7-15; 51:17; 54:6; 69:30-31; 119:108 and Proverbs 21:3. *Pharisees also stressed God's acceptance of piety as a spiritual offering, a factor that may have helped Pharisaism survive the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70; only a few of the special Palestinian Jewish movements, such as Pharisaism's successors and the Jewish Christians, survived without the temple.

13:17. The writer urges his readers to submit to present leaders (probably as they did to former ones—13:7), whom he presents as “watchmen” (see Ezek 3:17; 35:7; cf. Is 21:8; Hab 2:1). A theme of Greco-Roman moralists had long been advice to peoples on how to submit to rulers; this author gives a brief exhortation that functions as a sort of “letter of recommendation” (on these, see comment on 2 Cor 3:1), placing his own authority behind that of their *church's* leaders. *This author is not as leader-centered as some other groups like the Qumran community were, however; the Dead Sea Scrolls report that the leaders of the community would determine members' progress or lack of it, affecting members' standing in the community, hence before God (cf., e.g., CD 13.11-12; 4Q416-17).*

13:18-25

Conclusion

13:18-19. This might be the prayer request of one unjustly imprisoned; but cf. 13:23.

13:20-21. On Jesus as the “shepherd,” see comment on the introduction to John 10:1-18. The *Septuagint of Isaiah 63:11* says that God “brought up the shepherd of the sheep” (Moses) from the sea. *The prophets had also prophesied a new exodus (which could include coming up from the sea), which was fulfilled in Christ (on comparing coming up from the sea and the *resurrection, see comment on Rom 10:7).*

The first covenant was inaugurated by “the blood of the covenant” (Ex 24:8), sometimes called the “eternal covenant” (**Psalms of Solomon* 10:4; Dead Sea Scrolls). But the new covenant would also be called “eternal” (Is 55:3; Jer 32:40;

Ezek 37:26), and it was the blood of this covenant to which the author of Hebrews refers (9:11-22).

13:22. Philosophers and moralists provided “messages of exhortation.” Such spoken messages could also be given in writing, especially in letter-essays like Hebrews. Professional public speakers (*rhetoricians) often remarked that they had spoken briefly or poorly when such was clearly not the case, to claim for themselves less than was obvious.

13:23. If, as is likely, Timothy was arrested under Nero in Rome, he may well have been released on Nero’s death, because the Praetorian Guard and the Roman aristocracy had long before lost faith in Nero’s policies. This background would set the letter in the late 60s (see introduction).

13:24-25. “Those from Italy” could mean people from Italy now living elsewhere, possibly sending greetings back to Italy; most commentators who take this view think it refers to Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2). More likely—especially given the probable place of Timothy’s imprisonment (13:23)—is the view that the author sends greetings from *saints in Italy, and that the letter is written from Rome to a different location, probably to a city in the eastern Mediterranean region.

James

INTRODUCTION

Authorship. That “James” need not further specify which James he is in 1:1 probably 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.) Who else would have the status in the church to write to the “dispersed twelve tribes” (James 1:1)?

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 Martyr); (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. This last point would be especially appropriate for the leader of the mother church, in the one overwhelmingly Jewish city that also provided advanced education in Greek works (cf. the Greek in Acts 15:23-29).

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 (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.200). It is also possible that James’s followers edited his material relevant to the war and re-released it in collected form after his death, in the wake of the war or tensions leading up to it. This could explain the *Diaspora audience of James 1:1 even though the material in the letter is quite relevant to a Judean setting*. In any case, the material in 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 abuses by 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 (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.200-203).

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 sometimes used literary epistles of this sort, which were published and meant to be appreciated by a large body of readers (1:1). The messenger(s) 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. The letter draws on Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions, Jewish wisdom and Jesus' teachings (especially as now found in Mt 5-7). Because its present form includes a brief epistolary introduction (Jas 1:1) this commentary will call James a "letter," though with the recognition that apart from that introduction it reads more like an essay.

Situation. Although James's teaching can apply to a variety of situations (and was probably so applied by the letter's Diaspora audience), this commentary can provide the most specific background by giving special attention to how the teachings would have applied concretely in James's

immediate environment in Judea. This environment shaped the issues James had to address toward the end of his life. More than 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 increased.

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 anti-Roman 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 in general 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 Judea, 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 some other 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. Among commentaries with helpful background are Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James*, AB 37A (New York: Doubleday, 1995); Sophie Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, HNTC (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980); Ralph P. Martin, *James*, WBC 48 (Waco, TX: Word, 1988); and Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). On a less technical level, see also Peter Davids, *James* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1989). For more specialized works, see, e.g., Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (New York: Routledge, 1999); 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: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 97-103.

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 many people in his day, including peasants in Judea and Galilee.

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 work is, if a genuine letter of sorts, 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 is often associated with 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). Addresses like “friends,” “beloved” and “brothers” were common in ancient moral exhortation; “brothers” was used both for “fellow countrymen” and for “fellow religionists.”

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.) Lists of vices and virtues were 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; Sirach 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 Sirach 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 regularly 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, GNT; 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. One point leading to another, yielding a list of multiple items (as here in 1:14-15; Rom 5:3-5; 2 Pet 1:5-7), was a *rhetorical form known as concatenation*. 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. Many scholars think that James personifies "desire" (NIV, NRSV, GNT) 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 Sirach 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”; *Gentiles often viewed the stars as gods, but Jewish people viewed the stars as angels. (Scholars suggest that Canaanites at Ugarit had long before called El the “Father of lights”; 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. Belief in astrology and fearing the powers of the stars were on the rise in this period. 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 could thus proclaim: testings are not the result of arbitrary fate; our lives are 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; “message of truth” and “firstfruits” 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 revolutionaries' 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, falters 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 (pervasive in ancient sources, e.g., Diodorus Siculus 9.9.1; Diogenes Laertius 6.2.64; Letter of Aristeas 127; Mishnah Avot 1:17; 3:17; 5:14; Avot of Rabbi Nathan 24 A)*, 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. Alternatively,

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 may imply 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; *Contemplative Life* 78), 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 (cf. 1:19) condemns uncontrolled speech, which would include recent 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. Later Jewish sources suggest that at least in Judea, charity distributors tried to ensure 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 Judea, as in most of the empire, the rich were oppressing the poor (2:6-7). 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) 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 often amounted to a self-demeaning way to seek funds or other help. 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; many peasants had only one cloak, which would thus often be dirty (this was true at least in Egypt; but even two cloaks would wear thin).

“Assembly” (KJV, NASB, NRSV) or “meeting” (NIV, GNT) is literally “synagogue,” either because James wants the whole Jewish community to embrace his example, or because some 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 often took place in synagogues (2:2), which doubled as community centers. 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 urban public respected the rich as public benefactors, although many of the revolutionaries 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 hope to win 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 usually 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: much of 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 (cf. *Philo, *Posterity of Cain* 102; *Life of Moses* 2.3-4). 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 (e.g., Mishnah *Avot* 2:1; 4:2; Mishnah *Qiddushin* 1:10; *Sifre Deuteronomy* 76.1.1), 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 (e.g., R. Meir in Babylonian Talmud *Bekhorot* 30a). (Ancient writers often stated principles in sharp, graphic ways but in practice showed more mercy to actual transgressors in the community.)

Traditional *Stoics* (*against the Epicureans*) went even farther in declaring that all sins were equal (e.g., *Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.21.1-7), a Stoic view widely known even among non-Stoics (e.g., *Cicero, *On the Ends* 4.27.74-75; Pliny, *Epistles* 8.2.3; Diogenes Laertius 7.1.120). Some Jewish writers agreed: rejecting the smallest commandment was equal to rejecting the largest, because in either case one rejected God’s law (*4 Maccabees 5:19-21). 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 religiously conservative revolutionaries, 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 normally 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 partly against a misinterpretation of Paul’s teaching, as some commentators have suggested, but even more he might react especially 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

15:7-8); 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 relevant 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 13:2).

2:17. Writers such as *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 (e.g., Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.4.13; 1.11.8; 3.24.75).

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 acknowledge 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 Abraham’s 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 one 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. Abraham’s initial faith exhibited in Genesis 12 and 15 was incomplete (cf. Gen 16) but matured further over the years as part of a living relationship with God.

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., Prov 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; Sirach 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. 58:1-6; 1QHa 13.29 in 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 people 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: antagonistic speech, which fits the situation the letter as a whole addresses. Whether by incendiary *rhetoric or in other ways, 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 and barley 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 paradigm of violent retaliation, urged by *Zealots and other Jewish revolutionaries, 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” also appropriated 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 (1QS 3.25-26; 4.9) or spirits of Belial (CD 12.2), and folk Judaism increasingly 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). In Judea, such wisdom is neither that of those like *Zealots nor of those supporting 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; they were guilty of exploiting their hungry workers and violently silencing those who spoke for justice (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), though 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: harsh and even 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 crops raised by tenant farmers or slaves; 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 (e.g., Xenophon, *Hellenica* 2.4.17; 5.1.14) but fit Jewish piety well (cf., e.g., *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2.333; 7.373; 20.267); it appears elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 18:21; see comment on 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 tenant farmers (often alongside slaves) who worked their massive estates. That feudalism, with its serfs working rich landowners' property, arose only in medieval times is a misconception. This arrangement is simply less prominent in literature of Roman times because Roman literature concentrated on the cities, although only about ten 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 (like some Jewish visionaries of his era) appeals to God's judgment rather than to human retribution (4:12; cf. Deut 32:35; Prov 20:22). His *prophecy was timely; a few 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 perhaps 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 first-century Palestine, many day laborers depended on their daily wages to purchase food for themselves and their families; withholding money could mean that they and their families 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. Many *Diaspora Jewish texts* (literary texts, amulets, etc.) called God “Sabaoth” or “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 and their guests 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 (such as 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 entire structure of the book of Job may have been 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 (cf. the Hebrew of Job 42:10). *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, *Jewish War* 2.135, 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 could fit the context of James very well, his readers may not have recognized something so specific. The idea may be 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 (cf. Is 1:6; 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; cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.172; *Jewish War* 1.657). 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 (Sirach 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 possibility of

praying with 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 Circle-Drawer in the many later rabbinic traditions about him; Hanina ben Dosa, in later rabbinic texts; in later traditions about earlier pietists, occasional pious men like Honi's grandson Abba Hilkiah 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 James's hearers 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 1 Kings 18:1 and 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 might among other things invite 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 converted another to the practice of Judaism was as if he or she had created that person.

1 Peter

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 this tradition, 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 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 (4:7–5:14) 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 (linked early in Jewish views on the four kingdoms), 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 would probably include 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 older boyfriend 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 an executed 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 offered an appropriate political scapegoat.

According to the early-second-century historian *Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44), 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 may 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, 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 appears to be 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. One of 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: Baker Book House, 1981). More technical works that are helpful for background include Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, AB 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000); Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); J. R. Michaels, *1 Peter*, WBC 49 (Waco, TX: Word, 1988); and E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1947). Two of the best specialized works are David L. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter*, SBLMS 26 (Chico, CA: 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 constitute 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 audience (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, some of which could be grouped with Syria in this period instead of as a political part of Asia Minor. It has been suggested that 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 *berakhah*, 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 and identity when you converted. Earlier Jewish sources speak of receiving a new heart (Ezek 36:26; Jubilees 1:20-21; 4Q393 in the Dead Sea Scrolls) or becoming like a new person (1 Sam 10:6; Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 20:2; 27:10; *Joseph and Asenath 8:9-11). 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 (such as 4 Ezra 7:77, probably 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 (e.g., 4QpNah 3.3) 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 may function also as 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., Sirach 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, a 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, and thus "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 expected 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” (“foreigners”—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 attempts 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 Gentiles’ lifestyle, thus the former way of life of Peter’s hearers (“passing down” of the ancestors’ way of life by itself could refer either to paganism or to Judaism). Jewish sages contrasted the perishable wealth with the eternal, true wealth, (cf. 1:4, 7, 23) of righteousness or wisdom; here it refers to the price of the hearers’ 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 hearers but is probably not relevant 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 draw from the same sort of natural imagery as Peter's [except that Philo, unlike Peter, might draw on *Stoicism's seminal Logos*]. *That the Word of God was imperishable, however, was agreed throughout all of Judaism; cf. Is 40:6-8. The present image was more widespread in early Christianity; see 1 John 3:9 and cf. Luke 8:11.*) *God's word could be depicted as seed elsewhere (e.g., 4 Ezra 9:31, 33).*

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, GNT) milk is a possible translation (especially if we think in the sense of "nonliteral"), 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, milk—v. 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 may be 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 1 Peter 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 need not be 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" (Mishnah *Pesahim* 10:5). 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 more direct 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”; *Confusion of Tongues* 81; *Who Is the Heir?* 267) 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 and emphasized the need to war against them (cf. also Philo, *Creation* 81). Peter uses the same image, although not for the same reason that philosophers often 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 hearers (1:1) would instead be directly under governors (2:14), by "king" Peter may refer especially 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), everyone 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" would include the many 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. (Often the holders freed their slaves as a reward or to keep from having to feed them in old age, but slaves could not refuse that arrangement.) 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 slaveholders abused them as property; nearly all slaveholders treated them as socially inferior. (An aristocrat eating together even with his freedmen was considered unusual.) 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, a Stoic philosopher 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?” Diogenes Laertius 2.35). 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 (cf. comment on Mt 12:17-18).

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, refusing to reply in kind 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 “healing” as healing from 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 shepherd 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 (3:1) and silencing charges that Christianity is subversive; husbands were always in the position of authority in that culture. Peter addresses wives at much greater length than husbands; if proportions of converts were comparable to Judaism,*

women may have largely outnumbered men in the churches. (The proportion may have been greater for Jewish converts, however, since Diaspora churches did not require circumcision, one factor that discouraged male conversion.)

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 or other local 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 hearers would assume that his point was meant in the same way (challenging excess, not clothing per se). 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 others who could afford to do so.

3:5. Moralists often 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 might think 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), but inner adornment is Peter’s emphasis here.

3:6. Although Peter explicitly advocates only “submission” (v. 1), he cites Sarah as an example even of “obedience,” which was what Greek and Roman

male society ideally 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 apart from Gen 18:12 it is primarily 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 [cf. also Gen 18:3]. 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 many of our cultures today. 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 was prohibited, and reported examples of physical domestic abuse are rare in this region (when compared to the beatings of children and slaves) (known exceptions included the North African region in which Augustine grew up and an earlier abuser named Egnatius). (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. This approach fit the earlier conceptions 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 explicit 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 honor his wife as spiritual peer 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.) The citation 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 probably 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. Although the expression was often used figuratively, "arm yourselves" may evoke the military imagery of soldiers arming, training or otherwise preparing themselves for battle and possible death. The sense might be that those who died with *Christ through faith (cf. 2:24; or, those who have shared in some of his sufferings) 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; hosts*

poured libations to gods at the beginning of banquets. 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—most commonly, though by no means 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, before God. 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; this argument was highly unusual in ancient Judaism. 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; perhaps for such reasons, 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 would befall many Christians captured in Rome in A.D. 64: they were burned alive as torches to light Nero's gardens at night. But he may simply allude 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 might therefore be saying that those who share the *Messiah's sufferings also hasten the coming of the end. Nevertheless, the regular* New Testament idea of sharing Christ's sufferings is probably 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. Second-century apologists, or defenders of Christianity, argued that 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 some think that it 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). The meaning of term used here, though, remains debated.

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 often did. Throughout history, persecution has often refined and thus 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 a 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 (the Eighteen Benedictions) 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 Maccabees 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” most readily connotes a concerned guide rather than a severe ruler (although the image of shepherds had often been applied to rulers in parts of the ancient Near East, to Greek kings and so forth). 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 some 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 *Gentiles, 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, in 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—1:7), 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” (1QM 14.9).

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. Jewish people by this period viewed Rome as the fourth of the four kingdoms in Daniel 7 that would oppress Israel, a successor to Babylon. Some elements of contemporary Judaism had readily transferred prophecies of

Babylon's demise in the *Old Testament to the new empire of Rome (a transferral readily highlighted after A.D. 70). "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 Peter

INTRODUCTION

Authorship and Date. Regarding authorship, 2 Peter is one of the most disputed letters in the *New Testament*. *A number of scholars argue that 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 some scholars respond that 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 defenders of Petrine authorship counter that 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.) Others argue that a later writer, maybe a close associate of Peter, wove together Petrine material with material from Jude.

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 from 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). Parallels in Diaspora Jewish literature as well as Judean works in the so-called Psuedepigrapha suggest an audience with a strong background in Jewish literature.

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. Very helpful for background are Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC 50 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983); and Gene L. Green, *Jude & 2 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). On a less technical level, see, e.g., J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981); Steven J. Kraftchick, *Jude, 2 Peter*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002); and Ruth Anne Reese, *2 Peter & Jude*, Two Horizons (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

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 typical 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. They do illustrate that Peter praises God and his benefactions lavishly.

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 1 Pet 1:23.) In the context of monotheistic early Christianity, embattled by polytheistic culture, Peter’s subdued language might help 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 sometimes called sorites); cf., e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 6:17-20. “Moral excellence” (NASB) or “goodness” (NIV, NRSV, GNT) 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. Various Jewish writers 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. Some suggest that by announcing his imminent death (undoubtedly his execution in Rome), Peter may inform 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 ancient 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 frequent 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” (see comment on 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 (an allusion also probably present in the Gospel accounts of the transfiguration). (The *Old Testament usually applies the “holy mountain” 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 later 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. The lamp provided light until dawn. “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, such as 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; 1 Sam 10:10-11; 19:20-24). 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, found rich **patrons* 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 (e.g., *Dead Sea Scrolls CD 2.16-18*; *4Q180 f1.7-8*; *1 Enoch 6-7*; 16:2; 69:5; 106:13-15; **Jubilees 4:22*; 5:1; 7:21; **2 Baruch 56:10-15*; *Testament of Reuben 5:6*; **Philo, That God Is Unchangeable 1*). 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 pre-Olympian supernatural beings), but of the severest conceivable tortures; it occurs elsewhere in Jewish literature (e.g., *Sibylline*

Oracles 4.186; 5.178), including as the place where the fallen angels were imprisoned (*Sibylline Oracles* 1.101-3; most manuscripts of *Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* 60:3; cf. the "burning valley" in *1 Enoch* 67:4, 7). Jewish writers also generally affirmed a current hell as a holding place for the wicked until the final judgment. For God not "sparing" the offspring of the angels in Noah's day or (later) Sodom (as in 2 Pet 2:4-6), see also Sirach 16:7-8.

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* 1.129, 168; *Jubilees* 7:20). 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, e.g., Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 10:3; 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 (Dead Sea Scrolls 1QM 13.1-4; 4Q280 f2.2; 4Q286 f7ii.2-7; Babylonian Talmud *Menahot* 62a; cf. Sirach 21:27 LXX; *Life of Adam and Eve* 39:1). 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 apparently 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. The image would not be purely rural; many urban arenas displayed the hunting of animals for sport as public entertainment. 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 [cf. **Testament of Moses* 7:4] is quite 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, 16; 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 in terms of 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 a recension of 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. On "reminder," see comment on 1:12. For Jesus' commandment here, cf. Matthew 24:42-44 (especially for 2 Pet 3:9).

3:3. Some philosophers charged that *Epicureans, who denied future judgment, lacked a basis for morality. Likewise, in much Jewish literature, those who deny the *age to come* have no basis for morality (cf., e.g., *Wisdom of Solomon* 2:1-24; *Pharisaic accusations against the Sadducees*). Ridiculing the righteous was also understood to be characteristically wicked behavior; for example, *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. 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 many find most likely in Gen 1) was debated in Diaspora Judaism.

3:5. In Genesis 1, God created the world through his word (also Ps 33:6-9). (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.) The Greek philosopher Thales saw water as the primal element (though Peter's wording is much more ambiguous).

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 judgment 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*), some possibly influenced by Stoic conceptions. Jewish tradition thus declared that the present world would be destroyed not by water but by fire (e.g., *Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.70; Rabbi Meir, second century, Tosefta *Ta'anit* 2:13; *Life of Adam and Eve* 49:3). 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 commonly 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, rather than Aristotle.

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 (7:74; cf. 4:33-37); 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 may 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 hearers 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, in the first century, many Jewish and probably Christian groups were 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 *Septuagint) 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). Thus if Peter wrote these words, they reflect a remarkable insight for his day.

3:17-18. Peter's hearers are to resist the false teachers by growing in Christ. Even groups that separated humanity starkly into righteous and unrighteous or wise and foolish normally recognized the importance of the righteous or wise making progress.

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 probably 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 generally 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 document as a whole 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 apparently 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). One form of idolatry of particular concern may have been the imperial cult, to which people in the East needed to show their loyalty or, in some cities, 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, perhaps even with the imperial cult to save one's life. On the other hand, the issue might be one of the movements of false teaching that was developing toward full-blown second-century *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 those useful for background are I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, WBC 51 (Waco, TX: Word, 1984); D. Moody Smith, *First, Second and Third John*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991); and Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). The most detailed commentary is Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, AB 30 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), although its reconstruction of the situation overreaches the evidence. A sample of my primary source material appears in Craig Keener, "Transformation

Through Divine Vision in 1 John 3:2-6,” *Faith & Mission* 23, no. 1 (2005): 13-22.

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 1:1-18). 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*, e.g., 1QM 1.1, 11) 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 described “obeying” God’s commands as “walking” in them—so often that Jewish teachers called their view of the way Jewish people should behave *halakhah*, “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

Jesus' followers 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). For paradox, cf. 2:7-8. 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" often meant "intercessor" or sometimes "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 (cf. Rom 8:34), because of his position, his righteousness and his work (see 1 John 2:2).

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). Jewish sources 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 the children of light (e.g., 1QM 14.17 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls).

2:9-11. Part of John's application may be that the secessionists who have withdrawn from the Christian community that 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 language 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."

Some argue that "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. More likely is that John offers age-appropriate instruction; in antiquity, some writers addressed different kinds of moral instruction to different age groups to which particular points were most relevant (e.g., Isocrates, *Ad demonicum* 44; the Greek philosopher Epicurus in Diogenes Laertius 10.122; cf. Prov 20:29; 2 Tim 2:22).

Fathers (a title often accorded older persons) held positions of honor and authority, and were respected for their wisdom (e.g., Diodorus Siculus 1.1.4; Tosefta *Avodah Zarah* 1:19). Children were in positions of learning and lacked status and authority. Young men were generally associated with strength and vigor (cf. Jn 20:4; 21:7-8; Job 33:25; Prov 20:29); here they had overcome the evil one by participating in Christ's victory (1 Jn 4:4; 5:4) over sin (3:10-12). Although some ancient writers often considered young men more vulnerable to particular temptations (passions such as anger and 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 world system in competition with God. Just as Israel in the *Old Testament repeatedly had to decide between allegiance to God and allegiance to the values of 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 hearers, 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, it is not impossible that John alludes, 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 (2:1-11) 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," though John might call a substitute Christ a "false Christ," like "false prophets" in 4:1. 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, frequently 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 many modern interpreters, ancient Jewish interpreters would not see a contradiction between these two perspectives.

2:20-21. In the Old Testament people were literally anointed with oil to perform a specific task, especially for the priesthood (e.g., Ex 29:29; 40:15) or kingship (e.g., 1 Sam 10:1; 2 Kings 9:6); the term translated "anointed" is used figuratively for those ordained by God to particular tasks. Christians had been appointed to discernment (see 1 Jn 2:27).

2:22-23. By themselves, these verses would counter equally well a non-Christian 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 protecting them from direct challenges from 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 may have 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 younger but 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” (*Mishnah Avot* 3:15). 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 (cf. transformation through vision of the divine in *1 *Enoch* 71:10-11). 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 could view sin as imperfection; the Old Testament and Judaism saw it more concretely as transgression of God's *law.

3:5. Here John may use 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 one who lives righteously but sometimes succumbs to temptation or deception and genuinely repents.)

*Stoics, *Essenes and Jewish wisdom literature divided humanity into ideal types: righteous and unrighteous, or wise and foolish. All of these sources, however, recognize the imperfection of the righteous or wise; they might not fit the ideal type in all respects, but their allegiance is clearly decided.

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 (cf. John 8:44), 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). Some thought of divine seed in humans (e.g., Ovid, *Fasti* 6.5-6; *Seneca, *Epistle to Lucilius* 73.16; *Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.9.4-6), an idea Christians could adapt for those born from the *Spirit. 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., Deut 30:14; 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 Jn 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. John’s hearers might anticipate 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 sometimes tortured for information, especially if they were slaves, Christians might have to pay a tremendous price to avoid betraying their fellow Christians to death.

3:17. In addition to being ready to sacrifice one’s life for fellow believers (3:16), 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” (1QS 4.5; 1QM 13.12; 1QHa 17.35; 18.29; 19.14).

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” (Sirach 14:2).

3:22-24. John’s practical interest in this subject may be because these commandments are precisely those that 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. Most Jewish people did not believe that the Spirit (1 Jn 3:24) was available to many in the present age (the *Essenes, like the Christians, were apparently rare in this regard).

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); or it might be 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. Perhaps they deny the Jesus who is known from the eyewitness material in the Fourth Gospel. Whatever the error, the secessionists are claiming the authority of inspiration for it, as do some similar groups 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" probably 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* not 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. John could speak of the first witnesses, but for him also who 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; **Letter to Aristeas* 243). Although *Stoic philosophers emphasized not fearing anything, because circumstances cannot ultimately destroy one's reason, in this context John's assurance that true believers need not fear 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 principle of group allegiance extended even to friendship networks.) 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 (perhaps 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. The reference could also be

more general than any of these suggestions.

In any case, 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 four manuscripts—of the twelfth, fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries [the last in a marginal note]—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 might be prayer for an erring brother or sister, undoubtedly including 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 most prominently 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., Dead Sea Scrolls CD 9.6, 17; *Jubilees 21:22; 26:34; 33:18; cf. the Hebrew of Deut 22:26) 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 this severely false teaching 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" might mean falsehoods or sins in 1QS 2.11 in the *Dead Sea Scrolls; cf. antichrist in 1 Jn 4:3). A literal meaning (physical images of false gods) makes good sense to a congregation in Asia Minor. It could include worshiping the image of the emperor, to which many Christians were eventually required to offer incense to show their loyalty to the state (Pliny, *Epistles* 10.96). It could also refer to compromise with idolatry in a broader sense—Asia Minor afforded plenty of temptation for former pagans, such as food offered to idols. 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 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 audience, since the contents of 2 and 3 John indicate that the hearers 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 probably 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). Some propose that 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 false teaching's followers 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” includes cleaving to the Christian community (rather than leaving it, as the secessionists were doing).

7-9. See discussion in the introduction.

10. Guests were to be accorded hospitality and travelers to be 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. “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.

13. It was common to send greetings from those near the sender. For the “sister,” see comment on the “chosen lady” of verse 1.

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 usually 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). “Gaius” was a common name.

3-4. Rabbis and philosophers sometimes spoke of their *disciples as their “children”; here John probably intends those he brought to *Christ (cf. Gal 4:19 and perhaps 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 Greco-Roman 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 likely adopted the same practice.

7-8. Philosophers and sophists (traveling professional speakers, which is how

many observers in the Greco-Roman 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. Jewish people 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). (For letters of recommendation, see comment on 2 Cor 3:1.) No one in Diotrophes’s house church will receive him, so Gaius’s house church must help him.

13-15. 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.”

Jude

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 audience (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 specifically 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 or the availability of scribal help, 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 may be a letter-essay, a letter used as a sermon. Letters were meant as substitute speeches or surrogates for the presence of the writer.

Commentaries. Excellent commentaries include R. J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC 50 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), and (easier for those without Greek) J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, BNTC (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1981).

Jude's lack of elaboration on his office suggests that he is the well-known 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. On "slave," see comment on Romans 1:1.

3-6

Falling from Grace

3-4. At least part of the error that 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 teaching 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 hearers 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 (see comment on 2 Pet 2:4). In the earliest of these traditions, *1 *Enoch*, the fallen angels were imprisoned and bound (e.g., 10:11-14; 18:15-16; 21:3-6); Azazel was thrown into "darkness" (10:4), which was applied to the realm of the dead in much ancient tradition. First Enoch (22:11; 54:6; 84:4) uses "great day" for the day of judgment. Cf. Wisdom of Solomon 17:17 (and 17:2).

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 the guests 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) 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 encourage 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 (though others were soon added, e.g., Tobit 5:4; 2 Esdras 4:36), 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 (see comment on 2 Pet 2:10-11), 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 (Babylonian Talmud *Qiddushin* 81ab); cf. also the saying in Sirach 21:27 LXX. 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 Jn 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, enticing Israel to sin so they would be judged. 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. Communion as a full meal was apparently 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; in any case, 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); probably more relevant, 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 *Enoch*.

16. “Grumblers” may allude to Israel’s murmuring in the wilderness, but especially to the wrong speech (“defiant words”—NIV) of verse 15, expounding the citation from 1 *Enoch*. Ancient moralists repeatedly condemned flattery and advocated forthright 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).

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 may have been already moving in this direction. More important, 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 altogether 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), likely including (though not necessarily limited to) 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.

Revelation

INTRODUCTION

Authorship. Many scholars attribute the Fourth Gospel and Revelation to a common circle (for circles of literary production around an author, see the introduction to 1 John). Nevertheless, scholars also commonly argue that different authors wrote them; many do not even entertain the *possibility* that both were written by the same person. The style of Revelation is quite different from that of the Fourth Gospel, so some scholars as early as several centuries after their writing denied that they could have been written by the same author. Nevertheless, their connection should not be dismissed. Most of early *church tradition attributes both documents to John the apostle*; the argument that Revelation was written by him is certainly strong (see comment on 1:1; for the Fourth Gospel's authorship, see the introduction to John).

A close examination of the works indicates that much of the vocabulary is the same, though used in different ways; theological communities and schools (see the introduction to 1 John) usually share perspectives more than vocabulary, whereas authors may adapt their style to the *genre in which and the situation for which they write*. *If one accepts common authorship, one can account for most of the stylistic variations on the basis of the different genres of the two works: Gospel and apocalypse* (Revelation's style borrows heavily from Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, etc.). That a single community could produce and embrace both a Gospel (even one emphasizing the present experience of future glory) and an apocalypse is not difficult to believe; the *Dead Sea Scrolls contain similarly diverse documents*. *That a single writer could embrace multiple genres is no less possible (compare, e.g., Plutarch's Lives and his Moralia or Tacitus's Histories and Dialogues, though their differences in genre and style are less pronounced than those between the Fourth Gospel and Revelation)*.

Date. Some scholars have dated Revelation in the late 60s, shortly after Nero's death, as several emperors in a row quickly met violent deaths (cf. 17:10). In the book of Revelation, however, the emperor's power seems to be stable, and this situation does not fit the 60s. Similarly, the imperial cult in the Roman province of Asia (western Turkey) directly threatens some of John's

circle of churches; this situation fits the period of the 90s better. The church also seems to be entrenched (and sometimes prosperous) in the major cities of Asia; thus a date in Domitian's reign in the 90s of the first century, reported in early church tradition and still preferred by most scholars, seems more likely.

Genre. Revelation mixes elements of *Old Testament *prophecy with a heavy dose of the apocalyptic genre, a style of writing that grew out of elements of Old Testament prophecy. Although nearly all its images have parallels in the biblical prophets, the images most relevant to late-first-century readers, which were prominent in popular Jewish revelations about the end time, are stressed most heavily. Chapters 2–3 are “oracular letters,” a kind of letter occurring especially in the Old Testament (e.g., Jer 29:1-23, 29-32) but also attested on some Greek pottery fragments.

Although the literary structure of such documents may have been added later, many scholars argue that many Jewish mystics and other ancient mantics believed that they were having visionary or trance experiences. Like the Old Testament prophets he most resembles, John may have experienced real visions and need not use them only as a literary device. (The apocalypses are usually pseudonymous, thus it is difficult to be certain to what extent they reflect religious experience. But other accounts of Jewish mystics seeking to invade heaven in visionary ascents—see comment on 2 Cor 12:1-4—and anthropologists' reports on the commonness of ecstatic trance states in a variety of cultures around the world today allow that many such experiences were genuine. Early Christians generally accepted the reality of pagan inspiration as a phenomenon but attributed it to the demonic realm, while viewing their own inspiration as continuous with that of the Old Testament prophets. They held that there are many spirits in the world, but not all of them are good—1 Jn 4:1-6.)

Structure. After the introduction (chaps. 1–3), the book is dominated by three series of judgments (seals, trumpets, bowls), probably concurrent (they all culminate in the end of the age), and snapshots of worship in heaven (chaps. 4–16), then oracles against Rome (chaps. 17–18) and prophecies of the end (chaps. 19–22). The judgments may cover the (probably symbolic, but possibly deferred) period of 1,260 days to which the book repeatedly alludes (see especially comment on 12:6—if symbolic, this period might span history between Christ's first and second comings). The book is in logical rather than chronological sequence; John may report the visions in the sequence in which he has them, but every time he notes “And I saw/heard,” he is receiving a new image. The new image, while connected with what preceded, need not always

report an event that follows it chronologically.

Interpretations. There are several major categories of interpretation of this book: (1) Revelation predicts in detail the course of human history till the Second Coming, (2) Revelation reflects the general principles of history, (3) Revelation addresses only what was happening in John's day, (4) Revelation addresses only the end time and (5) combinations of the above approaches (e.g., John addresses the principles of history in view of the ever-impending end time until it arrives, and originally articulated these principles to speak to the situation of his late-first-century readers).

Many interpreters of John's day (especially interpreters in the Dead Sea Scrolls) reread Old Testament prophecies as symbols describing the interpreters' own generation, and the book of Revelation has similarly been reinterpreted by modern prophecy teachers in every decade of the past century. (For a sober rehearsal of the continual modification of prophecy teachers' predictions with each new series of events in the past century, see Dwight Wilson, *Armageddon Now!* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1977]; for a longer historical perspective, see Richard Kyle, *The Last Days Are Here Again* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998]; Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992], pp. 37-63.)

Some prophecy teachers have interpreted and reinterpreted Revelation according to the whims of changing news headlines; thus "kings of the East" (16:12) went from being the Ottoman Empire to imperial Japan to Communist China to Iraq, depending on the political needs of the Western interpreters. But John's images would have meant something in particular to their first readers, and this commentary therefore investigates that sense, following the same procedure for interpretation that it follows elsewhere in the *New Testament. Thus it directly addresses the third category of interpretation mentioned above, although this data can be combined with the second category (as it often is for preaching) and, in a sense that becomes clear in the course of the commentary, the fourth (and thus fifth) category.

Method of Interpretation. John wrote in Greek and used Old Testament, Jewish and sometimes Greco-Roman figures of speech and images; he explicitly claims that he writes to first-century churches in Asia Minor (1:4, 11), as explicitly as Paul writes to first-century churches. Whatever else his words may indicate, therefore, they must have been intelligible to his first-century audience (see comment on 1:3; 22:10). Ancient hearers had no access to modern newspapers, the basis for some popular methods of interpretation; but

subsequent generations have been able to examine the Old Testament and first-century history while studying the book. Historical perspective therefore makes the book available to *all* generations.

This perspective does not deny Revelation's relevance for readers today; to the contrary, it affirms that its message is relevant to every generation, although it uses the symbolism familiar to the generation of its first readers. (Thus, for example, future opponents of the church might be envisioned through the image of a new Nero, a figure more relevant to the original readers than to modern ones. But Christians oppressed in all times can take both warning—that such figures exist—and encouragement—that their end is prophesied—from this image, once they understand it.) By examining the original point of the symbols, this commentary provides readers better access to Revelation's message for applying it today.

Symbolism. As in the Old Testament prophets, much of John's symbolic language is meant as evocative imagery, to elicit particular responses, rather than as a detailed literal picture of events. Readers steeped in the Old Testament and Jewish apocalyptic literature would have understood this method of interpretation; sometimes older symbols could be reapplied to new situations but were meant to evoke the same sort of response. Sometimes John simply explains what the symbols mean (e.g., 1:20); in other cases the first readers would have understood from other clues in his book or because of cultural information or knowledge of how these symbols were used in antiquity, which he and his readers both understood. John plainly expected his readers to understand his points (1:3; 22:10).

Situation Part 1: The Imperial Cult. Only some cities faced persecution, but the threat was wider. The line between human and divine had always been thin in Greek religion, and consequently peoples of the Greek East had built temples to Roman emperors from the first emperor on; the first shrines were in Ephesus and Smyrna. In Rome itself the imperial cult was viewed as a symbol of loyalty to the Roman state, and emperors were deified only after they died. But several emperors—for the most part cursed instead of deified after death—claimed to be gods while still alive (Gaius Caligula, Nero and Domitian). The emperor at the time Revelation was written was most likely the widely hated Domitian, who demanded worship while he was alive. If some considered Christians subversive, cities in the eastern part of the empire could use worshiping the image of the emperor in his temple as a test of loyalty to the state (cf. Rev 13:14; earlier, cf. Dan 3:5).

Domitian repressed the aristocracy, expelled astrologers from Rome (lest they predict his demise) and persecuted philosophers and religions that he perceived as hostile to himself. The sources also show that he repressed Judaism and Christianity, although they were not singled out. Evidence on the imperial cult in Asia and outright persecution of Christians in Asia on the provincial level in the early second century (pre-Trajanic repression continuing in Trajan's time) suggest that Domitian's own claims and behavior stimulated the environment in which provincial persecution of Christians in Asia Minor occurred.

Situation Part 2: Inevitable Conflict. Jewish people were unofficially exempted from emperor worship, but well-off Asian Jews, disliked by Domitian and embarrassed by the relatively recent revolt of Palestinian Jewry (A.D. 66–70), wanted to dissociate themselves from potentially subversive groups. Some Asian *synagogues thus expelled Jewish Christians (2:9; 3:7-9), who could face Roman persecution if their Jewishness were in question. In other cities, possibly the majority, no one targeted Christians for persecution; the temptation there was simply to blend into the larger cultural environment. John's message would comfort some hearers and confront others.

The Romans repressed any groups whose prophets denounced Rome, but John stands well in the Old Testament tradition of uttering oracles against oppressive nations and empires, especially those that oppressed God's people. Some other Jewish writers did pronounce judgment against Rome (often with cryptic names like Babylon, the Kittim or even Edom), and many still wanted to revolt (this revolutionary fervor materialized in Egypt and Cyrene shortly thereafter); but Revelation is among the most explicit oracles of judgment against Rome's rebellion against God. Although Rome may have been the Babylon of John's day, other oppressive empires have followed it. Ancient authors often contrasted characters; Revelation contrasts Babylon, portrayed as a prostitute, with the New Jerusalem, portrayed as a bride. John invites hearers to live not for the empires of this age but for the promised city to come.

Message. Revelation provides an eternal perspective, by emphasizing such themes as the antagonism of the world in rebellion against God toward a church obedient to God's will; the unity of the church's worship with heaven's worship; that victory depends on Christ's finished work, not on human circumstances; that Christians must be ready to face death for Christ's honor; that representatives of every people will ultimately stand before his throne; that the imminent hope of his return is worth more than all this world's goods; and so forth. From the beginning, the Old Testament covenant and promise had implied a hope for the

future of God's people. When Israel was confronted with the question of individuals' future, the Old Testament doctrines of justice and hope led them to views like the *resurrection (Is 26:19; Dan 12:2). The future hope is further developed and embroidered with the imagery of Revelation.

Commentaries. For background at an advanced level, see especially David E. Aune, *Revelation*, 3 vols., WBC 52 (Dallas: Word, 1997); Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001). For useful commentaries on a more mediating level, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed., NCB (1978; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John the Divine*, HNTC (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1966); Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999); on a more popular level, see, e.g., Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) and especially Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994). Exceptionally useful specialized studies include Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (New York: T & T Clark, 1993); J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, JSNTSup 132 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); David A. Thomas, *Revelation 19 in Historical and Mythological Context*, Studies in Biblical Literature 118 (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

1:1-3

Title and Apocalyptic Introduction

Titles of documents often consisted of a statement like "the book of the words of so-and-so" (Tobit 1:1); John's title resembles that of some *Old Testament prophetic books (e.g., Is 1:1; Jer 1:1; Hos 1:1). Titles were normally affixed to the outside of a scroll, although by the mid-second century some people were using the codex, or modern form of book, and titles were put on the inside.

1:1. Most *apocalypses were attributed to meritorious Old Testament characters of the distant past; like Old Testament prophetic books, Revelation is written by a contemporary *apostle who does not need such a pen name; he writes to real congregations that know him (1:4, 11). (Other apocalypses did not

name specific recipients or use the epistolary form.)

Some revelations in the Old Testament (Dan 7:16; 10:5-21; cf. Ex 3:2; Judg 6:11-23) and many revelations in apocalyptic literature (e.g., *1 *Enoch* and *4 *Ezra*) were mediated through angels. Old Testament prophets were called God's "servants," a title John aptly claims for himself at the opening of his book.

1:2. "Witness" was especially a legal term, although its sense had been widely extended beyond that. Christians were being betrayed to Roman law courts, but in the context of Revelation, "witness" is the Christian proclamation of knowledge about Jesus, in a sense providing evidence in the light of the court of God's final judgment (cf. Is 43:8-12; 44:8-9).

1:3. Most people in antiquity could not read, and there would not at any rate be enough copies of the book (which would have to be copied by hand) for everyone to have his or her own. Thus the blessing is for the one who reads aloud to the congregation (just as someone would read in a *synagogue) and those who hear (just as the rest of the congregation listened to Scripture readings). The "blessing" form was common in the Old Testament and Jewish literature (see comment on Mt 5:1-12), and here implies that the hearers were expected to understand and obey what they heard. (Revelation contains seven such "blessings" and seven curses or "woes," probably all oracular, i.e., prophetic.) Apocalypses commonly predicted the imminent end of the age, or imminent events heralding that end (especially in the roughly contemporary work 4 *Ezra*).

1:4-8

Epistolary Introduction

Works that were not strictly letters but were being sent to readers could include letter introductions, for example, the historical work 2 Maccabees (1:1–2:32, especially 1:1). One could frame a paragraph or larger work with literary brackets; in this case, "the one who is, who was and who is to come, the Almighty" frames 1:1-4.

1:4. "*Grace and peace*" adapts a standard ancient greeting and blessing from a deity (here, from Father, Son and possibly Spirit); see comment on Romans 1:7. On the encyclical nature of the letter (which could not be quickly recopied by hand many times over, and thus was read by the messenger to each *church in sequence), see comment on Revelation 1:11.

The “one who is, was and is to come” is related to an occasional Greek title for an eternal deity, but especially reflects a Greek exposition of the *Old Testament name “I AM” (Ex 3:14; the *LXX has “he who is”), in the same form in which it was also expanded by a *targum. Some argue that the “seven spirits” here might refer to the seven holy archangels recognized by Judaism around the throne (Rev 8:2; see comment on 5:6). More often commentators argue that they evoke the sevenfold messianic Spirit of Isaiah 11:2. (That the sevenfold Spirit imagery of Is 11:2 was current is suggested by *1 Enoch 61:11; cf. *Psalms of Solomon 17:37.) Given Revelation’s predilection for the number “seven,” this number alone should not be decisive for resolving the seven spirits’ identity.

1:5. A “faithful” witness (2:13; 3:14) was a reliable one (Prov 14:5, 25; Is 8:2; Jer 42:5). “Firstborn” and “ruler over the earth’s kings” allude to Psalm 89:27. Under Old Testament ritual law, the blood of the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement freed Israel from its sins; the Jewish people had also been freed from Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb.

1:6. After God redeemed Israel from Egypt he called them “a kingdom of priests” (Ex 19:6), thus indicating that all of them were holy to him. A targum of this verse renders it “a kingdom and priests,” as here (cf. *Jubilees 16:18).

