THE NEW INTERPRETER'S® BIBLE

# ONE VOLUME COMMENTARY

Edited by
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# EDITORS' PREFACE

Study of the Bible has experienced a sea change since the *Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* was originally published in 1971. That is true in the arena of scholarly work, where the methods of study have exploded in recent decades, and in the range and number of scholarly interpreters. Alongside historical critical analysis, scholars now draw on literary analysis, social scientific work, postcolonial studies, and feminist criticism—to name only a few perspectives that inform contemporary biblical studies. Moreover, biblical scholars themselves are a more numerous and diverse group of people than was the case forty plus years ago.

What is sometimes overlooked is that the world of Bible study has also changed significantly for pastors and lay teachers of the Bible. In addition to the major shifts in the academy, serious readers of the Bible confront a vast array of resources, and sorting out the serious from the spurious is not always easy. Publications that purport to be exposés of various elements of early Christian history can muddy the waters, and some immensely popular works of fiction complicate matters further by raising questions about what actually is in the Bible and what is not.

Conscious of these developments, we offer this concise, one-volume commentary, confident that it provides both beginning and experienced readers of the Bible with reliable and accessible guidance. The contributors to this volume, who reflect the aforementioned diversity, were invited because of our confidence in both their scholarly competence and their abilities as communicators. No attempt is made to bring their various commentaries into a restrictive conformity, but we did ask all of them to avoid the jargon that too often mars scholarly work. In addition, we invited them to engage in theological reflection about the biblical literature they were addressing.

We also include articles that should make the commentary especially useful for pastors and teachers. In addition to overviews of specific kinds of literature (e.g., the prophetic literature or letters) and introductions to the cultural locations of biblical texts, this volume contains articles on preaching the Bible, teaching the Bible, the creation of the Bible, and the place of the Bible in the church.

As scholars and teachers of the Bible, we ourselves find it an endlessly fascinating book—surprising, challenging, sustaining. It is our hope that this volume will prove a genuinely valuable resource for others who join us in that study.

Beverly Roberts Gaventa
*New Testament Editor*

David L. Petersen
*Old Testament Editor*

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# MICAH

Carol J. Dempsey

## Overview

Rich in imagery, metaphors, and intricate wordplays, the book of Micah presents itself as a word addressed to the people of Israel and Judah in the latter half of the eighth century BCE during the reigns of Jotham (742–735 BCE), Ahaz (735–715 BCE), and Hezekiah (715–685 BCE). Though Micah's career as a prophet appears expansive, most likely it spanned only the last quarter of the century when Hezekiah reigned. Together with Amos, Isaiah, and Hosea, Micah was one of the four great prophets of the eighth century BCE. Little is known about his person. His name means "Who is like the Lord," and although the name is common in ancient Israel, he is distinguished from others by being identified with Moresheth—otherwise known as Moresheth-gath (1:14)—located twenty-one miles southwest of Jerusalem.

The book reflects a period in Israel and Judah's history that was plagued by Assyrian military invasion, beginning with the Syro-Ephraimitic War (734–732 BCE) down through Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in 701 BCE. In the midst of these turbulent years, however, Judah experienced religious reforms and an economic revolution that left the wealthy landowners growing in prosperity at the expense of small peasant farmers. Religious and political leaders began to view their vocations and positions as business careers with opportunities to assert their power for purposes of self-interest instead of for the common good. The times, then, became fraught with injustice, oppression, and corruption. The prophet Micah addresses the political, social, and religious climate of his day as he rails against the perpetrators of graft (see, e.g., Micah 1–3) while offering not only a vision of a new world order (see 4:1–5) but also a message of hope (e.g., 2:12–13; 4:6–8).

Micah makes clear that Israel's God will not tolerate injustice rooted in and flowing from apostasy, idolatry, hypocrisy, the disregard for the Torah, and a break in the covenant relationship. Divine justice will be meted out, and yet, the final word of the book as a whole offers a word of universal compassion (7:18–20), but not before the prophet intercedes on behalf of the people (6:6–8) and, in so doing, creates one of the most-often-quoted passages of the entire Bible (see 6:8).

The book of Micah grew over time. Micah 1–3 is generally accepted as authentic to Micah; Mic 2:12–13 could be a later addition, but evidence remains inconclusive. Micah 6:1–7:6 may also be attributed to Micah with the remainder of the book consisting of a compilation of later additions. The book includes a wide array of literary forms and techniques, i.e., judgment speeches (1:2–7; 3:1–2), laments (1:8–16; 7:1–7), a lawsuit (6:1–5), prayers (7:14–17, 18–20), reflections (6:6–8), and metaphors (e.g., 1:2–4; 2:12–13; 3:1–3; 4:1–5, 8–13; 7:1).