1:7. Like Matthew 24:30, this verse blends Daniel 7:13 (coming with clouds on the day of the Lord; cf. also, e.g., Ezek 30:3) with Zechariah 12:10 (those who pierced him, i.e., God, will mourn for him). “Tribes of earth” extends the image beyond the tribes of Israel (cf. Zech 12:12) to all peoples; citizens of cities in the Greek East (and even ancient Rome) were divided into tribes.

1:8. Some Greco-Roman writers called the supreme deity the “first,” but the Old Testament (Is 41:4) and Judaism (e.g., *Josephus, *Philo*, *adapting* Stoic language) had already called Israel’s God the “first and the last.” This is the point of calling him by the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, Alpha and Omega. (Some later Jewish teachers similarly came to call him the *’Alef* and the *Tav*, the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. They further called God “truth,” Hebrew *’emeth*, spelled *’alef-mem-tav*, which they said were the first, middle and last letters of the alphabet, showing that God was eternal and ruled over all time.) Greek-speaking Jews often called God “the omnipotent,” or “all-powerful,” as here.

1:9-20

The Opening Revelation

1:9. Governors of various provinces could exercise their own discretion as to whether those charged and found guilty should be banished to an island, executed or enslaved. Those of higher social status automatically received lighter sentences than others, but John was banished as opposed to executed (cf. 2:13) either on account of his age (as sometimes happened) or the clemency of the local governor. In general, banishments were of two kinds: *deportatio* (including confiscation of property and removal of civil rights) and *relegatio* (without such penalties); technically only the emperor could declare the former, but a provincial governor could declare the latter, as here.

The most common places of Roman banishment were some rocky Aegean islands called the Cyclades (around Delos) and the Sporades, off the coast of Asia, which included Patmos (forty to fifty miles southwest of Ephesus). Patmos was not deserted; it included a gymnasium and temple of Artemis (the island's patron deity). Because Babylon was the major place of exile in Old Testament tradition (Ezek 1:1), John's own banishment puts him in a position to denounce Rome as the new Babylon (chaps. 17–18; see comment on 14:8).

1:10. Because the Old Testament and ancient Judaism especially associated the Spirit of God with *prophecy*, "*in the Spirit*" here may mean that John was in *charismatic worship* (1 Chron 25:1-6) or (using closer language) a *visionary state* (Ezek 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 8:3; 11:1, 24). Nevertheless, the revelation here, as in the Old Testament but in contrast to much Jewish apocalyptic literature, is otherwise unsolicited (see comment on Rev 4:2). Some texts compared powerful voices to trumpets, but the "sound like a trumpet" may allude to God's revelation in Exodus 19:16, when the Lord was preparing to give forth his word.

One day a month was dedicated to the honor of the emperor in Asia Minor, but the Christians dedicated one day—probably each week—to Christ's honor, perhaps in view of the coming "day of the Lord." (According to some Jewish schemes for reckoning history, the seventh and final age of history would be an age of sabbath rest [cf. Rev 20]; some second-century Christian interpreters transferred the image to an eighth age, speaking of the Lord's day as the eighth day of the week. But it may be debated how early and how relevant these ideas are to John in Revelation.) Scholars often argue that "the Lord's day" refers to Sunday, as the weekday of Jesus' *resurrection; the early Jewish Christians may have preferred that day to avoid conflicting with sabbath observance.

1:11. The seven cities mentioned here are seven of the eight most prominent cities of western Asia Minor (what is now western Turkey). The Asiarchs met annually in one of seven cities, almost identical with this list; John simply

replaces Cyzicus, far to the north of the other cities, with Thyatira, which was more centrally located (and perhaps had a larger church). Word often spread from major cities (cf. Acts 19:10), so messages to the churches in these seven cities would affect the churches of the entire province. A messenger delivering John's book would arrive first in Ephesus; the other cities are arranged in the sequence a messenger would follow on foot to reach them. The distance between them generally varies from about thirty to forty-five miles. (Those who suggest that John meant the churches symbolically for different stages of church history have to assume that churches before the final stage could not hope for Christ's imminent return; but John's letters to the churches display too much local color to represent merely church ages, and their precise geographical arrangement suggests that he means them literally.)

1:12. On the lampstands, see comment on 1:20.

1:13-15. This scene evokes earlier biblical revelations. Its imagery resembles the picture of God in Daniel 7:9 (the white hair symbolizing the dignity accruing to age), features of the mighty angel in Daniel 10:5-6 and the title "one like a son of man" from Daniel 7:13 (where he would come to rule the nations). The sound of the angel's voice "like a tumult" in Daniel 10:6 is adapted by means of the divine imagery of Ezekiel 1:24; 43:2; extrabiblical Jewish traditions also spoke of waters in the heavens. The "robe" and "girdle" might allude to Jesus' role as *high priest (Ex 28:4). Others could also wear robes and girdles, however; some note that workmen wore their girdles around their waist while working, so a position around the breast would signify that his work is complete. Given the other biblical allusions here, however, an allusion to the Old Testament high priest seems probable. "Feet of bronze" could allude to the bearers of God's throne (Ezek 1:7) as well as to the angel of Daniel 10:6.

The cumulative impact of these images is to present the risen Jesus as the greatest conceivable figure, using biblical imagery. Apocalypses employed some of this imagery (angels that looked like lightning, etc.), although John at this point avoids postbiblical elaborations that became common in such works (angels thousands of miles tall, etc.).

1:16. The mouth of God's spokesperson could be presented as a weapon (Is 49:2) and the *Messiah's just decrees of judgment would be the weapon of his mouth (Is 11:4). Some Jewish texts described angels shining as the sun (cf. also the angel's face like lightning in Dan 10:6).

1:17. Terror was common during visions (Gen 15:12); those who received revelations of God (Ezek 1:28; 11:13) or of angels (Dan 8:18; 10:9, 15) in the

Old Testament often fell on their faces, unless the revealer touched and strengthened them (Dan 8:18; 10:10). (The image was continued in many later Jewish texts—e.g., Tobit, *1 Enoch and *4 Ezra—as well.) God often had to assure his servants not to be afraid (e.g., Deut 3:2; Josh 8:1; Jer 1:8), sometimes when he spoke to them (e.g., Gen 26:24). For “first and last,” see comment on 1:8.

1:18. In the Old Testament (Ps 9:13; 107:18) and Jewish literature, “the gates of Hades” referred to the realm of the dead and thus to the power of death; one who held the keys to these realms thus ruled over them. (Whoever held the keys in a royal house held a position of great authority in that house, as in Is 22:21-22; keys symbolized authority to control whatever they opened, and Jewish texts spoke of God dispensing keys to rain, etc.) *Gentiles spoke of netherworld deities, such as Hades or Anubis, holding the keys of death. Jewish literature said that God had authority over death and the gates of Hades (Wisdom of Solomon 16:13), a role here held by Jesus. Christ’s power over death, as the one who had risen, would encourage his followers now facing possible death.

1:19. Prophecy in the Old Testament involved speaking God’s message and was not strictly limited to prediction of the future. But the Greek writer *Plutarch* defined prophecy as predicting the future that is caused by the present and past; the Jewish Sibyl was said to prophesy the things that were before, were present and would come about (*Sibylline Oracles* 1:3-4). Jewish apocalyptic writers often divided history into ages as a prelude to their prophecies about the future (though often writing under a pseudonym, ostensibly before the history occurred).

1:20. Jewish texts often portrayed angels as stars (see comment on 12:4). Cosmic imagery was frequent; e.g., *Josephus* and Philo identified the “seven planets” with certain symbols in the temple, and Palestinian synagogues later sported zodiacs around Helios, the sun god, on their floors (despite Old Testament prohibitions). Pagans believed that Fate controlled the nations through the stars (which were often deified)—an Eastern view introduced into Greco-Roman paganism under the guise of the science of the day. By this period many Jewish people concurred that the nations were ruled by the stars, which they took as angels under God’s dominion. But if John uses this symbolism—and this is unclear—his point would be that *Christ is Lord over the universe, including Lord over the angels who guide the churches as well as the nations.

A (usually) seven-branched lampstand, or menorah, was one of the most common symbols for Judaism and synagogues in antiquity; by identifying the

churches as lampstands, John claims that the Jesus movement is the true form of Judaism, no matter what some hostile synagogue officials were claiming (2:9; 3:9). Because Revelation portrays heaven as a sanctuary (cf., e.g., comment on 4:6-8; 5:8-10; 7:9-12; 8:3), the lampstands may also allude to the spiritual representation of the churches in heaven (Ex 25:31-40).

There are three major views on the “angels” of the churches, of which only the third makes strong sense in the context of Revelation. One is that they are “messengers” bearing the scroll to the churches; although this meaning is not impossible (1 Maccabees 1:44), it is unlikely that John would have seven separate copies of the book or would send seven different messengers (see comment on Rev 1:11). A second view is that they are public readers in each congregation, like a corresponding kind of “messenger” in the synagogues. According to second-century teaching, if such a reader slipped in his reading of the biblical text, the whole congregation was held accountable before God because he acted as their agent. The first and second views falter in that Revelation nowhere else employs “angel” in this manner; as elsewhere in apocalyptic literature, Revelation uses the term for what we call “angels.” Thus, third, they may be the guardian angels of each congregation, analogous to the Jewish view (rooted in Daniel) that not only each person but each nation was assigned a guardian angel, and the angels of the evil nations would be judged together with the nations they led astray. Some who hold this view also suggest that they may represent heavenly counterparts to earthly realities (the churches), symbolizing the heavenly significance of the churches as the lampstands did; this view would also fit apocalyptic imagery.

2:1-7

Oracle to the Ephesian Church

Some “prophetic letters” also appeared in the *Old Testament (2 Chron 21:12-15; Jer 29) and other Jewish literature. Each of the oracle letters in Revelation follows the same form, which some have compared to imperial letter edicts posted as inscriptions in the cities of Asia Minor. Other scholars have compared the elements of the form to Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern covenant formulas; if they are correct, the prophecies here may act like the covenant lawsuits common in the Old Testament prophets (e.g., in Amos 2-4). They may also function analogously to series of oracles against the nations common in the

Old Testament prophets (e.g., Is 13–23; Jer 46–51; Ezek 25–32; especially the eight brief oracles of Amos 1–2). Compare especially throughout the **Sibylline Oracles* for later examples of oracles against nations, including oracles against some of the cities Revelation lists, such as Smyrna, Pergamum, Sardis, Laodicea and Ephesus. (Some other ancient Near Eastern prophets also included judgment prophecies against other nations, but these were military oracles in the service of nationalism; unlike the Old Testament prophets, they did not condemn their own peoples. The exceptions are Egyptian moralist oracles after the fact, and Mari prophets' rebukes of kings for not supporting the temple better. There is no parallel outside Israel to an intergenerational succession of prophets calling their own people to **repentance for moral sins.*)

William Ramsay long ago pointed to some local color in each of these oracles. Although some of his connections may be strained, others appear appropriate. Ancient cities were fiercely proud of their own history and culture and would be more sensitive to local allusions than most readers today would be. Although the **churches* in some cities seem to have faced persecution, in other cities the churches faced greater temptations to compromise with a relativistic paganism.

Ephesus had been one of the first Asian centers of the imperial cult, and it was also the most prominent; Domitian had allowed Ephesus the title of guardian of his temple. On the city's notoriety in **magic* and the worship of Artemis, see comment on Acts 19. Inscriptions attest that Ephesus also had a sizable Jewish population, of which Christians had originally been a comfortable part (Acts 18:19-20, 26; 19:8-9). In practice, Ephesus was the leading center of Asia Minor in this period. It was also the first of the seven cities that a messenger voyaging from Patmos (forty to fifty miles to the southwest) would reach.

2:1. “Says this” (NASB) echoes the Old Testament formula that prophets of God borrowed from royal edicts and typical messenger formulas: “Thus says the lord/king.” For the description of Jesus here, see comment on Revelation 1:13-16.

2:2-3. *Rhetorical experts (teachers of professional public speaking) recommended that speakers mix praise and blame for their hearers, to avoid closing them to the message while also avoiding populist flattery. Rhetoricians normally began with praise, as do most of the letters in Revelation 2–3. Edicts sometimes included “I know,” although the allusion here is to the omniscience of the one who inspires prophecy, a standard ancient idea.*

2:4. Sound doctrine and perseverance are inadequate without love. Interpreters debate whether the text means love for other Christians (as in 1 Jn; cf. “works”—Rev 2:5, 19; “hate”—2:6) or for God (Jer 2:2) or for both.

2:5. Royal emissaries could threaten judgment on cities, but this threat is closer to God’s warnings to the unrepentant in the Old Testament. Ramsay noted that eventually only a village remained of what was once mighty Ephesus, several miles from the original site of the city; due to silt deposits, it was already beginning to lose its geographical position as a coastal city in John’s day. Still, these oracles address the churches rather than the cities they represented before God.

2:6. This teaching may be related to that of “Balaam” (2:14-15); this sect may have advocated compromise with the imperial cult to avoid persecution. Later church fathers identified them as an immoral *Gnostic sect, but they may have been speculating. As in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, the “hatred” here is hatred of sin, not private revenge (the Scrolls taught that vengeance should be left to God).

2:7. “*The Spirit*” in Judaism was especially associated with prophetic enablement; thus the Spirit inspires John’s vision and prophecy (1:10; 14:13). On having an “ear,” see comment on Mark 4:9; the wording here might echo Jesus’ earlier teaching. Some moralists also exhorted hearers to “hear” sages of old they were citing, but the formula here resembles the common Old Testament formula “Hear the word of the Lord” (e.g., Amos 3:1; 4:1; 5:1). “Overcoming” (especially a military or athletic image of conquest or victory) here involves persevering in the face of conflict and hardship. Although the “tree of life” was used to symbolize the law in later Jewish teaching, this vision alludes to Genesis 2:9 and a restoration of paradise (on which cf. 2 Cor 12:2-4). Each of the promises in these oracles to the churches is fulfilled in Revelation 21–22.

2:8-11

Oracle to the Church at Smyrna

Only Smyrna and Philadelphia (the two most persecuted churches) are fully praised; Ramsay notes that of the seven these two cities held out longest before the Turkish conquest. Ephesus and prosperous Smyrna were the two oldest centers of the imperial cult in Asia. One of the oldest and most prominent cities in Asia, Smyrna sought but failed to achieve honor equal to that of Ephesus in this period. It was also known for its beauty. On the situation in Smyrna and

Philadelphia, which apparently includes expulsion from the *synagogues, see the introduction to John. John's Gospel probably addresses this or a related sort of situation.

2:8. On the description of Jesus here, see comment on 1:17-18. Some commentators have argued that Smyrna was likewise dead and living, because it enjoyed only a shadow of its former reputation. This interpretation is unlikely in view of its prosperity, even if it had been overshadowed by Ephesus. According to Strabo, Smyrna had been razed by the Lydians and rebuilt with great beauty many centuries before, but this revival of a city was not commonly understood as death and *resurrection, and the occasion was now so remote in the past that the Smyrneans themselves would probably not have caught such a purported allusion. Furthermore, Sardis was once burned as well, but 3:1 says the opposite about it. What is most relevant is that Jesus also promised them life for death (2:10) modeled after his own (1:18).

2:9. The strength of the Jewish community in Smyrna is well attested. In denying that his opponents are spiritually Jewish, he seems to return the charge they had made against the Christians; in calling them a “synagogue of *Satan*,” *his rhetoric resembles that of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, where a persecuted Jewish sect that considered the rest of Judaism apostate called its opponents “the lot of Belial” (Satan; cf. 1QHa 10.24). We should remember that this language reflects an intra-Jewish polemic, as in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and was applied only to a particularly hostile local situation in Smyrna and Philadelphia; it does not offer a model for normal dialogue.

People were betrayed to provincial officials by *delatores*, “informers,” and by the early second century it is attested that Christians in Asia Minor were usually charged only when accused by such informers. By the early second century, some Jews in Smyrna were reportedly fulfilling this function against Christians (such as Polycarp). But some believe that simply claiming publicly that Christians were no longer welcome as part of the synagogue community could constitute a form of betrayal; Christians who were not seen as Jewish had no protection against expectations for participation in the emperor cult. On a local level, some could use Christians' nonparticipation to question their civic loyalty.

2:10. Prison was merely a place of detention until trial or execution and could therefore be a prelude to execution. “Testing” for “ten days” could be a symbolic allusion to the minor test of Daniel 1:12, which preceded the major trials faced by Daniel and his three companions. “Behold” is common in

prophetic literature and occurs repeatedly in Ezekiel (e.g., 1:4, 15).

Many Christians were martyred in Smyrna over the next several centuries. Jewish martyr stories praised those who were faithful to death and thus would be resurrected at the end; “crowns” were victors’ (2:11) rewards for athletes or military heroes. (A number of ancient writers and inscriptions also mentioned the “crown of Smyrna,” possibly referring to the city’s beauty.)

2:11. Other Jewish literature also refers to the “second death,” although often meaning annihilation (Revelation uses it of eternal torment—20:10, 14). The text of *4 Maccabees portrays Jewish martyrs as fighting and triumphing by death and thus crowned as victorious athletes by godliness.

2:12-17

Oracle to the Church in Pergamum

There is some evidence for a Jewish community at Pergamum, but it was a strongly pagan city (see comment on 2:13). It was also a famous and prosperous city, and its rulers had been the first to invite the Romans into the affairs of Asia Minor. It was the center of the imperial cult for its province.

2:12. The “sword” in the *Old Testament and *apocalyptic literature often symbolized judgment or war; cf. 1:16, 2:16 and 19:13. Romans thought of the “sword” as the power to execute capital punishment (as in Rom 13:4).

2:13. Pergamum was traditionally known for its worship of Asclepius (whose symbol on Pergamum’s coins was the serpent; cf. 12:9) and worshiped other traditional Greek deities, such as Demeter, Athena and Dionysus. Its famous giant altar of Zeus (120 by 112 feet) overlooked the city on its citadel, and some have suggested that this is the background for “Satan’s throne” in this verse. Perhaps a more likely allusion for “Satan’s throne” is the local worship of the emperor, celebrated on Pergamum’s coinage in this period. Local rulers had been worshiped before the Roman period, and Pergamum was one of the first cities of Asia to build a temple to a Roman emperor (a temple to Augustus, also conspicuous on the citadel). A further imperial temple was dedicated there within a decade or two after John wrote Revelation.

All citizens were expected to participate in civic religion; most citizens wanted to participate in imperial festivals and eat the meat of sacrificed animals doled out at many pagan festivals. Once one Christian was legally martyred, the legal precedent was set for the execution of Christians in other provinces.

2:14-15. The false teachers advocate compromise with pagan cults, perhaps including the imperial cult, for humanly appealing reasons (2:13). “Balaam” was the most famous pagan prophet of the Old Testament and Jewish tradition (see comment on Jude 11) and is thus provided as the pseudonym for the heretical leader of the compromisers, like “Jezebel” in Thyatira (2:20).

Balaam, a prominent ancient figure also attested outside the Bible, led Israel to eat meat offered to idols and to have sexual intercourse with pagans to whom they were not married (Num 25:1-3; 31:16). Other nations could not destroy Israel, but Balaam knew that if he could subvert their morals, God would withdraw his blessing and judge them (see *Josephus and Pseudo-Philo*; cf. Num 25:8). God judged Israel, but Balaam, who acted from mercenary motives, also lost his life (Num 31:8, 16; Josh 13:22). “Sexual immorality” may be meant literally here (it was common in paganism) or may refer, as often in the Old Testament prophets, to spiritual infidelity against God (perhaps including emperor worship; cf. 17:5).

2:16. Although there would be one ultimate end of the world, the Old Testament prophets and Jewish literature occasionally described judgments in history in the language of the final day of the Lord.

2:17. The original ark of the covenant was permanently lost in 586 B.C. (cf. Jer 3:16), and the manna inside it had vanished before then. But a wide spectrum of Jewish tradition declared that Jeremiah (e.g., 2 Maccabees, 4 *Baruch*) or an angel (*2 *Baruch*) had hidden them and that they would be restored at the end time (a similar view took root among the *Samaritans, who dated the departure earlier). On the symbol of spiritual manna, see comment on John 6:35-40. Scholars propose various possible backgrounds of the white stone. Among the guesses: pebbles of various colors were used for admission to public celebrations; a black stone was the sacred symbol of the infamous Asian goddess Cybele; white stones used for medical purposes were associated with Judea; and perhaps somewhat more significantly, jurors used black stones to vote for a person’s guilt but white ones to vote for innocence. Though Pergamum usually used dark brown granite for building materials, they preferred white marble for inscriptions. For a new name, see Isaiah 6:2; for name change and promise, cf. Genesis 17:5, 15.

2:18-29

Oracle to the Church in Thyatira

Thyatira's economy seems to have emphasized trades and crafts. The trade guilds each had common meals (normally about once a month) dedicated to their patron deities. Although Thyatira had a Jewish community, it does not appear to have been influential; Christians who refused to participate in the life of the guilds might thus find themselves isolated socially and economically (cf. 13:17). Thyatira was only beginning to achieve prosperity in this period, hence its citizens probably valued wealth highly.

2:18. Thyatira hosted a major cult of Apollo, son of Zeus and the deity associated with *prophecy and the sun. Some scholars note that the emperor was linked with Apollo and suggest that he may have been worshiped in Thyatira as his earthly manifestation. Although bronze-working was not unique to Thyatira, some scholars have also pointed to the bronze-workers' guild in that city.

2:19-20. The biblical "Jezebel" was not a prophetess, but the name is used here for its related connotations. Jezebel had nine hundred prophets (1 Kings 18:19) and led God's people into idolatry (see comment on Rev 2:14). She was accused of prostitution, a damaging charge against a king's wife (the term was probably meant spiritually, as one who led Israel from their commitment to God), and of witchcraft, no doubt for her occult involvement in pagan cults (2 Kings 9:22). As a prostitute she becomes the prototype of the evil empire of chapters 17–18. Immorality and food offered to idols were common temptations of paganism (see Num 25:1-2; 1 Cor 10:7-8).

Some scholars have suggested that Thyatira was one of the Asian cities with an oracle of the Sibyl; this cult purported to involve female prophetesses in the Greek style, and its literary forms had come to be used by *Diaspora Judaism and eventually later Christians. Because false prophets were not limited to such settings we cannot really be certain whether this proposal provides background for "Jezebel."

2:21-23. Some Jewish writers thought of judgment against children produced by illicit unions, but the children are meant figuratively here (cf. Is 57:3-4, 7-8); *disciples were sometimes called "children." Jewish texts regularly portray God's omniscience and sometimes call him "searcher of hearts and minds" (based on *Old Testament descriptions of him; e.g., 1 Chron 28:9); here this characteristic of God applies to Jesus. God gave false prophets opportunity to turn from their falsehood and hear the true word of the Lord (Jer 23:22-23). Judgment according to one's works fits biblical expectations (see, e.g., Ps 62:12; Jer 17:10; Prov 24:12; Sirach 16:12, 14).

2:24. *Mystery cults stressed deep secrets shared only among the initiates;

Jewish people also spoke of “deep things” about God (e.g., Job 11:7; passages in *1 *Enoch*; *2 *Baruch*). For “no other burden” (NASB), cf. perhaps comment on Acts 15:28-29.

2:25-27. Revelation cites here an enthronement psalm that celebrated the promise to David and pointed to his seed who would reign over the nations that sought to rebel against him (Ps 2:8-9). The *Messiah, to whom the psalm applied par excellence (and to whom it was often understood to apply), here makes his people partakers of his rule over the nations. Most people in the Roman empire considered the emperor the supreme ruler; Revelation declares that Jesus is greater than the most powerful emperor the world had ever known.

2:28-29. The morning star, Venus, heralded the dawn, and great people could be compared to it as well as to the sun shining in glory (Sirach 50:6); cf. Revelation 22:16. Because most of the Greco-Roman world believed that life was ruled by the stars, to be given authority over one of the most powerful of stars (a symbol of sovereignty among the Romans) was to share Christ’s rule over creation (2:26-27).

3:1-6

Oracle Against the Church of Sardis

For what it is worth, William Ramsay pointed out that the two *churches condemned most harshly belong to the only two cities of the seven that are completely uninhabited in modern times, Sardis and Laodicea. Sardis hosted many pagan cults; typical Greek deities such as Artemis, Cybele, Demeter and Kore (Persephone) were all worshiped there. Some scholars note that the Greek goddess Demeter, absorbing the character of the old Asiatic goddess Cybele, had also been locally identified with the deified mother of an emperor. But mixing of deities was common in antiquity, and paganism permeated all the non-Jewish cities of the Roman Empire. Despite the city’s paganism, the Christian community there seems to have experienced no persecution—and no spiritual life. Sardis had a large, powerful and wealthy Jewish community that had long been a respected part of civic life; their *synagogue was roughly the length of a football field, with some of the city’s best real estate. Like the Jewish community, the church was probably tolerated.

3:1-2. On the “spirits” and “stars,” cf. 1:4, 16, 20. The past glories of Sardis as chief city of Lydia under Croesus were proverbial; its present prosperity could

never regain for it the position it had once held; most importantly, however, the “alive . . . dead” here reverses the imagery of 1:18 and 2:8.

3:3. Sardis’s acropolis had never been taken by battle, but twice in its history invaders had captured it by stealth unexpectedly in the night. More importantly, this verse refers to Jesus’ saying preserved in Matthew 24:43 (as do 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10).

3:4. Inscriptions in Asia Minor indicate that many temples barred worshipers with soiled garments, whose entry would insult the deity. White robes were worn by priests (and many other worshipers) in the Jerusalem temple, worshipers of most deities (e.g., Isis, Apollo, Artemis), celebrants in cult festivals for the emperor and so on.

3:5-6. All Greek and Roman cities had official rolls of citizens, to which new citizens could be added; in at least some cities, expelled citizens would be removed. (Sardis, with its ancient history of record-keeping, would be familiar with this practice.) The biblically literate, however, would catch an allusion to Exodus 32:32-33. The “book of life” appears in the *Old Testament and figures prominently in Jewish *apocalyptic; see comment on Philippians 4:3. Confessing the believer’s name before God’s judgment tribunal probably evokes an earlier saying of Jesus; see Matthew 10:32 and Luke 12:8.

3:7-13

Oracle to the Church in Philadelphia

Philadelphia worshiped typical Greek deities; it is known, for example, to have housed temples of Artemis, Helios, Zeus, Dionysus and Aphrodite. A third-century inscription from the Jewish synagogue there has been recovered. Believers in Philadelphia, like the church in Smyrna, had apparently been expelled from the Jewish community; the background resembles that for the Fourth Gospel (see introduction to John).

3:7-8. These verses clearly allude to Isaiah 22:22, which speaks of one who had David’s key to open and shut, indicating full authorization to rule the house. To Jewish Christians excluded from the synagogue, this was Jesus’ encouragement that he who rightly ruled the house of David now acknowledged them as his own people.

3:9. See comment on 2:9-10. Exclusion from the synagogue could lead to more direct persecution by the Roman authorities, as in Smyrna. Jesus’ claim

that their opponents would know that he had loved them might echo Malachi 1:2, where God tells Israel that he loved them—but despised Esau/Edom; cf. Proverbs 14:19. Jewish people expected the kings of the nations to bow before them in the end time (Is 49:23; 60:11, 14; *1 *Enoch*; *Dead Sea Scrolls; cf. Ps 72:10-11).

3:10. *Apocalypses sometimes prophesied special deliverance (i.e., protection) for the righteous in the coming times of hardship; the *Old Testament* also promised God’s faithfulness to his people in such times (see comment on 7:3). Some texts (e.g., the *Dead Sea Scrolls*) spoke of the righteous being tested by the future time of suffering, although the motif of the righteous being tested in sufferings in general was a common one (see comment on 1 Pet 1:7). (“Keep from” could mean “protect from” [cf. Rev 7:3; cf. Jn 17:15, the only other New Testament use of the construction] or “preserve from.”) Revelation probably contrasts the wicked “earth dwellers” with the righteous “heaven dwellers”; apocalypses (like *4 *Ezra*, **Similitudes of Enoch* and *2 *Baruch*) also announce judgments on the “inhabitants of the earth.”

3:11. “Crown” here alludes to the wreath that victors received at the end of a race or sometimes for military exploits.

3:12-13. God’s remnant people appear as a new temple in the *Dead Sea Scrolls* and in various other New Testament texts. Pillars could be used to symbolize the people of God (Ex 24:4; see also comment on Gal 2:9) but were a natural feature of temples and often bore dedicatory inscriptions (also on the pillars of the Capernaum synagogue, just as military standards and other items bore inscriptions). Israel’s own temple had pillars (Ex 27:10-17; 38:10-28; 1 Kings 7:2-6, 15-22) and this would be the case also in the end time (Ezek 40:9–41:3; 1 *Enoch* 90:29). The primary allusion is probably to Isaiah 56:5, where those whom the Jewish community rejected (cf. Rev 3:8-9) received a place within God’s house and a new name. On the new Jerusalem, see 21:2; “coming down” was natural in the vertical dualism common in apocalyptic literature and the Fourth Gospel, which typically contrasts heaven (where God rules unchallenged) and earth (where many disobey him until the day of judgment). Revelation portrays God’s throne room in heaven as a temple (see, e.g., comment on 4:6-8).

3:14-22

Oracle to the Church in Laodicea

Laodicea became important only in Roman times. It was capital of the Cibryatic convention, which included at least twenty-five towns. It was also the wealthiest Phrygian city, and especially prosperous in this period. It was ten miles west of Colosse and six miles south of Hierapolis. Zeus was the city's patron deity, but Laodiceans also had temples for Apollo, Asclepius (the healing deity), Hades, Hera, Athena, Serapis, Dionysus and other deities; that is, it was a fairly typical Greek city religiously. Many Jewish people lived in Phrygia.

3:14. "Beginning" is a divine title; see comment on 1:8 and 22:13. (It may also be relevant that the Roman emperor's primary title was *princeps*, "the first," i.e., among Roman citizens.) Jesus is also the "Amen," the affirmation of God's truth; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:20.

3:15-16. Cold water (and sometimes spiced hot water) was preferred for drinking, and hot water for bathing, but Laodicea lacked a natural water supply. Water piped in from hot springs six miles to the south, like any cold water that could have been procured from the mountains, would be lukewarm by the time it reached Laodicea. Although water could be heated, the natural lukewarmness of local water (in contrast with the hot water available at nearby Hierapolis) was undoubtedly a standard complaint of local residents, most of whom had an otherwise comfortable lifestyle. (Their imported water was also full of sediment, though better, said the geographer Strabo, than the water of Hierapolis.) Jesus says: "Were you hot [i.e., for bathing] or cold [i.e., for drinking], you would be useful; but as it is, I feel toward you the way you feel toward your water supply—you make me sick."

3:17-18. Laodicea was a prosperous banking center; proud of its wealth, it refused Roman disaster relief after the earthquake of A.D. 60, rebuilding from its own resources. It was also known for its textiles (especially wool) and for its medical school and production of ear medicine and probably the highly reputed Phrygian eye salve. Everything in which Laodicea could have confidence outwardly, its church, which reflected its culture, lacked spiritually.

Although Greeks did not share Palestinian Jews' moral abhorrence of nudity, everyone except *Cynic sages agreed that the lack of clothing described here, that of poverty (here spiritual), was undesirable. Phrygian "eye salve" (KJV, NASB) was apparently not an ointment per se but was probably powdered and smeared on to the eyelids (contrast Tobit 6:8). On white garments, cf. Revelation 3:4; here it may be a stark contrast with Laodicea's famous "black wool."

3:19. Compare the many prophetic rebukes of Israel in the *Old Testament.

3:20. Compare John 10:1-4; Matthew 24:33. Table fellowship was a sign of

intimacy and committed the guest and host to friendly relations. Jesus here invites the Laodicean Christians to dine (cf. Rev 2:7; contrast 2:14, 20) in the present at the messianic banquet (see comment on 19:9); it is an invitation to a genuinely lavish banquet, implying again their spiritual poverty (cf. 3:17-18). But the door to fellowship is presently closed—from their side (contrast 3:7-8).

3:21-22. The image here is one of sharing God's rule; Jesus shares as coregent or viceroy, whereas his people share because they are exalted to rule over the earth (as in Old Testament and Jewish expectations for Israel's exaltation). As the locus of God's glorious presence, his preexistent and glorious throne was the subject of much speculation among Jewish *apocalyptic writers and mystics; see comment on 4:2.

4:1-11

John's Throne Vision

Many scholars believe that Jewish mystics (many of whom penned *apocalypses*, like *1 Enoch*) strove for visions of the invisible God, and modeled their views of what they would find on visions of God's enthroned glory in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1 (cf. also Ex 24:9-11; 1 Kings 22:19; Dan 7:9-10). In time these visions were embroidered with every fantastic magnification of the divine glory the mystics could imagine. In contrast to such elaborate reports of the preexistent throne of God, John's description is simple, like the *Old Testament accounts: just enough description to convey the point of God's majesty. Some also argue that his picture of the throne room, including the activity of those surrounding the throne, may be a parody of the imperial court and the worship in the imperial temples—a daring revelation for a banished Jewish prophet like John.

4:1. "After these things" functions as a transition device to the next vision that John would see (7:9; 15:5; 18:1; cf. 7:1; 19:1; 20:3; Jn 5:1; 6:1; 7:1); it was commonly used as such a transition. "I looked, and behold," is typical visionary language (e.g., Ezek 10:1; 44:4; Dan 10:5; also *1 Enoch*, **4 Ezra* and other writings based on this *genre). On the trumpet, cf. Revelation 1:10. Although elsewhere in Revelation John is told, "Come here" (17:1; 21:9; cf. Jn 1:39), in this instance "Come up here" may also allude to God's call to Moses to come up the mountain (in later Jewish tradition, to heaven) to receive revelation (Ex 19:24; 24:12; 34:2); the same language appears frequently in apocalypses. The opened heavens are a figure for revelation as well (Rev 11:19; 19:11; Jn 1:51),

again following an important Old Testament pattern for such visions (Ezek 1:1), and also developed in other Jewish apocalypses (including the door, e.g., *1 Enoch*).

4:2. “In the Spirit” means that John is prophetically inspired in his vision (see comment on 1:10); Ezekiel had similarly been carried elsewhere in visions (Ezek 11:1, 24). Some Jewish mystics stressed the mortal dangers of the ascent to see God’s throne; in some sources they had to know special passwords, and many did not know enough to survive their purported ascent through the spirit realms (see especially **3 Enoch* and the *rabbis*). *But some apocalypses allow that angels could immediately lift one into the heavens (2 Baruch, *Similitudes of Enoch, 2 Enoch, Testament of Abraham)*. Like Ezekiel, John is simply caught up immediately by God’s **Spirit*.

4:3. For this description of the throne, see Ezekiel 1:26, 28 and 10:1. (Thrones indicated the ruler’s dignity and were generally approached by several steps; their bases could portray peoples subdued by the ruler.) This simple description may contrast with the Roman emperor’s pomp. It also contrasts with other elaborations of heavenly palaces (*1 Enoch* 14), the magnitude of majesty (e.g., the later rabbis’ crowning angel is a five-hundred-year journey tall), or a tour of earth, heaven and hell (especially in later works); John does not even elaborate by weaving together other available Old Testament throne imagery (cf., e.g., Dan 7 in *1 Enoch* 14).

4:4. “Elders” were those with authority in Old Testament cities and later Jewish communities who could function as representatives for their communities (e.g., Deut 21:6); see Isaiah 24:23. In the art of Asia Minor, a few priests could be used to represent thousands of worshipers. The number “twenty-four” has been related to the twenty-four books Jewish writers assigned to the Hebrew **canon*, but more relevantly to the twelve tribes plus the twelve *apostles* (cf. *Rev* 21:12-14), or the twenty-four orders of priests. *The orders of priests were fixed in the Old Testament (1 Chron 24-25), continued in the New Testament period and were still commented on by later *rabbis and in later inscriptions. The faithful dead are thus portrayed as priests offering worship to God (Rev 1:6). (Jewish apocalyptic literature often overlapped images of the future age with the present heaven for the righteous dead.)*

Greek accounts sometimes portrayed deities as appearing in white (e.g., Demeter and Kore); at least some ancient thinkers, like Pythagoras and some rabbis, associated white with good and black with evil. This contrast no doubt arose in ancient thought through the contrast between day and night, the latter

being more associated with witchcraft and (in Jewish thought) *demons. (Contrary to some modern criticisms, it does not relate to complexion; the same contrast between white and black even appears in some traditional African religions.)

Romans and often Jews buried the dead in white. In Jewish tradition, angels were nearly always garbed in gleaming white. More significant here may be the widespread tradition of worshipers dressing in white (3:4). Jewish teachers portrayed Israel as crowned at the revelation at Sinai; the righteous were sometimes viewed as crowned in heaven. (The *Ascension of Isaiah* has the righteous crowned, robed and enthroned in heaven, but it may well be a Christian work; the *Odes of Solomon*, which has a catching up to heaven by the Spirit—cf. 4:2—is a Christian work. But it is not always easy to distinguish early Christian works from Jewish works revised with Christian interpolations.) But the crowns here are probably victors' crowns for those who persevered to death (see comment on 2:10; 3:11). (Many Jewish traditions speak of a heavenly assembly—in the rabbis, a legislative or judicial body—composed of angels or deceased scholars; the antecedents of the image probably go back to the angelic court of God in the Old Testament and the Canaanite images of El's pantheon of seventy gods, replaced by the angels of the seventy nations in Jewish tradition.)

The arrangement is undoubtedly significant. Greek choruses would often sing or dance in circles; amphitheatres surrounded stages; and the Jewish Sanhedrin sat in a semicircle with the *high priest in the middle.

4:5. The special effects rehearse the glory of God's self-revelation at Sinai (Ex 19:16; cf. Ezek 1:4, 13). Some apocalyptic texts report the sources of lightnings and thunderings in particular levels of heaven.

4:6-7. The "sea of glass" (15:2) alludes to the sea in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7:23; 2 Chron 4:2, 6). It had always been natural to speak figuratively of God's heavenly temple (e.g., Ps 11:4), given the ancient Near Eastern tradition of the earthly temple reflecting the heavenly one. John's emphasis on worship leads to a portrayal of God's throne room in especially temple terms:

- A sea, as just noted (4:6; 15:2)
- the tabernacle of testimony (15:5)
- an altar of incense (5:8)
- an altar of sacrifice (6:9)
- the ark (11:19; cf. 15:5-8), which functioned as God's throne in the Old

Testament

- harps for worship (14:2; 15:2), as in the Old Testament temple, and so forth.

(Even the future New Jerusalem appears as a temple; see comment on Rev 21:16.) Heaven is a place of worship, perhaps implying in part that genuine worship on earth offers a foretaste of heaven. The crystal firmament derives from Ezekiel 1:22. The cherubim were covered with eyes in Ezekiel 10:12; the four creatures had four faces in Ezekiel 1:10 (where, however, each creature had all the features). Ezekiel's imagery may be intentionally figurative (cf. 1 Chron 12:8) but may draw on Babylonian throne and temple imagery and indicate a God greater than any pagans could have conceived; cf. also 1 Kings 7:29.

4:8. Ezekiel also spoke of the six wings (Ezek 1:11). The trisagion ("Holy, holy, holy") is from Isaiah 6:3, where seraphim—fiery, holy angels modeled after the cherubim of the tabernacle—surround God's throne in the Jerusalem temple, symbolizing his universal glory (Is 6:3) and demonstrating the impurity of sinful mortals like the prophet (Is 6:5). Later Jewish texts also employ the biblical imagery of these creatures and this song, which came into use in *synagogue and later *church liturgy as well. One may contrast for example the permanently appointed imperial cult choir at Pergamum, where thirty-six members were to sing hymns in honor of the deified Augustus. Such a choir was impressive by standards of the Roman Empire, but paled before the worship of the true God.

4:9-10. Prostration on one's face was a form of homage offered to gods and rulers in antiquity.

4:11. The emperor Domitian demanded worship as "our Lord and God" but never claimed the role of Creator. Jesus receives the same words of honor in John 20:28.

5:1-7

The Passover Lamb and the Scroll

5:1. Legal documents were sealed, often with roughly six seals imprinted with the attestations of the same number of witnesses. (The wax seals would have to be broken to loose the strings beneath them, which wrapped the scroll and guaranteed that it had not been opened and thus altered.) This form was used for

contract deeds and wills; it became increasingly common in Roman documents of the period, and some Palestinian Jewish documents of this sort have been recovered. Scrolls were normally written on only one side of a papyrus sheet, reserving the outside for the title or address; but this scroll is unusually full and thus written on both sides (cf. Ezek 2:9-10). The writing side was called the *recto*, where the fibers were horizontal and easier for writing; the *verso* was used only when the *recto* had inadequate space. Documents written on both sides are rare enough to have a technical name, an opisthograph.

5:2-3. Cf. perhaps Isaiah 6:8 for a similar call in the context of a throne vision, except that here the only one fit for the task is the lamb.

5:4. Loud wailing was normally reserved for intense mourning, such as for a person's death.

5:5. Lions were used on Torah shrines (containers which housed Law scrolls) in early Jewish art and were regarded as figures of strength and authority, but a more direct background lies at hand. The "lion of Judah" alludes to Genesis 49:9-10, which predicted the Davidic dynasty and was understood messianically in later Jewish literature (*4 *Ezra*, the *rabbis*). "*Root of David*" alludes to Isaiah 11:1 and 10 (*Jesse was David's father*), which suggests that the Messiah would come after the Davidic line had seemed cut off. The image is also used messianically in later texts (e.g., *Sirach*), and both these images are combined in the *Dead Sea Scrolls*. Apocalypses and other texts often included dialogue with heavenly participants in the scenes revealed (cf., e.g., Dan 7:16; Zech 4:11; 5:2).

5:6. Whereas a lion was the ultimate symbol of power in ancient views of the animal kingdom (cf. also, e.g., Is 35:9; 65:25), a lamb was considered powerless (cf. Is 40:11); a slaughtered lamb was a dramatic contrast with a reigning lion (cf. Is 53:7). Lambs were associated with a variety of sacrifices, but in Revelation this figure may evoke especially the Passover lamb, who delivers God's people from the plagues of the following chapters (cf. Ex 12:12-13).

Many texts mention lamb's horns, but the imagery of horns as symbols for authority is rooted in Daniel 8. The seven eyes ranging throughout the earth are from Zechariah 3:9 and 4:10. John might understand them as referring to angels (the image in Zechariah is modeled after Persian royal emissaries) in Zechariah 1:10 and 6:5-7, or to God's *Spirit in Zechariah 4:6. At any rate, the eyes in Zechariah are God's eyes; here they belong to the Lord Jesus.

5:7. Various ancient documents, including wills, were sealed with roughly six seals, and sometimes seven; seals on legal documents guaranteed that no one

had opened or tampered with them. A will could not be opened until the death of the person whose will it was could be attested; if a will is in view here (as some, but not all, suggest), it is significant that it is the lamb who has been *slain* who is worthy to open it. (The book may well be the lamb's book of life; cf. 3:5; 20:12. Seals were not a book's contents, but attesting marks outside it.) At any rate, under Roman law a document was valid only when the addressee had received it; it is thus ready to take effect.

5:8-14

Worshiping the Lamb

5:8. Prostration was particularly a sign of worship before gods and kings in antiquity; Jewish texts usually reserved it for God himself. The image of prayers as incense was not uncommon (e.g., Ps 141:2); here it alludes to the altar of incense and its censer in the heavenly temple (Rev 8:3). In this context, the harps probably indicate worship as in the charismatic, Levitical temple choir of old (1 Chron 25:1, 3, 6; 2 Chron 5:12; 29:25; Neh 12:27; cf. 1 Sam 10:5).