## Outline

I. Superscription (1:1)

II. Proclamation of Judgment; Word of Hope (1:2–3:12)

- A. Judgment Speech (1:2–7)
- B. Dirge-Lament (1:8–16)
- C. Woe Proclamation (2:1–5)
- D. Disputation Prophecy (2:6–11)
- E. Salvation Proclamation (2:12–13)
- F. Address to Israel's Political Leadership (3:1–4)
- G. Proclamation concerning the Prophets (3:5–7)
- H. Interlude: Statement of Confidence (3:8)
- I. Address to Israel's Leadership (3:9–12)

III. Proclamation of Future Restoration (4:1–5:15)

- A. Prophetic Vision (4:1–5)
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IV. Words of Judgment, Lament, Trust, Promise, Petition, and Compassion (6:1–7:20)

A. Covenant Lawsuit (6:1–5)

B. Torah Lawsuit (6:6–8)

C. Judgment Speech (6:9–16)

D. Lament (7:1–7)

E. Statement of Trust (7:8–10)

F. Divine Promise (7:11–13)

G. Petition (7:14–17)

H. Statement of Divine Love (7:18–20)

# Detailed Analysis

## I. Superscription (1:1)

The book of Micah opens with a superscription (1:1) typical of many prophetic books (see, e.g., Isa 1:1; Jer 1:1–3; Hos 1:1; Amos 1:1; Zeph 1:1) that situates both prophet and proclamation in a particular time period, and here specifically in the latter part of the eighth century BCE. All three kings mentioned ruled over Judah. The prophet's proclamation is the result of something that "came" to him, which he "saw" concerning Samaria and Jerusalem, the capital cities of the northern and southern kingdoms, respectively. The prophet seems to have had an intuitive experience that involved a vision.

## II. Proclamation of Judgment; Word of Hope (1:2–3:12)

### A. Judgment Speech (1:2–7)

The first major section of the book (1:2–3:12) includes a proclamation of judgment (1:2–2:11; 3:1–12) and a word of hope (2:12–13). Micah 1:2–7 is a judgment speech. The poet calls his listeners and the whole earth to attention, and also calls upon God to be a witness among the inhabitants of the land (v. 2). With metaphorical language he next describes an impending theophany (vv. 3–4). God's coming is imminent and will have devastating effects. The poet uses imagery from the natural world as metaphors for Israel and Judah, which will eventually be destroyed through military invasions. Together, vv. 3–4 disclose the power of God and the powerlessness of creation before God.

With two rhetorical questions (v. 5), the poet next indicts Israel and Judah, and specifically their capital cities Samaria and Jerusalem, the seat of leadership. Both cities were associated with idolatry in the latter part of the eighth century BCE (cf. Mic 1:6–7). In Mic 1:6–7, God, speaking through the prophet, announces a plan to destroy Samaria because of its transgressions (v. 5*b*) and idolatry. Samaria represents Jacob/Israel, the northern kingdom. Samaria's fate symbolizes the fate of the entire kingdom.

Micah 1:2–7 presents a hierarchical and patriarchal picture of God and God's power. This God dwells in "his holy temple" (v. 2), enthroned in the heavenly court, who will "come down" (v. 3), creating quite a different picture from the God who walked in the garden in the cool of the evening (Gen 3:8) and who spoke with Moses as a friend (Exod 33:11).

### B. Dirge-Lament (1:8–16)

Micah 1:8–16 is a dirge-lament. Verse 8 is a pivotal verse that looks backwards to vv. 5–7 and forward to v. 9. God will lament, wail, go barefoot and naked, make lamentation like the jackals and mourning like the ostriches because of the peoples' transgressions, the impending loss of the kingdoms, and the sad state of Jerusalem. Here nakedness is associated with sin (see Gen 3:10). God will perform all of these actions and sounds of lamentation through the prophet who will be a sign to the community of its sinfulness, while also being a sign of God's presence and an expression of God's righteous anger yet steadfast love. The "incurable wound" is the blow dealt by God (see Jer 15:18; 30:12–15; and Jer 1:14) that Judah and Jerusalem will soon endure, specifically, devastation at the hands of the Babylonians.

Verses 10–15 resemble a funeral song. All of the cities mentioned are located in the Shephelah—the lowlands of the region. When God comes down and treads upon the high places of the earth (1:3), not only will the mountains and the hilltops of Samaria and Jerusalem be destroyed but also the lowlands. The historical setting for this dirge-lament is most likely the Assyrian invasion by Sennacherib in 701 BCE (see v. 15*b*).

Verse 16 closes the dirge-lament. The poet exhorts his listeners to lament. The verse foreshadows the exile after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE.

The use of the present perfect tense, otherwise known as the prophetic perfect tense of vision, for an event that has not yet happened, signifies that what is predicted will, in fact, happen.

### C. Woe Proclamation (2:1–5)

Micah 2:1–5 is a woe proclamation. Together with Mic 2:6–11, these verses convey a stinging message of judgment. In v. 1, the poet proclaims a warning to those guilty of premeditated injustices, which he enumerates in v. 2. Verses 3–5 are an announcement of judgment composed of a proclamation of intended chastisement (v. 3), a prediction of disaster (v. 4), and a threat (v. 5). Here the poet depicts God as a schemer of actions that will take place to "get even" with those who have transgressed others. Those who have taken land will lose their fields (v. 4) and be banned from further acquisition of property. The text makes the point that God asserts divine power on behalf of those victimized by the abuse of power of others. Lastly, vv. 1 and 3 exemplify the principle of *lex talionis* (see Lev 24:18–21), which was part of Israel's social culture and which became part of its religious culture and Torah. Those who used power oppressively will experience the punitive power of God.

### D. Disputation Prophecy (2:6–11)

Micah 2:6–11 is a disputation prophecy. God, speaking through the prophet, quotes the prophet's adversaries, a comment that reveals a strained relationship between God and some of the Israelites due to the Israelites' smug attitude (v. 6) and their deeds of injustice (vv. 8–9). The rhetorical question in v. 7 highlights the distance that exists between the people and their God. Verses 8–9 add new transgressions to the list already begun in Mic 2:1–2. The punishment for wickedness is expulsion from the land (v. 10). Hence, the people's ill-gotten land will provide no place for the guilty to rest, especially because it has become "unclean" because of the people's sinfulness (see Lev 18:24–25). The poet ends the prophecy on a note of sarcasm (v. 11), which is God's final response to the objection raised by the opponents in v. 6 who do not want to hear an honest prophetic word proclaimed.

The tone of the poet's message changes in Mic 2:12–13, a salvation proclamation that promises divine care to those exiled, the remnant of "Jacob." Here "Jacob" does not refer to the northern kingdom; instead, "Jacob" refers to Judah as the remnant of Israel which, in turn, sets the stage for restoration promised in Mic 4–5. Verses 12–13 will serve as a consolation for the people when they are exiles, if only they remember them.

### E. Salvation Proclamation (2:12–13)

Micah 2:1–13 makes several theological points. First, the community addressed is struggling and living under a divine threat (vv. 1–11) and divine promise (vv. 12–13). Second, even those people closest to God are liable to sin and must accept the consequences of their actions. Third, since land is a divine gift, others' property rights and boundaries must be respected (see Exod 20:15, 17; Deut 15:4–5). Fourth, power, wealth, and status are not to be used to exploit others. Last, Israel's God is a God of justice who will not tolerate injustice.

### F. Address to Israel's Political Leadership (3:1–4)

### G. Proclamation concerning the Prophets (3:5–7)

The poet now returns to his proclamation of judgment (3:1–12). This new unit consists of an address to Israel's political leaders (vv. 1–4), a proclamation concerning the prophets (vv. 5–7), an interlude (v. 8), and another address to Israel's leadership (vv. 9–12). The poet exposes the overt and subtle abuse of power. In vv. 1–4, 5–7, and 9–12, the poet outlines the injustices and sins of Israel's political and religious leadership. The rhetorical question in v. 1 indicts Israel's leadership who do not act justly and who are the "haters of good and the lovers of evil" (v. 2*a*; author's translation). The poet continues his invective with a brutal metaphor in vv. 2*b*–3 that compares Israel's leaders to savage butchers and voracious cannibals who treat people like animals ready to be consumed. The poet next assaults verbally Israel's prophets (vv. 5–7), who are guilty of leading the people astray, who have corrupted their prophetic office for personal satisfaction and gain, and who will lose their prophetic gifts on account of their corruption.

### H. Interlude: Statement of Confidence (3:8)

In v. 8, the poet sets himself apart from those whom he has been attacking and, in so doing, he

becomes a refreshing contrast to the corrupted leaders of his day. To be filled "with power" is to be filled with God's Spirit and, consequently, with justice and might; such a person is responsible for exposing injustice. Thus, the prophet performs his tasks, proclaims God's word, and lives his life in the power and Spirit of God.

#### I. Address to Israel's Leadership (3:9–12)

In Mic 3:9–12, the poet again rails against the political and religious leaders of his day, inclusive of the community's priests (v. 11). He lists the wrongs of which his addressees are guilty and then mocks them by quoting their own words. He proceeds to inform his audience that because of the leaders' injustices, and all the other social injustices (see Mic 2), Jerusalem and the Temple—symbols of God's presence—will be destroyed. And yet, the presence of the Spirit-filled prophet remains among the people as a sign of God's enduring love for the people.

### III. Proclamation of Future Restoration (4:1–5:15)

#### A. Prophetic Vision (4:1–5)

#### B. Divine Promise (4:6–5:15)

The second major section of the book (4:1–5:15), a proclamation of future restoration, consists of a prophetic vision (4:1–5) and a divine promise (4:6–5:15). Verses 1–5 offer a vision in which weapons are destroyed and transformed into tools of production at the peoples' initiative. The prophecy promises (v. 1) the reestablishment of Mount Zion—the Lord's mountain—which was considered a sacred mountain that had great importance for the whole world. The image of all the countries streaming to Zion to learn God's ways suggests a sense of unity as well as a certain religious solidarity that the countries will have with Judah (v. 2). Verse 3 depicts God as a judge who arbitrates in an effort to establish universal peace and security among all peoples of the earth (v. 4). Verse 5 suggests and celebrates a common vision of faith shared among world religions. In this poem, the poet offers a prophetic message: the peace that can exist among all countries and the unity with the Divine can be a goal and can become a reality for world politics and world religions.

Micah 4:6–5:15 is a divine promise of restoration after exile. God will heal and transform the weak and afflicted into a strong nation, and will establish divine reign over them on Mount Zion (4:6–8). The mention of God having caused the affliction of the people harks back to Mic 1:9. Images of childbirth in 4:9–10 hint at the new life soon to be experienced. The language of harvesting in 4:11–13 symbolizes Israel's victory over hostile nations.

The language of Mic 5:1 is curious. Here the poet points to the time when Jerusalem will be invaded and its present ruler will be insulted by a slap on the face. The image shifts quickly in vv. 2–5, where the poet describes a new messianic ruler soon to be born in Bethlehem, who will be "the one of peace" (v. 5*a*). Verses 5*b*–6 offer another reference to peace, this time when Assyria is conquered. Verses 7–9 continue the theme of Israel's transformation heard earlier in Mic 4:6–8. The remnant of Jacob, once weak, will now be made strong like a lion, capable of defeating all its enemies. The poet closes this section of the book with a description of what God intends to do to Israel in the "new day." God will cleanse Israel of all its idols (vv. 10–14) and, in anger and wrath, will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey (v. 15). This last verse is harsh. The poet is proclaiming that Israel's God—the sovereign one—is not only Lord of creation but also Lord of history. Again, language about God reflects the historical background and backdrop of life lived in the latter part of the eighth century BCE.