5:9-10. Offered to congregations presumably gathered in worship (chaps. 2–3), visions of heavenly worship would encourage the *church on earth that they stood in continuity with a much greater chorus than their persecutors in the imperial cult could muster. The Dead Sea Scrolls show that earthly worshipers could envision themselves participating in heavenly worship with the angels. Inspired, spontaneous psalms composed by the temple worship leaders, perhaps in response to new acts by God, had been called “new songs” in the *Old Testament (Ps 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Is 42:10).

The particular praise reflects the redemption of Israel from Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb (see Ex 19:6 for kingdom and priests; also comment on Rev 1:6), except that the people of God now explicitly include representatives from every people, celebrating redemption in their multiethnic, diverse styles of worship. Further, they would finally reign over the rest of the earth; Jewish traditions portrayed Israel as receiving the *kingdom and reigning over the nations in the end time. Rome claimed to rule the earth, but knew of many peoples beyond its boundaries, from Iceland and Scythia (much of it in Russia) to the north, Parthia, India and China to the east, and Africa at least as far south as Tanzania. Only by faith in God's revelation could John have conceived of a church from all peoples, such as is forming today.

5:11. Dramatic numbers could highlight dramatic subjects. Some Jewish texts were given to citing fantastically large numbers of people (e.g., they listed more slain in one battle than all the people who have lived in history); more reasonably, such texts estimated even larger numbers of angels. “Ten thousand” was the largest single number used in Greek, so “ten thousands of ten thousands” (myriads of myriads) is the author’s way of calling them innumerable.

5:12. An early-second-century Roman governor confirms that Christians worshiped *Christ as a god*. *Multiple elements in a list of praises emphasized the subject’s greatness (cf., e.g., 1 Chron 29:11-12; Dan 7:14; for a king, Dan 2:37). Sets of seven praises (or other numbers) appear elsewhere also (e.g., in what became the later official text of the Passover celebration, praising God for redemption from Egypt; a Qumran text), though John’s predilection for sevens is broader than and independent of such texts.*

5:13-14. Although the Old Testament and Judaism believed that the world would submit to God’s rule wholly in the end time, they recognized that all the elements of the universe answered to his authority in the present.

6:1-8

The Four Horsemen

The imagery is adapted from the angelic horsemen sent by God to patrol the earth in Zechariah 1:8-11 and 6:1-8, though used in a different way. Although divine judgments in history are a major *Old Testament* theme, *pagans also recognized and would have understood John’s point; most cultures in history have recognized the existence of divine judgments. (Romans in fact kept official records of reports of omens portending disaster.) Jewish apocalyptic traditions* associated some of these judgments, such as war and famine, with the time just preceding the end of the age, though many believe that many early Christians applied that designation to the entire period between the *Messiah’s comings; cf. Matthew 24:6-8.

6:1. A document could not be opened until all the seals were broken (i.e., in Revelation, after 8:1); the seals (in this case judgments) witness the validity of the document’s contents. (In divine documents, witnesses need not be only human; in the Old Testament covenant, heaven and earth are called to witness; cf. Deut 30:19; Ps 50:4.)

6:2. The Old Testament uses the “bow” as a symbol of judgment by battle.

The image of an archer on a white horse might terrify hearers in the Roman Empire. The only mounted archers with which most were familiar were the Parthians, whose tactics and skills had made them Rome's most feared enemies; old Persian armies, whose heirs the Parthians were, included sacred white horses. Parthians had defeated Roman armies in some recent wars; Parthians' skill as archers was common knowledge, and other contemporary apocalyptic writers (**Similitudes of Enoch*) also suggested a dreaded Parthian invasion. But even if based only on the bow, ancient hearers would have readily understood that this horseman meant conquest and war.

6:3-4. The "sword" was often a symbol of judgment by war in the Old Testament and later literature, and red was the color most associated with war and bloodshed (hence the "red planet" is named Mars for the Roman god of war). The bloody unrest of A.D. 68–69, when three emperors were successively killed in Roman civil wars, would have offered one illustration of the principle here.

6:5-6. Famine and pestilence often followed in the wake of war. Basic staples of the ancient Mediterranean diet were barley and wheat, sometimes cheese and olives, and (for those living near water) fish. The "scales" indicate rationing, or at least the caution of merchants to get every cent the food is worth. Barley and wheat were basic staples. Because a quart of wheat was a day's sustenance, and a denarius was a day's wage, a man with a family would have to buy the cheaper barley instead. Even then, three quarts of barley was hardly enough daily food for a whole family to subsist on; in the many peasant families with large numbers of children, several children would die (as often happened anyway in impoverished areas such as Roman-period Egypt). The famine also created a high inflation rate: this wheat costs between five and fifteen times the average price of wheat.

Some mercy may be implied here; conquerors tended to ravage standing crops while sparing fruit trees and vines, since these took long to grow back and conquerors hoped to control the land. (Olive trees took roughly seventeen years to grow.) Nevertheless, the image would hold the attention of John's audience; much of western Asia Minor imported much of its grain, locally focusing on more lucrative products such as wine. Oil and wine were widely used, but were not essential for life like wheat or barley. Olive oil was especially used for anointing the head, washing the body and lighting lamps; wine was mixed with water (one part wine for two to three parts water) for meals. The selective continuance of such items of relatively secondary importance while staples were

barely obtainable would reinforce the reality of divine judgment. Because inflation was high at the end of the first century and some readers were no doubt aware of Domitian's unpopular restriction of land for vineyards, many hearers could have readily identified with the terror such prophecies implied. Asia Minor, though one of the wealthiest areas in the Roman Empire, experienced economic troubles during Domitian's reign.

6:7-8. This final specter may resemble the angel of death of Jewish tradition. Lists of judgments such as this horseman brought are common in the Old Testament prophets (e.g., Jer 14:12; 24:10; 27:8; Ezek 6:11; 7:15; 12:16) and, less related in form, some judgment lists in the **Sibylline Oracles*; this list is closest to Ezekiel 14:21.

6:9-11

The Fifth Seal

Some of the seven **churches* (such as Smyrna) were suffering, but others (such as Laodicea) were comfortable. Like many **Old Testament* prophecies (e.g., Amos 6:1), this message could disturb comfortable people. By contrast, oppressed and suffering people who trust God could resonate with the promise of vindication.

6:9. The blood of sacrifices was poured out at the base of the altar (Lev 4:7, 18, 25, 34; 5:9; 8:15; 9:9); the martyrs are thus viewed as sacrifices, presumably associated with the Passover lamb of Revelation 5:6. (Paschal lambs had come to be viewed as sacrificial in some sense. Martyrs were also viewed as sacrifices in, e.g., **4 Maccabees*; cf. Phil 2:7.) On heavenly temple imagery (such as the altar here), see comment on 4:6. Souls could be “visible” to recipients of **apocalypses*, due to the seers' visionary state.

6:10. The very fact of their shed blood (6:9) cries out for the vindication of retribution (Gen 4:10; see comment on Mt 23:35); as in the Old Testament, a prayer for vengeance for corporate sin was ultimately a prayer for the vindication of the righteous and of God's name. Justice could ultimately be done, and the oppressed delivered, only when God arose to judge the earth. “How long?” was common in Old Testament prayers of entreaty (e.g., Ps 6:3; 13:1; 80:4), including prayers for vindication (e.g., Ps 79:5, 10; Zech 1:12); it also could address the duration of a judgment (Is 6:11; Jer 47:6).

6:11. Other Jewish texts also include prayers for vengeance and protests over

delays (6:10); the souls of the righteous in *4 *Ezra* (probably from the same period as Revelation) ask how long until the end and are told that they must wait until the full number of righteous dead is completed. Jesus and Paul had also earlier stressed that the good news must be preached to all nations—with the attendant suffering for witnesses involved in such proclamation—before the end. On white robes, see comment on 4:4.

6:12-17

The Sixth Seal

Although cosmic, cataclysmic language is sometimes used for God's judgments in history (e.g., an already fulfilled judgment in **Sibylline Oracles*; cosmic exaggerations of Sinai phenomena in **Pseudo-Philo*; cf. Ps 18; Jer 4:20-28), the language of this passage lends itself most naturally to the view that it, like the sixth and seventh trumpets and vials, represents the end of the age (as cosmic destruction generally does in the **Old Testament* prophets and Jewish literature).

6:12-13. An Old Testament *prophecy associated the end of the age with a powerful earthquake (Zech 14:4-5; cf. Ezek 38:20; Amos 8:8); because severe earthquakes had wrought devastation in first-century Asia Minor (including cities such as Laodicea), this announcement would have special impact on the readers. Darkness was also an Old Testament judgment (Ex 10:21-23; Is 50:3), especially the judgment of the end (Joel 2:31; Is 13:9-10; 24:23; Ezek 32:7-8; Amos 5:18; 8:9; cf. *4 *Ezra*). The stars may symbolize angelic hosts (12:4; Is 24:21; Dan 8:10; 10:13), but in this context they probably depict simply the cosmic scope of the judgment (Is 34:4). The graphic language is not meant as literal astronomy: disappearing or shaken stars were used as poetic language for great devastations such as wars (*Sibylline Oracles*; **Petronius*; cf. Is 13:10, 17).

6:14. A reader would unroll a scroll with the right hand to read, rolling up again the part just read with the left; the language here reflects Isaiah 34:4, which is also echoed in other Jewish judgment oracles (*Sibylline Oracles*). This sort of language was normally reserved for the end of the age.

6:15-16. The Old Testament and *apocalypses also speak of judgment across social classes; the readers could be encouraged that God would ultimately vindicate them against the emperor and his governors who now judged them. Hiding in the rocks and crying for the mountains to conceal them from God's wrath reflects Hosea 10:8; cf. Isaiah 2:10 and 19-20. (Christians in Sardis may

have thought of the cave-tombs in the necropolis facing their city, though the image is not relevant to them alone.) Lambs were particularly docile creatures; “wrath of the lamb” is thus a jarring image.

6:17. This verse reflects especially Joel 2:11; cf. Malachi 3:2, referring to the day of judgment.

7:1-8

The Sealing of 144,000 Servants

Some take the 144,000 consistently literally (literally twelve thousand male Jewish virgins from each tribe—14:4); others take them consistently symbolically (the spiritual people of God, not literally 144,000). Against taking it literally could be Revelation’s usage elsewhere of “servants” (1:1; 6:11), suggesting that they constitute the whole of the saved community (7:3-4). But whether they represent the innumerable multitude of 7:9 or the restored remnant of ethnic Israel remains debated.

“After this I saw” (7:1) means that this vision follows the preceding one, not necessarily that the events it describes do (see comment on 4:1); if 6:12-17 represents the end of the age, 7:1-8 must precede that event chronologically (7:3), perhaps concurrent with the whole of 6:1-11 or simply 6:12-17.

7:1. *Gentiles often personified the elements of nature themselves or recognized gods attached to them; Jewish people believed that God had delegated his authority over various features of nature (including winds) to angels under his command (e.g., in **Jubilees*; cf. Ps 148:1-12). “Four corners” of the earth was meant figuratively, even in ancient times. A few people thought that the world was spherical, but most people viewed it as circular; “four corners” was nevertheless conventional speech, as was the idea of four winds from the four directions of heaven (probably viewed as angels even in Zech 6:5). The winds had both positive and negative effects in ancient sources. According to some views, the wind carried along the sun and moon chariots (*1 *Enoch* 72:5; 73:2), or God founded the heavens on the winds (1 *Enoch*, **Joseph and Asenath*), and the stoppage of winds could signal the advent of a new age (*Sibylline Oracles*, on the postdiluvian era). Like writers today, the biblical writers used the language conventional to the *genre in which they were writing; this could include, as here, symbolic imagery.

7:2. In the most popular ancient conception, Helios drove his sun-chariot in a

regular course above the earth, rising from the gates of the east and descending into the west to return by its path under the earth; the earth-circle was surrounded on all sides by the river Oceanus. Jewish people naturally modified the sun god into an angel; but any angel that would rise in the orbit of the sun would have been recognized as superior to the greatest of the kings of the earth. The expression here could also simply emphasize that the angel comes from the east (cf. Is 41:25), hence the universal extent of God's rule (cf. Ps 50:1; 113:3; Is 59:19; Mal 1:11).

"Seal" refers to the impress of a signet ring; an official who wished to delegate his authority for a task to a representative would allow that subordinate to use his signet ring.

7:3. Like documents or merchandise sealed and stamped to guarantee their contents and prevent tampering, God's servants were to be marked off as his (cf. Is 44:5). God had previously protected his people in Goshen during the plagues (Ex 8:28; 9:4; 11:7; see comment on Rev 5:6); the idea of a protecting sign is also an *Old Testament image (Gen 4:15; Is 66:19). Here it is taken directly from Ezekiel 9:4-6, where judgment could not begin until the foreheads of the righteous (those who mourned over the sin of their land) were marked. The forehead and the hand (Ex 13:9, 16; 28:38; Deut 6:8; 11:18) were the most natural and obvious parts of the body for this marking because they were most directly exposed to view.

With the possible exception of Genesis 4:15, all these Old Testament passages probably meant the sign symbolically (despite more literal postexilic Jewish practice of *tefillin*, phylacteries); Ezekiel 9:6 certainly did not mean a humanly visible mark, and Revelation presumably means it in the same sense as Ezekiel (cf. other writings in Rev 3:12; 17:5; 19:16; 22:4). In Hebrew, Ezekiel's mark was the Hebrew letter *tav*; in ancient script it looked like, and *rabbis compared it with, the Greek letter *chi*—similar to English *x*—which some Christian commentators have compared (perhaps wishfully) with the cross sign. Comparisons have also been made with branding animals; with the occasional but well-documented tattooing of slaves and, later, soldiers; with religious tattooing (e.g., in Mithraism); with spiritual circumcision (circumcision was called a seal); and with the divine imprint on humans (Philo), here applied specifically to those who live according to that image. See comment on Revelation 13:16-18 (for the mark opposed to this one) and on Galatians 6:17; cf. *4 Ezra 6:5; 10:23; *Psalms of Solomon 15:6-9 (for invisible marks for both the righteous and the wicked); and *Testament of Job 5:2.

7:4. Because this is the full number of God's servants (7:3), the righteous (1:1; 2:20; 22:6), the number and ethnic designation may be meant figuratively for true followers of Israel's God (followers of Jesus; cf. 2:9; 3:9; 21:2, 14). Whether this number is meant figuratively or literally, however, the allusion is clearly to the Old Testament and universal Jewish conception of Israel's restoration (cf. comment on Rom 11:26-27), which is pictured, as generally, in terms of the restoration of the remnant (survivors) of the twelve tribes. Some suggest that the numbering by tribe evokes the Old Testament custom of a military census, indicating that these represent the end-time army expected in some Jewish circles (e.g., the *Qumran War Scroll), except here as a *spiritual* army (cf. comment in Rev 14:1-5).

7:5-8. The normal Jewish understanding was that the twelve tribes would inherit the land together (Ezek 48). Yet by counting Joseph and Manasseh (the tribe of Joseph was usually broken down into two tribes, represented by his sons Manasseh and Ephraim) without omitting Levi, Revelation has to omit another of the tribes, and omits Dan, the first in Ezekiel's list (48:1), in order to maintain the number twelve. (Jewish commentators as early as the second century associated Dan with idolatry, but no emphasis on that special association has been documented this early. Dan's sins [Judg 18:30; 1 Kings 12:29; Amos 8:14; cf. *Jubilees* 44:28-29] are not the only ones mentioned in the Old Testament, and the association with the serpent [Gen 49:16-17] is too remote here.) Some scholars believe that this omission underlines the symbolic nature of John's point in the whole passage; one tribe might be omitted to indicate the danger of apostasy even among the people of God (cf. Jn 6:70; 1 Jn 2:19). The sequence of tribes itself is probably not significant—it varied considerably in the Old Testament.

The twelve tribes no longer existed as separate entities in the first century; with few exceptions, only Judah, Benjamin and Levi were recognized as ancestors, and today even most of those distinctions are no longer certain. The exact number, twelve thousand from each tribe, is another indication of the symbolic nature of the passage—twelve was the number of the people of God in Jewish texts (e.g., *Dead Sea Scrolls), and 144,000 is $12 \times 12 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10$. Symbolic numbers were standard fare in Jewish views of the future (see especially comment on the times of Revelation 12).

7:9-17

The Multitude of Overcomers Before the Throne

THE MULTITUDE OF OVERCOMERS BEFORE THE THRONE

This section may represent a different group than the one pictured in 7:1-8, or another picture of the same group now in heaven (double versions of visions sometimes occur in the *Old Testament too; cf. Gen 41:25-27; interpretations of visions also appear, e.g., in Daniel, *4 *Ezra* and *2 *Baruch*).

7:9-12. White robes were appropriate for worship in the temple and were also used for the worship of gods in Asia Minor. Jewish people regularly used palm branches in the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev 23:40; Neh 8:15). In the future, the remnant of all nations would go up to Jerusalem to worship at the Feast of Tabernacles (Zech 14:16); as in *apocalyptic texts, the earthly future realm is in some sense presently fulfilled in heaven (cf. Rev 7:15). Palm branches celebrated the victory of Israel's exodus from Egypt, and the feast commemorated God's faithfulness to them during their wanderings in the wilderness, when they were totally dependent on him. More generally, palm branches celebrated victory, hailing the victors (cf. 1 Maccabees 13:51; 2 Maccabees 10:7). Ironically, if these are martyrs, they triumphed by being faithful to death (see comment on 2:10), and they hail the slain lamb.

Some scholars have suggested that these multitudes are the martyrs or martyr *church of 6:11, viewed from another perspective. "Innumerable" meant that the crowd was huge, too many to count—not infinite (*3 Maccabees 4:17; it could also represent a number so great that it could be pictured as the sands of the sea in number, as in Judith 2:20).

7:13-14. Jewish teachers sometimes asked questions they knew their *disciples could not answer; the disciples then responded by asking for the answer. The same teaching technique is employed here. Jewish apocalypses and their occasional Roman analogues often included angelic guides (e.g., 1 Enoch and 3 Baruch) who asked the mortal observer *rhetorical questions to guide him to a truer understanding (e.g., 4 Ezra and Testament of Abraham; cf. Dan 8:13-14; 12:6-7); in other texts confused visionaries simply had to ask to begin with (Dan 7:16; 12:8; 4 Ezra) or wait for an interpretation (Dan 8:16).*

"The great tribulation" refers to Daniel 12:1, the period of great suffering that God's people were to experience before the end of the age. Making robes white with blood is a ritual rather than visual image: sacrificial blood purified utensils for worship in the Old Testament (see comment on Heb 9:21-22), and white was the color of robes required for worship in the *New Testament period.

7:15-16. God's tabernacle as a refuge over them directly echoes Isaiah 4:5-6, which in turn alludes to a new exodus of salvation in the future time. When God

redeemed his people from Egypt and they wandered in the wilderness (the time commemorated in the Feast of Tabernacles; see comment on Rev 7:9-12), he made such a cloud over them as Isaiah describes. Revelation also borrows the language of Isaiah 49:10 (again the salvation of the future age); cf. Psalm 121:5-6. What differs from Isaiah 49:10 here is that God's people now include representatives of many nations (Rev 7:9) and that the lamb fills the divine role. On God's throne room in heaven being portrayed as a temple, see comment on Revelation 4:6-7.

7:17. This verse alludes to Isaiah 25:8 (in the context of the messianic banquet at the *resurrection at the end of the age*) and 49:10 (*in the age to come*). For the imagery of the shepherd (here graphically juxtaposed with the lamb), see the introduction to John 10:1-18.

8:1-5

Preparing for the Trumpet Plagues

8:1. There are a number of possible ways to interpret "silence" here. In some texts, silence could characterize the end of the present world to form a new world (*4 *Ezra* and *2 *Baruch*; cf. *Pseudo-Philo). In this context of worship (7:9-12) and intercession (6:9-11; 8:4) in heaven, some suggest that "silence" could mean a brief delay in God's reception of his people's prayers for vindication (Ps 50:3, 21; 83:1) or silencing heaven's praises to receive his people's prayers (Rev 8:4), as in some later Jewish texts.

Perhaps more likely, it could be a form of awed worship (Ps 65:1) or perhaps of fear, grief or shame, as with the muzzled mouths of the guilty with nothing to say in their defense at the judgment (Hab 2:20; Zeph 1:7; Zech 2:13; cf. Ps 31:17-18; 76:8-10; Is 23:2; 41:1; 47:5).

8:2. Trumpets were used for celebrations, to call sacred or military assemblies, and as summons to battle, military signals or alerts, often warning of impending invasions. It is in this last sense that the prophets usually employed the image, and this is probably also why Revelation uses it. Given heavenly temple imagery elsewhere in Revelation, the use of trumpets in the temple might also be relevant (2 Chron 7:6; 29:26; Ezra 3:10). Although John undoubtedly would have used "seven" anyway (given his three sets of seven judgments each), commentators note that series of seven trumpeters appear in the *Old Testament (Josh 6:6, 13), probably regularly in the temple cult (1 Chron 15:24; Neh 12:41).

Again, though seven angels would be needed for seven trumpets in any case, it is noteworthy that between the time of the Old Testament and the time of the New Testament Judaism had settled on seven archangels (adding five to the two important angels named in Daniel), who “stood before God.”

8:3. The angel fulfills a task assigned to a priest in the earthly temple. For the heavenly temple in Revelation, see comment on 4:6-7; as in some other Jewish texts (including in the Old Testament, in Ps 141:2), prayers are presented as incense (some texts portrayed them also as sacrifices). For the heavenly temple in Jewish texts in general, see comment on Hebrews 8:1-5.

8:4-5. In this context, the continual prayers of the *saints for vengeance (6:9-11) are the direct cause of their eventual vindication through judgments on the earth (8:6–9:21). On the image of atmospheric phenomena caused by angelic activity, see comment on 4:5; cf. 11:19 and 16:18.

8:6-12

The First Four Trumpet Plagues

The sorts of judgments characterizing the judgments of the trumpets and bowls evoke especially the ten plagues of the exodus (although they are numerically adjusted to seven; see comment on Jn 2:11, the first of probably seven signs in John). As in other Jewish texts (e.g., *Pseudo-Philo*, *Artapanus*), *the sequence and even number of the plagues is not important for the point of the image. Some of the plagues are echoed in other judgment texts (especially Sibylline Oracles)* but never as systematically as here.

8:6. See comment on 8:2.

8:7. This plague echoes the seventh plague in Exodus 9:24-25. The mixture of hail and fire evokes the image in Ex 9:23-24 and Ps 105:32, where the fire probably alludes to lightning. The mixture with blood here probably evokes the plague of blood (see comment on Rev 8:8-9).

8:8-9. Waters running with blood would normally indicate war (e.g., Is 15:9), but these verses also echo the first plague in Exodus 7:20-21. The mountain hurled into the sea characterizes the sort of imagery standard in this type of literature (e.g., the burning star hurled into the sea in what may be a roughly contemporary oracle in *Sibylline Oracles*). The suggested parallel to Babylon as a burning mountain in Jeremiah 51:25, 42 is not as obvious, but it may have informed both Revelation (which elsewhere cites this section of

Jeremiah, e.g., in Rev 18:4) and the *Sibylline Oracles*.

This plague addresses contamination of the water supply, effecting not only many swift deaths by dehydration but also long-term devastation by destruction of Egypt's irrigation and fishing (Ex 7:18) resources.

8:10-11. Like the preceding plague, this judgment alludes to the poisoned water of Exodus 7:20-21, but through a sort of poisoning or embittering agent called "wormwood" (Jer 9:15; 23:15; cf. Jer 8:14), often used figuratively (for idolatry—Deut 29:18; fruits of adultery—Prov 5:4; suffering—Lam 3:19). This plague strikes local freshwater supplies and would naturally worry John's readers in Asia, especially in Laodicea (see comment on Rev 3:15-16).

8:12. This plague echoes the ninth plague in Exodus 10:22-23; many ancient texts speak of darkness as a dreaded judgment, and the *Old Testament (see comment on Rev 6:12-13) and some other Jewish texts also associate it with the end time.

8:13–9:11

The Fifth Trumpet Plague

8:13. The announcement of three impending woes indicates that as negative as the first four trumpet plagues were, the worst is yet to come. "Woe" often begins a new oracle in *1 *Enoch* and probably serves a similar function here.

The eagle was a symbol of imperial Rome carried by the legions and used on Herod's temple, but that symbolism may be irrelevant here. Perhaps more to the point, eagles were used as messengers in some texts (4 *Baruch*); Romans could view them as omens; they could symbolize God's protection (Rev 12:14); or the term here could mean (as it often does, including in the *LXX) "vulture," indicating a bird of prey (see 19:17), and thus imminent doom. Finally, it might simply reflect God's sovereignty over all his creatures (cf. 4:7). "Midheaven" (NASB, NRSV) is the level of heaven between God's throne and the lowest atmosphere (in the minimal three-heaven scheme of some ancients—on which see comment on 2 Cor 12:2-4—but also in some other schemes, e.g., in 2 *Enoch*).

9:1-2. Many Jewish traditions spoke of evil angels imprisoned in dungeons or rivers, awaiting their time to come out and wreak havoc. Some ancient writers assumed that the "abyss" (NIV, GNT; "bottomless pit"—NASB, KJV, NRSV) was a real geographical place that could be found on earth (1 *Enoch*); angels were

assigned over such sites and given keys. Most pagans held stars to be divinities, and many Jews held them to be angels; stars could naturally symbolize angels in Jewish texts, as in this case. John exploits the standard imagery to make his point.

9:3. In view of the larger context evoking Exodus's plagues, this plague recalls the eighth plague in Exodus 10:12, the locusts. Maintaining the imagery characteristic of much *apocalyptic and prophetic revelation, however, John's vision transmutes these locusts into something far more terrifying. Joel apparently describes an imminent locust plague in terms of armies (e.g., 1:4; 2:11, 20, 25) and also describes a final war (3:9-17). John borrows Joel's imagery here (e.g., Joel 1:6; 2:4-5) to amplify the imagery of a locust plague into a terrible invasion.

9:4. See comment on 7:3. Ordinary locusts would have feasted on the vegetation and left the people alone.

9:5. Scorpion stings were among the most intense pains (1 Kings 12:11; 2 Chron 10:14); but a pain lasting five months (9:10, unless this is simply the duration of the plague; one commentator says that five months fits the approximate lifespan of a normal kind of locust) was unheard of. Jewish texts often included scorpions as one of God's means of judgment.

9:6. Only the severest sufferings prompted a preference for death over life (Jer 8:3); but even death will be withheld during this plague.

9:7. An invasion of locusts could be described as warhorses (Joel 2:4), and horses could be described as being as numerous as locusts (Jer 51:27; cf. 51:14). The crowns might reflect prior military exploits or that they command still other locusts. Peoples such as Greeks and Babylonians envisioned various kinds of composite monsters evoking parts of different creatures (from centaurs and griffins, more positively, to snake-haired Gorgons). The image of human-faced scorpions derived from nightmarish traditions from the East, and Mediterranean zodiacs eventually applied it to Sagittarius, who was often portrayed with long hair (see comment on 9:8). Although the image is not meant literally, it draws on the most terrible, repressed images of that culture's unconscious fears to evoke horror at the impending judgments.

9:8. Joel 1:6 described locusts with "teeth like lions" to emphasize their destructiveness to the crops and everything else. In Joel, the image would terrify an agrarian society; in Revelation, it would remind readers of the lion's proverbial ferocity. The "hair like women" might evoke a particular military threat known to John's audience: everyone in the Roman Empire knew that

“barbarians” outside the empire, unlike most people in Greco-Roman society, had long hair. In the context of a military invasion, the readers might immediately think of the Parthians (or, in apocalyptic terms, perhaps the spiritual realities behind them). By way of illustration, the reigning emperor Domitian’s father was reported—perhaps fictitiously—to have joked about the Parthians’ long hair in view of a long-tailed comet portending his death. Thus Revelation, employing dramatic imagery of its day, communicates a terrible invasion.

9:9. The “noise of chariots” is borrowed from the military imagery for locusts in Joel 2:5; the swarms would be so intense that they would sound like an invading army, a sound great enough to make a land quake (Jer 8:16). The scales of a kind of locust’s thorax are compared with scaled armor in a later Jewish text; here John uses a more updated armor image.

9:10. Their tails may be mentioned simply because that was the weapon of scorpions (9:5), but the reverse could also be true; scorpions could be mentioned because of the tails. It may be of interest that the Parthians (9:8) had become famous for their rearward archery: they had retreated up hills mounted on horseback, and when unwary Roman legions had followed them, the Parthians had released a backward hail of arrows, wiping out several legions before the Romans learned not to follow them up hills. Although the lifespan of different kinds of locusts varies significantly, many live roughly three to five months.

9:11. “Abaddon” is a Hebrew name for the lowest depths of the earth, the realm of the dead (cf. Job 31:12; Ps 88:11; Prov 27:20); the *Dead Sea Scrolls also linked the “spirit of Abaddon” with the “angel of the pit.” “Apollyon” means “destruction” in Greek. (Some scholars have secondarily connected the name to Apollo, a Greek deity, one of whose totems was the locust patron, but the allusion is disputed.) The final, terrifying touch to this description of an army with elements from Joel’s locusts, from Parthians and from scorpions is that these are the armies of hell, sent by death itself to fill its bowels.

9:12-21

The Sixth Trumpet Plague

Parthians were Rome’s most feared enemies in this period. They were portrayed as untrustworthy, and the authority of their monarchs was absolute. Older Greek prophecies about an eastern invasion of the Roman Empire still made some Romans nervous, and the Jewish *Sibylline Oracles* prophesied that Nero would

return, leading Parthian hordes in vengeance on Rome. (Many Jewish people lived in Parthian territory, and many Jews in the Roman Empire felt no more allegiance to Rome than they would have to Parthia; in the Jewish-Roman War of 66–70 many Jews expected Parthia to intervene on their behalf, but their hopes were disappointed.)

9:12. See comment on 8:13.

9:13. On the temple imagery, see comment on 4:6-7. Ancient Middle Eastern altars typically had four horns.

9:14. Pervasive references in ancient literature reveal that it was common knowledge that the river Euphrates (16:12) was, above all else, the traditional boundary between the Roman and Parthian empires. Some other Jewish texts speak of fallen angels being bound in the depths of various seas, able to be released only at the command of God or one of his angels.

9:15. For all their recognition of demonic forces in this age, apocalyptic writers recognized also the standard Jewish doctrine that God ultimately rules all of history. Casualty statistics like this one are also familiar in Jewish judgment oracles (see the *Sibylline Oracles*). Some scholars suggest mercy in the statistic (contrasting two-thirds of God’s people destroyed in Zech 13:8, and of the world in the *Sibylline Oracles*).

9:16. Parthians were noted horsemen; in contrast to Rome, whose only cavalry contingents were drawn from its auxiliary (non-Roman) units, the Parthians were renowned for their cavalry. “Two hundred million” would be a huge standing army even today (only about one-sixth the population of India, but close to the entire population of Brazil, roughly two-thirds the population of the United States, nearly forty percent more than that of Mexico, a quarter more than that of Nigeria, and nearly six times that of Canada); in the first century it probably represented more than the population of the entire Mediterranean world.

9:17-18. The “dark blue” (NIV; “hyacinth”—NASB; or “sapphire”—NRSV) might allude to the color of the smoke of sulfur’s flame. Cf. 9:7-8 for the source of the image of horses and lions; lions were considered the most ferocious and regal of beasts, which no one cared to meet. In a widely read Jewish wisdom book, a writer had declared that God could have punished idolatry by sending lions or newly created, fire-breathing and smoke-belching monsters (Wisdom of Solomon 11:17-20). But again this imagery may be mixed with the threat of a Parthian invasion: Parthian archers often used flaming arrows.

9:19. The power “in their tails” may allude to scorpions or to the Parthian

cavalry's rearward archery (see comment on 9:10).

9:20-21. Jewish people commonly regarded the unrepentance of the world in the face of obvious judgments (e.g., Ex 7:22-23) as a sign of stupidity. (Even some pagan philosophers pointed out that divine judgments were acts of mercy, to bring the wicked to *repentance, as well as acts of justice; in this view they agreed with the *Old Testament*—e.g., Ex 8:10; 9:14, 29; 10:2; 14:4; Amos 4:6-11.) *Old Testament prophets and later Jewish writers frequently ridiculed the worship of idols (cf. Rev 2:14, 20) that were less powerful than those who made them (e.g., Ps 135:15-18; Is 46:6-7). That pagans worshiped demons was also widely accepted in Jewish circles (e.g., 1 Enoch; 1 Cor 10:20). Idolatry and immorality were standard parts of Greco-Roman culture; thieves and sorcerers were, however, considered dangerous by common consent.*

10:1-7

The Mysteries of the End

10:1. Jewish literature pictures a number of angels as being as high as the highest heavens, often shining like the sun (2 *Enoch*; *3 *Enoch*; *rabbis; cf. Dan 10:6; cf. the Greek figure Atlas). Both evil angels (*1 *Enoch*) and good angels could be very tall. Sometimes they were crowned (e.g., 2 *Enoch*; 3 *Enoch*), in this case with a rainbow; in 3 *Enoch*, even the crown is more than a five-hundred-year journey high. (Sometimes such language was also used figuratively, e.g., for a particular *high priest*.) *John borrows the imagery of his day for a powerful angel over creation (see comment on Rev 7:1). Apocalypses typically portrayed such glorious angels to imply the infinitely greater majesty of their creator.*

10:2. The seals having been opened (6:1–8:1), the contents of the book may now be examined (“open”). The angel’s enormity and his feet on both land and sea may indicate how great his dominion is.

10:3-4. Something remains sealed (cf. 22:10), indicating that some mysteries must remain mysteries until the end (Deut 29:29). On unspeakable revelations, see comment on 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. The text implies that John is taking notes (as rabbinic or especially Greek students sometimes did) or writing down what he hears and sees; one could write down visions or utterances as others were having them (e.g., **Testament of Job* 51, a section admittedly of uncertain date).

10:5-6. Raising one’s hand toward a god was used in solemn oath formulas

in Greek culture as well as in the *Old Testament and later Jewish literature. Here John alludes to Daniel 12:7, where an angel lifted his hands toward heaven and swore by the one who lives forever that there would be only three and a half more years until the end; here this angel swears that the time has come, and there is no further delay. (Some apocalyptic texts spoke of countable time itself ending, but the point here seems to be “time before the end,” given Dan 12:7; cf. Rev 2:21; 6:11; 20:3; Hab 2:3.)

10:7. All the Old Testament promises, both of judgment and of restoration, came to a head in the day of the Lord.

10:8-11

A Bitter Message for the Nations

This account is based on Ezekiel 2:8–3:3, where a hand is extended to Ezekiel containing a scroll, written on both sides (cf. Rev 5:1) with a message of three kinds of judgment. Ezekiel ate the scroll, which tasted sweet to his mouth but was a message of judgment for Israel.

10:8-10. These verses are based on Ezekiel 2:8–3:3; another contemporary *apocalyptic writer (*4 *Ezra*) drew more loosely on the same imagery. Sin tasted sweet like honey but was poison because it led to judgment (Prov 5:3-4; cf. Num 5:23-31); but the sweetness here is the word of the Lord (cf. Prov 24:13-14; rabbis), and the bitterness is the bitterness of judgment that John must proclaim. On an angel talking with the visionary, see comment on Revelation 7:13-14.

10:11. Ezekiel’s message from the book (see comment on 10:8-10) was for Israel, but John prophesies to many nations (like Jeremiah; Jer 1:10). The Jewish Sibyl in the **Sibylline Oracles* conceived her task as prophesying concerning all nations (cf. Rev 11:2), but this was standard with many *Old Testament prophets, who uttered oracles against the nations, to which John’s are much closer (Is 13–23; Jer 46–51; Ezek 25–32; Amos 1–2).

11:1-13

The Two Witnesses

John uses Old Testament language for prophets (Elijah, Moses) and a *high priest and king* (from *Zechariah*) to describe these witnesses. On a literal futuristic reading, they could refer to the new Moses and Elijah expected in Judaism;

conversely, Revelation could have recycled these expectations as symbols for the prophetic calling and joint aspects of the church, as rulers and priests (Rev 1:6; 5:10), especially since this is the meaning of lampstands elsewhere in the book (1:20).

11:1. Measuring the courts of God's house (21:15) was one way of praising the magnificence of the building whose construction was meant as praise to God (Ps 48:12-13; Ezek 40:3–42:20; Zech 2:1-5; cf. **Similitudes of Enoch*, where paradise is measured). A "reed" (NIV, KJV) could be used as a surveyor's rule (hence "measuring rod"—NASB, NRSV, GNT).

11:2. The sanctuary had been trodden down before (Is 63:18; 1 Maccabees 3:45; 4:60), and its desolation was portrayed as the typical goal of pagans (Judith 9:8), but here only the outer court is trodden down. Yet the whole temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, and (with most scholars) Revelation was probably written in the 90s. Even the literal treading down of the outer sanctuary had taken place more than forty-two months before John's time, perhaps implying that the number was symbolic for the whole period from its devastation in some sense until its restoration (see comment on Rev 12:6).

If the heavenly temple is meant (11:19; see comment on 4:6), the outer court would be meant symbolically. Perhaps as at **Qumran*, the temple stands for God's chosen remnant (cf. 21:3). The outer court was the only court *Gentiles were allowed to enter. Although the literal outer court was in ruins like the rest of the temple, the image might refer to some danger such as pagan spiritual domination over the church as Israel's spiritual remnant (cf. 2:9; 3:9) or over the holy land or Jewish people, or to the lack of a temple; even while the temple stood, many felt that it was spiritually impure (e.g., Dead Sea Scrolls).*

11:3. On the 1,260 days, see comment on 12:6; based on a 360-day year, this was the same as forty-two months or three and a half years (Daniel used all three figures). Sackcloth was proper Old Testament apparel for mourning or repentance; the two witnesses are apparently lamenting the sins of God's people (e.g., Joel 1:13; Jon 3:6; *Joseph and Asenath*; clothing for prophets in *Ascension of Isaiah*, etc.). Two witnesses was the minimum number acceptable under Old Testament **law* (Deut 17:6; 19:15).

11:4. The source of the image is clear: Zechariah 4:2-3 presented two seven-branched lampstands and two olive trees, which represented the two anointed ones (Zech 4:14): the king and the priest (Zech 6:13). In Zechariah's day they represented Zerubbabel and Joshua. (Thus **Qumran* in some periods in its history stressed two future anointed figures, a messianic king and an anointed

priest.) John might connect the image with a kingdom and priests (Rev 1:6; 5:10).

That they “stand” (currently) could indicate, as some (e.g., the second-century North African Christian Tertullian) have suggested, an allusion to Old Testament figures who did not die (cf. also *4 *Ezra*)—Elijah, Enoch (according to the most common reading of the Old Testament) and Moses (according to some Jewish storytellers, against the plain sense of Deut 34). They could also simply represent the church, whose heavenly representatives are already before God (Rev 4:4; cf. Mt 18:10). The two anointed ones in Zechariah 4:14 “stand” by the Lord of all the earth.

11:5. Elijah seemed to have a spiritual gift for calling down fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:38; 2 Kings 1:10, 12; cf. Lev 9:24–10:2). But what appears to be an allusion to Elijah is slightly modified: the fire comes from their mouths (perhaps symbolic for efficacious proclamations of judgment—Jer 5:10, 14). (Later Jewish texts expand this gift to Joseph, Abraham and others; later *rabbis told stories of earlier pious rabbis, especially Simeon ben Yohai in the second century A.D. and Johanan in the third, who disintegrated disrespectful men by gazing at them spitefully.)

11:6. Elijah had “shut” the sky, bringing drought in obedience to God’s word (1 Kings 17:1; 18:41); according to a probable Jewish tradition, this was for three and a half years (cf. also Jas 5:17; Lk 4:25). Authorization to turn water to blood clearly recalls Moses (Ex 7:14-25). Jewish people were expecting both a new prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15-18) and the return of Elijah (Mal 4:5); in the language of their power, Revelation describes the mission of the two witnesses, possibly the church (see introduction to 11:1-13).

11:7. Developing Old Testament pictures of the end (Zech 14:1-3), Jewish texts commonly expected this age to end with a long, climactic battle, which often included suffering for God’s people but culminated in their ultimate triumph (cf. both sufferings of the final generation and spiritual battle plans in the War Scroll in the Dead Sea Scrolls).

11:8. Throughout the ancient world, refusing to bury the dead (sometimes a punishment for the worst crimes) was the greatest cruelty one could offer (e.g., Is 5:25) and was usually a mark of grave impiety as well. As Paul contrasts the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4:25-26), so Revelation may do here (the place of Jesus’ crucifixion); the Old Testament prophets often compared Jerusalem or Israel with Sodom (e.g., Is 1:9-10; Jer 23:14). As Egypt had oppressed Israel, so Jerusalem’s authorities had oppressed the true followers of

God. The association of Jewish authorities with the persecution of the church held true at least in some cities in Asia Minor (Rev 2:9; 3:9); compare this city with Babylon in chapters 17–18. In contrast, some scholars have pointed to the use of the “city” for Rome elsewhere in Revelation, arguing that the city here is Rome, who martyred *Christ in Jerusalem, or the world system as a whole. All of those hostile to the church might be blended together as the world city. (When used figuratively, “the prostitute” [Rev 17] in the Old Testament was almost always used for Israel or Judah betraying their covenant with God; Revelation reapplies the title to Rome.)

11:9. “Three and a half days” may be mentioned to signify that the dead bodies of the two witnesses were decomposing; it might also correspond to the three and a half years of their prophesying.

11:10. For “earth-dwellers” see comment on 3:10. The giving of gifts characterized some pagan celebrations and (probably not in view here) the Jewish Feast of Purim, which celebrated Israel’s deliverance from Persian enemies (Esther 9:19, 22).

11:11. The breath of life entering the two corpses alludes to Genesis 2:7 and perhaps Ezekiel 37 (cf. Jn 20:22; *Testament of Abraham*, recension A).

11:12. Elijah ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11), and as time went on, Jewish tradition multiplied the number of holy servants of God taken directly to heaven without death. Greek traditions pictured a very small number of heroes taken to heaven in death. But ascension after *resurrection refers in other Christian texts to Jesus (Acts 1:9-11) and the church (1 Thess 4:15-16).

11:13. If “seven thousand” is understood as one-tenth of the population, the description fits Jerusalem better than Rome (the latter is estimated to have had a population as high as one million, though some think this inflated). (Some commentators see it as a specific reference to the remnant of Israel—1 Kings 19:18. Mercifully, here the surviving remnant is nine-tenths rather than one-tenth as in Is 6:13.) On a final earthquake, see Revelation 6:12.

11:14-19

The Final Trumpet and the World’s End

11:14. See comment on 8:13; cf. 9:12.

11:15. The world system (in John’s day, Rome) constituted a *kingdom, but

it would be handed over to God's people (Dan 7:17-18). On the eternal reign of Israel's final king, cf. Isaiah 9:7, Daniel 7:13-14 and 1 Maccabees 2:57. Trumpets were always blown on the accession of an Israelite king (1 Kings 1:34).

11:16. See comment on 4:4 and 10.

11:17. Although Judaism acknowledged God's present rule over the earth, it also awaited and celebrated his future rule unchallenged over all humanity, and it usually acknowledged Israel's rule over the nations on his behalf. In Jewish sources, this rule would be inaugurated at the very end of the age.