### IV. Words of Judgment, Lament, Trust, Promise, Petition, and Compassion (6:1–7:20)

#### A. Covenant Lawsuit (6:1–5)

#### B. Torah Lawsuit (6:6–8)

The third major section of the book (6:1–7:20) includes words of judgment, lament, trust, promise, petition, and compassion. Micah 6:1–5 is a covenant lawsuit. In vv. 1–2, the poet prepares the audience to hear God's case against Israel, which a bewildered God lays out in vv. 3–5 in conciliatory fashion while recounting past events (see Exod 1–15; Num 22–24). The people have forgotten their story and, in the process, have for-

gotten the graciousness of their God. Verses 6–8, a torah liturgy, are a response to God's questions, plea, and demand for an answer. Here the prophet stands in a humbled, self-reflective, penitential state, representing his people who have yet to come before the Lord. Micah raises three soul-searching questions aimed at atonement. Each question reflects a willingness to offer some sort of sacrifice, culminating in the offer to sacrifice one's firstborn for the sake of one's sin. What God requires, however, is justice, lovingkindness, and a humble walk together (v. 8). The humble walk with God will reveal what needs to be done by way of justice and lovingkindness.

### C. Judgment Speech (6:9–16)

A raging voice from God, angered over the people's transgressions, is heard once again in vv. 9–16, a judgment speech. Following an initial statement that calls his listeners to attention (v. 9), the poet depicts God enumerating a list of the Israelites' unjust behaviors, and the divine plans to be executed upon the guilty parties (vv. 10–16). The poet describes a punitive God who uses the natural world to chastise a wayward people. This situation triggers a lament from the poet (7:1–7).

### D. Lament (7:1–7)

### E. Statement of Trust (7:8–10)

### F. Divine Promise (7:11–13)

### G. Petition (7:14–17)

In Mic 7:1–7, the poet uses similes and metaphors created from the natural world to describe the condition of his society; it is a wasteland, totally corrupt. The prophet, however, does not lose heart: he places his confidence in his God (v. 7) and utters a profound statement of trust (vv. 8–10). Another divine promise of restoration follows next (vv. 11–13; cf 4:6–5:15), accompanied by the prophet's petition that God care for the people as in the days of old (vv. 14–17), which in turn would serve as an instruction to all the nations.

### H. Statement of Divine Love (7:18–20)

The book of Micah closes with what is, perhaps, the most poignant of all words within the prophetic corpus. In Mic 7:18–20, the prophet asks a simple rhetorical question (v. 18*a*) that leads into a heartfelt statement that describes God's compassionate and faithful love for all time (vv. 18*b*–20). Although the text as a whole is filled with biting words of judgment, with some sections sprinkled with promises of restoration, the final word of the prophet and the text is a word of hope, a word of love, and herein is revealed the true God of Israel.

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# 4 MACCABEES

Jeremy F. Hultin

## Overview

The present work was included in some early Christian codices of the Bible (Alexandrinus, Sinaiticus, and Venetus) with the simple title "Fourth Maccabees." Eusebius and Jerome referred to the work more descriptively as "On the Supremacy of Reason," and attributed it to the first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus. The text does occur in some editions of Josephus's works under the related title, "On Temperate Reason," but both the details of the account and its language confirm that the attribution to Josephus was erroneous.

As the author himself notes (3:19), the work is divided into two main parts. In the first section (1:1–3:18), the author uses a variety of arguments and biblical illustrations to demonstrate that "devout reason is sovereign over the emotions" (1:1). In the second portion of the book, the author recounts the fates of nine Maccabean martyrs: the aged priest Eleazar (5–7), the seven brothers (8–14), and their widowed mother (14–17). The noble conduct of these martyrs is presented as further evidence that "devout reason" can triumph over any emotion or agony. But the accounts of the martyrs are certainly more than just further illustrations of the book's thesis. In an age when the temptation to abandon a distinctively Jewish way of life could be powerful, these heroes' steadfast adherence to the Mosaic law is put forward as a moving example worthy of imitation (18:1–2).

Little can be said with certainty about the author or when and where he wrote. He was clearly a devout Jew who had the benefit of an education in Greek rhetoric (cf. 1:12) and had some acquaintance with Stoic philosophy. But such an education could have been obtained in any major city of the Hellenistic Diaspora, or even in Palestine. Although the events he describes transpire in Jerusalem (4:22; 18:5), the early Church commemorated the martyrs in Antioch, making that one attractive possibility (but only a possibility) for the book's provenance. Regarding the date of composition, the references to the Temple (4:9; 4:20) cannot count as evidence that the cult in Jerusalem was still operational, for other Jewish texts written after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE also describe cultic activities in the present tense. One possible clue about the date can be found in the fact that Apollonius is called governor of Syria, Phoenicia, and Cilicia (4 Macc 4:2; cf. 2 Macc 3:5). Elias Bickerman observed that Cilicia was only governed along with Syria between 20 and 54 CE; if the author wrote during this period, he could have projected the administrative circumstances of his own day into the past. As attractive as Bickerman's proposal is, subsequent scholarship has complicated the question. Ultimately, a date between the middle of the first century and the early second century CE is reasonable; recent scholarship has tended to favor the later end of this spectrum.