11:18. The raging of the nations, God's wrath and the rule of Christ over the nations echoes Psalm 2. Judaism held that the righteous were rewarded at the end of the age (or at death). Destroyers of earth could evoke humanity's abuse of its stewardship over the earth (Gen 1:26). This idea was not unknown in John's day (e.g., *2 *Baruch* 13:11, although the unrighteous use of creation there may refer specifically to idolatry); many Jewish writers also believed that humanity's sin had corrupted the whole creation (e.g., *4 *Ezra*). Most relevantly, however, "destroying the earth" alludes to Babylon's conquests devastating the world (Jer 51:25).

11:19. The ark of the covenant (see comment on 23:17) was the piece of furniture in the tabernacle and temple that corresponded to a throne in ancient Near Eastern symbolism; the inclusion of the ark thus fits the dual image of heaven as a throne room and as God's temple. Jewish hearers of the book would also be aware that the covenant had been deposited in the ark and that the covenant was associated with stipulations and curses (plagues) against the disobedient. The Dead Sea Scrolls and many *apocalyptic writers felt that the old temple had been defiled, but that God would supply a renewed, pure temple at the end of the age; on the heavenly temple here, see 4:6. The ark was kept behind a curtain in the holy of holies in the *Old Testament*, seen only by the high priest one day a year; here it is exposed to open view. (One scholar has suggested that this verse evokes the image of the ark going forth to war, portrayed in terms Roman readers would readily catch: the numen of the state going forth from the temple of Janus for war, thus the opening of heaven here.) On the lightnings and related phenomena, see comment on 4:5; this exodus language (Ex 19:16; cf. Ezek 1:4) suggests that John's revelation is understood as a revelation on the same level as Moses'.

The Dragon, the Woman and the Child

This vision reapplies imagery that was widely known in ancient mythology. A common Greek story, spread in several forms, presented Leto begetting the god Apollo while opposed by the dragon Python; Apollo then pursued the dragon Python and slew him. In an Egyptian story, the goddess Isis gave birth to the sun god Horus as the red dragon Typhon was pursuing her; Horus eventually killed Typhon. Some argue that people also applied such popular stories to the Roman emperor, whose rule is here linked with the evil dragon (in contrast with Roman tradition, which portrayed him in terms of the hero Apollo). Although these stories omit many details John includes from other sources (his whole account could be reproduced from the *Old Testament and Jewish sources*), *they indicate that all his readers could identify with a story line that modern readers often find impenetrable. But ancient readers familiar with the Bible would especially recognize here the story of Israel giving birth and Satan's opposition to God's people.*

12:1. Symbolic women occasionally appeared in *apocalyptic visions* (e.g., 4 *Ezra*). Ancient writers sometimes meant “signs” in heaven astrologically (consider Virgo, the virgin, and Draco, the dragon or serpent), but these signs were also fairly common as props in apocalyptic visions. The sun, moon and twelve stars help identify the woman as the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen 37:9). Judaism in this period (e.g., *Josephus*, Philo; later evident in *synagogue mosaics and the rabbis*) often associated the twelve signs of the zodiac with the twelve tribes, despite biblical prohibitions against astrological speculation; indeed, the romance novel **Joseph and Asenath* borrows twelve rays from typical Greek imagery for the sun god. But the Genesis reference itself is clear enough to show that the allusion is to Israel (cf. also Abraham and Sarah as sun and moon to Isaac in the *Testament of Abraham*).

The Old Testament portrayed faithful Israel (or Judah or Jerusalem) as a virgin or God's bride but their unfaithful equivalent as a prostitute; thus the tale of two cities that contrasts the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 21:2) and Babylon the prostitute (17:5). (**2 Baruch* and 4 *Ezra* also follow Old Testament models and contrast righteous Zion with its oppressor wicked Babylon.)

12:2. Righteous Israel was portrayed as the mother of the restored future remnant of Israel (Is 54:1; 66:7-10; Mic 5:3; cf. Is 7:14; 9:6; 26:18-19), an image freely mixed with the image of Israel as a bride (Is 62:5). The *Dead Sea Scrolls* also spoke of the righteous remnant of Israel travailing to give birth (either to a

saved Israel—cf. Rev 12:17—or to the Messiah; the precise referent is disputed). Cf. John 16:21.

12:3. Ancient Mesopotamian myths portrayed seven-headed monsters; later Jewish tradition linked the worship of dragons to Babylon (Bel and the Dragon 23-27). The image of a seven-headed serpent or dragon was also part of Canaanite mythology that the Israelites symbolically turned to better purposes: God's parting the Red Sea was now symbolized as a defeat of the primeval serpent Leviathan or Lotan (Ps 74:13-15; cf. also Ps 89:9-10; Is 27:1; 30:7; 51:9; Job 9:13; 26:12-13; Ezek 29:3; for the principle, see Ex 12:12; Rahab in some of these texts had become a symbol for Egypt—Ps 87:4); this may be the most relevant background here. The Greek hero Heracles also confronted a seven-headed dragon, the Lernean hydra, in Greek mythology, although in that case the number of heads changed quickly! Serpents were also associated with Asclepius (relevant esp. in Pergamum); their association with Athena is less relevant in Asia Minor. Serpent veneration is common in many cultures and prevailed in a *Gnostic sect called the Ophites in the second century.

Jewish people had many stories about the great evil reptile Leviathan, that he would even be killed and served up as part of the course at the messianic banquet (cf. 2 *Baruch* and later rabbis). Here the dragon is identified with the serpent of Genesis 3 and the devil (Rev 12:9).

12:4. The image of stars battling in heaven was used in the Old Testament (Judg 5:20, figurative language for the heavens pouring out rain against the enemy), the **Sibylline Oracles* (catching the world on fire) and some Greek sources. Old Testament texts and later Jewish texts portrayed both Israel or the godly (Dan 12:3; cf. 8:10) and angels (*1 *Enoch*; probably also Is 24:21 and 2 *Baruch*) as stars. Jewish traditions usually assigned the fall of angels to the period of Adam (refusal to worship God's image in Adam) or, more often, to Noah's time (sexual sins), but Revelation links their fall especially with rebellion against Christ.

12:5. Virgil and other Roman writers also extolled the birth of a divine boy who would bring deliverance to the world, glorifying the first emperor Augustus. If the emperor appears in Revelation, however, he is a puppet of the dragon, whereas Jesus is the divine leader of a group that may be marginalized or persecuted for rejecting the imperial cult.

In the various forms of the Greco-Roman and Near Eastern myth, the divine child was sheltered until he returned to slay the dragon. Here he is kept at God's throne until he comes to destroy the dragon. In the light of Psalm 2:6-9, Isaiah

9:6-7 and Micah 5:3, the “birth” probably indicates Jesus’ death, *resurrection and messianic enthronement, not his literal birth (cf. Jn 16:21).

12:6. When God led his people from captivity, they wandered in the “wilderness” until their redemption was complete (i.e., until they possessed their inheritance in the Promised Land). As elsewhere in the *New Testament (see comment on Jn 1:23), the interim between Jesus’ first coming and second coming is compared with Israel between Egypt and the Promised Land. The Jewish people were also expecting a new exodus of final deliverance in the wilderness (cf. Is 40:3; Hos 2:14-15).

More than 1,260 days had obviously already passed since Jesus’ exaltation (see also comment on 11:2), but symbolic numbers were standard fare for apocalyptic texts. Although “1,260 days” surely alludes to the great tribulation of Daniel (cf. Dan 12:11; also 7:25; 9:27; 12:7), it is possible that Revelation reapplies it as a general symbol for final tribulation to the whole course of the present age. Daniel’s own numbers were a reapplication of Jeremiah (Dan 9:2, 24), and some other apocalyptic writers also described other periods of tribulation figuratively. Such designations would characterize the kind, rather than the length, of time they described. This would fit the New Testament understanding that the “last days” involved the time between the Messiah’s comings (see, in context, Acts 2:17; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1; Heb 1:2; 2 Pet 3:3); Jesus coming twice required adjusting traditional Jewish expectations about the end.

(The language of older prophecies was commonly reused in Old Testament, later Jewish and Greek *prophecy; sometimes prophecies and other texts sought to evoke the same meaning as the earlier texts, and at other times they simply borrowed earlier language as standard prophetic imagery, without implying that they referred to the same meaning. As to what happened to the literal 1,260 days, Josephus and possibly the Gospels applied them to A.D. 66–70, the Maccabean literature applied them especially to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, and many early Christians probably expected a literal period of that length to precede Christ’s return, as became explicit in writings of some of the church fathers of subsequent centuries.)

12:7-17

This Means War

One may read the structure of the context as suggesting that the 1,260 days of 12:6 symbolically covers the whole period between the first and second comings. The period begins with Jesus' exaltation (12:1-6), the coming of salvation (12:10) and believers' justification (no longer prosecuted before God, 12:11). It spans the period of persecution of Christians (12:11-17), and, given the story line Revelation uses (familiar to the first readers), undoubtedly ends with Christ's return to slay the dragon (see comment on 12:1-6).

12:7-8. One of two angels mentioned by name in the *Old Testament, Michael was one of the chief heavenly princes, the guardian angel of Israel (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1; in much ancient Jewish thought, each nation had its own angelic prince). In early Jewish literature and invocations, Michael was the chief prince of the heavenly host, God's main messenger (cf. Jude 9); in the Dead Sea Scrolls, everyone was either in the camp of the Prince of Light or that of the Angel of Darkness. Common mythical language from Jewish stories about a primeval, heavenly battle leading to the fall of the evil prince and his angels is here transformed: the *ultimate* battle surrounded Jesus' death and exaltation (Jn 12:31; 16:11). Because Michael was sometimes presented as Israel's advocate before God, and Satan was generally presented as Israel's accuser (see 12:10), the image of war here may be one of judicial as well as of violent conflict.

12:9. The dragon is identified with the serpent of Genesis 3, who would be crushed by "the woman's seed" (Gen 3:15).

12:10. From his portrayal in the book of Job on, Satan is presented as an accuser of the righteous, a prosecuting attorney before God's court. In later texts, his role of tempter (gaining incriminating evidence) became more prominent, but he always retained his role as accuser; later rabbinic texts declared that he accused Israel day and night before God, except on the Day of Atonement. (They derived this idea fancifully: the number of Satan's name was 364, so he accused Israel 364 days per year.) This verse declares that Christ's finished work has ended Satan's power to accuse the righteous (cf. Rom 8:33-34).

12:11. The believers' legal "testimony" (offered in this world) counts more before the throne than Satan's accusations, and the object of their testimony is the finished work of *Christ on their behalf (1:2, 5, 9; 2:13). "Loving not one's life to the death" was the language of valor in battle (Judg 5:18), as was "overcoming"; they fought and won by faith to the point of martyrdom.

12:12. In many Jewish views of the end time, Satan/Belial would be unleashed against God's people in the final years (Dead Sea Scrolls). His authority was always delegated by God, permitted for only a particular length of

time, to give him and his followers full opportunity to prove themselves wrong.

12:13-14. When God led his people forth from Egypt and into the wilderness, he “bore them on eagles’ wings” (Ex 19:4; Deut 32:11), and other Old Testament texts speak of God sheltering his people beneath his wings (Ps 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4; cf. Jer 49:22); later Jewish texts speak of God’s protecting his people, including converts to Judaism, under “the wings of his presence.” “Time, times, and half a time” refer to three and a half years, as in Daniel (7:25; 12:7; cf. 4:32). The miraculous provision in the wilderness also recalls God’s provision of manna for Israel of old there. The Old Testament prophets and Judaism looked forward to a new exodus like the first one in which God would ultimately deliver his people from all their oppressors; the early Christians applied this notion to their salvation by Christ’s first coming and entrance into the future era of the *kingdom by his second (see comment on Rom 8:12-17).

12:15. In the most common form of the Greek story about Leto and Apollo (see introduction to 12:1-6), the sea god hid Leto beneath the sea till she could bear the child; in another version of the story, the dragon stirred the waters against her but the earth helped her by raising up the island of Delos. Revelation may reapply such images with new content. “Floods” are a typical image of judgment (e.g., Jer 47:2—war) and tribulation (Ps 32:6; 69:15) in the Old Testament, but God had promised safety for the people of the new exodus, just as he had brought Israel through the Red Sea (Is 43:2).

12:16. In Jewish tradition, creation, loyal to God, sometimes helped the righteous against their wicked human oppressors; thus, for example, a tree hid Isaiah from his pursuers, and the earth swallowed and so hid the vessels of the temple; in the Old Testament, cf. Genesis 4:10 and Numbers 16:31-32.

12:17. The woman’s “seed” alludes to Genesis 3:15; the woman’s seed would ultimately crush the serpent’s head, but only after the serpent had bruised the seed’s heel.

13:1-10

The Worshipped Beast

Whereas most of Revelation (including this passage; see Dan 7:3-8) draws on images from the *Old Testament, many scholars believe that this passage also plays on a theme prominent in the thought of John’s contemporaries. Although

Nero died, reportedly by his own hand, on June 9, A.D. 68, rumor circulated that he was still alive and ready to take vengeance on the Roman aristocracy for rejecting him. According to writers of the day, the majority of people in the eastern part of the empire expected his return. Several impostors arose claiming to be Nero, hoping to gather followings in the eastern empire, where he was most popular; one of them arose in Asia Minor during the reign of Titus (Domitian's older brother). During Domitian's reign, a Nero figure even persuaded the Parthians to follow him to invade the Roman Empire, but Domitian forced them to back down and execute the impostor instead.

Jewish oracles predicted the return of Nero, and many Christians feared it. Although John clearly does not believe in a literal return of Nero, he may use the image of this popular myth, as many scholars think, to say: "You thought Nero was bad; wait till you see this!" (the way we today might use the image of Hitler, Stalin or Pol Pot). This image so shaped the views of early Christians—thousands of whose numbers had been eradicated under Nero in Rome—that "Nero" even reportedly became a term for "antichrist" in the Armenian language. Many later Christian writers, including Tertullian, Augustine and Jerome, connected Nero with the antichrist. The view that John here uses this Nero redivivus myth has continued through history and is widely held by modern scholars, such as F. F. Bruce, William Barclay and most commentators on Revelation. Politically dangerous oracles were known forms of Greek and Jewish protest, and Rome would have taken serious offense at the implications of this exiled prophet John had the authorities cared to take note of the symbolism of his book. See further comment on the number of the beast in 13:18 and the return of a king in 17:9-11. None of this means that Revelation or its early interpreters expected literal Nero to rise from the dead; emperors often claimed to be a second or new "Augustus" or some other emperor before them, and a new Nero need be no more literally the same person as his model than a new Moses or Elijah (Rev 11:5-6) or new Joshua or Zerubbabel (11:4) would need to be the same people as their models.

13:1. Rome came "from the sea" from the vantage point of the eastern empire, although the image itself is borrowed from Daniel 7:3. (*4 *Ezra* 11:1 likewise has a symbol for Rome—an eagle with twelve wings and three heads—come from the sea, although in 13:1 a messianic figure does the same.)

Emperors bore titles such as "divine" ("god," on Asian coins) and "son of a god" (i.e., of the preceding ruler), and Domitian demanded the address "Lord and God," thus "blasphemous names" here (see comment on Rev 13:5-6 for Old

Testament background). On seven-headed beasts, see comment on 12:3; on the heads, see comment on 17:9-10.

13:2. Daniel described four beasts, representing four successive empires (7:3-7); the fourth, probably the Greek empire of Alexander, was in John's day often interpreted to represent Rome instead. This passage uses components from several of Daniel's beasts (which were a winged lion, a bear, a winged leopard and a beast with iron teeth) to portray a composite of oppressive evil, evoking the worst feelings his hearers would have toward Rome and all oppressive political powers.

13:3. Much of the passage can be explained by the beast's imitating God as a false god, hence the pseudoresurrection here. But many commentators have also seen reference here to the myth that Nero, who apparently died in A.D. 68, was alive and would return (according to some forms of the story, Nero was dead but would return from the dead; see introduction to 13:1-10).

13:4. The praise here offered to the beast mimics a praise often offered to God (Ex 15:11; cf. Judith 6:2-3; Sirach 33:5, 10).

13:5-6. The proud mouth is the sort of imagery that later fed into the antichrist traditions (originally built around Antiochus Epiphanes and those after him who would be like him—Dan 7:8, 20, 25; 11:36; 1 Maccabees 1:24). On the forty-two months, see comment on Revelation 11:2-3; 12:6. The identifying of the tabernacle with the righteous heaven-dwellers matches the *Essene and early Christian picture of the righteous community as God's holy temple.

13:7. In Daniel 7:21-22, an antichristlike figure (applied first to Antiochus IV Epiphanes but necessarily reapplied to his successors in the role, with which history is replete) waged war against the *saints ("holy ones," God's people—7:18, 25; 8:24) and "overcame" them—until the day of judgment and the kingdom arrived. *Nero burned Christians alive to light his imperial gardens at night, crucified others and fed still others to wild beasts; they were his political scapegoat for a fire in Rome for which he and his boyfriend Tigellinus were being blamed. Domitian does not seem to have instituted an empirewide policy of repressing Christians, but some later emperors did so. Daniel spoke of all peoples, nations and languages (also mentioned in Dan 4:1; 6:25), including under oppressive rulers and worshiping a false image (Dan 3:4, 7; 5:19); as in Revelation, the oppressive human multicultural empire contrasts with God's own multicultural kingdom (7:14). (Although Daniel's formula usually includes three elements, the LXX includes four elements, as in Revelation, the first time the formula appears in Daniel at 3:4.)*

13:8. Antiochus Epiphanes, one of the earliest candidates for an antichrist sort of figure (second century B.C.), had brought all the nations (in his part of the world) under his authority as one people (1 Maccabees 1:41-43) and demanded the worship normally considered due rulers in the East. The Romans had likewise united much of the ancient world, and most of the ruler-worshipping eastern empire now worshiped the emperor. “All the earth” was used in other texts of John’s time to mean all the “civilized” earth, all that was under a mighty empire (e.g., Judith 2:7; 6:4; 11:1; although everyone was aware, from legend, mythology and trade connections, of peoples outside the sphere of Rome, Parthia and the northern barbarians). This verse indicates the Jewish doctrine of predestination, which many Jewish people held alongside the doctrine of free will (many of the early writers never saw enough tension between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility to contrast them, although the idea of God’s foreknowledge may have helped; see comment on Rom 9:19-21). On the “book of life” (cf. Dan 12:1), see comment on Philippians 4:3.

13:9. See comment on 2:7.

13:10. The language is from Jeremiah 15:2 and 43:11, where God promises to exterminate most of the Israelites by various means and to enslave the others in captivity; but the judgment here is against all nations who have rebelled against God. This judgment would encourage the martyred *saints concerning their vindication (Rev 14:11-12).

13:11-18

Enforcing Imperial Worship

Although most of the details of 13:1-10 could apply to the emperor of John’s day, and via him to totalitarian regimes throughout history, some of the details of 13:11-18 could suggest that John consciously anticipates its ultimate fulfillment in an emperor yet to come (17:11).

13:11-12. Although the evidence is limited, some think that the beast “from the earth,” as opposed to “from the sea” (13:1), represents the local provincial council who supervised the imperial cult in Asia, as opposed to the Roman administration. It was called the *commune Asiae*, headed by the Asiarchs from local towns (see comment on Acts 19:31). John may not imply any great difference between earth and sea (cf. Dan 7:3, 17). The “horned lamb” probably parodies *Christ (Rev 5:6); the two horns might reflect the power of ancient

Persia in Daniel 8:6. Fire from heaven parodies and so apparently relativizes the miraculous power of God's witnesses (Rev 11:5), as Pharaoh's magicians tried to do with Moses' miracles as long as they could (Ex 7:11, 22; 8:7, 18; cf. 2 Kings 18:33-35).

13:13. Although the ancient Mediterranean world was full of self-proclaimed wonderworkers (some of whom were friends of emperors), and a few wonders had been attributed to Domitian's father (the emperor Vespasian), such wonders were not regularly associated with the imperial cult. Although some people did pray to Caesar for help (e.g., Lucius in Apuleius's story of the ass and his transformation), most of the miracle reports are associated with temples like those of the healing deity Asclepius. (It is reported that some emperors in Roman history staged fake thunder or fire, but this was neither common nor central to the emperor's activity.) John apparently envisions a future blending of anti-Christian state religion and occult power, both of which existed mostly separately in his own day. His source for this view is undoubtedly Jesus (Mt 24:24; 2 Thess 2:9), and he has *Old Testament precedent for the occult powers in the service of an anti-God ruler repressing God's people (Ex 7:11, 22).

(As crosscultural studies of shamanism and spirit possession become more available, the once-popular tendency of commentators to rationalize away ancient reports of miracles, whether Christian or otherwise, will probably continue to diminish, although not all the reports, ancient or modern, are of equal value. Christianity has traditionally recognized the reality of other superhuman forces in the universe besides God—e.g., 1 Cor 10:20.)

13:14-15. Some magicians simulated the moving and speaking of idols (the skeptical *rhetorician *Lucian describes in detail the purported methods of a false prophet named Alexander). Hearing the extent to which the world can be deceived by false religion and state propaganda would evoke familiar discomfort in John's first Christian readers (cf. Deut 13:1-2). The demand to worship the image, which to the authorities symbolized appropriate loyalty to the state but to the Christians would symbolize apostasy, resembled the situation the Maccabean martyrs had faced (cf. 1 Maccabees 1:50-51) and especially the conflicts faced by Daniel's three friends (Dan 3:12-18; cf. 6:7).

13:16-17. A Greco-Egyptian king had similarly required Jews to be branded with the ivy leaf, the emblem of Dionysus (*3 Maccabees 2:28-29); this is likewise a mark of ownership, a brand or tattoo indicating to which god or empire one belongs. The term for "mark" is, among other things, the regular term for the imperial stamp on documents and of the image of his head on coins.

Like the other markings in Revelation, this one might be symbolic (see comment on 3:12; 7:3; cf. 14:1; 17:5; 19:12; 22:4); some Jewish texts speak of a symbolic mark of destruction on the forehead of the wicked (**Psalms of Solomon* 15:9) in contrast to the mark of the righteous (15:6). Some interpreters have nevertheless seen a tangible expression of allegiance to the world system; in at least the last two major imperial persecutions of Christians, both in the third century, certificates were issued to those who had fulfilled the mandated rite of emperor worship. But the text may simply imply a figurative slave brand identifying to whom a person belongs—God or the world. Participation in idolatry on at least some level appeared to be almost an economic necessity in many cities in Asia Minor (see comment on 2:18-29), and John warns that commercial discrimination would grow more severe, alongside the graver danger of martyrdom.

13:18. This verse is a typically cryptic *apocalyptic riddle* (cf. *Mt 24:15*). *Six hundred sixty-six is a doubly triangular number, which is very rare; though most ancient readers would not know that, some may have taken note of it, given Pythagorean and other interest in special numbers.* It has also been thought a parody on the divine number, seven, given Revelation's use of seven and given other demonic parodies of the divine in Revelation. Scholars more often turn to another explanation. "Counting a name" or word was an easy practice in Greek and Hebrew, which used letters as specific numbers (later Jewish teachers often played with the numerical values of words; this form of calculation was known as *gematria*). Many ingenious proposals have been made for the meaning of "666"; Irenaeus, a second-century Christian scholar, listed among the possibilities "Lateinos" (Rome as the final kingdom). Although the term may be transliterated into Hebrew letters more than one way, *therion*, "beast," can be spelled in Hebrew so as to come out to "666." This may be more than coincidence (though one might wonder why Revelation would treat the literal number of "beast" as a riddle). One might also transliterate *theriou*, "of the beast," as "616," a textual variant in Revelation 13:18. (The variant, however, loses the potential connection with the number seven or triangular numbers.)

But one of the most popular proposals among scholars is "Nero Caesar." Although his name comes out to 1,005 in Greek (which would have been obvious, because a familiar wordplay on that number of his name had circulated throughout the empire's graffiti), his name comes out to "666" if transliterated into Hebrew. If John intends an allusion to Nero here (see comment on 13:1-10), either he expects his readers to know to switch to Hebrew letters (probably with

the help of more skilled members of the congregation), or he and they had already used “666” in this manner. Some ancient Christian sources do indeed suggest that this interpretation was already known. The other possible spelling comes out to 616—which is a textual variant for Rev 13:18, as if *scribes knew the answer to the riddle but calculated the spelling differently. (This calculation requires using the Greek pronunciation Neron-Kaisar in Hebrew letters, with appropriate Hebrew numerical values: $N = 50$, $r = 200$, $n = 6$, $K = 100$, $s = 60$, $r = 200$. Hebrew used only consonants. The **Sibylline Oracles*, a Jewish document composed in Greek, does its *gematria* in Greek, not Hebrew; most of its readers would have been able to read only the former, being unable even to transliterate a name into proper Hebrew letters. Jewish scholars who used Hebrew incorporated many Greek loanwords, but John’s readers would need either some help or prior knowledge to discern his point.) If this is the correct explanation, or part of it, it helps explain the image of the deceased ruler returning in 17:9-11.

14:1-5

Followers of the Lamb

14:1. “And I looked, and behold” indicates another vision (Ezek 10:1; 44:4; Dan 10:5). Mount Zion was the Temple Mount (sometimes loosely encompassing all Jerusalem), thus applied to the heavenly temple in the present (Rev 11:19) but pointing to the new Jerusalem of the future (21:2), a hope shared by nearly all ancient Jews, who longed for the restoration of their city and its sanctuary. Mount Zion thus figures prominently in *apocalyptic expectations* (*it appears by that title in 4 Ezra and *2 Baruch*). Ancient *rhetoric often contrasted persons, but more relevantly here apocalyptic often contrasted the righteous and the wicked; the name on their foreheads contrasts with Revelation 13:16 (cf. 3:12; 7:3; 22:4). The association of the 144,000 with Zion here may represent their role as New Jerusalemites; on their possible identity, see comment on 7:4-8.

14:2. Ezekiel heard the sound of many waters in heaven (Ezek 1:24; 43:2; cf. Rev 1:15), and thunder was heard at Sinai (Ex 19:16; cf. Ezek 1:4, 13; Rev 4:5; 19:6). Ancient meteorology, as reflected in *1 *Enoch*, placed waters (for rain) and thunders in the heavens. Harps had been used by priests and Levites in the worship of the earthly temple; it was natural to expect them in heaven’s temple (Rev 5:8; 15:2).

14:3. Only these people could offer the song because it involved only them (5:9-10); on secret revelations in the heavens, see comment on 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. If Revelation portrays them as a spiritual army that has overcome (see comment on Rev 14:4), it may be relevant that warriors celebrated victory (see fuller comment at 15:3-4).

14:4. The Greek term translated “virgin” here is hardly ever applied to men in Greek literature (perhaps partly because men in ancient Greek culture rarely were), but it means never having had sex with someone of the opposite gender, and hence includes not being married. In a literal sense, this virginity was practiced most often among a Jewish group known as the *Essenes. But the image here may allude symbolically to the purity of priests for the temple service (Lev 15:16-18) or to the purity required by the rules of a spiritual holy war (Deut 23:9-11; 1 Sam 21:5; 2 Sam 11:11; *Qumran War Scroll). The latter suggestion would fit the possible military census that some commentators find in Revelation 7:4-8. Given the link to Zion (14:1), their chastity may also be a male version of that of the image of the New Jerusalem as a bride in contrast to Babylon the prostitute. “Firstfruits” were the beginning of harvest, offered up to God; the term declares their holiness as sacrifices devoted to God (Ex 23:19; 34:26; Lev 2:12; 23:10; Num 28:26; Neh 10:35; Jer 2:3) or perhaps that others like them would come after them.

14:5. The promised end-time remnant would have no lie in their mouths (Zeph 3:13). Truth-telling was important in ancient ethics, although it could be suspended even in the Bible to save life (e.g., Ex 1:19-20; Jer 38:25-27).

14:6-13

Vindication of the Righteous

14:6-7. On “midheaven” see comment on 8:13. The angel’s “good news” is the vindication of God’s people by judgment on the wicked (14:7; cf. Nahum 1:15). Because the activity of angels in heaven often corresponds to what happens on earth, however (12:7), some commentators have suggested that this picture may refer to the final proclamation of the good news of the *kingdom (including both salvation and vindication/judgment) preceding the end (cf. Mt 24:14).

14:8. In a taunting mockery of a dirge, Isaiah 21:9 announces, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon” (cf. Jer 51:8), referring to the historical Babylon that would later drag Judah off into captivity. But Jewish writers of John’s day saw

commonalities among all the empires that subjugated Israel, generally believing that Rome was the final such power (cf. Dan 2:35, 44). “Babylon” and its synonym, “the Chaldeans,” were used as ciphers for Rome in Jewish texts such as the *Dead Sea Scrolls, *4 *Ezra* and the later *rabbis* (although the rabbis use “Edom” more frequently). The Old Testament normally reserved the symbolic use of “prostitute” for the sins of God’s people (with only two exceptions), but the allusion here is to Babylon in Jeremiah 51:7, who made all the nations drunk with its wine (i.e., Babylon was God’s judgment on them).

14:9-10. In the Old Testament, God passed around a cup of intoxicating wrath to all the nations (cf. Ps 75:8; Is 51:17, 21-22; 63:6; Jer 25:15; 49:12; Ezek 23:31; Hab 2:16; Zech 12:2; also the Dead Sea Scrolls; for infidelity, cf. Num 5:24). Fire and brimstone were appropriate for a spiritual Sodom (Rev 11:8; Gen 19:24), although the image may be broader than that (e.g., Ezek 38:22). (This text need not imply that they cannot repent if they do so before death or the world’s end—Rev 2:21; 11:10-13.) As often in apocalyptic literature, the wicked get to see what they missed (cf. also Ps 112:10); but Revelation omits a common apocalyptic feature, in which the righteous also get to see and gloat over the fate of the damned (e.g., *1 Enoch* 108:14-15).

14:11. The eternal smoking of Edom (night and day; contrast 4:8; 12:10) is described in similar terms in Isaiah 34:10, but there the meaning is desolation, whereas here it is eternal burning and torment. On the alternate views of judgment in ancient Judaism, of which the present view appears among the harshest, see comment on Matthew 3:12 or “*Gehenna” in the glossary.

14:12. Many comfortable people today (understandably influenced in part by historical misapplications of biblical ideals of mercy) dislike the idea of judgment. But salvation/deliverance in the Old Testament picture was not complete without vindication—removing the shame of the oppressed by punishing their unrepentant oppressors. The martyrs are here assured that they will be vindicated to the utmost (cf. 13:10).

14:13. Jewish texts spoke longingly of the day when the sufferings of the righteous would end. Greco-Roman letters of consolation stressed either that the dead were happy or that they were at least not sad, but Judaism especially stressed the peace of the righteous dead. The writer of *1 Enoch* noted that the wicked would have no rest (99:13-14; cf. Rev 14:11), but the righteous dead would have great rewards (*1 Enoch* 103:3), and the idea of rest for the righteous dead occurs throughout Jewish texts (Syriac Menander, Wisdom of Solomon). Jewish funerary inscriptions regularly mentioned peace for the dead; over half

the Jewish epitaphs recovered in Rome included the words “in peace” (hence “rest in peace” is not only a modern concept). The image of reward for works is from the Old Testament and is common in Judaism and in the *New Testament (see comment on Rev 22:12).

14:14-20

Reaping the Earth

14:14-16. Commentators debate whether “one like a son of man” here refers to Jesus (1:13; Dan 7:13), or simply means that this figure appeared human, in contrast to some of the other angelic figures in the book (Rev 4:7; *Christ would not need to take orders—14:15-16*). *The harvest is also an image of judgment against Babylon in the Old Testament (Jer 51:33); it is specifically appropriate for the final battle when blood would flow, as Joel 3:13 noted: “Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full” (NASB).*

14:17-19. Because crushed grapes could look like human blood (Gen 49:11), this image, playing on Joel 3:13 (cf. also Jer 25:30), was powerful for ancients, who were more familiar with viticulture than most modern peoples are (contrast Christ and his people as a vine in Jn 15:1). This harvest image is particularly from Isaiah 63:1-6: God goes on to tread the winepress of his fury and tramples the nations, splattering his garments with their lifeblood. For angels over various elements of nature (including fire), see comment on Revelation 7:1.

14:20. Ancient reports of urban battles sometimes refer to streets flowing with blood due to the massive slaughter that occurred in a short span of time. For example, exaggerating the massacre at Bethar, the rabbis declared that rivers of blood flowed from the city to the distant sea, rolling boulders from their place and submerging horses. Likewise, *1 *Enoch* reported God judging people by letting them slay one another till blood flowed in streams (100:1-2), so that horses walked up to their chests in it and chariots were submerged (100:3); cf. similarly other oracles of the end time (**Sibylline Oracles*, several times).

The literal number here, “1,600 stadia” (NIV), which is about 200 miles (NASB, NRSV, GNT), is a square number (40 x 40), probably used roundly for a large quantity (although some also report that some ancients estimated the length of Palestine to about 1,600 stadia). The wine of God’s wrath (14:10, 19) turns out to be human blood here, which is drunk in 16:6; other texts also speak of being drunk with blood (e.g., Judith 6:4).

15:1-4

Response of the Saints to Their Vindication

15:1. Ancient texts sometimes began and ended on the same point, thus bracketing it off (this design is called an *inclusio*). The heavenly perspective on the judgments on earth is bracketed by 15:1 and 8.

15:2. The *saints celebrate their vindication in 15:2-4. Jewish texts often spoke of rivers of fire proceeding from God's throne, based on Daniel 7:9-10; this image is mingled here with the imagery of the heavenly temple (on the "sea," see comment on Rev 4:6), in contrast to the lake of fire. Their triumph over their oppressor may also suggest another connotation of the "sea": like Israel delivered from the Egyptians, who were slain in the Red Sea, they offer God praise (15:3-4).

15:3-4. The "great and wonderful" (GNT) works refer to the plagues (15:1; cf. Ex 15:11). The "song of Moses" could refer to Deuteronomy 32 (especially to the part where God avenges the blood of his servants—32:34-43), which was used alongside psalms in Jewish worship. But in this context Moses' song almost surely refers to his song of triumph and praise after his people came safely across the sea, where their enemies were drowned (Ex 15:1-18). "Song of the lamb" recalls redemption from the final plague (Rev 5:6).

The language here recalls psalms, especially Psalm 86:9-10; the *Old Testament often proclaimed the hope of the remnant of the nations turning to God. "King of the ages" (the variant reading) or "of the world" was a common Jewish title for God. God would be universally and solely worshiped as king in the final day of judgment (cf. Zech 14:9).

15:5–16:1

Preparing the Final Plagues

15:5. On the heavenly tabernacle/temple, see comment on 4:6 and Hebrews 8:1-5.

15:6. Ancient Jewish literature often viewed angels as wearing white linen, but such texts also described priests in this manner, and John portrays these angels as servants of the heavenly temple.

15:7. The image of the golden bowls is probably derived from the use of such incense bowls in the temple before its destruction several decades before; cf. 5:8 and 8:3. On the cup of wrath, see comment on 14:9-10.

15:8. The temple filling with glory recalls the dedications of the earthly temple in earlier times (Ex 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11; cf. Ezek 10:3-4 for its withdrawal).

16:1. The *Old Testament commonly used the phrase “pour out wrath” (especially throughout Jeremiah and Ezekiel); the image of the cup may be related to this idea.

16:2-11

The First Four Bowls of Wrath

Like the trumpet plagues, the imagery for most of these judgments is especially borrowed from the judgments on Egypt in the Old Testament book of Exodus, reminding John’s hearers that they, like Israel of old, were protected from these judgments that would eventuate in the capitulation of their oppressors and their own deliverance.

16:2. Sores were the sixth plague in Exodus 9:10.

16:3. This plague was the first in Exodus 7:20 (the second plague in the listing in Rev 8:8).

16:4. This judgment also extends the first plague (Ex 7:20; cf. comment on the third plague in Rev 8:10).

16:5. The oppressed often cried to God to vindicate them; and when vindicated, they praised God for his justice (often in psalms; the language was also used for his mercy, e.g., Tobit 3:2). In the *Old Testament God often let people destroy themselves (the wicked fell into their own trap), and sometimes punished them in ways obviously related to their crime (see comment on 16:6-7 below). Judaism developed this theme, emphasizing the appropriateness of particular punishments against the wicked. Jewish people believed that angels had charge over different elements of nature, including over the seas (see comment on Rev 7:1).

16:6-7. Early Jewish tradition declared that God turned the water of Egypt to blood to requite them for shedding the blood of Israel’s children (Wisdom of Solomon 11:5-7). (On the wicked being “worthy” of punishment, compare Wisdom of Solomon 16:1, 9; 17:4; 19:4; cf. *Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.3.5, 216.) This observation develops a genuine theme in Exodus: in response to Pharaoh drowning Israel’s babies in the Nile, God later turned the Nile to blood, struck Egypt’s firstborn and drowned Pharaoh’s army. The image of drinking blood

was sometimes used metaphorically for shedding it, so the justice of the judgment would be apparent even to the few hearers unfamiliar with the exodus story (some recent *Gentile converts). The altar speaks up as a witness to the lives of the righteous sacrificed on it by martyrdom (see comment on 6:9).

16:8-9. The Old Testament mentions being stricken by heat as a common suffering of field laborers and wanderers in the desert (e.g., Ps 121:6; cf. Ex 13:21); although it is not one of the plagues on Egypt, it contrasts with the following plague of darkness. On unrepentance, see comment on 9:21; the purpose of judgments, up until final destruction, was to secure *repentance (Amos 4:6-11).

16:10-11. Darkness was the ninth plague (Ex 10:22; the fourth plague in Rev 8:12); the darkness in Egypt could be “felt” (Ex 10:21).

16:12-21

The Final Bowls of Wrath

16:12. Every informed reader in the Roman Empire, especially in places like Asia Minor and Syria-Palestine near the Parthian border, would understand the “kings of the East” as the Parthians; the river Euphrates was the boundary between the Roman and Parthian empires (although some border states like Armenia kept changing hands); cf. 9:14. Swollen, large rivers could delay the crossing of armies until bridges or rafts had been constructed, but God sees to it that this army will encounter no delays. (The same image of difficulty in crossing major rivers is implied in the new exodus of the Euphrates’s parting in *4 *Ezra* 13:43-47, but Revelation uses the image for an invading army [a natural usage], not for captivity and restoration.) Some streams dried up during some seasons in the Near East, but the Euphrates would not do so naturally; God, however, could dry up rivers in judgment (Nah 1:4).

16:13-14. The writer of *2 *Baruch* mentions the release of *demons to wreak havoc in the final period before the end. Frogs were negative symbols (Ovid, *Apuleius*, *Artemidorus*); *one ancient writer* (Plutarch) even suggested tongue in cheek that Nero would be reincarnated as a frog. In this text the frogs may allude loosely to one plague on Egypt that John had not had room to include up to this point (second plague—Ex 8:5-7); here the dragon is compelled to act as God’s agent in bringing judgment. In Jewish texts like the *Qumran War Scroll, the army of Belial (the devil), consisting of the nations and apostate Israel, would

gather to be destroyed by God and his faithful remnant (cf. 4 *Ezra*). Gathering the nations for judgment is the judgment language of the *Old Testament prophets (Joel 3:2, 11; Zeph 3:8; cf. Is 43:9), as is the “day of the Lord” (e.g., Amos 5:18-20).

16:15. Guards were to stay awake at their posts at night. It was common for people to sleep naked at night in the warm season, but most Jewish people would be horrified to be seen naked in public; perhaps the image is of a naked householder chasing a thief. The ultimate roots of the shameful nakedness image are from the Old Testament, perhaps for the shameful stripping of captive Babylon (Is 47:3), one drunk (Hab 2:16), or God’s adulterous people (Hos 2:3; Ezek 16:37; cf. Rev 3:18); on the thief image, see comment on Revelation 3:3.

16:16. The Lord had promised to gather the nations (Joel 3:2, 11; Zeph 3:8; Zech 12:3; 14:2; cf. Is 13:4; Jer 50:29, against Babylon); Jewish tradition about the end time continued this image (*1 *Enoch*, *Dead Sea Scrolls). The nations and the dragon who led them might intend their gathering for other purposes, but God was gathering them to their own final destruction.

The Old Testament site of the future battle was the valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2, 12, 14), probably the strategic plain of Megiddo in the valley of Jezreel and Esdraelon. It was the corridor between the easily traveled coastal plain and the road to Damascus in Aram, and thus an essential crossing point for armies avoiding the difficult mountains (Judg 5:19; 6:33; 2 Chron 35:22; Zech 12:11; Pharaoh Thutmose III in 1483 B.C., etc.). Megiddo was a plain, not a mountain (“Har-Magedon,” which the KJV read as “Armageddon,” is literally “mountain of Megiddo”). Nevertheless, so transforming the site (for those who knew some Hebrew) would not be incongruent with John’s *apocalyptic geography (13:1; 17:1, 3, 9). John’s exact referent is debated, but a site related to the valley of Megiddo remains the most common view and some might recognize that this site would allow the armies of the East to engage Rome in Palestine.

16:17-18. This language suggests preparation for a theophany, a manifestation of God’s glory, as at Sinai (cf. Ex 19:16; Rev 4:5); the powerful earthquake may suggest the end of the age (see 6:12; 11:13).

16:19. The oppressed would cry out to God to remember their oppressors’ deeds against them (Ps 137:7). On the cup, see comment on Revelation 14:9-10.

16:20. This sort of language normally concerns the “end of the world” (see comment on 6:14)—vast, cosmic devastation.

16:21. This hail is much more severe than that in Exodus 9:24; it would crush everything in its path, leaving no survivors; this language too must be

relegated to the end of the age. People's unrepentance indicated how much they deserved the judgment to begin with (Ex 7:22); see comment on Revelation 16:9.

17:1-5

A Vision of the Prostitute

Although the *Old Testament usually reserved figurative use of the designation "prostitute" for God's faithless people (e.g., Lev 17:7; Is 1:21; Jer 3:1-14; Ezek 16; 23; Hos 4:15), it was also appropriately applied to mighty mercantile or military centers. Thus Isaiah 23:16-18 portrayed Tyre as a prostitute who served all the kingdoms of the world; Nineveh as capital of a world empire also was called a harlot and sorceress, who sold nations (into slavery) by both devices (Nah 3:4). Allusions to both passages appear in Revelation 18–19. (Sorcery and prostitution are also linked in Is 57:3; cf. 2 Kings 9:22.) The false prophetess portrayed earlier in the book might appear as an agent of the system (Rev 2:20). See comment on 18:23.

Parallels and contrasts between Babylon the prostitute, in this passage, and the New Jerusalem the bride, in chapter 21, fit the practice in *apocalyptic literature (and other sources, such as wisdom literature) of contrasting the righteous and the wicked. One need not assume that John's prophecies of Babylon apply only to Rome; other evil empires have also come and gone. Because Rome was the Babylon of John's day, however, it supplies the images for John's original audience in the seven *churches.

17:1. Angelic guides were common in apocalypses, especially when the writer was given a tour of heaven or earth. Ancient art pictured cities as their patron goddess, often enthroned on the shore of a river; thus, for example, a coin from the reign of Domitian's father depicted the goddess Roma seated on seven hills. Rome, whose empire spread throughout the Mediterranean coasts, is naturally portrayed here as sitting on many waters (cf. Ps 65:7; Is 17:12-13).

17:2. Rulers of client states in Asia and Syria subservient to Rome were called "kings," even though they had to please Rome and cooperate with its agents; they also raised no objections to the imperial cult. Undoubtedly they did not think they were prostituting themselves, but any rare pockets of nationalistic resistance (such as in Judea, which was monotheistic besides) would have differed with their evaluation. For the nations' becoming drunk on Babylon's

wine, see Jeremiah 51:7.

17:3. For being carried away in visions by the *Spirit, see Ezekiel 8:3; 11:1 and 24 (a “strong spirit” in *2 *Baruch*; angels in *1 *Enoch*). The wilderness was the place of another symbolic woman’s new exodus (Rev 12:6, 14), although it was also associated with the demonic in some Jewish tradition; the point here may be that the woman who fancied herself seated on many waters would actually be “desolate” (using a Greek word related to the word for “desert,” i.e., barren like the wilderness—17:16). Some relate the beast (13:1) to the she-wolf of Roman legend associated with the goddess Roma (seated on seven hills) on some contemporary Roman coins (although John had ample Jewish precedent in representing kingdoms as beasts, e.g., Dan 8). The scarlet color of the beast is probably related to the blood of martyrs with which it was stained (Rev 17:6), or to the ostentation of the wealthy or of prostitutes (cf. 17:4; Jer 4:30). On the blasphemous names, see comment on 13:1 and 5-6.

17:4. True purple and scarlet required expensive dyes and were thus worn only by the wealthy, such as queens (18:7), or by well-to-do prostitutes, who used purple attire to attract attention. Many ancient moralists reviled the ostentation of wealthy women, but John also intends a contrast between the earthly splendor of Rome, renowned throughout its provinces, and the true splendor of the heavenly woman (12:1; 21:9-14) and heaven’s court (4:3-11; comparison of characters was a major feature of ancient speech and writing).

17:5. As “mother” (cf. 2:23) of “prostitutes” and “abominations” (perhaps idolatries), “Babylon” is pictured as the most terrible of them all. (In the East, where married women generally covered their hair, a “prostitute’s forehead” [Jer 3:3; cf. Hos 2:2] might seem an obvious image in this period; of course, most persons in Revelation are identified by their forehead or hand anyway [e.g., Rev 7:3; 13:16]. Older Greek literature reports the slander that Babylonian women were all required to play the prostitute once in life, but it is doubtful that this association was popular in the *New Testament period; the imagery comes instead from the Old Testament.)

17:6-18

The Meaning of the Prostitute

17:6. Given the ancient horror of cannibalism, the image of “drunk with blood” is a terrifying one. Although the verse refers to Christians martyred under Rome

in general, Rome's thirst for blood may have brought a special image to many minds. Rome's officials kept the multitudes happy with free grain and public amusements, the latter including especially bloodshed in the arena. Criminals and slaves were special candidates for satiating the public appetite for violent entertainment; once Christians were considered criminals (in the first century, especially clear under Nero), their large numbers would supply an inordinate proportion of victims. See comment on 16:6.

17:7-8. Again using the ancient *rhetorical technique of comparison, Revelation pictures the beast who “was and is not and is to come”—a parody on the eternity of God (1:4). apocalyptic texts often specialized in explaining cryptic revelations, frequently with the aid of an angel. On seven heads and ten horns, see comment on 12:3; 13:1; as it was widely recognized that children often looked like their parents, the beast bears a striking resemblance to the dragon.

17:9. It was common knowledge that the original city of Rome sat on seven hills; this datum appears throughout Roman literature and on Roman coins and was celebrated in the name of the annual Roman festival called Septimontium. Here the hills have become mountains in characteristic apocalyptic *hyperbole. (The seven mountains of paradise in *1 Enoch* 24:2 and 32:1 are probably unrelated, unless by way of radical contrast. But the **Sibylline Oracles* also prophesied judgment against “seven-hilled Rome”—2:18; 11:109-16.)

Various features identify Rome as the Babylon of John's day:

1. It sits on seven hills.
2. In John's part of the world, it was the “city that reigns over the kings of the earth” (17:18).
3. Like Babylon it had conquered God's people and destroyed Jerusalem.
4. Because it had conquered God's people and destroyed Jerusalem, some other Jewish interpreters portrayed Rome as a new Babylon, and it had long been viewed as successor of other evil empires including Babylon.
5. It was a mercantile empire that sat on waters and is known to have traded in precisely the kinds of merchandise listed in 18:12-13.
6. The suggested new Nero imagery (13:1-2, 18; 17:9-11) fits Rome.

Like many Jewish interpreters of his day who construed Old Testament language in multiple ways, John here allows his symbolism to stand for more than one referent (see Rev 17:10-11).

17:10-11. Some commentators count the kings starting from the first emperor (Augustus) but use up the seven before reaching the current emperor, Domitian, although the text itself claims that one of the seven was then reigning (v. 10). An allusion to the legendary kings who preceded the Roman Republic fails because obviously none of them is still living, either.

The real clue is that one king was then reigning, and one of the seven would return. Whether an author writing in the reign of the Flavian king Domitian would count the three brief usurpers between Nero and Vespasian as “kings” is doubtful; hence Nero, probably viewed as less than seven kings before Domitian, would appear as one of the seven. Interestingly, Nero was also expected to return (see comment on 13:1-10).

17:12. Ten horns represented ten kings in Daniel 7:24, possibly successors of Alexander the Great’s Greco-Macedonian kingdom; most Jewish people in the Roman era, however, read Daniel’s fourth kingdom as Rome. They might thus apply the description to Rome’s client states in the East (cf. Rev 17:2).

17:13. The kings’ unified conspiracy against God would come to nothing; this conviction had long been part of Jewish hope (cf. Ps 2:2; 83:5).

17:14. “King of kings” had long been applied to supreme rulers of the East (Ezra 7:12; Ezek 26:7; Dan 2:37; cf. 2:47) and was now used as the title of the Parthian king, Rome’s most feared earthly nemesis. More significantly, Jewish people regularly applied these titles to God (from Deut 10:17; Dan 2:47). This true ruler over the earth’s kings (cf. 1:5) contrasts with Rome’s control of mere client kingdoms (17:2).

17:15-16. The Roman Empire and its allies would eventually turn on Rome itself—a threat concerning the self-destructiveness and lack of faithfulness of those who pursue evil. The image is from the Old Testament (Jer 4:30; Lam 1:2; Ezek 23:9). The burning derives from Daniel 7:11. Although fire was the standard method for destroying captured cities in antiquity (Amos 1:4), some knowledgeable readers might have remembered the rumor that Nero burned down Rome in A.D. 64 and blamed it on the Christians: Rome thus ought to be wiser than to embrace one who might be like a new Nero. (The proposed allusion to burning for sexual immorality in Lev 21:9 is less likely; cf. Deut 22:21.)

17:17. Jewish people recognized that the present world was dominated by evil powers but viewed those powers only as angels with limited authority; they recognized that God rules the ages. They also realized that, as in the Old Testament, God raises up one nation to judge another, but his purposes are far

different from the purposes of the finite nations themselves (e.g., Jer 51:11, 29; 52:3; Joel 2:11).

17:18. In John's day, no one in the Roman Empire could have doubted that the city that "reigns over kings" meant Rome, any more than anyone would have doubted that the seven hills (17:9) alluded to Rome.

18:1-24

A Dirge over Babylon

Ancients often contrasted weddings (see 19:7-9) with funerals. In contrast to the praises in 19:1-7, Revelation 18:2-3, 10-19 contains funeral dirges over Babylon, following *Old Testament models; prophets sometimes ironically mourned a city's destruction, thereby prophesying its ruin. (More generally, laments over fallen cities were an ancient literary form.) It is difficult for us to catch the impact today: a condemned and probably aged prophet, confined to an island for defying the whims of the mightiest empire the Mediterranean or Middle Eastern world had ever known, prophesied that empire's destruction. Yet the faith he proclaimed has spread throughout the world, and Rome has now been fallen for more than fifteen centuries. Although "Babylon" stood for Rome in John's day, other embodiments of the oppressive world system have risen and fallen since then.

Ancient *rhetoricians and writers often showed off their epideictic (praise) rhetorical skills by praising important cities, as in Aelius Aristides's lavish flattery of Rome. In contrast to such praises, John describes the city's power and wealth to condemn it, as the Old Testament prophets did with arrogant empires, and to produce a funeral eulogy that curses instead of blesses. Oracles of woe against the nations were common in the Old Testament and continued in some Jewish literature of John's day (particularly **Sibylline Oracles*). Dominant biblical allusions in this passage include not only Old Testament references to Babylon but also to Tyre, a prosperous and boastful mercantile center, in Ezekiel 26-28.

18:1. Powerful angels were frequently described as shining like lightning or the sun (Dan 10:6 and often in later Jewish texts).

18:2. Old Testament prophets often pronounced an event as done even though it had yet to be fulfilled in practice. John takes this taunt-lamentation against Babylon directly from the Old Testament (Is 21:9; cf. Jer 51:8), as well

as the description of a barren land possessed only by desert creatures (Is 34:9-15; cf. Jer 50:13; 51:29, 37; other cities—Jer 9:11; 49:33; cf. Baruch 4:33-35). (The mention of “*demons” also appears in the *LXX of Is 34:14.) Although Rome’s population was probably close to a million in John’s day, five centuries later it may have been as low as thirty thousand.

18:3. Cf. Jer 51:7. Later Jewish resistance oracles (some *Sibylline Oracles*) likewise portrayed Rome as lying with many suitors but headed for judgment. On the nations drinking from her cup, see comment on 14:8.

18:4. In pronouncing judgment on Babylon, Jeremiah warned his people—who were supposed to be at home there in the short term (29:4-10)—to flee from the city’s midst, because God would destroy it (51:6, 45; cf. Zech 2:7); even the presence of some of the righteous would not stay the judgment (cf. Gen 19:17). (In the *Dead Sea Scrolls, the righteous were to “separate” themselves from the “children of the pit”; in one *Essene commentary on Nahum*, when the iniquity of those who were leading people astray was exposed, the righteous of Ephraim would flee from among them, joining the forces of the true Israel. But Qumran separatism, unlike early Christian separatism, was geographic.) Getting out of an imminently doomed city was common sense for anyone who believed the prophecy (cf. Tobit 14:8; Ex 9:20-21); John’s largest concern, however, may be worldliness: how much of the spirit of Babylon was inside the churches (especially in Sardis, Laodicea and the like).

18:5. Jewish people recognized in the Old Testament (e.g., Gen 15:16; 2 Kings 22:20) that if God’s full judgment was delayed, it meant only that he was storing up retribution for the sins of many generations to pour them out on an even more wicked generation (also Mt 23:34-36). “High as heaven” may be an idiom (1 Sam 5:12) but certainly implies that God would take notice (cf. Gen 18:21).

18:6. Paying retribution to the wicked according to their mistreatment of others was a fairly common theme in the Old Testament (Neh 4:4; Esther 9:25; Ps 7:15-16; 35:8; 57:6; Prov 26:27; 28:10; Dan 6:24; Jer 50:15, 29—Babylon; Obad 15). Paying someone back “double” indicated that the retribution would be more than complete (Is 40:2); it was also the punishment expected for a thief (Ex 22:4, 7, 9). For the cup with the wine of judgment, cf. Jeremiah 51:7, Psalm 75:8, Isaiah 51:22-23 and other references in comment on Revelation 14:9-10.

18:7. For John, the “queen” might evoke Jezebel (Rev 2:20), but a clearer connection with the Old Testament here is the quotation from Isaiah. Here John cites Isaiah 47:8-9 (also used by the *Sibylline Oracles*), condemning Babylon’s

arrogance and smug security that it would never fall (cf. also, e.g., Is 32:9; Jer 48:11; 49:31; Ezek 16:49; Amos 6:1; Obad 3). Rome claimed to be the “eternal city” and certainly glorified itself; it allowed subject peoples to worship the goddess Roma, who personified Rome. Rome’s luxury (including grain subsidies to keep the local masses happy) came at the expense of other nations, such as the heavily taxed peasants of Egypt. The thoughtless extravagance of the Roman elite invited God’s wrath; cf. Amos 4:1-2.

18:8. Beset by problems ignored by its king Nabonidus, ancient Babylon had fallen without battle to its conquerors in a single night, as Jewish people well knew (Dan 5:30). But this new “Babylon,” the new site of the oppression of God’s people, would be judged with fire (see comment on Rev 17:16). The image of Rome’s destruction by fire would be vivid to anyone who knew of the city’s burning a generation before, in A.D. 64. In the context of one of the dominant quotations in this context, the God who would vindicate his people and judge Babylon was “strong” (Jer 50:34; cf. 32:18; Deut 10:17; Neh 9:32).

18:9-10. Although the imagery is not totally consistent here (cf. 17:16; but *apocalyptic imagery did not have to be consistent), genuine mourning might be natural: client kings were normally appointed only with the favor of Rome, and Rome’s fall would grant freedom and prestige to political competitors.

18:11. The fleet of merchant ships bringing grain to Rome, by which the fertile soil around the Nile fed the masses of Italy, represented the largest form of transport until modern times. Revelation especially addresses the luxury trade (18:12-16), focusing on nonessential items secured for those who could afford them. Rome’s port of Ostia, constructed roughly half a century earlier, had a square with many offices for the merchants overseeing its international trade. With Rome destroyed, wealthy shippers would become no better off than the empire’s peasants—whose situation in some regions might improve without heavy Roman taxation. The image of merchants mourning over a great trade center is from descriptions of Tyre in Isaiah 23:1-8 and especially Ezekiel 27, a passage that describes in more detail the city’s greatness.

18:12-13. Most of Rome’s gold and silver came from mines in Spain, many of them confiscated from their owners; slaves who worked these mines had brief life expectancies. Rome imported precious stones (for use by wealthy men but especially their wives) especially from India. Romans procured pearls (perhaps Rome’s heaviest trade with the East) from the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, but particularly from India, where divers risked their lives to secure them. Spain, Asia Minor and especially Egypt supplied most of the fine linen (becoming more

prominent than wool by this period). Rome procured the costly purple dye mainly from Phoenicia, and red especially from the kermes oak of Asia Minor. Although some silk was grown on the Aegean island of Cos, Rome imported most silk from China; some Romans thought it grew on trees. This special kind of scented wood (“citron wood”—NIV, NASB) had long been imported from western North Africa as far east as Cyrene, but having depleted most of those forests Rome now imported most of it from Morocco; one table made from this wood was so expensive that one could have bought a large estate with the price. Romans imported marble, especially used for palaces, from North Africa, including Egypt, and Greece. Cinnamon, including both the plant’s wood and, more expensively, the spice made from its shoots and bark, came from Somalia; trading ships with East Africa made a two-year round-trip voyage, traveling as far south as Tanzania. Wealthy Romans used incense to perfume their homes (and in religious rituals), and imported most of the aromatic merchandise specified here. One spice here comes from south India; myrrh, from Yemen and Somalia; frankincense, from southern Arabia.

Although not a luxury item, the amount of wheat imported to support the Roman populace (an estimated four hundred thousand tons of grain each year) also suggests exploitation; two hundred thousand families in Rome ate free imported grain while many children in Egypt, one of the empire’s most fertile regions, starved. The empire’s economy positively generated wealth, but it was inequitably distributed to the advantage of those who held power. In contrast to wheat more generally, “fine flour” was a luxury good imported in largest quantities from Africa. Beef was rarely eaten even by the wealthy, and people rarely ate mutton; Italy used cattle as work animals, and sheep for wool. Italy imported horses primarily for chariot races, used for public entertainment, and to draw the carriages of the very few people who were rich.

The list climaxes with the worst forms of exploitation: slaves ultimately from subjugated peoples but in more recent times mainly from breeding slaves, and sometimes discarded babies raised as slaves. “Human lives” (NASB, NRSV, GNT) comes from Ezekiel 27:13, where it refers to Tyre’s wicked trade in slaves (Scripture treated this trade as a capital offense; this was the usual meaning of “kidnapping,” a capital offense in Deut 24:7). If distinguished at all from “slaves,” it probably refers to people reserved for gladiatorial shows and other forms of death to entertain the public; criminals, prisoners of war, the lowest of slaves and Christians were commonly used in such shows.

John may model his list after Ezekiel 27:2-24, but he condenses and updates

it to apply to Rome. One first-century source (Pliny the Elder) offers a list of Roman imports that contains items very similar to the present list. A second-century writer estimated Rome's imports just from China, India and Arabia at roughly thirty million denarii (a denarius was a day's wage in Palestine). Rome was a center of international trade, and no merchant marine existed like Rome's for a thousand years after its demise.

18:14-15. For "fear" at its fall, cf. the reaction predicted for Tyre's fall in Ezekiel 26:17-18; the merchants' investments are lost.

18:16. On the adornments, cf. 17:4; these represent Rome's extravagance and wealth. Those who had never been to Rome often had an exaggerated opinion of its greatness (some later Mesopotamian *rabbis spoke of 365 sections of Rome, each with 365 palaces, each with 365 stories!). But it was the most powerful city that the ancient Mediterranean had ever known and that most of the world would know for many centuries after it. No one in the provinces could describe the judgment on Rome and not think of the destruction of great wealth (e.g., also the *Sibylline Oracles*).

18:17-19. Throwing dust on one's head was a familiar way of mourning. The merchants themselves had good reason to mourn—they were now out of business, perhaps with outstanding debts on their expensive cargoes that would lead to the loss of everything they had.

18:20. Writers sometimes bracketed a section with a key phrase; 18:20, 24 address vengeance for the blood of God's people. Judgment of the wicked is vindication of the righteous; cf. 6:9-11. The Greek phrase (literally "God has judged your judgment from her") may mean that God convicted Rome by applying to that city the judgment of its own law courts against the Christians. When Rome was later sacked by the barbarians of northern Europe after its acceptance of Christendom, the North African theologian Augustine explained that the judgment was due to Rome's past sins (cf. 18:5) and a church too weak to avert judgment in its own time (cf. 18:4).

18:21. In Jeremiah 51:63-64, the prophet is commanded to hurl a stone into the Euphrates and declare that Babylon would likewise sink, never to rise again. Rome sometimes used drowning as a punishment, recognizing that it was a horrible fate. Here the stone is the kind of millstone turned by a donkey, so heavy that it could never be retrieved from the sea, and probably alluding to Jesus' earlier warning (Mk 9:42).

18:22. The ghastly silence of Babylon here means complete devastation, as it meant in Isaiah 13:20-22: the city is without inhabitants.

18:23. The “voice of the bridegroom and bride” was the ultimate sound of joy; the prophets used the image of its stifling for terrible destruction (Jer 16:9; 25:10; Joel 1:8). Babylon, who would be left a widow (Rev 18:7, following Is 47:8), was a sorceress (Is 47:9) like Nineveh of old, a prostitute who enslaved nations (Nah 3:4, which supplies much of the wording here); the “sorceries” (KJV) here may refer to love potions or to the occult rites of their pagan priests. (Jezebel is associated with both sorcery and spiritual prostitution in 2 Kings 9:22.)

18:24. God dealt vengeance against those stained with the blood of the innocent (Jer 2:34). Although it is not technically true that all the righteous were killed in Rome (cf. Mt 23:35), Rome assumed responsibility for their slaughter as the present embodiment of the oppressive empire, a trait of corporate human sin that recurs throughout history.

19:1-10

Praise over Babylon’s Fall

The scene shifts immediately from mourning on earth to rejoicing in heaven (cf. 18:20); the martyrs have been vindicated at last. Although the reference is particularly to Rome, it may look beyond Rome to the oppressive elements of the world system that carry on Rome’s role until the return of Christ.

19:1. “Hallelujah” (19:1, 3, 4, 6) is frequent in the Hebrew (and often the Greek) form of the Psalms (cf. Ps 146–50), and is a strong command to praise the Lord (a *piel*—it is the strongest possible command, probably originally uttered by the inspired Levite musicians summoning their hearers to worship). It was appropriate in all worship, especially in praising God for his magnificent acts (e.g., after deliverance—*3 Maccabees 7:13, or in end-time Jerusalem—Tobit 13:18). It functioned as a call to worship in the temple, and so functions in the heavenly courts of worship (Rev 19:1, 3, 6; cf. v. 5).

19:2. Vindication for the righteous included just punishments against their killers; see Deuteronomy 32:43; cf. Psalm 79:10 and Jeremiah 51:48-49 (on Babylon).

19:3. This quotation is from the description of the fall of Edom’s leading city in Isaiah 34:10 but naturally applied to all cities that practiced the same wickedness, including the world system (cf. 66:24). (The application from city to society or world would have been as natural in the first century as application

from one city to another; philosophers often viewed the whole state as a macrocity.) This language of smoking ruins was natural war imagery, and as an eternal devastation it is also repeated in the **Sibylline Oracles*.

19:4. The **Old Testament* pictures God enthroned both in heaven and above the cherubim on the ark in his temple; given the derivation of the four living creatures from Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1, the image may again be one of a heavenly temple as well as of a throne room.

19:5-6. For the “sound of waters” see comment on 1:15. Music and celebration were crucial at a wedding. God was often called “Almighty,” and the Old Testament frequently celebrates his reign, especially with regard to his rule over creation (Ps 97:1), great deliverances (Ex 15:18) and the end time (Is 24:23; 52:7; Mic 4:7).

19:7. In Isaiah 25:6-7 God announces a great banquet for all peoples (cf. Rev 19:7), and in Isaiah 25:8 the promise of deliverance from death. In Isaiah 25:9 God’s people celebrate their salvation, declaring, “Let us rejoice and be glad” in the salvation God had enacted on their behalf (slightly different in the **LXX*). The Old Testament and later Jewish literature often compared Israel to a bride wedded to God; cf. Revelation 21:2. The messianic age or world to come was also often portrayed as a banquet.

19:8. Pure linen was mandatory apparel for the **high priest* entering the holy of holies (Lev 16:4), extended in time to all ministers in the sanctuary; angels were often supposed to be dressed in linen too (probably based on Dan 12:6-7). Its symbolic use for purity and (here) righteous deeds would thus be natural. In Revelation it particularly contrasts with the prostitute’s fine linen (18:12, 16).

19:9. The banquet here is from Isaiah 25:6, and the image of end-time reward was often developed in Jewish tradition (see comment on Rev 19:7). Revelation contrasts this marriage supper with a terrible feast in 19:17-18.

19:10. Revelation elsewhere might encourage the view that Christians on earth worship with the angels, in communion with the worship of heaven (a common Jewish view); but the book simultaneously rejects the views of those who prayed to and praised angels (amulets and incantations attest that some Jews invoked angels). Most of early Judaism associated the *Spirit of God with the spirit of prophecy*; for John, witnesses of Jesus dependent on the Spirit (thus, ideally, all Christians) were prophets in the broadest sense of the term. It was, in fact, the proper witness to Jesus that distinguished true prophets from false ones (1 Jn 4:1-6), an important issue among some of the book’s hearers (Rev 2:20).

19:11-16

The Final Invasion

This section is the ultimate climax of the book, for which readers have waited since 1:7. All the previous armies and other judgments were mere preludes to the coming of the final King of kings on a white horse.

19:11. Roman princes customarily rode white horses in military triumphs; the emperor Domitian had himself ridden one behind his father and brother in their Judean triumph after the Jewish war of 66–70. But the image of Jesus returning on a white horse, conjoined with the title “King of kings” (19:16), may mean that Jesus is portrayed like the *Parthian* king (cf. comment on 6:2; 17:14), his whole army coming on white horses (19:14). That is, Revelation again employs the most feared imagery of the day to communicate its point. The pretentious claims of the emperor and all who were like him would be nothing before the true divine king from heaven.

The image may allude to God going forth as a warrior on behalf of his people (e.g., Is 31:4; 42:13; 59:16-18; Hab 3:11-13; Zech 14:3; cf. Ex 15:3). This is the ultimate “holy war,” anticipated in the *Old Testament*, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, by the *Zealots and by many other Jewish people, although not all these sources expected the deliverance and armies to come directly from heaven.

19:12. On “eyes like a fiery flame,” see comment on 1:14 (Dan 10:6); diadems (in contrast to many *New Testament references to “crowns,” most of which refer to victors’ garlands) were for rulers. That his name is unknown might be meant to imply that no one has power over him (ancient magicians claimed that they could coerce spirits once they knew their names); compare Revelation 2:17.

19:13. The garments of God were stained with the blood of the winepress in Isaiah 63:2-3, when God was avenging his servants by judgment (cf. Rev 14:17-20); a later Jewish tradition naturally connects this text with the idea of Genesis 49:10-11, reading the latter as proclaiming that the warrior *Messiah will be stained with blood. Compare Wisdom of Solomon 18:15-16, where God’s slaying the firstborn of Egypt is figuratively described as his Word leaping out of heaven like a mighty warrior; his commandment goes forth as a sharp sword (cf. Rev 19:15).

19:14. The armies of heaven were sometimes revealed in the Old Testament (2 Kings 2:11; 6:17; Is 66:15; Hab 3:8; cf. Ps 68:17; Jer 4:13), although God’s “hosts” were usually pictured on chariots there, whereas here they ride horses—

the customary means of attack for the Parthians. In each case the portrayal matches the most devastating sort of aggressors known in the writer's time. White horses were often considered superior and associated with royalty, and were connected with the Parthians more than with other peoples. Most Palestinian Jews believed that Israel would participate in the final battle (Dead Sea Scrolls; cf. Ps 149:6-9), but some also envisioned the angelic host as warriors on horseback (e.g., 2 Maccabees, *4 Maccabees). The coming host could involve angels (Zech 14:5) but here include believers (17:14), who have already "overcome" through martyrdom and other tests.

19:15. The words of God's mouth could be described as a sword (Hos 6:5; cf. **Similitudes of Enoch*) and the Messiah's decrees as a rod (Is 11:4); the mouth of Isaiah's servant also resembles a sharp sword (Is 49:2). (The writer of *4 *Ezra* 13 also describes a fire going forth from the Messiah to devour the wicked; the fire is said to represent the *law of God*. In *Psalms of Solomon* 17:24 and 35-36, the Messiah smites the nations of the earth with the word of his mouth.) God's sword is also described as his instrument of judgment (Is 34:5; Jer 12:12; 47:6), especially in the end (Is 66:15-16). The sword was a Roman symbol of an authority's right over life and death (capital punishment) but appears throughout the Old Testament prophets as an image for judgment by war. Ruling with an iron rod alludes to royal authority in Psalm 2:9 (cf. *Psalms of Solomon* 17:26-27).

19:16. In Roman antiquity, horses and statues were sometimes branded on the thigh, but people were not (cf. Ex 28:36-38). This is a symbolic depiction; everyone in Revelation is identified by a name on his or her person (e.g., 7:3; 13:16). "King of kings" was the title of the king of Parthia but had been applied in Jewish tradition long before that Parthian usage to God himself, the suzerain King who rules over all the kings of the earth (see comment on 17:14; cf. Deut 10:17; Dan 2:47; Zech 14:9).

19:17-21

The Defeat of the Wicked

19:17-18. The *saints have one feast (19:7-9), the birds of the air another (19:17-18). Revelation takes the image and language here from Ezekiel 39:17-20 (esp. 39:17; cf. Is 49:26; Zeph 1:7), which in context occurs after the final battle with Gog (cf. Rev 20:8). Everyone understood that if the corpses of those killed

in battle were not buried they would be eaten by vultures, dogs and other animals (1 Sam 17:44-46; Jer 16:4; Ezek 29:5; throughout Greek and Roman literature). The description of such ultimate destruction of their mighty oppressors (cf. also *Sibylline Oracles*) may have been a powerful encouragement to persecuted ancient Christians hearing the book.

19:19. In this depiction of the end, it is the armies, rather than the entire populations of the nations themselves, who are destroyed at this point (cf. 20:8); different Jewish views on the exact character of the final war tried to reconcile different *Old Testament images of the end.

19:20-21. Some of these details (judgment by fire, the defeat of *Satan and his forces, with special attention to the evil leaders*) are standard in accounts of the end time; others are unique to John's story line (the evil emperor and his sorcerer/propaganda minister being thrown into the furnace alive). Cf. Isaiah 30:33 and Daniel 7:11. Brimstone may allude to Sodom, though the destruction here is perpetual (cf. 20:10). Some Jewish texts spoke of fiery Gehenna (sometimes drawing on Greek images of torment in Tartarus) and of rivers of fire flowing from God's throne (cf. Greek pictures of a fiery river in the afterlife, but esp. Dan 7:10); Revelation contrasts a lake of fire for the wicked with a heavenly sea of glass mingled with fire (15:2).

20:1-6

The Thousand-Year Kingdom

Many Jewish texts pictured an intermediate kingdom between the present and future eternal reign (cf. *4 Ezra 7:28-30; *2 Baruch 29:3; 30:1-5; 40:3). Whether this suggests that the period is literal or figurative in Revelation—and if figurative, figurative for what—has been debated since the first few centuries of church history. “Amillennialists” like Augustine, Calvin and Luther usually have taken it as symbolic for the present age, whereas “premillennialists” like Irenaeus, Justin Martyr and Isaac Newton have read the period as future and after Christ's return; “postmillennialists” like George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney have predicted a future millennial period preceding Jesus' return (this last view is generally rare today). Those who take Revelation's millennium as in some sense future generally regard it as qualifying the absolute imminence of the final end, which might otherwise be supposed from 1:3. Many read the structure of the narrative here (19:20; 20:4, 10) as

referring to a future period, but some others contend that this reading does not fit other biblical passages and have appealed to the cyclical structure of the rest of Revelation. The commentary follows the narrative as it appears to stand rather than taking sides on whether it should be read literally or figuratively, what the figure means or whether it is merely an apocalyptic literary device. All three positions could use the presence of intermediate kingdoms in many ancient apocalypses to argue for their own position.

Revelation 20 and what follows especially expound the later chapters of Ezekiel: Israel's *resurrection (chap. 37), the war with Gog and Magog (chaps. 38–39) and the new Jerusalem's temple (chaps. 40–48), though Ezekiel lacks an explicit thousand-year period and Revelation lacks a literal, physical temple.

20:1-3. On the dragon/serpent, see comment on Revelation 12:3 and 9. Many early Jewish texts spoke of wicked angels being “bound,” meaning chained and imprisoned, until a particular time, usually the day of judgment (especially *1 Enoch; cf. Tobit, *Jubilees and *Testament of Solomon). Thus, for example, angels could be bound and hurled into the abyss (1 Enoch 88:1), and a leader of fallen angels could be hurled into fire on the day of judgment (1 Enoch 10:4-6).

Many Jewish texts include an intermediate period between the present and future ages; in some, it is an age of messianic peace, but in others it is the final tribulation, which came to be called the “messianic travail.” The length of the final intermediate period varies in those ancient Jewish texts that include it, producing such diverse figures as forty years, three generations, four hundred years and nearly as many other calculations as there are opinions recorded, sometimes counted by “weeks” or jubilees of years. A few Jewish traditions divided history into seven one-thousand-year periods, of which the final period would be an age of peace. (*Plato's figure of one thousand years between death and reincarnation as the intermediate state of the Greek afterlife might have influenced this Jewish figure [cf. also the phoenix of Greek mythology, discussed by *rabbis], but this is not clear; the apocalyptic penchant for dividing history into ages, plus the natural appeal of a round number like one thousand [cf. one hundred in Is 65:20], and especially the Jewish application of Ps 90:4 to the seven days of Gen 1, are sufficient to explain the length of the period on purely Jewish terms.)

20:4. The resurrection of the righteous was a standard part of Jewish hopes; the subsequent reign of God's people with him is less frequent but also appears in Jewish literature (in the *Old Testament, cf., e.g., Is 60:5; Dan 7:14, 18). Roman citizens were normally executed by beheading (with axes in previous

times, but with swords by the first century); they were first beaten and blindfolded and then forced to kneel.

20:5-6. The punishment of the rest of the dead after an interim period could be inferred from Isaiah 24:21-22, even though Daniel 12:2 (like a number of *New Testament texts) does not distinguish the time between the resurrection of the righteous (after the tribulation Daniel mentions in 12:13) and that of the damned. Jewish texts sometimes spoke of the “second death” of the wicked at the judgment. On the reigning priests, see comment on Revelation 1:6.

20:7-10

The Folly of Gog and Magog

20:7-8. Gog, prince in the land of Magog, appears as the final enemy of Israel in Ezekiel 38–39, after Israel’s regathering and perhaps the time of the *resurrection (chap. 37). Although scholars dispute whom Ezekiel has in mind, they agree that the enemies are from the north (like most of Israel’s enemies in that period); *Josephus identified them with the Scythians. Gog and Magog thus recur often in Jewish texts as the final major enemies of Israel (rabbis, apocalyptic texts, Dead Sea Scrolls).*

Many Jewish teachers expected a mass conversion of pagans to Judaism in the messianic time, to be followed by mass apostasy in the time of Gog and Magog. The army of the nations is called Belial’s (*Satan’s) army in the *Dead Sea Scrolls (although this text corresponds more to the battle envisioned in Rev 19). The Old Testament often employs the phrase “like the sand on the seashore” for a vast multitude (e.g., Gen 22:17; 32:12; 41:49).

20:9. Some Jewish texts portrayed a wall of fire around Jerusalem (based on Zech 2:5; cf. Ex 13:21), and some depicted fire falling from heaven to consume the enemies (**Sibylline Oracles*; based on such judgments as Gen 19:24-25; Lev 10:2; 2 Kings 1:10); here see especially Ezekiel 38:22; 39:6. In the **Similitudes of Enoch*, angels stir up Parthians to invade the Holy Land, but the ground opens to swallow them up. The Dead Sea Scrolls call the remnant community the “camp of the *saints,” a picture that also resembles Israel in the wilderness awaiting its final entrance into the Holy Land. For the gathering of the nations against God’s people, see, for example, Zechariah 12:3 and 14:2; see comment on Revelation 16:13-16.

20:10. Judaism also anticipated the ultimate defeat and judgment of Satan, a

position in harmony with the Old Testament view that God would reign unchallenged forever after the final day of judgment.

20:11-15

The Final Judgment

In various Jewish end-time scenarios, the day of judgment would be too late for *repentance* (see e.g., *1 Enoch* 97:6; **4 Ezra* 7:33).

20:11. Although many writers also stressed a judgment of souls at death (some thoroughly Hellenized writers like **Philo* had little interest in a future resurrection and judgment), Judaism had much to say about the day of judgment before God's throne at the end of the age. The image of a new heaven and earth (cf. *Rev* 21:2) is from *Isaiah* 65:17.

20:12. The opening of the books before God alludes to *Daniel* 7:10. Many early Jewish texts refer to heavenly tablets (**Jubilees*, *1 Enoch*, *2 Enoch*, **3 Enoch*, *Testament of Abraham*) containing records of human history or God's laws; angels were continually writing down people's sins, recording deeds in books for the day of judgment. The "opening" of the books meant that everything was about to be made known (see also, e.g., *4 Ezra*). The final judgment would be a public judgment—there would be no way of hiding one's naked shame.

The image of the "book of life" appears in the **Old Testament* (*Ex* 32:32-33; *Dan* 12:1; *Mal* 3:16) and was developed more extensively in later Jewish literature (e.g., *Dead Sea Scrolls*, *Jubilees*). All would be judged according to their works (*Psalms* 62:12; *Proverbs* 24:12; *Jeremiah* 17:10; 32:19; *Ezekiel* 18:30), but former sinful works canceled by true repentance would not count against the righteous (*Ezekiel* 18:21-22).

20:13-14. Jewish texts often spoke of the final day on which the wicked would be cast into the abyss of fire (e.g., *1 Enoch*). "Hades" (rendered "hell" in the KJV) was the abode of the dead (named for the Greek deity of the underworld, but not associated with him in Jewish texts), the equivalent of the Old Testament realm of the dead, Sheol. In many Jewish texts, as here, the wicked were held there under judgment until their final destruction or place of torture; in Jewish texts, Hades would return what was entrusted to it. Many **Gentiles* questioned whether those who died unburied, especially at sea, had a part in the afterlife; others questioned how those lost at sea could be resurrected.

This passage is clear that even the sea would give up its dead for judgment.

20:15. Most Jewish people believed that all normal Jews (i.e., those who followed Judaism) would be saved, along with the small percentage of the righteous among the nations (Gentiles); the rest would be damned. Israel's faith had always been exclusivistic (worshiping one supreme God; John would add here the further exclusivism that God was truly worshiped only through Christ—cf. 1 Jn 2:23), and the Old Testament prophets had proclaimed a day of judgment that would call the nations as well as Israel to account. It would be too late to repent in that time.

21:1-8

Promise of the World to Come

Some pagan oracles predicted a future age of bliss, but the hope for a future age of peace, ruled by God alone, is a distinctively *Old Testament, Jewish and Christian hope.

21:1. Isaiah had already predicted the new heavens and new earth (Is 65:17; 66:22); the focus of attention in this new creation would be the new Jerusalem (Is 65:18; cf. 66:22). Many Jewish depictions of the *age to come* (e.g., in *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees* and *Pseudo-Philo) emphasized the new heavens and earth. Some Jewish texts spoke of the replacement of the first creation by a new creation; others envisioned the new creation as a renewal of the old. Many texts described the end time in terms of the beginning, as a renewal of paradise (see comment on 22:1-5); so here the new creation recalls the goodness of the first creation before sin marred it (Gen 1:1).

Predictions of the sea's evaporation (perhaps in **Sibylline Oracles* 5:157-59, although in 5:447-49 the drying of the seas for ships does not do away with water) were far less common for *apocalypses. Some commentators point to much earlier Canaanite myths, but these would not have been sufficiently contemporary to be obvious to John's readers. The sea's disappearance here may accommodate a literal (and typically ancient Jewish) reading of Isaiah 65:17, which mentions heaven and earth but does not mention the sea; another explanation may be the symbolic depiction of an end to the mercantile power Babylon (13:1; 17:15; 18:17).

21:2. Like any city, "Jerusalem" meant both the place and the people who lived there; the new Jerusalem is thus a bride because its residents are a bride

(19:7). Greco-Roman *encomia* (praises) of cities often turned to describing them as people, and Jewish people were familiar with Old Testament personifications of Jerusalem and the Old Testament depiction of God's people as his bride. Contemporary Jewish writers (e.g., Tobit, 2 Maccabees, Sirach, *Philo and Josephus) and Jewish coins also called Jerusalem the "holy city" (in the Old Testament, cf. Neh 11:1, 18; Is 48:2; 52:1; 62:12); Jewish people (e.g., the Qumran Temple Scroll) viewed it as the holiest of cities.

Pious Jews prayed daily for God to restore Jerusalem. The new Jerusalem, an Old Testament image (Is 65:18), had become a standard Jewish hope for the future, whether as a renewed and purified Jerusalem (Tobit, **Psalms of Solomon*) or (as here) a new city from above (probably *4 Ezra); a city "from above" would be perfect, having been built by God himself (a hope found in some texts). In some apocalypses (*2 Baruch), the righteous would dwell on high; in early Jewish literature like *Jubilees*, God would descend and dwell with his people.

21:3. The tabernacle had always symbolized God's dwelling among his people (Ex 25:8-9; 29:45; 1 Kings 6:12-13); God had also promised to "dwell" among his people as part of his covenant (Lev 26:11-12), especially in the sinless world to come (Ezek 37:24-28; 43:7-10; Zech 2:11). Ezekiel expected God to dwell with his people in the future temple (Ezek 43:7, 9); here the entire holy city functions as God's temple (see comment on the shape in 21:16; cf. 21:22), even greater than Ezekiel's promise.

21:4. These depictions allude especially to Isaiah 25:8; 35:10; 51:11 and 65:16-19.

21:5. On the promise of a future new creation, see comment on 21:1; for divine Wisdom spiritually "making all things new" in the present, cf. Wisdom of Solomon 7:27.

21:6. On Alpha and Omega, see comment on 1:8. The future age was portrayed as having abundant water (e.g., Is 35:1-2; Ezek 47:1-12; see comment on 22:1); for the offer of free water to the obedient, cf. Isaiah 55:1.

21:7. God had called Israel his children in the Old Testament (the language also continues in subsequent Jewish literature); those who had become his children were part of the covenant community and shared its promises for the future. God promised that his people who endured would inherit the world to come (Zech 8:12). The standard Old Testament covenant motif (also in *Jubilees*) is "I will be their God and they will be my people" (cf., e.g., Ex 6:7; 29:45; Lev 26:12; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:33; Ezek 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23, 27;

Zech 8:8), a promise slightly augmented here.

21:8. Part of the promise in the Old Testament (e.g., Is 66:24) and Jewish literature was that the righteous who persevered would not have to share the world to come with their oppressors. Ancient cities forbade some morally or socially despised groups to live inside the city walls; here the exclusion is moral. Ephesus had a widespread reputation for the popular practice of *magic; sexual immorality was pervasive. Some of the sins may relate to issues addressed elsewhere in Revelation or Johannine literature. On the lake of fire, see comment on 19:20.

21:9-27

The Glory of the New Jerusalem

*Rhetoricians often showed off their epideictic (praise) skills by describing and praising magnificent cities like Rome (Aelius Aristides) or Athens (Isocrates); John here describes the greatest of cities. His *encomium* is on a renewed city whose prototype was also loved and praised in the *Old Testament (e.g., Ps 48) and whose future glory was the hope of the prophets (e.g., Ezek 40–48).

Jewish literature after Ezekiel also delighted to describe the glory of the new Jerusalem (e.g., Tobit 13:9-18, which includes streets paved with precious stones; 5Q15, a written blueprint in the *Dead Sea Scrolls modeled on Ezek 40–48; *rabbis), often as part of their praise to God for his coming deliverance. Most writers intended their imagery to praise the greatness of God and his holy city, however, not as literal depictions. Thus Isaiah has not only gates of crystal and walls of precious stones (Is 54:11-12), but walls of salvation and gates of praise (60:18). Zechariah, by contrast, noted that Jerusalem would not need walls because God would be a wall of fire for the city (Zech 2:4-5).

Some Jewish pictures of the end emphasized a return to Israel's pastoral/agricultural beginnings, without ruling out urban existence (*Sibylline Oracles* 3:744-51), but the *New Testament and most contemporary Jewish literature are more urban than most Old Testament depictions of the end (Amos 9:13-15). The symbolic imagery for paradise was adapted to speak most relevantly to the cultures addressed.

21:9. Given the commitment involved in ancient Jewish betrothal, a betrothed woman and thus a bride could be referred to as a wife (as in 19:7).

21:10. The description of the revelation in 21:9-10 parallels exactly that in

17:1-3. Ancient rhetoric commonly taught by means of contrasting characters, and the contrast between Babylon the prostitute and new Jerusalem the bride is explicit and intentional. Those who instructed public speakers emphasized clarity and vividness in descriptions, and this description exemplifies those characteristics.

Apocalyptic texts sometimes used a mountain reaching to heaven to provide visibility (**1 Enoch* 17:2; cf. 18:6-8; 24:1-3; 77:4; Mt 4:8); Jerusalem was also regarded as atop a mountain (**Letter of Aristeas* 83-84, 105-6; often in the Old Testament, e.g., Joel 2:1); the image here is rooted in Ezekiel 40:2.

21:11. The emphasis on the wealth of the new Jerusalem would remind older Jewish readers of the glory of the temple, whose gates had been adorned with gold and silver; John declares that the whole city will share the glory of the temple. God would set his glory among his people in the end time (e.g., Is 60:1-3; Sirach 36:14). Jewish writers spoke of supernatural precious stones that were luminous, or light-giving, by themselves.

21:12-13. The text of *1 Enoch* links the twelve gates of heaven to the twelve signs of the zodiac, but Revelation links New Jerusalem's gates to the twelve tribes, each tribe having its own position, as they did in the Old Testament during the wilderness wanderings and the settlement in the Promised Land. In the Temple Scroll (one of the Dead Sea Scrolls), some Jewish pietists noted that the tribes would be commemorated on the twelve gates surrounding the new temple (three on each of the four sides). The image is from Ezekiel 48:31-35.

21:14. Jesus had made clear the continuity between the twelve tribes in the Old Testament and the first *apostles in the New Testament by his initial numbering of those apostles (see the introduction to Acts 1:15-26); Asian Christians would easily recognize the symbolism (Eph 2:20).