The division of the work into two parts creates a challenge for defining its genre. The opening portion (1:1–3:18) is well described as a literary diatribe, in which the author addresses imagined objections to his thesis (1:5; 2:24). The latter portion of the book is a form of epideictic rhetoric, the rhetoric of praise and blame. In particular, it resembles Greek funeral orations, which praised the piety and bravery of the dead so as to encourage the imitation of their virtues. Although there is a clearly marked division between the two halves of the work (3:19), there is no reason to doubt its overall unity. The first part of the book also makes use of historical examples (such as Joseph, Moses, and David) to demonstrate the supremacy of reason over the passions; and the praise of the Maccabean martyrs in the second part of the book is punctuated with reflections on their evidentiary value for the same thesis (6:31–35; 13:1–5). It has been argued that this speech was originally presented orally, perhaps at Antioch, the traditional burial site of the martyrs (17:8–10 refers to their tomb). The references at 1:10 and 3:19 to "this anniversary" and "the present occasion" could indicate that we have a commemorative funeral oration. But an author trained in rhetoric would have been able to simulate the language used in funeral orations, so there is little to say whether it was actually delivered or was composed simply to be read.

*Significance and Influence*. 4 Maccabees was translated into Syriac, but no Latin translations survive and it was not made part of the Vulgate. Without question, the literary influence of 4 Maccabees on Christian authors can be seen in second-century literature about martyrdom, especially in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch and in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*. It was also an important book for major patristic authors such as John Chrysostom, Augustine, and Jerome. The story of the mother and her seven sons is preserved in rabbinic sources (discussed by Hadas); but the rabbinic accounts seem not to be literarily dependent on 4 Maccabees, for they place these events in the reign of the Roman Emperor Hadrian rather than the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

Among the most striking teachings of 4 Maccabees is its claim that the deaths of the martyrs functioned as a "ransom" and an "atoning sacrifice" for Israel (see the comments on 6:29; 17:20–22). Because similar language is used of Jesus' death in the NT, some have proposed 4 Maccabees as an inspiration for this idea. Students of the apostle Paul may be particularly interested in the way 4 Maccabees portrays the role of the Mosaic law in the pursuit of self-control. Throughout 4 Maccabees it is taken for granted that it is possible to adhere to the law and that the law helps individuals to triumph over passions. For instance, 4 Macc 2:5–6 cites the commandment not to "covet" (Exod 20:17; Deut 5:21) as *evidence* that reason can control desires (i.e., God would not command what was impossible); Paul, on the other hand, claims that through this very commandment the power of sin "produced in me all kinds of covetousness" (Rom 7:7–8).

## Outline

I. The Supremacy of Devout Reason over the Emotions Proven Philosophically (1:1–3:18)

- A. Introduction of Thesis and Main Topic: The Maccabean Martyrs (1:1–12)
- B. Definitions of Key Terms (1:13–30*a*)
- C. Biblical Evidence of Reason's Power over the Emotions (1:30*b*–3:18)
  - 2:1–6*a*. Joseph's Triumph over Sexual Temptation
  - 2:6*b*–14. Jewish Law Helps Restrain from Vice
  - 2:15–23. Moses and Jacob Conquered Anger
  - 2:24–3:5. Reason Does Not Rule over Its Own Emotions, such as Ignorance
  - 3:6–18. David Resisted Irrational Thirst

II. Reason's Supremacy Demonstrated from Maccabean Martyrs (3:19–17:6)

- A. Historical Background of the Persecution (3:19–4:26)
  - 3:19–4:14. Apollonius's attempt on the Temple treasury
  - 4:15–26. Jason's reforms and Antiochus's persecution
- B. Martyrdom of Eleazar (5:1–7:23)
- C. Martyrdom of the Seven Brothers (8:1–14:10)
  - 8:1–14. Introduction of the brothers; Antiochus's offer
  - 8:15–9:9. Cowardly response contrasted with their actual response
  - 9:10–12:19. Torture and death of the seven brothers
  - 13:1–14:10. Philosophical implications of the seven brothers' example
- D. Martyrdom of the mother (14:11–17:6)
  - 14:11–15:28. The power of maternal affection and the mother's triumph over it
  - 16:1–4. Relevance of mother's conduct for the thesis
  - 16:5–25. What the mother could have said; what she told her sons
  - 17:1–6. Mother's voluntary death and summary praise of her virtue

III. Concluding Encomium (17:7–18:24)

- 17:7–18:5. Review of martyrs' triumph as divine athletes
- 18:6–19. Mother's testimony to her children
- 18:20–24. Conclusion

# Detailed Analysis

## I. The Supremacy of Devout Reason over the Emotions Proven Philosophically (1:1–3:18)

**1:1–12.** The author presents the thesis to be defended and explains (1:7–12) that he will do so both by argument (1:1–3:18) and by considering the conduct of the Maccabean martyrs (3:19–18:24). The thesis is that "devout reason" is overeign over the emotions. With the adjective "devout" or "pious," the author sounds at once his distinctively Jewish approach to the broader philosophical question of the relation of reason to the passions. For him, true reason is "devout" because it is directed toward God and nurtured by the God-given law of Moses.

The Greek word *pathos*, commonly rendered "emotion," could also be translated by "passion" or "affection." All schools of Greek philosophy were in agreement that reason should be superior to the passions or emotions, but they disagreed about the degree of mastery possible and the means of achieving such mastery. The earliest Stoics had argued that the emotions must be extirpated entirely, resulting in a state of *apatheia*, passionless perfection. Thus the author's claim that reason does not *destroy* the emotions but only resists yielding to them has been cited as evidence that he diverges (intentionally or otherwise) from pure Stoic dogma. But Stoics such as Posidonius (ca. 135–51 BCE) had modified the older Stoic teaching about the passions, arguing that they were in fact innate to a person (cf. 2:21–22), and hence that they were to be controlled rather than eradicated. Thus it is possible that the author may be entirely consistent with a later Stoic position. On his claims about the passions, see also 1:28–29; 3:2–5.