21:15. The "measuring rod" comes from Ezekiel 40:3; the measurements of the city were to produce awe of God's great promises and thus *repentance (Ezek 40:4; 43:10-11). The Dead Sea Scrolls also emphasize measurements of the future temple to call readers to endure for the future age. John's measurements differ from Ezekiel's, but not in a way that anyone would complain: his New Jerusalem is nearly two thousand times larger, without even counting its height. All such images simply depicted in a symbolic way the much greater grandeur to come (cf. 1 Cor 2:9-10).

21:16. That the dimensions are equal on all sides indicates that the city is shaped like a cube—like the holy of holies in the Old Testament temple (1 Kings 6:20), indicating that the presence of God would always be with them in its

fullest intensity. Like some Roman cities of John's era, Ezekiel's city was also square, although not clearly cubed (48:32-34; cf. 45:2; 48:16, 20); but the cubing illustrates the point of Ezekiel 48:35—God's presence—all the more graphically. In some Jewish traditions, the future Jerusalem would expand in all directions (based on Is 54:2-3) and would become so tall that it would ascend to God's throne (based on Ezek 41:7). None of these descriptions is literal; if it is difficult to breathe atop the world's highest mountain (about five miles high), a city fifteen hundred miles high would not be very practical (at least under current laws of physics!). John elsewhere uses "twelve thousand" and 144 symbolically, and the connection may suggest that New Jerusalem is the city of God for the people of God (7:4-8).

21:17. This wall, literally 144 cubits, is quite disproportionate with a city fifteen hundred miles high, but this point reinforces its symbolic use; important ancient cities always had walls, hence John includes one. Although John could have excluded walls (Is 60:18; Zech 2:4-5) as he does the temple (Rev 21:22), emphasizing that they were unnecessary given the lack of aggressors, he would then not have been able to include his symbolic use of gates (see comment on 21:12-14).

Moreover, great ancient cities always had walls, so they were important for John's hearers to understand this image with reference to the greatest of cities. Apocalyptic texts (2 *Enoch*) sometimes called angels "men," and angels often appeared in human form in the Old Testament and Jewish literature.

21:18. Isaiah envisioned walls made of precious stones (Is 54:12); in contrast to Babylon's mere decorations of gold and pearls, every part of the new Jerusalem is precious. Jewish descriptions of the costly stones used to build the new Jerusalem included miraculous elaborations, hence absolutely pure gold that looked like clear glass would have fit the *genre. Metal was used in mirrors, so it could mean that the gold gives a perfect reflection.

21:19-20. Twelve stones were normally used in the Old Testament (Ex 28:17-20; Josh 4:2-3) and Judaism (e.g., *Pseudo-Philo) to signify the twelve tribes. The image is from Isaiah 54:11-12, where every part of the city (walls, foundations, gates, etc.) would be constructed with precious stones. Texts in the Dead Sea Scrolls interpret this passage in Isaiah figuratively and apply it to the righteous, who displayed God's glory (including the twelve leaders of the community). Tobit applies it literally to the future Jerusalem but includes streets that cry out praises to God.

That the *Septuagint of Ezekiel 28:13 lists a variety of precious stones may

inform Revelation 17:4, but the use of twelve different precious stones, each signifying a tribe of Israel, is from Exodus 28:17-20; John's list is roughly equivalent to the Hebrew one in Exodus. Thus the image of Aaron's breastplate (Ex 28) evokes the priestly city for divine worship; the precious stones on his breastplate evoked the glory of God's people (Wisdom of Solomon 18:24). The possible allusion to Tyre's wealth (Ezek 28) contrasts the absolute wealth that is God's gift with the limited wealth acquired by Tyre and its imitator in Revelation, Babylon. (Both *Josephus* and Philo also link the twelve stones on Aaron's breastplate with the twelve signs of the zodiac, but John characteristically avoids the astrological associations that some writers linked with the symbols he employs.)

21:21. In Tobit 13, the new Jerusalem's streets are paved with precious stones, and its walls and towers are of pure gold. Some rabbis expounded that the new Jerusalem's gates would be made of giant pearls and precious stones; in one later story, a man who ridicules a rabbi's exposition about the pearls sinks to the bottom of the sea and sees the angels working on the gates of the new temple; he then pays the price for his mockery when the rabbi disintegrates him with his eyes. But the main source for the image of precious stones in the future city is Isaiah 54:11-12. "Street" (11:8) might be functionally plural but probably refers to the main street (cf. "great street"—NIV) running through well-planned towns on the Greek model. First-century Jerusalem had major east-west and north-south streets, some of them as wide as thirteen meters (more than forty feet) at points, but the glory of the old Jerusalem will not compare with the glory of the one that God has promised.

21:22. One of the most basic hopes of ancient Judaism, recited daily in prayer, was the restoration and renewal of the temple (a hope from Ezek 40–48 onward). Even unlearned *Gentiles would be shocked; ancient cities conventionally had temples. But John offers a greater, not a lesser, vision than Ezekiel: the entire city is God's temple or dwelling place (see comment on Rev 21:11, 16; Zech 14:21), and God is its temple as well.

21:23. The city's light being the Lord's glory rather than the sun or moon is taken directly from Isaiah 60:19-20 (cf. the image of 24:23; 30:26). Many Jewish teachers stressed that God's light would fill the world to come, and that God would shine on his people.

21:24. The nations will gather to Jerusalem to worship and bring tribute in the end time (e.g., Is 60:3-22; Jer 3:17; Zech 14:16-19; cf. Tobit 13:11-12; see comment on Rev 3:9), bringing their glory into it (Is 66:12) and depending on its

light (Is 60:1-3). In some biblical and other ancient Jewish depictions of the future, the Gentiles would be destroyed in the end time; in others, they would bring tribute; in still others, they would become part of God's people (Is 19:23-25; Zeph 3:9). Revelation draws on all these images, but clearly all true followers of the lamb from all peoples become New Jerusalemites (see comment on 7:16-17).

21:25-26. Like the gates of ancient cities, the temple's gates in the old Jerusalem were closed at night (cf. also the closing of gates in Ezek 46:1); but in the world to come, Jerusalem's gates will never need to be closed, because tribute rather than aggressors will come to them (Is 60:11). Revelation adds that the gates will also remain open because there will be no night, since the Lord will be the light (21:23; cf. Is 60:19-20). Night was also associated with sorcery, *demons and robbers, and most people considered it a good time to stay inside when possible. Contrast the city of wealth in Revelation 18:11-19.

21:27. Outcast groups (e.g., prostitutes) sometimes lived outside city gates, but an Old Testament allusion is in view here. There will be no more abominations in the house of God (Zech 14:21) or unbelievers in Jerusalem (Joel 3:17). The unclean had always been excluded from God's house so long as they remained in that state; this text refers to spiritual or moral uncleanness. The whole city is God's temple, or dwelling place (21:3, 16, 22).

22:1-5

The New Paradise

The *Old Testament sometimes figuratively described Jerusalem's restoration in paradise language (Is 51:3), but it was later Jewish texts that especially developed the picture of the end time as the restoration or amplification of the original paradise. Such texts present paradise as the home of the righteous, *Gehenna that of the wicked.

22:1. Despite Laodicea's lack, all strong cities should have a water supply. The rivers of paradise in Genesis 2:10 and the waters of Jerusalem (Ps 46:4) may supply some of the background for the image here; the immediate allusion, however, is to the rivers of water flowing from the new Jerusalem's temple in Ezekiel 47:1-11 (cf. Joel 3:18; Zech 14:8). (*Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.1.3, 38, employed the Greek geographical concept of Oceanus and claimed that the garden in Eden was watered by one earth-encircling river that divided into four

parts: Ganges, Euphrates, Tigris and Nile. John might allude to the *Spirit; cf. Jn 7:37-39.)

22:2. The description of the “tree of life” is from Ezekiel 47:12, which speaks of many trees bearing fruit each month (as opposed to one season a year) and leaves for healing. John adds “for the nations,” and further modifies Ezekiel’s “trees” to incorporate an allusion to paradise: although treated elsewhere in Jewish literature (e.g., *4 *Ezra*), the “tree of life” is from Genesis 2:9. Later Jewish traditions further expounded the figure. (Some Jewish texts spoke of twelve trees, one for each month, in a four-river paradise, weaving together features of Ezekiel and Genesis in a manner similar to Revelation. Jewish texts frequently connected the twelve months with the twelve tribes and constellations, but John avoids astrological associations here, as elsewhere.)

22:3. The removal of the curse is from Zechariah 14:11, and in this context it refers to the reversal of the curse in Eden (Gen 3:16-19).

22:4. God’s once-hidden face (Ex 33:20) will now be fully disclosed to his people (cf. comment on Jn 1:14-18); many other Jewish people also expected this in the end time. For writing on the forehead, see comment on Revelation 7:3; the point is that it will be clear that God’s people belong to him alone.

22:5. Jewish visions of the future sometimes included the righteous shining like the sun or stars (*1 *Enoch*; Sirach; 4 *Ezra*; *rabbis; cf. Ex 34:29; Dan 12:3); for God shining on his people, see comment on 21:23. The righteous shining and also ruling in the future are combined in Wisdom of Solomon 3:7-8.

22:6-21

Final Announcements

Divine revelation and exhortation could go hand in hand. For instance, Tobit’s praise to God (Tobit 13:1-18) includes both a description of the final Jerusalem (13:9-18) and a call to *repentance for Israel (13:6).

22:6-7. “Faithful and true” may represent a testimony oath formula (cf. 3:14; 22:18; Jer 42:5), verifying the veracity of the revelation. “God of the spirits of all flesh” is an Old Testament title for God (Num 16:22; 27:16) attested in subsequent Jewish (e.g., **Jubilees*; inscriptions) and *Samaritan texts; “Lord of Spirits” is also a divine title (**Similitudes of Enoch*; cf. similar expressions in the *Dead Sea Scrolls). Here John especially identifies God with the prophets.

22:8-9. Commentators on Ephesians and Colossians often suggest that some

Jewish Christians in Asia Minor had been assigning too prominent a role to angels; if that error is at all in view here, this passage refutes it (cf. also Rev 19:10).

22:10. Daniel had been instructed to seal up his words until the end time (Dan 12:4, 9); some of his visions had applied only to the future (Dan 8:26; 9:24; 10:14; cf. Jer 23:20; 30:24; *1 Enoch* 100:6). By contrast, John's revelation is meant to be understood in his own generation as well as subsequently (which should affect how subsequent generations understand his book). On opening sealed documents, see comment on 5:1.

22:11. The righteous would stand, but the wicked would continue in their wickedness (Dan 12:10). John's exhortation here resembles an ironic invitation: let those who reject God's words do so, but they will pay the consequences (Ezek 3:27; cf. Jer 44:25; Amos 4:4-5; Eccles 11:9; **Sibylline Oracles* 3:57-59).

22:12. The Old Testament and Judaism stressed that God was righteous and would reward his people (e.g., Gen 15:1; Ps 18:20; 19:11; Is 49:4; **4 Ezra*). That God would give each person according to his or her works was also Old Testament teaching (e.g., Ps 62:12; see comment on Rev 20:12).

22:13. In three different forms, this verse attributes to the speaker (Jesus in 22:12) a divine title (see Is 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). A literary device called *inclusio* was used to frame a section of text by starting and ending on the same note; most of Revelation is framed by the announcement that the Lord of history is both Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end (1:8; see comment on that verse).

22:14. On washed robes, compare 3:4-5 and 7:14, and see comment on 3:4; on the tree of life, see comment on 22:2.

22:15. "Dogs" probably refers to the sexually immoral, specifically unrepentant prostitutes (Deut 23:17-18). Elsewhere in Revelation state religion (in John's era, especially the imperial cult), combined with sorcery, martyrs Christians; immorality (both literal and spiritual) characterized the lifestyle of **Gentile men*. See also comment on 21:8 and 27; cf. also Genesis 3:24.

22:16. "Root of David" comes from the "stem of Jesse" (David's father) in Isaiah 11:1—the shoot that would spring up from the stump of David's lineage, after his descendants had lost the throne. Some commentators suggest that "root" reverses the image, making him David's source. The morning star is Venus, herald of the dawn (cf. Rev 2:28); in this case the text probably also alludes to Numbers 24:17, the star descended from Jacob (Israel) and destined to reign and crush the enemies of God's people. (The Dead Sea Scrolls also applied Num 24:17 to a conquering **messiah*.)

22:17. Ancient Judaism especially associated the *Spirit with *prophecy. Everyone who hears the invitation is to join in it, and the thirsty may come and drink freely (Is 55:1) of the water of 22:1.

22:18-19. The words of a divinely instituted covenant or book were not to be altered (Deut 4:2; 12:32; cf. Prov 30:5-6). Covenants often included curses against those who broke them; those who followed idols thus invited all the curses of Deuteronomy (29:20, 27). Such claims of completeness or inspiration of books were often made in later times (e.g., *1 Enoch*; Josephus and **Letter of Aristeas* made this claim for the *LXX) to uphold their authority or to secure them against later editors interpolating their own ideas—a practice common in books that were not treated as sacred Scripture or other inspired writings.

22:20. “Come, Lord” translates the *Marana tha* prayer common in early Christianity (see comment on 1 Cor 16:22), acknowledging believers’ early recognition of Jesus’ deity. For the testimony of witnesses at the end of a document, see comment on John 21:24.

22:21. This was an appropriate concluding greeting, often attached to Christian letters (see comment on Rom 1:7).

Glossary

The most important terms and names are highlighted in the text with an asterisk (*).

Achilles Tatius. A second-century A.D. *rhetorician who wrote *Cleitophon and Leucippe*, a Greek romance novel.

Age to come. Many Jewish people divided history into at least two eras, the present age and the age to come. “*Eternal life” was the life of the coming age.

Akiba. A late-first- to early-second-century *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 reportedly 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 like 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 expressly 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, Sirach (also known as Ben Sira or Ecclesiasticus), 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 Palestinian Jewish custom such a messenger (a *shaliakh*, or agent) acted on the full authority of his sender, to the extent that he 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 lead God's people (e.g., Moses, Deborah, Samuel) thus may provide the best Old Testament models (cf. 2 Cor 3:6-18).

Apuleius. A second-century A.D. *rhetorician who may have 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 in the cities; it was still widely spoken in different forms in Syria-Palestine (especially in rural areas) and farther east in Jesus' day. Most Jewish people in first-century Judea and Galilee probably spoke both Greek and Aramaic, though most were probably more fluent in one or the other. The Galilean peasants to whom Jesus often spoke were probably often more fluent in Aramaic.

Aristeas, Letter 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, attested in a wide range of ancient cultures and literature. 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 provides cleansing from sin's impurity and 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) may have provided the most significant model for John the Baptist's and subsequently Christian baptism: it indicated an act of conversion, of turning from the old life to the new. This conversion-baptism, like regular Jewish washings in purity pools, involved immersion. Scholars generally presume that this practice was continued by the earliest Christians (though exceptions soon came to be allowed where needed; see *Didache* 7.1-3, probably from the late first century).

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 Palestinian Judaism accepted the present *Old Testament as canonical*; some groups added other works (probably some others works such as *1 Enoch* were accepted at Qumran, and some Diaspora Jews apparently highly valued other works now considered part of the *Apocrypha*). Early Christians came to accept the books of the present New Testament in addition to the Jewish canon. Some books were widely accepted very early (such as the four Gospels and most of Paul's letters); others were debated for some time before the majority of Christians agreed on them (such as 2 Peter) or rejected them (such as *1 Clement* or *Shepherd of Hermas*).

Chiasmus. An inverted parallel literary structure, in which the last line or idea corresponds with the first one, the next to the last corresponds with the second one, and so forth. The title for this structure is first attested later than the *New

Testament, but scholars find examples of it as early as Homer.

***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 one of the terms often used in the *Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for the “congregation” (*qahal*) of Israel: “church” (assembly); the other was “*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 mistaken; that sense is actually more appropriate for “*saints,” i.e., “those separated” or “consecrated” [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 (see *patron*).

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. In an early period Rome sometimes gave veterans land grants, settling them in these areas as Roman colonies.

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*. (*A number of Qumran scholars today doubt whether the scrolls come from Essenes, but the sectarian scrolls do seem to fit the Essenes depicted in Philo, Pliny the Elder and *Josephus. Some scholars also argue that Qumran was not a residence but merely a library, at least in some periods.*) The writings include the War Scroll, the Manual of Discipline (Community Rule), the Damascus Document,

the Thanksgiving Hymns, the Genesis Apocryphon, the Temple Scroll and commentaries on and expansions of various biblical books. Many of the most prominent and distinctive scrolls appear to have been written in the second century B.C.; most scholars believe that the site was abandoned during the Judean-Roman War (A.D. 66–70), although a few scholars allow that the site may have been revisited in later times.

Demons. Although the Greek term so translated often had a neutral sense in Greek (for souls or various kinds of spirits), Judeans and Galileans less shaped by Greek thought used especially the negative sense of the term. Negatively, it applied to nonhuman spirits other than God and the angels subservient to him; they were hostile to God's people. Exorcists typically employed various means for their extraction, such as stinky roots and magical formulas.

***Diaspora.** The Jewish dispersion outside Palestine. The technical term "Diaspora Judaism" is thus used interchangeably with "non-Palestinian Judaism" in this commentary.

Diatribē. 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 or adherents of *rabbis or philosophers, normally committed to memorizing and living according to their master's teachings. Members of schools could pass the teachings on as canonical from one generation to the next.

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 all of Jesus' followers, who are a chosen people in Christ. The vast majority of Jewish people followed the biblical emphasis that God was sovereign in human affairs; apparently the majority (exemplified in Josephus's depiction of the Pharisees) did not treat God's sovereignty as incompatible with human decisions and responsibility.

1 Enoch. An *apocalypse whose five sections may derive from different authors, *1 Enoch* is mainly (excepting the **Similitudes of Enoch*) 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.

2 Enoch. Although a Semitic original might derive from the first century, the current, edited work is from a later period and preserved in Slavonic.

3 Enoch. An *apocalypse from the perspective of rabbinic mysticism that is no later than the fifth century A.D. (probably from the third century).

Epictetus. A first-century *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*. Josephus estimates that there were about four thousand Essenes altogether.

***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 (or possibly early second) 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, poem, science fiction or bomb threat. Although modern genres bearing the same

title as ancient ones (e.g., letter, historical narrative, biography) have much in common with their predecessors, they typically differ in some features (see the introductions to the Gospels and Letters).

***Gentile.** Anyone who is not Jewish. In ancient Jewish parlance, this was often roughly the equivalent of how someone today might use “pagan” in a negative sense.

***Gnosticism.** A fusion of Greek, Jewish and Christian ideas that began by the early second century and presented a major challenge to early Christianity. The blanket term actually encompasses a variety of schools and movements that would not have all identified with one another, but some common features include an emphasis on “secret” knowledge outside the widely shared public traditions of other early Christian groups. Some scholars have seen tendencies toward developed Gnosticism in opponents presupposed in Pauline letters (especially in Colossians and the *Pastoral Epistles) and in the Gospel and letters of 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, although these works do proclaim good news; 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 unearned covenant love, which was expressed in passages like Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:7-9 and 10:15. The Greek term appears in inscriptions with reference to gifts and benefaction, and in the ancient ideology of reciprocity it invites gratitude.

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.”

High priests. Although the phrase applied to only the highest priest in the *Old Testament*, Josephus shows that in this period, the plural title applied to the aristocratic priests generally. Many prominent members of these aristocratic families in and around Jerusalem served on its municipal assembly (the Sanhedrin), and many were *Sadducees.

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 common 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 or 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 14–16), which Judaism did not do.

Hyperbole. A *rhetorical exaggeration or overstatement, 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, which he describes along with the events leading up to it. His works (*Jewish War*, *Jewish Antiquities* 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 who wrote especially in the early second century A.D. He is especially known for his invective against women, foreigners and *freedpersons who appeared to be encroaching on rights and privileges once reserved for aristocratic Roman males.

***Kingdom.** This term means “rule,” “reign” or “authority” (not normally a king’s people or land, as 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 widely 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.” Jewish people sometimes used “heaven” as a polite way of referring to “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 first-century B.C. Roman historian.

Lucian. A second-century 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.

Magic. Whether particular acts were attributed to magic or to positive divine power often depended on whether the observer approved of the person and his or her acts. Most people considered sorcery and magic to be secretive, antisocial and selfish, but it was widely practiced though sometimes associated with centers of magic such as Egypt and Ephesus. Popular magic included love charms, curses against opponents (even in sports), manipulation of spirits, and the like.

***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. Many and probably most Jewish people in Palestine 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 would be more 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 literature finally declared canonical by the *church and accepted by nearly all Christians today. Although it includes information about the new covenant (as does Jer 31:31-34), it is not technically a “testament” in itself; speaking of “Scripture written after Jesus’s coming,” however, would be cumbersome.

***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 Tanakh. Although it includes information about God’s covenant with Israel, it is not technically a “testament” in itself.

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. At the same time, parables sometimes had multiple points of contact with the realities they represented (e.g., the four soils in the parable of the sower); explicit interpretations often followed ancient Jewish parables, and they often contained such multiple points of contact. 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.) suggested in the Hebrew term *mashal*.

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. In the technical sense, patronage was a Roman political institution; *New Testament scholars today often apply the designation more generally to include what was technically benefaction in the Greek-speaking eastern Mediterranean world (and to encompass the English sense of “patron” as well).

Petronius. A first-century 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 (*Josephus estimates six thousand) pious Jewish men who sought to interpret the *law carefully and according to the traditions of previous generations of the pious. They lacked much direct access to 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.* Although early Christians more often emphasized occasions on which the Pharisees differed from Jesus, many of their other views resembled his.

***Philo.** A first-century Jewish philosopher committed to both the Greek translation of the Torah and to Greek education, especially eclectic Middle Platonic philosophy. He lived in Alexandria, Egypt, and held a position of great influence and prestige in the Jewish community there.

Pilate. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea from A.D. 26 to 36. His position was probably secure as long as his patron Sejanus remained in power in Rome; but after Sejanus’s execution on October 19, A.D. 31, he undoubtedly had to act more carefully. *Josephus and *Philo both portray Pilate as insensitive to Judean concerns. He brought Roman standards, which Jewish people viewed as idolatrous, into Jerusalem under cover of night, provoking public protests that forced him to withdraw them. He diverted funds from the temple treasury for an aqueduct and otherwise infuriated Judeans. His massacre of Samaritans finally provoked his recall to Rome.*

Plato. A student of Socrates whose idealism and dualistic worldview became influential in subsequent Greek thought. He flourished in the fourth century B.C., but his thinking influenced Middle Platonists (such as Philo) in the first century A.D. and later; a developed form of Platonism became a dominant philosophic force later in antiquity.

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, most Jewish people 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 might reflect early Pharisaic piety, or at least the form of early Judaism in which Pharisaism was also at home.

Pseudepigrapha. A broadly defined, modern collection of very diverse ancient Jewish texts outside the Jewish and Christian canons and other collections such as the *Apocrypha*, Dead Sea Scrolls and *rabbinic literature*. So named because most of them are pseudepigraphic. These works include (among others) *2 Baruch; *1, 2 and *3 Enoch; *4 Ezra; *Jubilees; *Letter of Aristeas; *Life of Adam and Eve*; 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.

Pythagoreanism. A mystical philosophy attributed to 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. Pythagoreans also practiced strict vegetarianism.

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 (“my master”). 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 earliest written edition of some of this material comes from the early third century A.D. (mostly citing second-century *rabbis). 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*, *Mekilta on Exodus*, *Sifra on Leviticus*, *Sifre on Numbers and Deuteronomy*, and later (after the third century) the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds and various works in the Midrash Rabbah.

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 kind of turning that a Gentile would undergo when converting to Judaism or any sinner would undergo when becoming a follower of Jesus.*

***Resurrection.** Although some scholars in the early twentieth century associated the idea of Jesus’ resurrection with 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 fertility. 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. Ancient Jewish sources show that 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, as articulated in 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 (as the more popular of the two forms of advanced education in antiquity), 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 apparently supernaturalistic emphasis on angels and other spirits, and most of all were disturbed by talk of the *resurrection of the dead, other end-time beliefs, and anything that could arouse unrest. Messianic beliefs about the end time or revolutionary demands for change could—and ultimately did—challenge the stability of their own position in Palestine.

Saints. Some translations use this term (*hagioi*, singular *hagios*) for the “holy ones,” that is, for those who have been consecrated to God. This title for believers indicates their ritual status as set apart exclusively for God's use (even when some of them fail to recognize it).

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.

Sanhedrin. The term designates an assembly; major cities could have their own senates, or assemblies. Jerusalem's Sanhedrin decided local Judean affairs, though they remained answerable to Rome's appointed agents.

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. Developing Old Testament themes, early Judaism viewed Satan as accuser (cf. Job 1:6–2:7; Zech 3:1-2), tempter (cf. 1 Chron 21:1) and deceiver.

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 (e.g., Is 45:15, 21).

***Scribes.** Throughout the Roman Empire, local executors of legal documents. In Jewish Palestine these presumably would be the people who also taught children how to read or recite the Scriptures; at least some 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, for the sake of avoiding technical questions beyond its scope, refers to the most widely accepted standardized form.

Shammai. A famous Jewish teacher contemporary with *Hillel and with Jesus' early childhood; usually stricter than Hillel's, his school's opinions usually prevailed in the time of Jesus.

Shroud of Turin. The purported burial 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 first-century 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 believed to have been collected from Jewish circles in Alexandria, Egypt and Asia Minor. Their composition spans a wide range of time, but most believe them to be mainly pre-Christian.

Similitudes of Enoch. These *parables of *1 Enoch (chaps. 37–71) 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 pre-Christian, although the majority of Enoch scholars currently argue that it is.

***Son of God.** The phrase meant many things to many different people in the ancient world, but it could strike some Roman pagans as portraying Jesus as a rival to the emperor. Most *New Testament texts evoke *Old Testament usage*, where the term was applied generically to all Israel (Ex 4:22) but specifically to the Davidic king (2 Sam 7:14), especially (after 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; called “synoptic” 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 his people. Tax collectors thus appeared as collaborators with the occupying pagan power. Some tax collectors were customs agents, collecting customs taxes from traveling merchants. “Publican” is a modern English mistranslation of a Greek term that simply meant “*tax gatherer.” The Romans did not use literal *publicanoi*, a special kind of tax farmers, in the Palestine of Jesus’ day, but there were many tax collectors there.

Testament of Job. A *Hellenistic Jewish account of Job’s suffering and triumph, maybe from Egypt and often dated to the first century B.C. or the first century A.D. (though some argue that at least part of the work is no earlier than the late second century).

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 ancient magical texts.

Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. Probably a mainly pre-Christian 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.

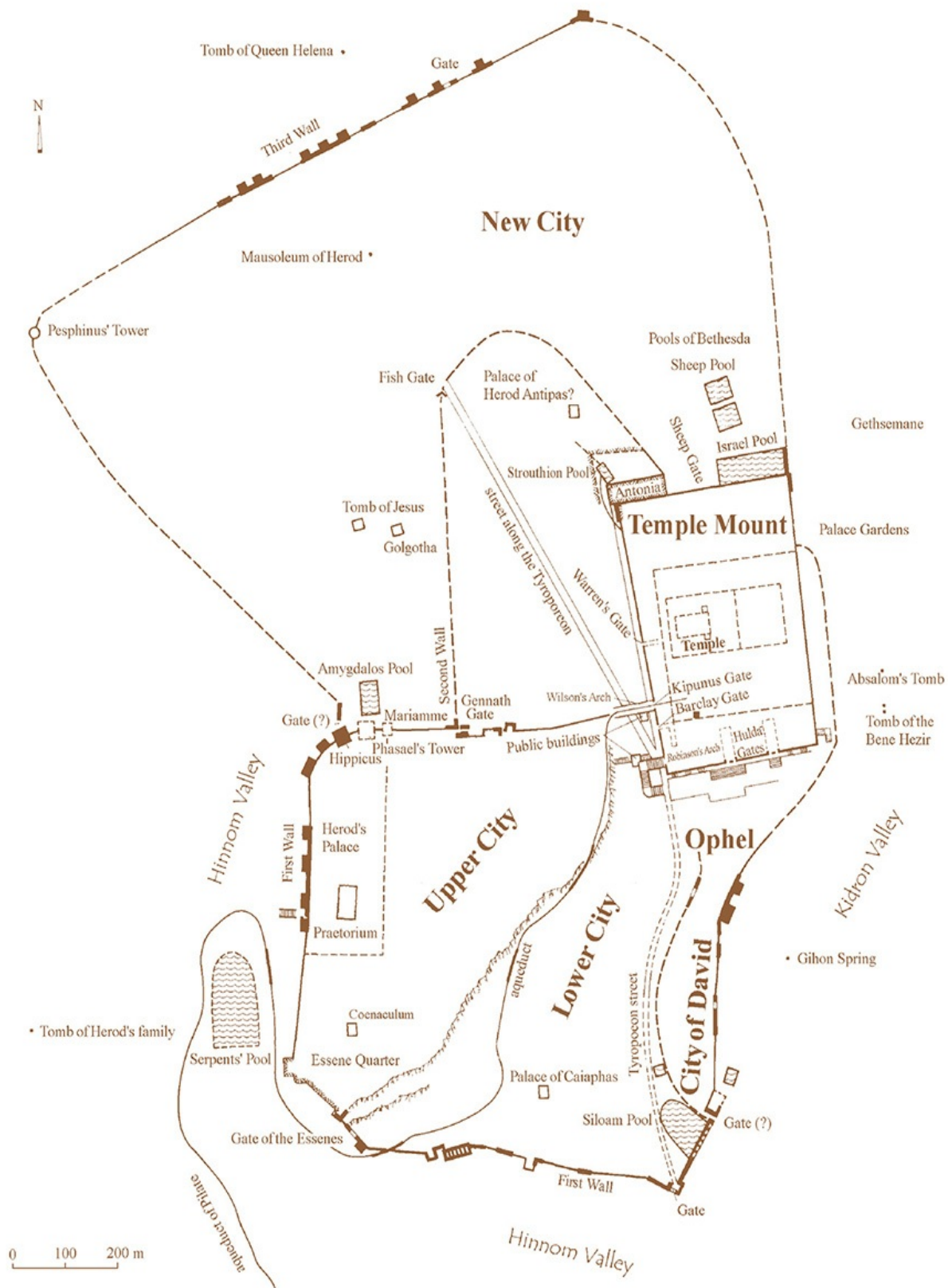
Theon. A Greek *rhetorician whose manual of rhetoric is helpful in reconstructing ancient speaking and writing styles (along with handbooks by *Quintilian and others).

***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 and some younger Sadducees*. Although “Zealots” technically refers to only one of the resistance groups, modern writers have often used the term as a convenient title for the entire resistance movement.

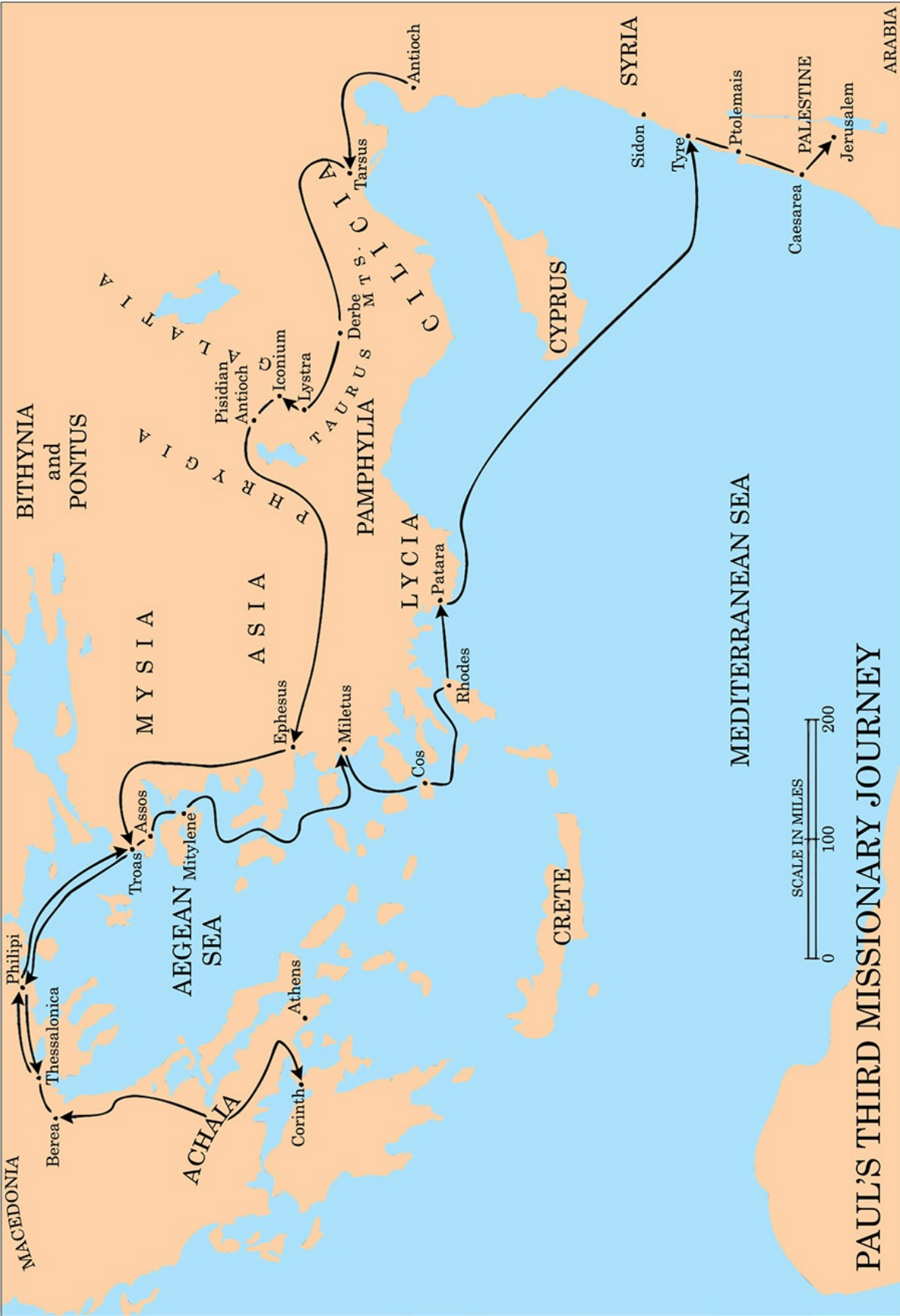
Maps & Charts

MAP OF JERUSALEM









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 (41–54)
◊ patron of Pallas
◊ expels Jews from Rome over “Chrestus” (possibly 49)

■ Nero (54–68)
◊ murders, orgies, bestiality, matricide

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); probable 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. 18–26)

■ 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. 60–62)

- Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, 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

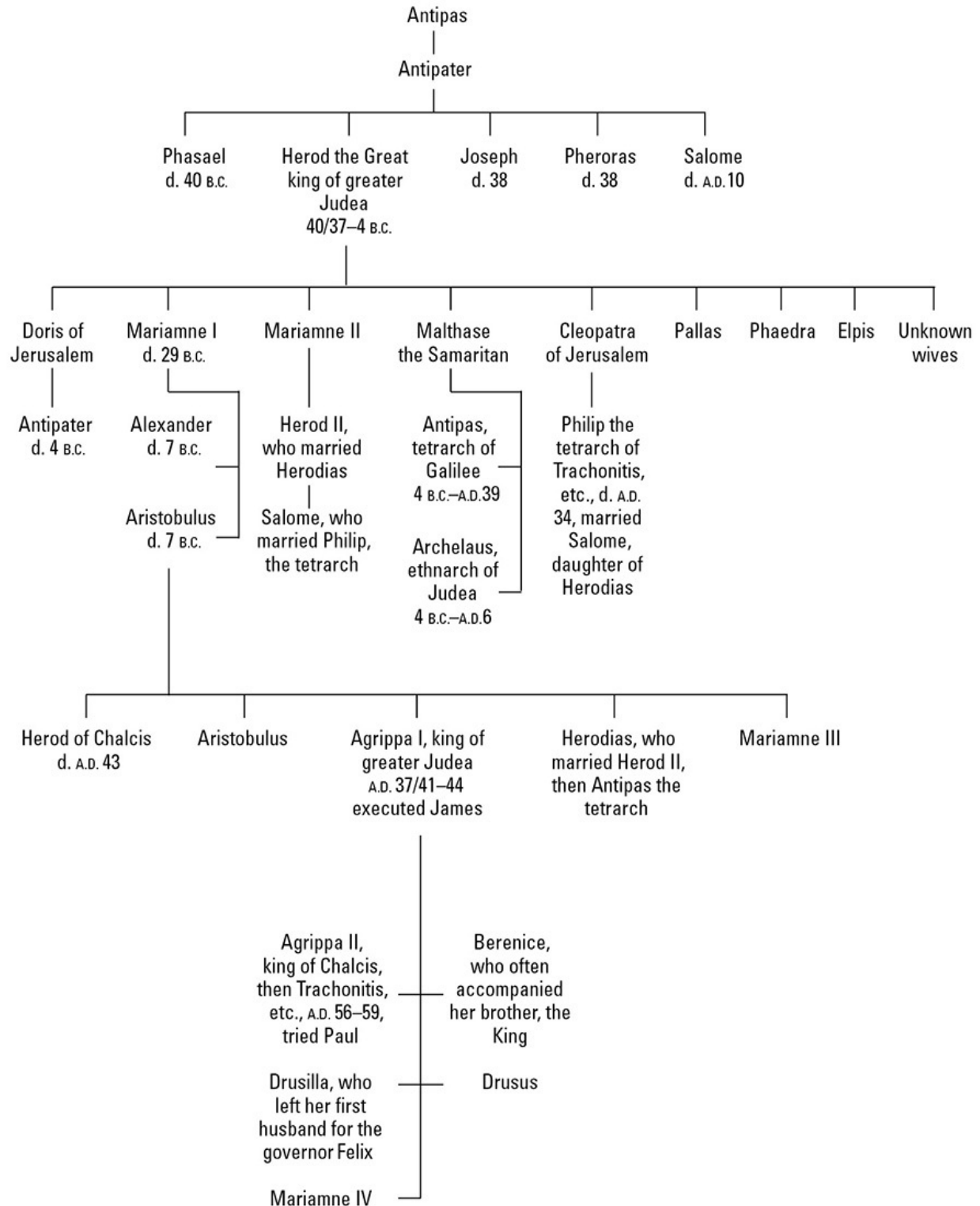
- Revelation

- Gentile Christianity overshadowing Jewish Christianity in many areas, understanding its roots less

- *Justin Martyr

- Irenaeus, Athanasius, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian

MAJOR FIGURES IN THE HERODIAN FAMILY



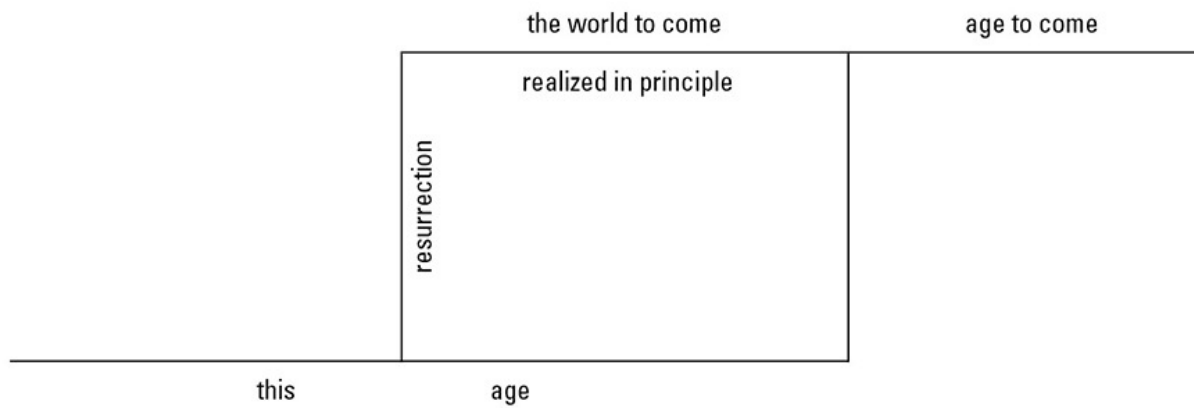
From Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992). Used with permission.

JEWISH ESCHATOLOGY

this age

age to come

CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY



George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: 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: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 65-66. Used with permission.

Old Testament Scripture Index

Page numbers refer to print version.

Genesis

1, 249, 495, 640, 658, 704, 770
1–2, 153
1:1, 249, 772
1:3, 433, 434, 505
1:11-12, 678
1:14-19, 673
1:21, 678
1:24-25, 678
1:26, 415, 560, 577, 673, 677, 751
1:26-27, 102, 160, 263, 428, 435, 441, 493, 495, 570, 642
1:26-28, 493
1:27, 93, 483
1:28, 570, 677
1:30-31, 609
2, 495
2:2, 261
2:2-3, 452
2:4, 47
2:7, 52, 256, 276, 311, 377, 466, 493, 495, 751
2:9, 297, 457, 732, 776
2:10, 775
2:17, 575, 714
2:18, 428, 473, 483, 606
2:21-22, 483
2:24, 93, 153, 472, 553
3, 105, 189, 274, 517, 606, 752, 754

3:1, 53
3:3, 575
3:5, 466, 560, 700
3:6, 457, 709
3:8, 713
3:9, 243
3:11, 243
3:13, 437
3:15, 435, 457, 754
3:16, 490
3:16-19, 776
3:18, 197
3:19, 598
3:22, 297
3:24, 714, 777
4:4-7, 57
4:8, 106, 211
4:9-10, 243
4:10, 106, 119, 211, 658, 664, 681, 742, 754
4:15, 78, 119, 743
4:24, 78, 91
5, 47
5:1, 47
5:3, 441
5:11, 47
5:21-24, 658
5:24, 350
6, 702
6-9, 704
6:1-3, 206, 483, 518, 694, 702
6:1-4, 721
6:3, 438, 538, 694, 705
6:8, 181
6:9, 179
6:11-13, 621
8:10-12, 130, 252
8:11-12, 53

8:21, 551
9:2, 677
9:4, 268, 366
9:6, 119
9:15, 704
9:15-16, 183
9:21, 179
10, 323, 377
11:31-32, 659
12, 677
12:1, 336, 659
12:2-3, 446
12:3, 327, 361, 529, 530, 547
12:4, 659
12:10-20, 70
13:10, 261
13:15-16, 531
14, 649
14:17-24, 649
14:18, 646
14:20, 649
15:1, 181, 380, 776
15:2, 533
15:6, 182, 433, 529, 530, 535, 677
15:8, 180
15:12, 730
15:12-21, 275
15:13, 336
15:16, 586, 765
16, 677
16:1, 535
16:1-4, 535
16:3-4, 433
16:11, 48, 179
16:15, 535
16:16, 433
17:1, 179

17:5, 434, 734
17:8, 336, 531
17:9-14, 530
17:10-14, 524, 536
17:11, 433, 529, 574
17:13, 336
17:15, 734
17:15-21, 535
17:18-21, 442
17:19, 48, 179
17:24-25, 433
18, 274, 665
18:2, 261
18:3, 693
18:4, 200, 288
18:12, 693
18:12-15, 181
18:14, 158, 181
18:17, 296
18:21, 765
18:22-32, 85
18:23-32, 673
18:25, 702
18:27, 133
18:30-32, 133
19, 71, 206, 226
19:1-16, 702
19:2, 243
19:5, 721
19:11, 180, 346
19:15-16, 226
19:16, 181
19:17, 765
19:19, 181
19:24, 759
19:24-25, 771
19:26, 226

20:1-18, 70
20:7, 715
20:17, 715
21:2, 536
21:6-7, 180
21:10, 274, 536
22, 659, 677
22:1, 673
22:2, 77, 130, 159, 231, 659
22:11, 346
22:12, 677
22:16, 648
22:16-18, 184
22:17, 659, 771
22:17-18, 531
22:18, 327
23, 337
23:4, 659, 690
24, 258, 259
24:7, 531
24:13-27, 345
24:17, 259
24:28-32, 261
24:60, 531
24:63-64, 261
25:23, 442, 526
25:31-34, 663
26:3, 183
26:4-5, 677
26:7-11, 70
26:12, 79, 137
26:18-22, 630
26:24, 380, 617, 730
26:29, 367
26:31, 367
26:34-35, 663
27:13, 120

27:28-29, 659
27:35, 253
27:38, 663
27:39-40, 659
28:12, 253
28:12-15, 380
28:15, 380
29, 258, 259
29:10, 259
30:23, 180
31:24, 380
31:26, 253
31:54, 653
32:12, 771
32:22-32, 554
32:24, 579
32:26-30, 147, 254
33:4, 457
33:13-14, 693
33:19, 337
35:19, 51
37:5-11, 48
37:8, 712
37:9, 752
37:11, 185, 336
37:20, 159
38:6, 47
38:11, 102, 259
38:12, 279
39:1, 344
39:12, 472
39:17-19, 288
40-41, 48
40:14, 241
40:20-22, 256, 287
41:2, 279
41:8, 384

41:25-27, 744
41:32, 347
41:33-36, 354
41:38, 292, 573, 688
41:39, 384
41:42, 257
41:49, 771
41:55, 254
42:2, 337
43:23, 617
45:8, 337
45:15, 457
45:16-20, 337
46:2, 346
46:30, 186
47:9, 690
48:13-14, 192
48:14, 154, 335
48:14-20, 343
48:15, 278
49, 659, 672
49:3-4, 571
49:9-10, 739
49:10-11, 769
49:11, 268, 759
49:16-17, 744
49:24, 278
49:29-32, 337
50:13, 337
50:24, 183
50:24-25, 659

Exodus

1, 346
1:7, 338

1:8, 338
1:8-22, 51
1:9-11, 338
1:10, 223
1:19, 269
1:19-20, 758
1:22, 51, 338
1:22–2:10, 51
2, 258, 259
2:1-10, 48
2:2, 338
2:2-3, 659
2:5-6, 338
2:10, 338
2:12, 338
2:13-14, 50
2:13-15, 338
2:14-15, 660
2:15, 258
2:16-21, 259
2:20, 261
2:21-22, 338
2:23, 440, 506
2:23-25, 697
2:24, 183
3:1-2, 136
3:1–4:17, 346
3:2, 641, 728
3:2-10, 338
3:4, 346, 347
3:6, 160, 232
3:7-9, 697
3:11, 503
3:13, 297
3:14, 83, 145, 266, 275, 299, 503, 728
3:15, 297
3:16, 183

4:3, 256
4:4-9, 291
4:9, 261
4:10, 347, 465
4:11, 69
4:19, 51
4:21, 549
4:22, 146, 250, 274, 303, 440, 533, 662, 664
4:22-23, 263
4:31, 274
5:17, 452
5:21, 274
5:23, 291
6:5, 183
6:6, 183
6:7, 275, 366, 773
6:8, 183
6:9-13, 622
6:12-30, 47
7:1, 508, 629
7:3, 454
7:5, 543
7:7, 338
7:9, 256
7:9-10, 256
7:10-12, 342
7:11, 342, 384, 597, 621, 756
7:14-25, 750
7:15, 256
7:18, 746
7:20, 254, 760
7:20-21, 746
7:22, 342, 443, 756, 762
7:22-23, 748
8:5-7, 761
8:6, 192
8:7, 342, 756

8:10, 748
8:13, 108
8:15, 443
8:17, 192
8:18, 756
8:18-19, 342
8:19, 210
8:24, 192
8:28, 743
8:32, 443
9:4, 743
9:10, 760
9:11, 342
9:12, 443
9:14, 748
9:15-16, 443
9:16, 443
9:20-21, 765
9:21-23, 109
9:23-24, 746
9:24, 762
9:24-25, 746
9:29, 748
9:35, 443
10:2, 748
10:12, 747
10:13, 192
10:21, 761
10:21-23, 173, 742
10:22, 242, 761
10:22-23, 746
10:27, 443
11:7, 743
11:9-10, 454
11:10, 443
12, 660
12:3, 285

12:6, 285
12:8, 268
12:11, 214, 688
12:12, 752
12:12-13, 740
12:13, 432
12:14, 236, 484, 654
12:15-17, 148
12:22, 289, 307
12:23, 480
12:25, 530
12:31, 50
12:40, 531
12:46, 307
13:2, 186
13:3, 484
13:5, 530
13:8, 714
13:9, 743
13:12, 186
13:16, 743
13:19, 183
13:21, 440, 761, 771
13:21-22, 50
14:4, 748
14:10-22, 660
14:13, 186
14:16, 344
14:29, 660
14:31, 290, 660
15:1-18, 760
15:2, 548
15:3, 768
15:11, 755, 760
15:13, 183, 440
15:18, 768
15:26, 526

16, 266
16:2, 268
16:4, 209, 267
16:7, 254, 283
16:7-12, 480
16:8, 346
16:13, 192
16:15, 267
16:18, 513
17:1-7, 271
17:2, 480
17:3, 480
17:4, 276, 281, 341
17:6, 480
17:7, 54, 189, 480
18:21, 334
19–20, 55
19:4, 106, 217, 754
19:5, 629
19:5-6, 100, 689
19:6, 689, 690, 728, 740
19:9, 264, 291
19:11, 264
19:12-13, 663
19:16, 663, 729, 738, 752, 758, 762
19:18, 322, 330, 664
19:24, 195, 737
20, 272
20:1, 545
20:2, 432
20:5, 105, 211, 264, 516, 679
20:6, 291, 555
20:7, 61, 118, 682
20:11, 363
20:12, 57, 249, 530, 553
20:17, 58
20:18-21, 663

20:19, 663
20:20, 530, 663
21:16, 603
21:17, 221
21:24-25, 58, 152
21:32, 114, 119
22:1-4, 229
22:2-3, 110
22:4, 765
22:7, 765
22:9, 765
22:13, 280
22:18, 77, 270
22:20-24, 674
22:21, 714
22:22-24, 226
22:25, 112
22:26-27, 59, 163
22:28, 300, 398, 691
22:31, 146
23:4-5, 59
23:6-8, 62
23:7, 433
23:9, 500
23:16, 493, 496
23:19, 493, 758
23:22, 689
24, 653
24:1, 149
24:1-2, 195
24:3, 453
24:4, 52, 736
24:6-8, 653
24:7-8, 687
24:8, 115, 167, 236, 484, 653, 655, 666
24:9, 149
24:9-11, 737

24:10-11, 56, 264
24:11, 480
24:12, 453, 737
24:14, 88, 150
24:15, 88
24:15-16, 88, 150, 204
24:16, 88, 149
24:17, 664
25:2, 514
25:8, 292, 293
25:8-9, 651, 772
25:30, 481
25:31-40, 731
26:33, 122, 242
27:10-17, 736
28, 774
28:3, 334, 544
28:4, 730
28:9-12, 52
28:17-20, 774
28:30, 570
28:36-38, 769
28:38, 743
29:18, 551
29:29, 710
29:37, 653
29:43, 298
29:45, 293, 772, 773
30:7-8, 179
30:12, 88, 605, 657
30:13-16, 89
30:19, 679
31:3, 292, 334, 543, 544, 547
31:14, 76, 135, 195
31:18, 272, 503
32-34, 149, 204
32:1-6, 339

32:1-8, 88, 150
32:4, 480
32:6, 480
32:10, 100, 649
32:10-13, 673
32:13, 183, 648
32:21-25, 88, 150
32:28, 480
32:32, 207, 442
32:32-33, 565, 735, 771
32:33-34, 442
32:33-35, 443
32:35, 88, 150
33-34, 250, 297
33:9, 504
33:10, 504
33:11, 294, 487, 504, 655
33:12, 279
33:12-34:9, 146, 254
33:13, 181, 564
33:17, 279
33:18, 291
33:19, 144, 250, 297, 443, 504
33:20, 250, 504, 614, 713, 776
33:20-23, 250
33:23, 655
34:2, 737
34:5, 297
34:5-6, 504
34:6, 250, 291
34:6-7, 256, 505
34:14, 297, 516
34:22, 493
34:26, 493, 758
34:29, 88, 297, 776
34:29-30, 336, 504
34:29-35, 711

34:30, 331, 504
34:30-35, 655
34:33-34, 507
34:33-35, 504
34:34, 504
34:35, 336, 504
35:2, 76, 135, 195
35:5, 514
35:21-22, 514
35:24, 512
35:30, 294
35:31, 292, 328, 334, 543, 544
38:10-28, 736
40:15, 649, 710
40:34-35, 322, 760
40:35, 88

Leviticus

1, 537
1–4, 512
1:3, 508, 614
1:3-9, 254
1:10, 614
1:14, 157
2:2, 350
2:12, 758
2:13, 152
3:1, 614
3:6, 614
4:2, 656
4:2-21, 254
4:3, 614
4:7, 742
4:18, 742
4:22, 656

4:23, 614
4:25, 742
4:32, 614
4:34, 742
5:3, 64
5:5, 708
5:7, 157
5:9, 742
5:11-13, 653
6:17, 448
6:25, 448
8:2, 254
8:15, 653, 742
9:7, 646
9:9, 742
9:11, 666
9:24-10:2, 750
10:1-5, 331
10:2, 771
10:4-5, 331
11, 84, 146, 452, 665
11:4, 105
11:31, 510
11:32, 105
11:34, 105
11:38, 232
11:39, 575
11:44, 688
11:44-45, 60, 451, 510, 551
12:8, 157, 186
13:45-46, 64, 132, 225
14:1-32, 64, 133, 193, 225
14:6, 259, 653
14:7, 655
14:9, 655
14:10, 263
14:19, 396

14:31, 396
14:51, 259
15:5, 575
15:16-18, 758
15:19, 65
15:19-33, 69, 140, 141, 202
15:25-28, 141
15:26-27, 69, 141, 202
15:28, 140, 141
16:2, 648
16:4, 768
16:5-19, 666
16:6, 646, 650, 652
16:11, 650, 652
16:13-16, 650
16:14, 652
16:14-15, 432
16:15-16, 650, 652
16:21, 654, 708
16:21-22, 251, 508
16:27, 666
16:28, 666
16:30, 396, 708
17-18, 366
17:7, 481, 762
17:10-11, 268
17:11, 653
18, 428
18:3, 60, 549
18:5, 207, 444, 530
18:6-8, 469
18:16, 143
18:17, 82
18:22, 428
18:24-30, 549
19:2, 60, 551, 688
19:9-10, 681

19:13, 681
19:15, 398, 675, 676
19:17, 709
19:18, 59, 94, 102, 160, 195, 207, 290, 537, 675, 676, 709, 717
19:19, 510
19:23, 216
19:34, 714
20:7, 688
20:13, 428, 471
20:14, 143
20:21, 143, 588
20:23-24, 549
20:24-26, 588
20:26, 60, 471, 688
20:27, 273
21:9, 607, 764
21:10, 306
21:18, 97
22:21, 254
23:10, 441, 493, 758
23:17, 493
23:18, 561
23:22, 681
23:23, 285
23:29, 679
23:37, 561
23:40, 285, 744
24:10-23, 67, 77, 133
24:14, 305, 666
24:16, 275, 341
24:23, 275, 305
25, 59, 190, 196
25:10, 190
25:18, 530
25:23, 659, 690
25:36-37, 112
25:39-41, 215

26:1, 546
26:3, 537
26:11-12, 292, 293, 510, 772
26:12, 275, 651, 773
26:13, 332
26:18, 78, 215
26:29, 108, 241
26:41, 430, 563, 679
26:42, 183
26:45, 183
27:26, 496

Numbers

2, 331
3:12, 605
4:3-47, 189
4:35, 341
5, 331
5:2-3, 198
5:23-31, 749
5:24, 759
6:1-21, 51, 393
6:3, 452
6:3-4, 180
6:18, 381
6:24-26, 565
6:24-27, 244
6:25, 544
8:21, 396
8:25, 275
9:12, 307
11, 482
11:1, 443, 480, 595
11:4-6, 480
11:17, 353

11:18, 480
11:20, 480
11:21-22, 265
11:24-25, 205
11:24-29, 330
11:25-26, 353
11:26, 205
11:28, 151, 152
11:29, 488
11:31-32, 192
11:33, 480
12:1, 338
12:6, 198
12:6-8, 487
12:7, 644, 655
12:7-8, 643
12:8, 644
14:2, 73
14:10, 276, 281, 341
14:11, 73, 261, 283, 291
14:12, 100
14:20, 108
14:22, 254, 673
14:22-23, 442, 480, 647
14:27-29, 480
14:37, 443
15:20-21, 446
15:22-29, 327
15:29-31, 656
15:30, 67
15:30-31, 327
15:32-36, 263
15:35-36, 305, 341, 666
15:38-41, 69
16, 722
16:11, 73
16:22, 776

16:28-35, 331
16:31-32, 754
16:32-35, 443
16:34, 331
16:41, 480
17:13, 663
18:9, 653
18:26, 649
19:2, 156
19:3, 666
19:6, 653
19:11, 105, 140, 575
19:11-12, 69
19:11-20, 198
19:11-22, 69, 140, 141
19:17, 259
19:21-22, 198
20:8, 480
20:10, 550
21, 256
21:4-9, 256, 259
21:5-6, 480
21:6-9, 415
21:8-9, 256
21:16-18, 256, 259
22-25, 350
22:20-35, 703
22:23, 352
22:27-28, 352
24:17, 701, 777
25:1-2, 734
25:1-3, 734
25:1-8, 480
25:3, 472
25:4-5, 443
25:7-13, 563
25:8, 734

25:9, 480
25:11, 516, 526, 678
25:13, 396
26:10, 480
27:15-23, 195
27:16, 776
27:17, 70, 144, 279
27:18, 292, 335, 573, 688
27:23, 192, 335, 383
28:10, 76
28:26, 758
31:8, 703, 734
31:16, 480, 703, 734
31:23, 466
33:55, 521
35:18-21, 59
35:33, 119
35:34, 573

Deuteronomy

1:13, 334
1:16, 272
1:34-35, 442
1:35, 443
2, 279
2:5, 336
3:2, 440, 730
3:26, 550
4:1, 207, 444, 530
4:2, 777
4:6, 464
4:7, 565
4:11-12, 663
4:12, 264
4:16-20, 428

4:19, 339
4:20, 629
4:24, 663, 664
4:25-31, 447
4:26, 444
4:30, 586, 640
4:32, 640
4:34, 454
4:40, 207, 437, 444, 530
5:10, 291, 555
5:11, 682
5:16, 249, 553
5:22, 503
5:24-25, 663
5:25-27, 663
5:29, 291, 429, 443, 545, 651
5:33, 444, 530
6:4, 78, 160, 281, 298, 432, 477, 677
6:4-5, 73, 219, 482, 677
6:5, 102, 160, 207, 291, 593, 709
6:5-6, 709
6:6-7, 445
6:7, 622
6:8, 103, 743
6:11, 56
6:13, 54, 189
6:14, 54, 189
6:16, 54, 189, 480
6:18, 526
6:22, 454, 521
6:25, 464
7:3, 476, 510
7:5, 384
7:6, 629
7:6-7, 294
7:6-9, 545
7:7-8, 182, 256

7:7-9, 543, 677
7:8, 183, 447
7:19, 454, 521
7:25, 384
8, 86
8:1, 207, 249, 437, 444, 530
8:2, 189, 673
8:3, 53, 189, 267, 303
8:3-5, 189
8:5, 54, 662
8:7-10, 56
8:15, 206
8:16, 640
9:3, 664
9:4, 444
9:5, 183
9:5-6, 444, 545
9:10, 272
9:19, 663
10:12-13, 104
10:16, 340, 429, 430, 563, 574
10:17, 429, 764, 766, 769
10:19, 714
10:22, 337
11, 533
11:1, 291
11:3, 454
11:9, 249
11:13, 291
11:18, 743
11:22, 291
11:29, 258
12:8, 526
12:25, 526
12:32, 777
13, 63, 525
13:1, 198

13:1-2, 757
13:1-11, 74, 115, 158
13:3, 673
13:3-4, 291
13:5, 136, 470, 525
13:6, 66
13:6-11, 73, 656
13:13-14, 145
14, 84, 146
14:1, 440
14:2, 294, 543, 629
14:3-20, 665
14:24-27, 157
15:4-11, 514
15:7-8, 676
15:9, 59, 133, 196, 675, 714
15:9-10, 515
15:10, 59, 196, 514, 567
15:11, 59, 114, 165, 285
15:14, 496, 512
16:2-3, 484
16:16, 186
16:18-20, 62
16:20, 207, 444
17:3, 339
17:5, 305, 666
17:6, 142, 264, 272, 351, 522, 612, 714, 750
17:6-7, 656
17:7, 91, 272, 341, 470
18, 150
18:5, 291, 294
18:7, 291
18:9, 60
18:9-20, 74
18:9-22, 270
18:10, 147, 270, 364
18:11, 49

18:15, 49, 51, 88, 109, 150, 198, 204, 265, 271, 327
18:15-18, 88, 243, 251, 253, 260, 266, 644, 750
18:18, 51, 198, 265, 271, 339
18:18-19, 149, 158
18:19-22, 291
18:20, 136, 158, 525
18:21, 133
18:21-22, 63
18:22, 64, 170
19:9, 291
19:15, 90, 142, 264, 272, 273, 351, 522, 612, 714, 750
19:16-17, 272
19:16-21, 117, 169
19:18-19, 119, 336
19:18-21, 62
19:19, 272, 341, 470
20:7, 219
21:1-9, 106, 119, 211, 390, 664
21:3, 156
21:5, 294
21:6, 120, 679, 738
21:17, 213, 221, 640
21:18-21, 221, 553, 578
21:19-21, 305
21:20, 74, 199, 626
21:21, 331, 470
21:22-23, 174, 332, 352
21:23, 123, 307, 308, 463, 530, 657, 662
22:7, 57
22:10, 510
22:12, 69
22:13-29, 471, 587
22:15-21, 516
22:21, 764
22:23-24, 48
22:23-27, 48, 517
22:24, 305, 666

22:26, 469, 715
23:1, 93, 344, 345, 537
23:2-6, 105, 211
23:3-4, 455
23:9-11, 758
23:15-16, 633
23:17, 563
23:17-18, 776
23:19-20, 112
23:21-23, 58
23:25, 75
24:1, 93, 153
24:1-4, 93
24:5, 219
24:7, 470, 603, 766
24:13, 108, 550
24:14-15, 95, 681
24:15, 550
24:19, 681
25:2-3, 334, 519
25:3, 71
25:4, 478, 612
25:5, 102, 232
25:5-6, 160
25:5-10, 189
25:8, 91
26:5, 484
26:8, 323, 324, 454
26:16-19, 549
27-28, 104, 195, 525
27:12, 258
27:25, 119
27:26, 56, 530
28, 530
28:6, 279
28:10, 366
28:19, 279

28:26, 109, 226
28:29, 173
28:49, 489
28:53, 241
28:57, 108
29:4, 84, 443, 446
29:13, 183
29:17, 343
29:18, 663, 746
29:23, 152
29:29, 110, 722, 749
30:1-6, 447
30:6, 207, 291, 340, 429, 430, 503, 545, 563, 574
30:11, 444
30:11-14, 503, 545, 651, 714
30:12, 444
30:12-14, 445
30:13, 444
30:14, 133, 291, 444, 445, 712
30:15, 63
30:16, 444, 530
30:16-20, 207
30:19, 741
30:20, 183, 444, 530
31:6, 665
31:8, 665
31:23, 70
32, 640, 760
32:5, 86, 325, 440, 561
32:6, 60, 377
32:8, 544
32:11, 106, 217, 754
32:13, 480
32:17, 481
32:18-20, 440
32:19, 510, 643
32:19-20, 250

32:20, 86
32:21, 445, 446, 481, 679
32:32, 71, 206, 343, 702
32:34-35, 429
32:34-36, 595
32:35, 59, 449, 680
32:35-36, 657
32:37-39, 481
32:41, 595
32:43, 106, 211, 453, 768
32:47, 530
33:2, 340, 641, 663
33:4-5, 266
34, 721, 750
34:6, 204
34:7, 338
34:9, 192, 334, 335, 383, 544
34:10, 487
34:11, 454

Joshua

1:5, 665
1:9, 181
2:1, 47
2:1-21, 677
2:15, 348, 520
3-4, 129
3:13-17, 84
4:2-3, 774
4:20-21, 52
5:13, 243
6, 660
6:6, 745
6:13, 745
6:22-25, 677

6:25, 350
7, 330
7:1, 330
7:5, 470
7:12-13, 470
7:19, 277
7:25, 470
8:1, 730
10:14, 108
10:26-27, 662
13:1-2, 645
13:22, 703, 734
23:13, 521
24:32, 337

Judges

2:3, 521
2:18, 697
2:22, 673
3:6, 476
3:10, 353
4-5, 660
5:18, 754
5:19, 762
5:20, 753
5:28, 186
6:11-23, 728
6:11-24, 346
6:17, 86, 180
6:22-23, 124
6:23, 181
6:33, 762
6:34, 353, 451
6:36-40, 180
7:9-15, 346

7:10-11, 180
10:16, 256, 289, 697
11:29, 252
12:6, 170, 238
13:4-5, 180
13:7, 180
13:19-20, 124
14:6, 328
15:14, 547
16:28-31, 661
18:30, 744
19:5-9, 244

Ruth

1:4, 47
2:2-3, 75
4:11, 87, 466

1 Samuel

1-2, 180
1:2, 186
1:7, 186
1:18, 181
2:1, 183
2:1-10, 182
2:1-11, 180
2:3-9, 75
2:25, 715
2:26, 184, 187
2:31, 230, 260
3:3-10, 396
3:4-10, 351
3:10, 346
5:12, 765

6:7, 156
8:7, 73, 151, 346
9:2, 269
9:3, 90
9:17, 303
9:20, 89
10:1, 710
10:5, 260, 488, 489, 740
10:5-6, 183
10:6, 255, 343, 687
10:9, 710
10:10-11, 701
10:24, 294
11:12, 120
11:13, 205
12:3-5, 521
12:7-12, 336
12:17-18, 683
12:22, 629
12:23, 570
14:24, 117
14:45, 72, 212, 234, 413
15:2-3, 105, 211
15:3, 288
15:18, 288
15:22, 68, 654
16:2-3, 269
16:7, 223, 366, 507
16:13, 710
16:14, 343
16:23, 70, 77, 131
17:28, 712
17:33, 609
17:37, 624
17:44, 109, 226
17:44-46, 769
17:45, 64

19:12, 348, 520
19:20, 127, 353, 489, 593
19:20-24, 63, 701
19:23, 353
19:24, 299
20:41, 390, 457, 497
21:1, 135
21:5, 758
22:3, 306
23:26, 108
24:3, 278
24:8, 84
25:4, 681
25:23, 84
25:33, 59
25:36, 681
25:41, 181, 288, 611
26:10-11, 59
28:23, 244
29:9, 534
30:6, 276
31:4, 119

2 Samuel

3:18, 183
3:21-23, 367
3:28-29, 120
4:4, 263
5:2, 278, 279
5:8, 97
5:24, 116
6:2, 645
6:6-7, 331
6:10-11, 546
7, 86, 640

7:5, 183
7:5-7, 689
7:8, 183
7:10, 366
7:12-16, 181, 689
7:14, 86, 170, 303, 426, 510, 640
7:16, 287
7:24, 629
7:25, 181
7:26, 183
8:18, 546
9:6, 181
9:11, 181
10:12, 133
11:3, 47
11:11, 758
12:1-7, 99
12:5-7, 99
12:7, 92, 207
12:9, 324
12:9-10, 350
12:13-14, 119
12:31, 515
14:2-20, 96
14:4, 286
14:8-17, 99
14:11, 72, 212, 234, 413
14:17, 534, 647
14:20, 534
15:18-22, 546
15:19-20, 66
15:21, 510
15:21-22, 66
15:23, 299
16:6, 281
16:13, 281
17:23, 119

18:2, 546
19:22, 205
19:27, 534
19:37-38, 561
20:16-22, 96
20:23, 546
21:1, 211
21:1-9, 455
22:3, 183
22:6, 324
22:14, 286
22:48, 449
22:50, 453
23:2-3, 489
24:14-16, 657
24:18-24, 546

1 Kings

1:1, 562
1:15-21, 96
1:33, 97
1:34, 751
1:38, 230
1:52, 72, 212, 413
3:4-5, 396
3:5, 672
3:9, 647
4:5, 304
6:12-13, 772
6:20, 774
6:22, 652
7:2-6, 736
7:15-22, 736
7:23, 738
7:29, 739

8:10-11, 322, 760
8:14, 547
8:22, 203, 547
8:23, 555
8:39, 441
8:41-43, 157, 393, 546
8:46, 431
8:54, 203, 341, 547
10:1, 78, 93, 101
10:5, 213
10:10, 50
11:29, 127
11:40, 50
12:11, 747
12:29, 744
13:4, 135, 188, 263
13:8-9, 127
13:9-10, 206
13:30-31, 123
14:4, 263, 278, 562
14:6, 89
14:11, 224
14:13, 224
14:15, 73, 198
16:4, 224
16:31, 74, 85, 206
17, 317, 683
17-19, 131
17:1, 683, 750
17:3-4, 344
17:4, 129
17:8-24, 85
17:9, 129
17:9-14, 344
17:9-24, 73, 74, 206
17:12, 152
17:12-16, 152

17:13-24, 370
17:16, 266
17:17-24, 146, 198
17:18-19, 85
17:19, 348, 349
17:21-22, 69, 388
17:21-24, 661
17:22, 82, 202
17:23, 148, 198, 348, 349
18:1, 683
18:4, 340
18:12, 266, 345
18:13, 71, 188, 340
18:19, 734
18:24-26, 291
18:28, 139, 563
18:28-39, 342
18:31, 52
18:32, 291
18:36, 283
18:36-37, 146, 254
18:38, 86, 205, 750
18:41, 750
18:41-46, 683
19:2, 188
19:3-4, 87
19:4, 559, 683
19:8, 88, 136, 266
19:10, 446
19:11-18, 136
19:14, 446
19:18, 751
19:19, 131
19:19-21, 154, 205
20:40, 230
20:40-42, 99, 207
21:10, 691

21:18, 127
21:24, 224
22:4, 534
22:12-13, 195
22:16, 117
22:17, 70, 296
22:19, 737
22:24, 59, 398
22:26-27, 188
22:26-30, 443
22:27, 195
22:34-35, 443
22:38, 224

2 Kings

1-8, 131
1:2, 209
1:2-3, 77
1:4, 263
1:8, 52
1:9, 188
1:10, 205, 326, 331, 750, 771
1:12, 205, 331, 750
2, 320
2:2, 146, 254, 391
2:3, 391
2:3-7, 489
2:4, 146, 254, 391
2:5, 391
2:6, 146, 254, 391
2:7, 391
2:9, 146, 180, 254, 291
2:9-10, 391
2:11, 74, 204, 345, 751, 769
2:14, 326

2:15, 489
2:15-18, 391
2:16, 266, 345
2:19-22, 147
2:21-22, 158, 326
2:24, 291, 326, 331
3:15, 488
4:1, 227
4:1-7, 147, 192
4:2, 181
4:3-7, 158
4:8-11, 71, 370
4:8-23, 370
4:8-37, 73
4:10-11, 348
4:14-28, 146, 254
4:16, 282
4:27, 93, 153
4:27-28, 133
4:28, 85
4:29, 206, 214, 383
4:32, 348
4:33, 349
4:33-35, 69
4:34-35, 82, 202, 388
4:35-37, 661
4:36, 148, 198, 349
4:38, 71, 127, 265
4:38-41, 147
4:41, 265
4:41-44, 158
4:42, 200
4:42-43, 83
4:42-44, 83, 144, 147, 192, 203, 265, 266
4:43, 265, 326
4:44, 266
5, 191, 225

5:7, 135
5:10, 326, 344
5:10-14, 276
5:11, 291
5:14, 64
5:15-19, 71
5:20-27, 330
5:26, 89
5:27, 330
6:1, 71
6:1-3, 127
6:1-7, 489
6:12, 133
6:16, 713
6:16-17, 139, 352
6:17, 116, 243, 244, 346, 544, 595, 769
6:18, 108, 358
6:18-20, 69, 346
6:26, 286
6:29, 108, 241
6:31, 188
6:32, 89, 139
7:3, 64, 191, 225
7:16, 147
8:10, 269
9:1, 214
9:1-10, 127
9:3, 206
9:6, 710
9:7, 52
9:11, 507, 703
9:13, 156
9:22, 734, 762, 767
9:36-37, 255
13, 317
13:14, 157, 263, 562
13:21, 383

14:25, 272
14:25-27, 704
17:16, 339
18:4, 194
18:5, 74
18:12, 251
18:21, 73, 198
18:33-35, 756
19:7, 392
19:28, 392
19:33, 392
19:34, 251
19:35, 116, 312, 392
20:6, 251
20:8, 180
20:8-9, 85
20:17, 230, 260
21, 47
21:3, 339
21:5, 339
21:18, 308
21:26, 308
22:11, 679
22:20, 765
23:4-5, 339
23:25, 74
24:2, 251

1 Chronicles

5:12, 571
11:41, 546
11:46, 546
12:8, 739
12:18, 244
12:33, 672

12:38, 453
14:12, 384
15:2, 294
15:24, 745
16:16, 183
16:31, 453
16:36, 183, 548
17:6, 660
17:14, 644
17:22, 275
18:17, 546
23:15, 338
24-25, 738
24:7, 321
24:7-18, 179
25:1, 740
25:1-3, 183
25:1-5, 488, 489
25:1-6, 260, 552, 563, 729
25:3, 722, 740
25:6, 740
25:8, 321
27:33, 304
28:9, 441, 735
28:10, 294
29:1, 294
29:6-9, 514
29:11-12, 740
29:12, 541, 544
29:15, 690

2 Chronicles

4:2, 738
4:6, 738
5:12, 740

5:13, 453
6:4, 183
6:13, 341
6:41, 550
7:2-3, 353
7:6, 745
10:14, 747
12:14, 710
15:2, 619, 665
15:6, 107
16, 47
16:12, 141, 263
18:16, 70
18:23, 59, 398
20:6, 570
20:7, 294, 677
20:14, 252
20:17, 186
20:20, 158, 290
21:12-15, 420, 731
21:15-19, 357
23-36, 474
24:20, 451
24:20-22, 106, 211, 340, 661
24:21, 188, 341
24:21-22, 330
24:22, 59, 106, 196, 211, 241
26:16-21, 331
28:15, 208
29:11, 294
29:25, 740
29:26, 745
29:30, 488
30:2-3, 194
31:4, 478
31:4-6, 649
32:7-8, 713

32:24, 85
33:7, 596
35:22, 762
36:15-16, 105

Ezra

2:68, 514
2:69, 512
3:10, 745
6:10, 448
7:12, 764
7:17, 157
9:2, 476
9:5, 341
9:12, 510
10:8, 277

Nehemiah

1:5, 555
4:3, 217
4:4, 765
5:7, 112
5:13, 379
8:1-18, 271
8:8, 395, 609
8:15, 744
9:6, 363
9:7, 294
9:11, 660
9:12, 440
9:15, 267
9:20, 292, 440
9:26, 340, 585
9:29, 530

9:30, 295
9:32, 766
10:35, 758
10:37-38, 649
11:1, 772
11:18, 772
12:27, 740
12:41, 745
13:5, 649
13:12, 649
13:22, 328
13:25, 510

Esther

3:7, 321
3:9, 92
4:16, 346
5:3, 143
5:6, 143
7:2, 143
9:19, 751
9:22, 751
9:25, 765

Job

1–2, 53
1:1, 179
1:6, 640
1:6-12, 237
1:6–2:6, 521
1:11-12, 715
1:21, 613
2:3-6, 715
3, 114

3:1-19, 559
3:3-26, 166
4-5, 467
4:8, 514, 539
4:10, 564
5:2, 744
5:13, 467
9:8, 144, 266
9:11, 144
9:13, 752
10:4, 223
11:5-9, 548
11:7, 735
12:17, 464
12:24-25, 75
13:16, 559
14:1, 74
16:10, 59
23:10, 687
26:12-13, 752
27:6, 190
28:12-19, 573
28:12-28, 548
28:28, 75
29:14, 550
31:12, 747
31:13-15, 553
33:25, 709
37:2, 286
37:5, 286
38:17, 87
40:4-5, 431
40:9, 286
41:11, 448
42:3-6, 179
42:6, 431
42:8, 715

42:10, 682

Psalms

1:1, 55, 68, 220

2, 103, 148, 160, 233

2:2, 764

2:7, 86, 303, 426

2:8-9, 735

2:11-12, 264

3:5, 67

3:7, 340

4, 340

4:8, 67, 139

5:9, 431

6:3, 742

6:8, 63

7:2, 624

7:6, 340

7:9, 321

7:15-16, 765

8, 642

8:1, 572

8:4-5, 493

8:6, 544

9:2, 291

9:13, 87, 730

9:14, 592

9:19, 340

10:7, 431

10:9, 624

10:12, 340

11:1, 66

11:2, 555

11:4, 739

12:2, 672

12:5, 340
12:6, 687
13:1, 742
14:7, 447
15, 538
15:5, 112
16:10, 491
17:8, 106, 217, 754
17:12, 624
17:13, 340
17:13-14, 624
18, 742
18:1-2, 548
18:6-19, 109, 235
18:7-16, 164
18:13, 286
18:20, 776
18:25-26, 648
18:25-27, 619
18:49, 291, 453
19:1, 363, 572
19:8, 293
19:10, 573
19:11, 776
20:3, 448
22, 360
22:1, 122
22:2, 587
22:3, 645
22:6, 494
22:12-13, 494
22:13, 624
22:15, 307
22:16, 494
22:18, 121
22:20-21, 494
22:21, 624

22:25-31, 122
22:27, 453
23:1, 278, 280
24:4, 603, 605
24:7-8, 675
25:5, 296
25:8, 68
25:8-9, 193
25:13, 56
27:1, 548, 570
27:2, 273
28:5, 466
28:9, 220, 278
29:1, 440
29:3-7, 286
30:3, 500
30:9, 559
31:12, 505
31:17-18, 745
32:1-5, 708
32:5, 433
32:6, 754
33:1, 182, 592
33:3, 740
33:6, 249, 640
33:6-9, 704
34:15, 278
34:18, 565
34:23, 182
35:1-8, 624
35:8, 765
35:23, 311
35:26, 624
36:1, 431
36:7, 106, 217, 754
37:9, 55
37:11, 55

37:28, 665
37:31, 444, 651
37:32, 536
39:1-3, 677
39:12, 690
40:3, 740
40:6, 68
40:8, 651
41:9, 166
41:13, 183
42:1, 56
42:1-2, 679
42:5-6, 115
42:8, 587
42:11, 115
43:1, 295
43:3, 296
43:5, 115
44:22, 56, 294
46:2, 88
46:4, 775
46:10, 489
47:1, 182, 592
47:5, 591
47:8-9, 591
48, 773
48:6, 296, 591
48:12-13, 749
49:7, 149
49:7-8, 88
49:7-9, 654, 662
49:15, 149, 654
50:1, 743
50:3, 745
50:4, 741
50:7-15, 68
50:8, 295

50:8-13, 377
50:21, 745
51:4, 431
51:10, 577
51:11, 382
51:16, 68, 654
51:18, 87, 466
52:1-4, 677
52:5, 624
55:5, 561
55:15, 624
55:23, 624
56:8, 207
56:9, 441
56:12, 263
57:1, 106, 217, 754
57:4, 555
57:6, 765
58:3-7, 555
58:4, 105
59:17, 548
60:3, 155
61:4, 106, 217, 754
62:12, 88, 735, 771, 776
63:1, 56, 482, 679
63:6, 116, 587
63:7, 106, 217, 754
63:9, 549
63:9-10, 624
64:3, 555
65:1, 745
65:7, 762
67:1, 319
67:7, 319
68:5, 60
68:17, 769
68:17-18, 340

68:18, 548
69, 321
69:2, 155
69:4, 294
69:7, 56
69:8, 690
69:14-15, 155
69:15, 754
69:21, 307
69:22-28, 624
69:25, 321
69:30-31, 68
69:35, 87, 466
71:6, 526
71:17, 622
72:10-11, 50, 736
72:15, 50
72:18, 183
73:1, 56, 603
73:2-28, 56
73:13, 534, 603
73:17-20, 624
74:1, 278
74:3-7, 163
74:13-15, 752
74:19, 494
75:8, 155, 759
76:2, 649
76:8-10, 745
77:2, 587
77:6, 116, 587
77:19, 144, 266
77:20, 278, 440
78:5-7, 622
78:14, 440
78:18, 480, 673
78:19-20, 267

78:21-22, 442
78:24, 266
78:39, 438
78:41, 673
78:52, 278, 440
78:56, 673
78:71-72, 278
78:77, 278
79:2, 109, 226
79:5, 742
79:10, 106, 211, 742
79:13, 278
80:1, 645
80:4, 742
80:8, 293
82:8, 340
83:1, 745
83:5, 764
84:2, 679
84:3, 66
84:11, 184, 701
86:13, 549
87:4, 752
88:11, 747
89, 103, 160, 233
89:3-4, 324
89:9-10, 752
89:27, 86, 303, 426, 571
89:35, 648
89:37, 363, 572
89:49, 648
90:4, 770
90:12, 578
91:4, 106, 217, 754
91:11, 54
91:13, 206, 415
91:14, 489

92:15, 708
93:1, 550
94:12, 662
94:19, 500
95:2, 182, 592
95:7-8, 645
95:8, 549
95:8-11, 442
95:9, 673
96:1, 740
96:10, 453
97:1, 768
97:3, 595
97:6, 572
98:1, 740
99:1, 645
100:3, 278
102:6-7, 66
102:22, 453
102:27, 665
103:15-16, 62
104:4, 54
104:27, 62
105:8-9, 183
105:9, 183
105:32, 746
106:9, 440
106:20, 428
106:26, 648
106:26-27, 442
106:28, 481
106:30-31, 295, 678
106:37, 481
106:45, 183
106:48, 548
107:10-16, 332
107:18, 730

107:29, 139, 201
107:42, 431
109:6-20, 330
109:8, 321
109:18, 550
110, 649
110:1, 161, 170, 175, 233, 493, 544
110:4, 648, 649, 651, 653, 655
111:5, 183
111:10, 75
112:5, 59
112:9, 59, 514
112:10, 759
113–118, 97, 115, 156, 167, 230, 286, 509
113:3, 743
113:7-8, 195
116:10, 509
117:1, 453
118:6, 441
118:10-11, 291
118:18-21, 100, 159, 232
118:22, 546, 643
118:25-27, 100, 159, 232
118:27, 156, 286
119:11, 185, 548, 651, 712
119:14, 573
119:18, 244, 544
119:28, 548
119:32, 509
119:40, 56
119:43, 619
119:47, 56
119:55, 587
119:61-62, 372
119:63, 68, 494
119:67, 662
119:70, 56

119:71, 662
119:72, 573
119:75, 662
119:92, 56
119:97, 56
119:103, 56
119:105, 249
119:127, 573
119:142, 291, 297
119:148, 116, 255, 587
119:151, 291
119:160, 297
119:162, 573
119:176, 296, 692
120:2-4, 677
121:1, 297
121:6, 761
121:8, 279
123:1, 283, 297
124:7, 66
125:1, 88
125:5, 540
128:6, 540
130:3, 431
132, 103, 160, 233
132:11, 324, 648
132:17, 183
135:4, 294, 629
135:15-18, 748
136:16, 440
137:7, 762
137:7-9, 196, 241
138:3, 330
138:6, 195
139:8, 442
139:15, 549
139:16, 207

139:19-22, 59
139:23, 645
140:3, 105, 431, 677
140:12, 195
141:2, 503, 740, 746
141:3-4, 61
142:3-6, 115
143:2, 431
143:3-4, 115
143:10, 292, 440
144:9, 740
145:18, 565
146–150, 767
146:6, 363
146:9, 226, 674
147:2, 87, 466
147:4, 279
148:1-12, 743
148:2-4, 533
149:1, 740
149:1-5, 182, 592
149:6-9, 769

Proverbs

1:2, 543
1:2-7, 570
1:7, 75, 212, 543
2:2, 543
2:3-4, 138
2:4, 505
2:6, 543, 672
3, 662
3:4, 187, 513
3:5-7, 75
3:11-12, 662

3:13-14, 138
3:13-15, 573
3:19, 571
3:19-20, 658
3:20, 201
3:34, 182, 679, 697
4:26, 663
5:3-4, 749
5:4, 746
5:19-20, 473
6:21, 185
7:19-20, 164
8, 249, 571
8:10, 138
8:19, 138
8:20, 99, 346
8:22-31, 658
8:24, 201
8:27-30, 571
8:30, 249, 640
9:1-18, 64
9:10, 75
10:11, 78
10:12, 683, 695
10:15, 224
10:24, 679
11:9, 677
11:16, 74
11:17, 56
11:18, 514, 539, 678
11:22, 63, 224
11:24, 681
11:24-26, 514
11:30-31, 52
11:31, 696
12:4, 224
12:15, 75

12:18, 677
12:28, 99, 346
13:8, 224
13:20, 68, 494
13:22, 213
13:23, 679
14:5, 728
14:7, 68, 494
14:19, 736
14:20, 224
14:25, 728
14:31, 195
15:1, 468, 578
15:4, 78
15:8, 57, 278
15:11, 664
15:29, 278
15:32, 63
16:2, 75
16:10, 450, 691
16:16, 138
16:27, 677
16:31, 99, 346
16:32, 490
17:3, 687
17:27-28, 78
18:10, 291
18:21, 677
18:22, 224
19:13, 607
19:17, 59, 62, 113, 151, 196, 218, 346, 567, 714
19:23, 139
20:1, 626
20:9, 431
20:12, 69
20:15, 138
20:18, 219

20:22, 449, 680
20:29, 709
21:1, 450, 691
21:2, 75
21:3, 68, 654, 666
21:9, 224
21:13, 59, 195
21:21, 429
21:22, 515
21:27, 278
21:28, 664
21:30, 464
22:4, 429
22:7, 451
22:8, 514, 539
22:9, 59, 196, 514
23:9, 63
23:20-35, 551
24:3, 64
24:6, 219
24:12, 88, 429, 735, 771
24:13-14, 749
24:21, 691
25:6-7, 104, 218
25:14, 722
25:18, 555
25:21-22, 59, 449
25:27, 507
25:28, 490
26:2, 206
26:4-5, 518
26:11, 63, 703
26:12, 75
26:21, 677
26:27, 765
27:2, 507, 516, 520
27:6, 116, 168, 238, 535

27:11, 607
27:20, 747
27:21, 466
28:7, 68, 494
28:8, 59, 112, 196
28:9, 278
28:10, 765
28:13, 708
28:20, 613
28:22, 95
28:23, 584
28:24, 84
28:27, 196
29:5, 584
29:8, 468
30:5-6, 777
30:8, 61, 209, 514
30:12, 708
30:14, 537
31, 612
31:6-7, 172