The author also explains (1:10–12) how the praise of the martyrs is related to his principal theme: the martyrs' ability to despise suffering illustrates his claim that "reason controls the emotions." To be sure, the martyrs are more than simply evidence of a thesis: they are also national heroes, for their virtue and steadfastness resulted in the downfall of the "tyrant," the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

**2:7–23.** The author was clearly aware of the charge that the Mosaic law seemed too arbitrary and particular for it to count as philosophical. Before illustrating the way that Eleazar was a "true philosopher" (5–7), he first notes that the legislation itself has the power to improve people morally. For instance, if one follows the law, one is forced to lend without interest (2:8; cf. Exod 22:25; Lev 25:35–37; Deut 23:19–20) and to cancel debts in the seventh year (Deut 15:1–11), and hence, even a "lover of money" is forced to overcome his or her base inclination. A host of related examples are adduced. Importantly, the author notes that the law is superior to the power of familial and friendly attachments (2:10–13) in that it enjoins rebuke. This prepares the way for the author's reflections on the family affections of the brothers and their mother (4 Macc 13–14). With the examples of Moses and Jacob, the author argues that the law and reason can master even anger: Moses did nothing rash to Dathan and Abiram when they grumbled against him (Num 16:12–15, 23–25, although the biblical account does claim that Moses was "very angry"!); and Jacob censured Simeon and Levi for their savage treatment of the Shechemites (Gen 34). In a fascinating theological reflection on the source of the emotions, the author affirms that God "planted" the emotions and inclinations in humans, but that God also set the mind as governor over them (2:21–22). To this enthroned mind God gave the law. The claim that those obedient to the law have a "kingdom" echoes the famous claim of the Stoics that only the wise man was truly a king (cf. 14:2).

**2:24–3:5.** The author concedes that reason cannot deal with "its own emotions," such as forgetfulness and ignorance; rather, its proper control is over the emotions of the body. Nevertheless, even passions of the mind, such as anger or malice, can be resisted by reason so that they do not gain the upper hand.

**3:6–18.** The example of King David's ability to resist his irrational thirst is perhaps not best suited for the problem of reason's ability to rule over its own passions (e.g. forgetfulness and ignorance). The illustration is, however, a fascinating interpretation and expansion of the incident recorded in 2 Sam 23:13–17 and 1 Chr 11:15–19. Several details are added to the biblical account to accentuate the irrationality of David's thirst

and the challenge of resisting it: David was *extremely* thirsty; there were springs where he was; the two young soldiers who fetched the water did so at tremendous risk (in the books of Samuel and Chronicles it is *three* warriors, and the dangers of their mission are not so great).

## II. Reason's Supremacy Demonstrated from Maccabean Martyrs (3:19–17:6)

**3:19–4:26.** An abridged version of the events of 2 Macc 3–6 sets the scene for the martyrdoms, which will occupy the remainder of the book (4 Macc 5–18). In condensing 2 Maccabees the author has changed and garbled a few details. The attempted seizure of the Temple funds (3:20) took place not under Seleucus Nicanor (311–281 BCE) but Seleucus IV Philopator (187–175 BCE); furthermore, Seleucus was not the *father* of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (4:15) but his brother. Finally, in 2 Macc 3 it is Heliodorus, not Apollonius, who is prevented from stealing funds from the Temple treasury. None of these details is as important for the author as giving an explanation for why God allowed such terrible persecution. So long as there was a righteous high priest and good conduct in Jerusalem, God came to the Temple's defense (3:19–4:14); it was the *unlawful* reforms of the high priest Jason (175–72 BCE) that angered "divine justice" and brought Antiochus's persecution as punishment (4:15–26). Because it was unlawful behavior that brought about the dire persecution, it is fitting that the deaths of the martyrs "for the sake of the law" (6:27) reverse Israel's fortunes (cf. 17:22).

**5:1–7:23.** Whereas the events leading up to the persecution under Antiochus have been condensed, the relatively brief account of Eleazar's martyrdom (2 Macc 6:18–31) is here greatly expanded so that the philosophical validity of Eleazar's actions—and indeed the philosophical nature of the law itself—can be defended. At stake is nothing less than whether the practice of Judaism is consistent with the highest principles of philosophy. Most schools of ancient philosophy were in agreement that life should be lived "according to nature." Antiochus thus questions whether Eleazar can really be a "philosopher" when he "senselessly" refuses something nature has given, such as pork (5:5–12). Furthermore, Antiochus adds, God would surely forgive a *minor* transgression committed under such duress (5:13; cf. 8:22).

**5:14–38.** Eleazar replies to both arguments. To eat defiling food would *not* be a minor transgression, for it would be tantamount to despising the whole law, since all transgressions are of equal value (5:19–21). Furthermore, the Jews' reputation for piety was at stake (5:17–18; cf. 6:18), and, as Eleazar will note later, he should not set a bad example for others (6:19). As for the weightier charge that the particular food laws were irrational and unnatural, Eleazar responds along two lines. First, he claims that the law engenders such universally recognized virtues as "self-control," "courage," "justice," and "piety" (the first three of these belong to the four "cardinal" virtues), and therefore the law is philosophically worthy. Second, he notes that God the lawgiver is also God the Creator of all things; hence God's particular stipulations in the law must reflect what is best for his creatures (5:25–26).