Ecclesiastes

1:6, 255
1:8, 255
1:14, 255
1:17, 255
2:11, 255
2:17, 255
2:18, 213, 261
2:24, 213, 494
2:26, 255
3:12, 213
4:4, 255
4:6, 255

4:16, 255
5:5, 58
5:7, 575
5:18-19, 213, 494
6:9, 255
7:20, 431
8:8, 255
9:11, 443
11:1-6, 137
11:7–12:14, 494
11:9, 105, 776

Song of Solomon

1:5, 240
2:7, 240
2:15, 217
3:5, 240

Isaiah

1:1, 187, 728
1:2, 440
1:3, 294, 327
1:4, 105, 211, 440
1:6, 682
1:9, 206, 444
1:9-10, 702, 750
1:10, 71
1:10-15, 57
1:10-17, 223
1:10-20, 84, 145
1:11, 654
1:11-17, 233
1:16, 689
1:17, 161, 195, 226, 674

1:21, 762
1:23, 226
2:1, 608
2:1-4, 663
2:2, 323, 426, 620, 640
2:2-3, 55
2:2-4, 536, 701
2:3, 250, 503
2:4, 112
2:6, 49
2:10, 241, 595, 743
2:11, 464
2:11-12, 104, 154, 182, 429, 596
2:12, 218, 705
2:17, 154, 182, 464, 596
2:19, 595
2:19-21, 241
2:20, 596
3:9, 71, 206, 469, 702
3:10, 539
3:12-15, 84
3:13, 340
3:16-17, 241
4:3, 207
4:4, 241
4:5-6, 745
5, 158
5:1-2, 99, 158
5:1-3, 293
5:2, 52, 197
5:4, 99, 197
5:6, 63, 648
5:7, 293
5:14, 75, 206
5:15, 104
5:16, 61, 209
5:20, 708

5:25, 750
6, 417, 614, 737, 768
6:1, 187, 287
6:1-5, 287
6:1-13, 346
6:2, 734
6:3, 739
6:4, 330
6:5, 192, 739
6:8, 346, 347, 739
6:9, 105
6:9-10, 79, 138, 278
6:9-11, 428
6:10, 84, 137, 287, 692
6:11, 742
6:13, 751
7:10-14, 180
7:11, 442
7:11-14, 86
7:14, 49, 179, 181, 184, 185, 752
7:14-16, 643
7:14-17, 49
8:1-4, 643
8:2, 728
8:3-4, 49
8:12, 694
8:13, 694
8:14, 235, 444, 690
8:14-15, 100, 186, 232
8:17, 643
8:17-18, 643
8:18, 86, 643
9, 243, 253
9:1, 54
9:1-2, 54, 505
9:2, 184, 570
9:6, 157, 185, 296, 752

9:6-7, 54, 148, 181, 184, 233, 287, 297, 324, 493, 753
9:7, 103, 156, 160, 233, 705, 751
9:11, 243
9:16, 84
10:3, 690
10:18-19, 52
10:20-22, 298
10:21, 181
10:22-23, 443, 444
10:33-34, 52
11, 253
11:1, 51, 103, 156, 160, 233, 739, 777
11:1-10, 148
11:2, 544, 728
11:4, 597, 730, 769
11:6-9, 327, 415
11:10, 426, 453
11:10-11, 596
11:12, 109, 164
12:3, 259
13-23, 731, 749
13:4, 761
13:4-7, 487
13:6, 226, 429, 462, 565
13:7, 663
13:8, 107, 296, 591
13:9, 226, 429, 462, 583
13:9-10, 742
13:10, 109, 164, 173, 235, 242, 742
13:13, 429, 583, 664
13:17, 742
13:19, 71, 206, 702
13:20-22, 767
14, 206, 518
14:13-14, 596
14:14, 263
14:14-15, 75, 206

15:9, 746
16:11, 256
17:12-13, 762
17:13, 53, 188
18:5, 293
19:1, 235
19:2, 107
19:11-12, 75
19:12, 464
19:14, 598
19:16, 235
19:18-25, 458
19:20, 86
19:23-25, 426, 775
19:24-25, 366, 446, 690
19:25, 546
20:2-6, 148
20:3, 86
21:3, 296, 591
21:8, 666
21:9, 758, 765
22:12-14, 494
22:13, 494
22:13-14, 213
22:17, 429
22:20-22, 87
22:21-22, 730
22:22, 736
23:1-8, 766
23:2, 745
23:16-18, 762
23:17, 230
24:17-18, 235
24:21, 742, 753
24:21-22, 771
24:23, 109, 738, 742, 768
25:6, 56, 65, 100, 115, 167, 237, 484, 768

25:6-7, 768
25:6-9, 218
25:8, 484, 495, 745, 768, 772
25:9, 768
26:3, 439
26:11, 53, 595, 656
26:16-21, 296
26:17-18, 591
26:17-19, 296
26:18-19, 752
26:19, 73, 264, 439, 495, 656, 727
26:19-21, 643
26:20, 583, 657
26:20-21, 586
27:1, 752
27:6, 52, 293, 538
27:9, 447
27:12-13, 590, 596
27:13, 109, 495
28:5, 586
28:9-10, 489
28:11, 489
28:16, 100, 444, 445, 643, 689
29:9-10, 148, 598
29:9-12, 428, 464
29:10, 446
29:11-12, 327
29:13, 84, 145, 576
29:13-14, 464
29:14, 75, 463, 464
29:15, 212, 467, 551
29:16, 443
29:23, 61, 209
30:7, 752
30:14, 505
30:19, 106
30:20, 56

30:27, 583
30:33, 770
31:3, 438
31:4, 591, 768
32:9, 765
32:9-14, 241
32:13-15, 81
32:15, 244, 252, 319
32:16-17, 705
32:17, 678
33:6, 573
33:11, 466
33:18, 464
33:19, 489
33:21, 441
33:24, 66
34:4, 109, 164, 235, 742
34:5, 769
34:8, 234
34:9-15, 765
34:10, 759, 768
34:14, 765
35:1-2, 772
35:3, 663
35:3-4, 592
35:4, 595
35:5, 198
35:5-6, 73, 175, 319
35:6, 147
35:9, 740
35:10, 772
37:16, 645
37:30, 86
38:7, 85, 86
40, 187
40:1, 55, 195, 500, 511
40:2, 765

40:3, 51, 52, 129, 184, 251, 346, 434, 753

40:6-7, 672

40:6-8, 62, 689, 709

40:9-11, 327

40:11, 220, 278, 692, 740

40:13, 448, 466

40:26, 279, 544

40:28-31, 75

41:1, 745

41:4, 145, 266, 729, 776

41:8, 155, 294, 677

41:8-9, 643

41:17-18, 56

41:25, 743

41:26, 164, 289

42-49, 182

42-53, 50

42:1, 130, 295, 319, 426

42:1-4, 53, 76, 77

42:3, 73, 198

42:4, 319

42:5, 377

42:6, 56, 186, 273, 319, 426, 570

42:6-7, 408, 430

42:8, 264, 275, 297

42:10, 740

42:13, 591, 768

42:14, 296, 591

42:16, 408

42:16-19, 278

42:19, 84

42:19-20, 148

43:1, 279

43:2, 661, 687, 754

43:5, 109, 164

43:6, 440, 510

43:8, 137

43:8-12, 728
43:9, 761
43:9-10, 289
43:10, 83, 145, 155, 175, 266, 273, 275
43:10-11, 249
43:10-12, 295, 319
43:11, 603
43:13, 83, 266, 275
44:2, 155, 526
44:3, 53, 130, 252, 271, 295, 319, 353, 439, 507, 530
44:5, 743
44:6, 776
44:7, 289
44:8, 319
44:8-9, 295, 728
44:11, 289
44:12-20, 481
44:18, 137, 148
44:20, 598
44:21, 155
44:23, 298
44:24-26, 643
44:25, 464
45:1, 450
45:9, 443
45:11, 440
45:14, 454, 489
45:16-17, 212
45:20-25, 481
45:21, 366, 565
45:21-25, 432
45:22, 319
45:23, 452, 561, 648
46:1-11, 481
46:4, 665
46:5-7, 363
46:6-7, 748

46:13, 298, 595
47:3, 761
47:5, 745
47:8, 767
47:8-9, 765
47:9, 767
47:10, 75, 464, 551
47:11, 591
47:11-15, 49
47:14, 466
48:2, 772
48:3-7, 289
48:5, 109, 164
48:11, 264, 275, 297
48:12, 776
48:20-21, 440
49:1, 526
49:2, 730, 769
49:3, 155, 298, 327
49:4, 534, 776
49:5, 109, 164, 327, 560
49:6, 56, 273, 319, 320, 361, 426, 570
49:7, 560
49:8, 508
49:10, 745
49:13, 55, 186, 500, 511
49:23, 453, 736
49:24-25, 77, 137
49:26, 769
50:3, 742
50:6, 59
50:8, 441
51:1-2, 86
51:2, 536
51:3, 55, 186, 511, 775
51:7, 430, 444, 651
51:9, 752

51:11, 772
51:12, 55
51:16, 572
51:17, 759
51:17-23, 155
51:21-22, 759
51:22-23, 765
52:1, 772
52:3, 186
52:5, 430
52:6, 130, 297
52:7, 129, 185, 352, 426, 427, 445, 554, 768
52:9, 55, 186, 511
52:10, 186, 319
52:11, 510
52:13, 256, 273, 286, 287, 327, 560
52:13–53:12, 148
52:14–53:11, 561
52:14–53:12, 273
52:15, 454, 653
53, 96, 115, 167, 237, 253, 256, 268, 286, 288, 304, 345, 352, 360, 536, 560,
655, 691
53:1, 287
53:1-3, 339
53:3, 329
53:4, 66
53:4-5, 692
53:4-6, 491, 653
53:5-12, 434
53:6, 70, 296, 692
53:6-8, 85
53:7, 251, 692, 740
53:7-9, 329
53:8, 491
53:8-12, 653
53:9, 691
53:10-12, 155

53:11, 251, 327
53:11-12, 491
53:12, 123, 237, 243, 491, 560, 654
53:12–54:1, 296
54:1, 536, 752
54:2-3, 774
54:5, 111, 516
54:5-6, 472
54:9, 704
54:10, 88
54:11, 55, 511
54:11-12, 773, 774, 775
54:12, 774
54:13, 268
54:17, 340
55:1, 772, 777
55:2, 56
55:3, 360, 666
55:5, 298
55:10, 514
56:3-5, 344, 345
56:3-8, 345, 458, 546, 690
56:4-5, 93, 274
56:5, 736
56:7, 97, 157, 230, 448
56:8, 109, 164
57:3, 762
57:3-4, 78, 735
57:7-8, 735
57:15, 287
57:18, 55
57:19, 325, 352, 546, 666
57:20, 672, 722
58:1-14, 223
58:3-12, 61
58:6, 343
58:6-7, 195

58:8, 440
58:8-10, 570
59:5-8, 78
59:7-8, 431
59:9, 570
59:10, 273
59:13, 84
59:16-18, 768
59:17, 554, 555
59:19, 743
59:20-21, 447
59:21, 439
60:1, 551, 570
60:1-2, 264, 298, 494, 595
60:1-3, 773, 775
60:3, 453, 690
60:3-12, 446
60:3-22, 775
60:5, 770
60:6-10, 454
60:9-14, 453
60:11, 736, 775
60:11-14, 454
60:14, 736
60:18, 774
60:19, 434, 494
60:19-20, 775
60:21, 543, 690
61, 73, 190
61:1, 73, 330, 352, 710
61:2, 55, 234
61:3, 434, 494, 543, 550, 586, 690
61:6, 689
61:10, 550
62:1-2, 705
62:2, 434, 494, 595
62:3, 586

62:4-5, 516
62:5, 296, 752
62:12, 772
62:16, 186
63:1-6, 759
63:2-3, 769
63:4, 234
63:6, 759
63:8, 440
63:9, 256
63:9-10, 289
63:10, 382, 550, 657
63:11, 666
63:14, 53, 440
63:16, 60, 263, 377
63:18, 657, 749
63:19, 366
64:1, 130
64:4, 465
64:8, 60, 263, 377
65:1-2, 445
65:7, 196
65:8, 216
65:13-16, 195
65:15, 53
65:16, 291
65:16-18, 508
65:17, 94, 130, 465, 704, 705, 771, 772
65:17-18, 327, 440, 595
65:18, 772
65:20, 770
65:23, 534
65:25, 740
66:1, 58, 377
66:1-2, 339
66:5, 295
66:7-10, 296, 536, 752

66:8-14, 296
66:12, 775
66:13, 55, 186
66:15, 322, 595, 704, 769
66:15-16, 595, 769
66:19, 86, 573, 743
66:20, 454
66:22, 94, 508, 704, 772
66:24, 53, 152, 188, 595, 773

Jeremiah

1, 776
1:1, 81, 82, 191, 728
1:4-19, 346
1:5, 526
1:5-8, 408
1:6, 465
1:8, 181, 380, 617, 730
1:10, 87, 466, 488, 515, 749
1:11-12, 63, 255
2:2, 111, 732
2:3, 446, 758
2:6, 440
2:8, 63, 294
2:11, 385, 428
2:13, 259, 543
2:17, 440
2:22, 689
2:30, 534
2:30-32, 289
2:32, 516
2:34, 767
2:35, 708
3:1, 472
3:1-2, 516

3:1-14, 762
3:3, 763
3:4, 60, 377
3:13, 708
3:15, 278
3:16, 194, 650, 734
3:17, 775
3:19, 60, 263, 440, 510
3:22, 440
4:4, 53, 430, 563, 595
4:5, 109
4:9, 235
4:13, 769
4:14, 679, 689
4:19, 109
4:20-28, 109, 164, 235, 742
4:21, 109
4:22, 294, 457
4:30, 763, 764
4:31, 296, 591
5:4, 294
5:9, 234
5:10, 750
5:14, 750
5:21, 278
5:29, 234
5:30, 63
5:31, 195
6:11, 110, 622
6:13-14, 223, 503
6:14, 195, 591, 622, 692, 721
6:15, 469
6:16, 75
6:20, 57, 223, 448
6:24, 296, 591
6:26, 230, 591
7, 336

7:1-15, 231
7:3-15, 157
7:4-15, 107, 233
7:6-7, 226
7:11, 97, 157, 231
7:16, 715
7:23, 773
7:25, 52
8:3, 747
8:8-9, 75, 464
8:9, 464
8:10-11, 503
8:11, 622, 692, 721
8:12, 469
8:14, 746
8:16, 747
8:18-9:3, 230
9:1-3, 289
9:3, 621
9:9, 234
9:11, 765
9:12, 464
9:15, 746
9:20, 628
9:23, 464
9:23-24, 516
9:24, 275, 464
9:25-26, 430, 563
10:2, 60, 235
10:3-5, 598
11:4, 687, 773
11:14, 715
11:15, 654
11:16, 52
11:18-23, 191
11:20, 59
11:21-23, 81, 82

12:1, 680
12:3, 681
12:5, 573
12:7, 106
12:10, 293
12:12, 769
12:13, 539
13:1-11, 392
13:11, 543, 596, 690
13:16, 273
13:21, 296, 591
13:23, 344
13:24, 53, 188
13:27, 106
14:9, 366
14:11, 715
14:12, 742
14:14-15, 291
15:2, 756
15:7, 53, 188
15:10, 559
15:14, 53, 595
15:15, 59, 196, 241, 330
15:16, 56, 261
15:20, 380
16:2, 475
16:4, 769
16:9, 767
16:10-13, 106
16:16, 192
16:19, 548
16:21, 544
17:3, 207
17:4, 595
17:10, 88, 321, 735, 771
17:13, 259
17:18, 59, 241

18:7, 466
18:7-8, 392
18:15, 273
18:18, 188
18:23, 59, 188, 241
19, 97
19:1-15, 148
19:11, 505
20:3, 252
20:7-18, 87
20:8-9, 622
20:9, 592, 617
20:11, 273
20:12, 59, 241
20:14-18, 114, 166, 559
21:1-2, 195
21:12, 595
22:5, 648
22:13, 681
22:16, 628, 709
22:23, 296, 591
23, 99, 144, 158, 231
23:1, 280, 296
23:1-2, 278
23:2-4, 549
23:4, 281, 313
23:5, 51
23:5-6, 48, 156, 324, 353
23:7-8, 440
23:13-14, 195
23:14, 71, 206, 702, 750
23:15, 746
23:16, 158, 525
23:16-32, 702
23:17, 721
23:18-22, 549
23:20, 776

23:22-23, 735
23:25, 721
23:32, 575
24, 157
24:6, 87, 466
24:7, 570, 773
24:10, 742
25:9, 450
25:10, 767
25:15, 759
25:15-29, 155
25:18-29, 696
25:30, 759
26:9, 118
26:11, 56, 118, 188
26:16, 239
26:20-23, 105, 188, 329
26:21, 50
26:21-23, 340
26:23, 191
26:24, 239
27:2, 75, 392, 489
27:8, 742
27:11, 697
28:1, 346
28:8-9, 56, 195
29, 420, 731
29:1-23, 724
29:6, 475
29:7, 604
29:11-14, 586
29:23, 551, 712
29:26, 507, 703
29:29-32, 724
30:6, 296
30:7, 586
30:22, 773

30:24, 776
31:3, 268
31:4, 87, 466
31:9, 60
31:11, 186
31:15, 51
31:18-19, 106
31:19, 242
31:20, 51
31:27-28, 81
31:28, 87, 466
31:31, 230, 236, 260, 484, 651
31:31-34, 250, 275, 423, 437, 444, 503, 504, 531, 538, 651, 655
31:32, 366, 516, 651
31:32-33, 712
31:33, 275, 429, 773
31:33-34, 280, 366, 487, 651, 709
31:34, 280, 564, 570
31:35, 673
31:35-37, 110, 164, 235
32:6-10, 119
32:19, 88, 771
32:20-21, 454
32:40, 666, 705
32:42-44, 327
34:16, 61, 209
35:5, 391
35:5-6, 452
35:15, 251
36, 420
36:9, 61
36:26, 191, 276
37-38, 188
37:3, 195
37:4, 257
38:5, 120
38:7-13, 344

38:14-23, 404
38:15, 239
38:25-27, 758
42:2, 195
42:5, 728, 776
42:10, 84
44:4, 251
44:25, 105, 776
44:25-26, 61
44:25-27, 428
44:26, 648
45:4, 84, 466
46–51, 731, 749
46:6, 443
46:10, 234
47:2, 754
47:3, 663
47:6, 742, 769
48:11, 765
48:36, 256
48:43-44, 235
49:9, 110
49:12, 155, 759
49:13, 648
49:22, 106, 217, 754
49:22-24, 296, 591
49:31, 765
49:33, 765
50:5, 472
50:6, 70, 692
50:13, 765
50:15, 765
50:17, 296
50:24, 235
50:29, 761, 765
50:34, 295, 708, 766
50:40, 71, 206, 702

50:43, 296, 591, 663
51:6, 234
51:7, 759, 762, 765
51:8, 759, 765
51:11, 764
51:14, 648
51:25, 746, 751
51:27, 747
51:29, 764, 765
51:33, 53, 759
51:36, 295, 708
51:37, 765
51:42, 746
51:46, 107
51:48-49, 768
51:56, 449
51:63-64, 767
52:3, 764

Lamentations

1:1-4, 230
1:2, 764
1:12, 235
2:1, 206
3:15, 343
3:19, 343, 746
3:30, 59
3:37, 158
3:45, 468
3:58-66, 295
4:6, 71, 206, 702
4:21, 155
5:18, 66, 217

Ezekiel

1, 614, 736, 737, 768
1:1, 130, 188, 253, 729, 737
1:1–3:15, 346
1:4, 738, 752, 758
1:7, 730
1:10, 739
1:11, 739
1:13, 738, 758
1:22, 739
1:24, 730, 758
1:26, 738
1:28, 88, 299, 346, 730, 738
2:1, 346
2:1-2, 88
2:2, 520, 729
2:5, 198
2:6, 206
2:8–3:3, 749
2:9-10, 739
3:1-3, 261
3:12, 345, 729
3:14, 345, 520, 729
3:17, 666
3:18-20, 390
3:18-21, 379
3:24, 520, 729
3:27, 776
4:1–5:17, 148
4:3, 86
4:13-15, 351
5:11, 597
6:11, 742
7:7, 696
7:12, 696

7:15, 742
7:17, 663
7:19, 429
8:3, 266, 520, 596, 729, 762
9:3, 173
9:4-6, 743
9:6, 696, 743
10–11, 106, 122, 242, 276
10:1, 737, 758
10:3-4, 760
10:4, 173, 320
10:12, 739
11:1, 520, 729, 738, 762
11:5, 330, 353
11:13, 730
11:19-20, 503, 577
11:20, 773
11:23, 173
11:24, 266, 520, 729, 738
12:1-11, 148
12:2, 137, 148
12:11, 86, 185
12:13, 235
12:16, 742
12:27-28, 704
13:3-10, 702
13:4, 66, 217
13:10, 622, 721
13:10-11, 398
13:10-12, 105
13:16, 622, 721
13:19, 61, 209
14:11, 773
14:21, 742
15:6, 52
16, 762
16:32, 516

16:37, 761
16:46, 206, 702
16:46-49, 71
16:49, 765
16:60, 183
17:20, 235
17:24, 104, 218
18:8, 112
18:9-20, 607
18:13, 112
18:17, 112
18:21-22, 771
18:21-23, 683
18:21-24, 99
18:21-32, 273, 654
18:23, 704
18:24, 92
18:24-25, 683
18:24-26, 274, 710
18:30, 88, 771
18:31, 577
18:32, 704
19:10, 293
20:11, 530
20:13, 530
20:14, 61, 209
20:34, 510
20:41, 510, 551
21:2, 204
21:7, 663
21:26, 104, 218
21:31, 595
22:12, 112
22:20, 595
22:28, 398
23, 762
23:9, 764

23:31, 759
24:24, 86
24:27, 86, 180, 183
25–32, 731, 749
26–28, 765
26:7, 764
26:17-18, 767
27, 766
27:2-24, 766
27:13, 766
28, 206, 518, 774
28:2, 263, 596
28:3-12, 75
28:13, 774
28:24, 521
29:3, 752
29:5, 769
29:6, 73, 198
29:21, 183
30:2-3, 429
30:3, 226, 242, 565, 591, 729
30:18, 242
31:2-18, 52
32:4-6, 109, 226
32:7, 173, 591
32:7-8, 109, 164, 235, 242, 742
32:24, 549
33, 389
33:11, 704
33:19, 530
33:22, 180, 183
33:30-32, 674
33:31-33, 143
33:32-33, 64, 197
34, 99, 158, 231, 278, 313, 390
34:1-8, 389, 390
34:1-10, 144

34:2-6, 280
34:2-10, 90
34:3, 537
34:4, 144
34:5, 70, 144
34:5-6, 296
34:6, 229, 280, 692
34:11, 183
34:11-16, 70, 280
34:11-31, 278, 586
34:12, 296
34:15, 144
34:17, 112
34:21, 296
34:23, 280
34:24, 233
34:25, 130
34:30, 441
35:7, 666
36, 255
36:9, 441
36:20-23, 430
36:23, 61, 209
36:24-27, 255, 536
36:25, 396
36:25-27, 130, 271, 538, 548, 588, 630
36:25-28, 319
36:25-29, 655
36:26, 255, 447, 687
36:26-27, 423, 437, 503, 504, 577
36:27, 291, 292, 366, 430, 439, 440, 537
36:28, 275, 773
36:33, 396
36:37, 440
37, 256, 311, 322, 751
37:1-14, 426
37:5-14, 539

37:14, 297, 319, 439
37:21-24, 280
37:21-28, 327
37:23, 396, 773
37:24, 233, 280
37:24-28, 772
37:26, 666
37:26-28, 510
37:27, 773
37:27-28, 292, 293
38-39, 771
38:16, 640
38:20, 742
38:22, 759, 771
38:23, 61, 209
39:6, 771
39:7, 61, 209
39:17-20, 109, 226, 769
39:27, 61, 209
39:28-29, 501
39:29, 53, 130, 252, 319, 353, 439, 507
40-48, 773, 775
40:2, 773
40:3, 774
40:3-42:20, 749
40:4, 774
40:9-41:3, 736
40:39, 655
41:7, 774
42:13, 655
42:15, 651
43:2, 730, 758
43:7, 290, 772
43:7-10, 772
43:9, 290, 293, 772
43:10-11, 774
43:18-27, 655

43:22, 396
43:24, 152
44:4, 737, 758
44:9-16, 290
44:23, 647
44:29, 655
46:1, 775
46:16-17, 274
47, 271
47:1-11, 775
47:1-12, 772
47:12, 776
48, 744
48:31-35, 774
48:35, 290, 774

Daniel

1, 320
1:6, 346
1:12, 733
1:17, 48
2, 547
2:8, 551, 578
2:18-19, 137
2:19-45, 48
2:27-30, 137, 543
2:28, 608, 620
2:28-30, 447, 495
2:34, 100, 232
2:35, 759
2:37, 740, 764
2:37-44, 377
2:44, 100, 181, 232, 759
2:47, 137, 495, 764, 769
3:4, 756

3:5, 726
3:7, 756
3:12-18, 757
3:16-18, 329
3:18, 133, 661
3:23-27, 661
3:25, 122
3:27, 234
3:29, 122
4:1, 756
4:3, 181
4:8, 573
4:8-9, 292
4:12, 80, 139, 216
4:18, 573
4:32, 54, 189, 450
4:34-37, 140
5:4, 620
5:11, 573
5:14, 573
5:19, 756
5:30, 765
6:7, 596
6:10, 329
6:13, 329
6:16-24, 660
6:22, 130, 415
6:24, 765
6:25, 756
6:26, 181
6:27, 624
7, 235, 697, 738
7:3, 755, 756
7:3-8, 754
7:8, 755
7:9, 730
7:9-10, 737, 760

7:10, 770, 771
7:11, 764, 770
7:13, 320, 590, 591, 729, 730, 759
7:13-14, 81, 88, 109, 112, 118, 125, 135, 149, 151, 164, 170, 203, 226, 235, 239,
264, 278, 297, 340, 608, 751
7:14, 181, 287, 493, 740, 770
7:16, 728, 739, 745
7:17, 756
7:17-18, 751
7:18, 770
7:20, 755
7:21, 107
7:21-22, 226, 755
7:22, 435, 471
7:24, 764
7:25, 107, 596, 755
8, 740, 763
8:6, 756
8:10, 742
8:11, 596
8:13-14, 745
8:16, 180, 721, 745
8:17, 88, 346
8:18, 88, 346, 730
8:25, 598
8:26, 776
9-11, 596
9:2, 753
9:3, 75
9:4, 555
9:6, 52
9:10, 52
9:16, 427
9:19, 366
9:21, 180, 721
9:24, 652, 753, 776
9:24-27, 163, 596

9:26-27, 596
9:27, 107, 163
10:5, 320, 737, 758
10:5-6, 243, 730
10:5-21, 728
10:6, 730, 748, 765, 769
10:7, 346
10:9, 299, 730
10:10, 730
10:10-21, 554
10:11-12, 88
10:12, 181
10:12-13, 554
10:13, 180, 189, 544, 721, 742, 753
10:14, 608, 620, 776
10:15, 180, 730
10:20, 544
10:21, 180, 545, 554, 721, 753
11, 163, 596
11:28, 183
11:30, 183
11:31, 107, 590, 596
11:36, 596, 755
12:1, 108, 163, 180, 207, 235, 364, 545, 554, 565, 586, 590, 597, 721, 745, 753,
756, 771
12:1-2, 583, 695
12:2, 82, 113, 124, 150, 163, 202, 256, 264, 403, 491, 492, 551, 661, 727, 771
12:2-3, 81, 494, 565
12:3, 545, 561, 753, 776
12:4, 776
12:6-7, 745, 768
12:7, 749
12:8, 745
12:9, 776
12:10, 776
12:11, 590, 753
12:11-12, 108, 164

12:13, 661

Hosea

1–3, 679

1:1, 728

1:2, 489

1:6, 690

1:8-9, 690

1:10, 56, 440, 443, 690

2:2, 763

2:3, 761

2:14-15, 753

2:14-20, 68, 111, 134

2:16, 693

2:19-20, 516

2:20, 275, 472, 570

2:21-23, 81

2:23, 311, 443

3:5, 640

4:4-9, 223

4:6, 327

4:15, 762

4:17, 472

4:19, 223

5:4, 294

6:2, 491

6:5, 597, 769

6:6, 68, 223, 280, 654

6:9, 207

6:11, 81

7:6, 550

8:2, 708

8:2-3, 628

8:7, 514, 539

9:7, 234, 507

10:1, 52, 293, 538, 570
10:8, 241, 743
10:12, 514, 539
10:12-13, 52
11, 50
11:1, 50, 51, 303, 439, 440, 643
11:1-4, 256
11:4, 268, 440
11:5, 50, 439
11:8, 289
11:8-11, 256
11:9-11, 327
11:10, 440
11:11, 50, 439
13:4, 603
13:12, 429
13:13, 107, 591
13:13-14, 296
13:14, 495, 496
14:1-7, 106, 447
14:2, 666
14:4, 66
14:4-7, 327, 495, 586
14:4-8, 293
14:7-8, 52, 570
14:8, 538

Joel

1:5, 241
1:6, 747
1:8, 680, 767
1:13, 750
1:13-14, 679
1:15, 226, 429, 565, 705
2:1, 226, 462, 773

2:1-2, 429
2:2, 163, 173, 242, 323, 591
2:4, 747
2:4-5, 747
2:5, 747
2:9, 591
2:10, 173, 242, 323
2:11, 226, 462, 743, 764
2:12-13, 679
2:12-3:2, 447
2:18, 679
2:28, 53, 271, 434, 487, 488, 501, 544, 630
2:28-29, 130, 252, 324
2:28-3:1, 319
2:30, 323
2:30-3:3, 323
2:31, 173, 226, 242, 429, 462, 742
2:32, 167, 298, 323, 328, 445
3:2, 761, 762
3:11, 761
3:12, 762
3:12-14, 53
3:13, 138, 759
3:14, 109, 429, 565, 591, 762
3:15, 173, 242, 323
3:17, 775
3:18, 596, 775

Amos

1-2, 428, 731, 749
1:4, 764
2-4, 731
2:2, 591
2:6, 215
2:6-3:8, 327

2:7, 61, 161, 209
2:9, 52
2:10, 440
2:14-15, 443
3:1, 732
3:1-2, 215
3:2, 74, 696
3:7, 296
4:1, 732
4:1-2, 765
4:1-3, 681
4:2, 648
4:4-5, 105, 776
4:6, 543
4:6-11, 673, 748, 761
4:11, 206
5:1, 732
5:6-11, 511
5:13, 551, 554
5:18, 173, 242, 462, 742
5:18-20, 429, 705, 710, 713, 761
5:19, 415
5:20, 462
5:21-24, 57, 233
5:21-27, 223, 654
5:25-27, 339
6:1, 680, 742, 765
6:3, 554
6:4-7, 681
6:8, 648
8:5-6, 161
8:8, 742
8:9, 122, 173, 242, 742
8:14, 744
9:7, 52, 361
9:8-12, 298
9:9, 237

9:11, 366
9:11-15, 327, 586
9:12, 366
9:13, 79, 167
9:13-14, 115
9:13-15, 773

Obadiah

3, 765
5, 110
15, 429, 591, 765

Jonah

1:3, 350
1:5, 412
1:5-6, 139
1:6-16, 413
1:7, 321
1:15, 139
1:15-16, 78
1:17, 491
2:1, 78
3:4-10, 392
3:6, 750
3:10, 78
4:8, 479
4:9, 115
4:10-11, 78
4:11, 60, 74

Micah

1, 63

1:8, 680
1:10-15, 255
2:12, 280
3:2-3, 537
3:5, 503, 622, 721
3:8, 544
3:11, 503
4:1, 323, 620, 640
4:3, 112
4:7, 768
4:9-10, 296
5:1-4, 296
5:2, 49, 271
5:3, 752, 753
5:4, 278
5:5, 546
6:8, 104, 429
7:5-6, 180
7:5-7, 71, 162, 234
7:6, 72, 73, 215
7:18-19, 56

Nahum

1:6, 595
1:15, 758
2:8, 78
3:1, 78
3:7, 78

Habakkuk

1:5, 360
1:15, 192
2:1, 666
2:3, 657, 704, 749

2:4, 427, 530, 657

2:16, 759, 761

2:20, 745

3:8, 769

3:11-13, 768

Zephaniah

1:7, 429, 565, 745, 769

1:7-8, 462

1:14, 462

1:14-15, 235

1:14–2:2, 429

1:16, 109

1:18, 583, 595

2:2-3, 462

2:9, 71, 206, 702

3:8, 595, 761

3:8-9, 366

3:9, 775

3:13, 758

3:16, 663

Haggai

2:5, 530, 544, 664

2:6, 664

Zechariah

1:1, 106

1:5-6, 110, 164

1:8-11, 741

1:10, 740

1:12, 742

1:13, 550
2:1-5, 749
2:4-5, 773, 774
2:5, 440, 771
2:7, 765
2:11, 366, 426, 458, 472, 772
2:13, 745
3:1, 179
3:2, 721, 722
3:8, 51
3:9, 740
4:2-3, 750
4:6, 544, 740
4:6-9, 89, 98, 158
4:7, 487
4:11, 739
4:14, 750
5:2, 739
6:5, 743
6:12, 51
6:13, 750
7:10, 195
8:8, 773
8:12, 467, 773
8:16-17, 550
9:7, 366
9:9, 96, 156, 230, 286, 304, 306
9:14-16, 109
10:2, 115
11:3, 115
11:12-13, 114, 119
11:13, 119
11:15-17, 115
11:16, 296
12:2, 155, 759
12:3, 761, 771
12:8, 307, 534

12:10, 130, 307, 729
12:10-12, 109
12:11, 762
12:12, 729
13:1-9, 115
13:7, 115, 167, 296
13:8, 748
13:9, 466
14, 271
14:1-3, 750
14:2, 761
14:3, 768
14:3-4, 591
14:3-5, 595
14:3-8, 109
14:4, 98, 320
14:4-5, 742
14:5, 88, 164, 320, 587, 769
14:6, 109, 173, 242
14:7, 110
14:8, 259, 775
14:9, 61, 209, 760, 769
14:10, 98
14:11, 776
14:16, 744
14:16-19, 775
14:21, 775

Malachi

1:1-3, 442
1:2, 736
1:6-7, 113
1:7, 481
1:11, 743
1:12, 481

2:8, 273
2:14-16, 93
3:1, 74, 130, 150, 184, 198, 257
3:1-6, 254
3:2, 429, 743
3:2-3, 322
3:4, 448
3:5, 681
3:6, 665
3:15, 673
3:16, 207, 565, 771
4, 150
4:2, 184, 701
4:5, 74, 86, 88, 143, 150, 173, 204, 251, 429, 750
4:5-6, 52, 74, 88, 130, 180, 184
4:6, 88, 150

Praise for the *First Edition of The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*

“Keener writes in clear, non-technical language for the lay person. His commentary is a valuable tool for teachers, small-group leaders, pastors, missionaries (who are trying not to impose their own cultural biases in their new setting), and all who enjoy digging deeper in their personal study of God’s Word.”—*Discipleship Journal*

“The product of a decade of work, this commentary is indispensable for Bible study. . . . By selectively providing background information from a variety of primary and secondary sources, Keener admirably bridges the cultural gaps experienced by modern readers of the Bible. . . . Sermons and lessons will be greatly enhanced by referencing this excellent resource.”—*Ministries Today*

“Well-written in a style suitable for both professional students and daily disciples.”—*World Christian*

“A stunning work destined certainly to become a standard resource for study of the New Testament. . . . Though produced by a competent scholar, it is not . . . intended to be a technical, scholarly work . . . for me Keener’s work is going to be a prime reference tool and constant companion from now on in my personal study of the New Testament text.”—*Journal of Psychology and Theology*

“Keener has accomplished a monumental task in assimilating a vast amount of primary and secondary material on first-century Jewish and Greco-Roman culture and making it accessible to nonspecialist readers. In addition, he displays a wide knowledge of New Testament scholarship (Pauline studies, gospels studies, etc.). To make this commentary useful to a diverse audience, Keener has minimized theological comments and emphasized historical, cultural, and social background. The text is clearly written and fairly free of technical jargon. . . .

This volume should be a useful addition to public, academic, and seminary libraries.”—*Library Journal*

“The commentary will be of value to pastors in sermon preparation . . . written in a clear, non-technical language and arranged verse by verse. It provides at least some cultural background for nearly every verse in the New Testament. . . . You need to have it in your theological library.”—*A. M. E. Zion Quarterly Review*

“A few hours with this volume will rapidly convince one that Craig Keener . . . is a rising star among evangelical New Testament scholars. . . . Written simply and clearly, though meticulously researched, this book will be a valuable acquisition for every thoughtful student, pastor, and teacher who tries to understand the original setting for any passage in the New Testament. . . . [C]arefully researched and judiciously written from an orthodox Christian perspective to provide dependable information without overt theological bias. I heartily recommend it.”—*Enrichment* (Assemblies of God)

“This is a splendid book to have next to your Bible . . . a fascinating Bible study resource.”—*Good News* (United Methodist)

“An excellent resource for pastors and teachers. . . . This is background information that most pastors’ libraries will not contain, which makes it a vital tool for serious Bible study and preaching.”—*The Communicator* (Nazarene)

“In the American Christian publishing world, a world filled with adequate but probably unnecessary commentaries and Christian helps, Craig Keener . . . has done the remarkable. He has produced a work that was genuinely needed but not envisioned—until now.”—*Faith and Mission* (Southeastern Seminary, Southern Baptist)

“A fine tool for personal Bible study . . . Unlike a typical commentary, which interprets the meaning of each text, Keener’s book offers insights which enable readers to study individual texts with greater personal involvement and practical gain. The author, an evangelical Protestant, is remarkably balanced and unbiased in his analysis, making this quite suitable for Catholic use—a valuable supplement to a good concordance, commentary, and Bible dictionary.”—*The Bulletin of Applied Biblical Studies* (The Franciscan University of Steubenville)

“One of the most useful available reference tools for pastors and laypeople alike, and I frequently recommend it from the pulpit. The reader simply has to look up his comments on a passage to find out, for example, why it was momentous that the prodigal son received sandals and a ring when he returned to his father. Although background material is often notoriously slippery and debatable, Keener makes it useful for students of the Scripture.”—Gary Shogren, *Biblical Theological Seminary*

“Keener succeeds in being informative and, this reviewer thinks, more than fair in trying not to impose his views on the texts. . . . Keener, as he promised, wrote a ‘popular’ rather than a scholarly book. Keener’s scholarly credentials are strong and his book is a God-send to busy pastors. As already indicated, it is of great help to Bible students who do not have access to a theological library.”—*Southwestern Journal of Theology* (Southern Baptist)

“Specifically designed to meet the needs of pastors and students who have less access to scholarly resources and less time to mine exegetical details. As such, it is extremely accessible and user friendly, a welcome addition to the pastor’s bookshelf.”—Christopher Hall, Eastern University

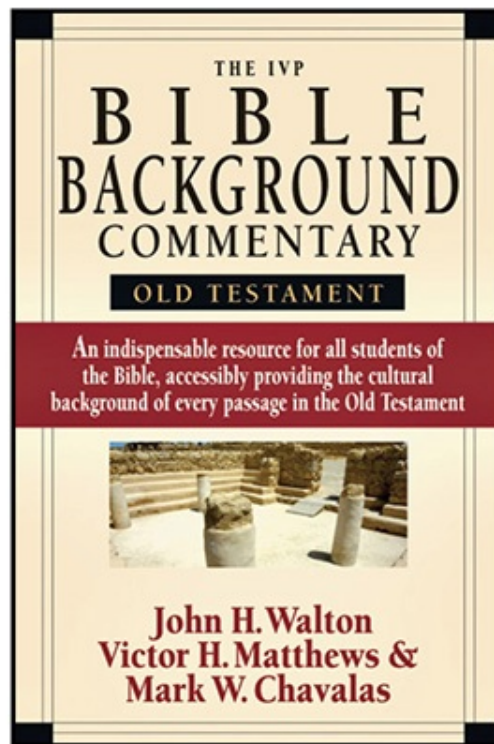
“Carefully researched yet accessible for the busy pastor or other reader, this commentary puts years of research at the reader’s fingertips, passage by passage, in a single volume.”—George O. Wood, general superintendent of the Assemblies of God

About the Author

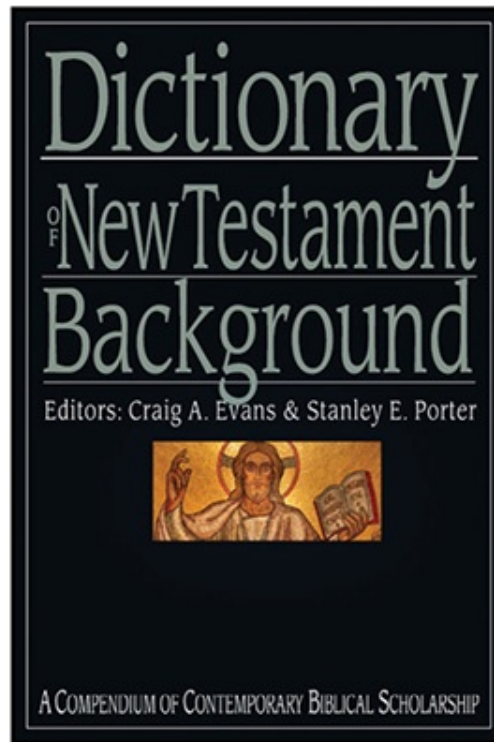


Craig S. Keener (PhD, Duke University) is professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary. Some of his seventeen books include *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* and commentaries on Matthew (*The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*), John (2 vols.), Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Revelation, and a currently-being-published four-volume commentary on Acts. Four of his books, including *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* have won *Christianity Today* book awards.

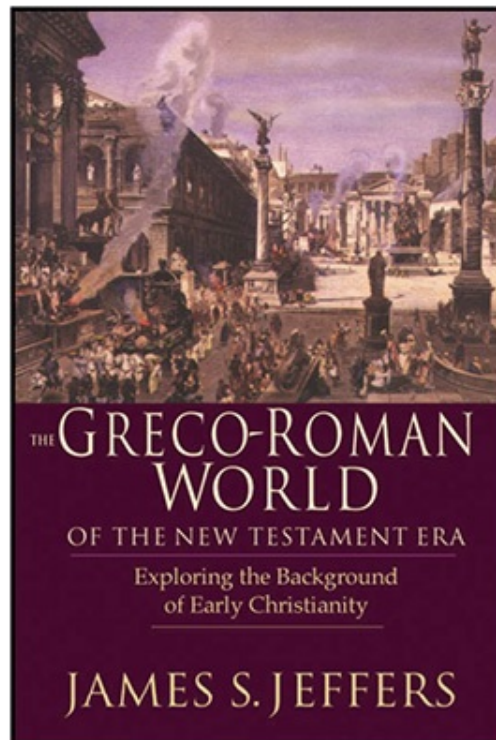
More Titles from InterVarsity Press



The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament
978-0-83081419-0



Dictionary of New Testament Background
978-0-83086734-9



The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era
978-0-83081589-0

For a list of IVP email newsletters, including information about our latest ebook releases, please visit www.ivpress.com/eu1.

Finding the Textbook You Need

The IVP Academic Textbook Selector

is an online tool for instantly finding the IVP books suitable for over 250 courses across 24 disciplines.

www.ivpress.com/academic/