**6:1–35.** The gruesome details of Eleazar's torture and death demonstrate the extent of his self-mastery and introduce the athletic motif (6:10) that will recur in the other martyrdoms (9:8; 11:20–21; 14:5; 15:29; 16:16; 17:11–16). Eleazar's concern for setting a good example means that he cannot even *pretend* to eat pork (6:15–23). Eleazar prays that his voluntary ("I might have saved myself") suffering and death could count vicariously for the Jewish people (6:27–29). His blood is to purify them and his life is given as ransom for theirs, an idea that is later echoed by the first brother (9:24) and developed by the author (17:20–22).

From this lurid account of torture the author draws a conclusion relevant to his initial thesis: Eleazar's conduct illustrates that "devout reason is sovereign over the emotions" (6:31) for it "has mastered agonies" (6:35).

**7:1–23.** Eleazar is praised in terms reminiscent of a Stoic sage: by his deeds he has proven that his "divine philosophy" is true (7:9). Because Eleazar's death constituted an "atoning sacrifice" that saved Israel (17:22; 6:27–29), he is compared to Aaron, who "made atonement for the people" to stop the plague (Num 16:46–50). Like Isaac (Gen 22:1–19), Eleazar was willing to be slain.

As earlier (1:5; 2:24), the author now addresses imagined objections (7:17–23). In this case the question does not go to the heart of his claim that reason can control the emotions; rather, the counter argument simply notes that not all people have "prudent reason." The author is actually in agreement with this "objection," for he claims that only those who "attend to religion with a whole heart" (7:18), only the "wise and courageous" (7:23), master their emotions. Once again, philosophy and "faith" in God are combined (7:21) in a uniquely Jewish synthesis.

**8:1–9:9.** In order to show just how great a temptation the brothers overcame, the author first imagines how they might have spoken had they been "cowardly and unmanly" (8:16–26) before he reports what they actually said (9:1–9). Likewise the mother's hypothetical speech (16:6–11) is presented before her actual response (16:16–23). In both cases, the hypothetical discourse proposes various plausible reasons to submit to the king's order. One suspects that some such arguments in favor of assimilation were current in the author's day and that he sought to counter their seductive logic. The brothers are introduced as "handsome," and their beauty makes an impression on the king (8:4, 5, 10), suggesting that it is he, rather than these young men, who is the victim of his passions.

**9:10–12:19.** In an almost formulaic fashion, each of the seven brothers endures brutal torture and speaks defiantly to the king before dying. Their bold responses to the tyrant cast them as true philosophers who take no notice of human status. The fact that the brothers appear from oldest to youngest heightens the pathos of the account and illustrates that reason can overcome the innate weakness of youth. In fact, the seventh brother (12:1–19) is so young that even the king feels compassion and allows him to speak with his mother. She, however, advises him in the "Hebrew language" (12:7), a detail that not only invokes the unique heritage of the Israelites but also heightens the suspense, as it leaves both Antiochus and the readers unsure what she has advised him to do. The king and his friends believe that the boy has come to his senses, and they set him free (12:9), but, just as his brothers had done, he audaciously informs Antiochus that eternal "tortures" await him (12:12, 18; cf. 9:32; 10:11, 21; 11:3, 23) and chastises him for ignoring the fact that his victims "are made of the same elements" as he is (12:13). As will his mother (17:1), the last brother takes his own life (12:19). Stoics and some Jews believed that suicide was permissible—and even noble—in certain dire circumstances (cf. 2 Macc 14:37–46).

**13:1–14:10.** After noting that the brothers' triumph over their passions demonstrates the initial thesis (13:1–7), the author then (13:8–14:10) reflects on the power of their brotherly affection. Although the author praises such familial affection as a gift of "all-wise Providence" (13:19), he also recognizes that brotherly love was an emotion to be "overcome" (14:1; cf. 2:9–12).

**14:11–20.** He makes a similar argument about the mother's overcoming her love for her children. Even in "unreasoning animals" the parental instinct to protect progeny is strong. Hence the mother's dramatic choice of religion over her own children is all the more remarkable, and she can be likened to Abraham (14:20), who was willing to sacrifice Isaac in obedience to God. When faced with a choice between "religion" and her children, the mother rightly chose religion; but it is a religion "that preserves them for eternal life" (15:3), so that in a sense, she, like Abraham, will get her children back. That the mother belongs to the "weaker sex" (15:5) represents a widespread prejudice (cf. 1 Pet 3:7). The ability of a woman—and a *mother*—to control her passions is the greatest proof of the author's central thesis. It is obvious just how gendered a virtue self-control was in the ancient world, for the author claims that the mother showed "a *man's* courage" (15:23) and indeed acted more courageously than "males" (15:30; cf. 16:14).

**16:15–23.** Whereas 5:4 and 8:3 suggest that the mother and her sons were brought into Antiochus after Eleazar had been killed, here the author reports how the mother exhorted her children to martyrdom as though they had witnessed his death. Her argument emphasizes shame and honor: if an elderly man can endure such torments, it would be shameful for these young men to cower.

**17:1–18:5.** After the gory and detailed treatment of the demise of Eleazar and the brothers, the mother's death is announced with striking brevity (17:1–6): she commits herself to the

flames lest the guards touch her body, thus highlighting her modesty. (On voluntary death, cf. 12:19.) This final praise of the mother likens her and her sons to the stars, perhaps indicating a sort of astral mode of immortality (cf. Dan 12:3). The author believes in the immortality of the soul (9:22; 14:5; 15:3; 16:13; 17:12; 18:23) rather than in the resurrection of the body (cf. Philo and the Wisdom of Solomon).

### III. Concluding Encomium (17:7–18:24)

In a concluding reflection on the accomplishment of the martyrs (17:7–18:5), they are presented as victorious *athletes* who triumphed over the tyrant before the entire world (17:11–16; cf. 6:10; 9:22). Such metaphors were common in philosophical language as well as in early Christian discourse (cf. Heb 12:1).

**17:20–22.** The martyrs' deaths are said to have caused the overthrow of Antiochus and the purification of the homeland (cf. 6:27–29; 9:22). The language used for the martyrs' deaths bears striking resemblance to that used by Christians for the death of Jesus, as their deaths are called a "ransom" (cf. Mark 10:45) and an "atoning sacrifice" (cf. Rom 3:24; cf. also 1 Tim 2:6; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 1:19). The idea of one person's death applying vicariously to others is uncommon in the OT and in other ancient Jewish writings, but was well known from Greek literature.

**18:10–19.** The mother recounts that her deceased husband had faithfully taught their sons "the law and the prophets." Jews in the ancient world took great pride in their ancestral scriptures and in the fact that they saw to the education of their young.

**18:20–24.** The entire work concludes with a recapitulation of the torture the martyrs underwent. The author understands that it would be natural to lament such suffering. But because the martyrs will receive "immortal souls from God" (18:23), any lament must be paradoxical: their trial was "bitter ... and yet not bitter" (18:20), for through their steadfast piety, they saved their country, brought down the tyrant, and won themselves a place in the heavenly chorus.

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# 1 THESSALONIANS

Sze-kar Wan

## Overview

Widely regarded as the earliest of Paul's letters, 1 Thessalonians is free of controversies over the law or polemics against his opponents that characterize the apostle's later writings. The letter is distinguished by its irenic spirit and warmth towards the recipients. Paul's praise for the Thessalonians is so effusive that it takes little imagination to categorize this as a "friendly letter," a standard type in ancient epistolography. But the positive tone cannot mask an anxiety over some unspecified persecution the young converts are facing, persecution that may or may not have been also responsible for Paul's own hasty retreat from the city almost immediately after he founded the congregation. In the meantime, deaths of some members unsettled the community and might have caused them to rethink their belief in the Lord's coming. Thus, while Paul is concerned about the perception that he has abandoned the Thessalonians at this critical time, he is equally concerned that the Thessalonians not lose hope in the final revelation of Christ. His personal integrity, the authenticity of his message, and the cohesion and ongoing vitality of the new congregation have all become one and the same issue.

After dispatching Timothy to Thessalonica to strengthen the community and upon receiving favorable news from him (see 3:1–6), Paul writes this letter, declaring his profound love for the community in an effort to draw the Thessalonians closer to him in spite of his absence. He exhorts the congregation to maintain unity in the face of afflictions from without, and he counsels them to console one another about the deaths of members without losing hope in the Lord's coming. Paul also takes the opportunity to answer a number of queries raised by the congregation.

## Outline

I. Prescript (1:1)

II. Thanksgiving (1:2–3:13)

- A. Prayer (1:2–10)
- B. Paul's Sincerity and Purity of Motives (2:1–12)
- C. Encouraging the Congregation Under Persecution (2:13–16)
- D. Paul's Desire to Visit the Thessalonians (2:17–3:13)

III. Exhortations (4:1–5:22)

- A. Warnings Against Sexual Immorality (4:3–8)
- B. Concerning Life in the Community (4:9–12)
- C. Concerning Those Who Are Asleep (4:13–18)
- D. Concerning the Imminence of the Parousia (5:1–11)
- E. General Parenesis (5:12–22)

IV. Postscript (5:23–28)

## Detailed Analysis

### I. Prescript (1:1)

Paul introduces himself without the usual title "apostle" (contrast to Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1). The only other self-designation comparable in simplicity is that of Philippians (1:1), which like 1 Thessalonians is a friendly letter overflowing with warmth and praise for the addressees.

### II. Thanksgiving (1:2–3:13)

A standard feature in ancient letter writing and in most of the undisputed letters of Paul, the thanksgiving in 1 Thessalonians is unique in its unusual length. In fact, this section is so long that it may well be considered the main body of the letter. Some take the thrice-repeated thanksgiving (1:2; 2:13; 3:9) to indicate multiple letters, but the narrative flow of the entire section does not support that theory.

A. Prayer (1:2–10)

The thanksgiving prayer proper conforms to the usual Pauline form and function. The opening is standard: "We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly" (1:2; cf. Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 1:4; Phil 1:3; Phlm 4). It announces, as is Paul's custom, major themes of the letter: the Thessalonians' conversion (1:4–5, 9), Paul's past labor in their midst (1:5, 9), persecution (1:6), and apocalyptic urgency (1:10).

That the Thessalonians were Gentile converts is clear, since they "turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God" (1:9). Though used sparingly by Paul, *to turn* (*epistrephein*) was a technical term for Gentile conversion to Judaism (e.g., LXX Ps 21:28; Isa 19:22; Jer 18:8, 11; Tob 14:6) and was adopted by the Jesus movement (e.g., Acts 3:19; 9:35; 14:15). "To serve (*douleuein*, literally "to be a slave") a living and true God" means complete surrender to God as a slave to a master. Here and elsewhere, Paul conceives of conversion not so much as liberation but as switching allegiance to a different master, from mute idols to "a living and true God" (see, e.g., Rom 6:6, 12–23; 7:25; 12:11; 14:18; 16:18; Gal 4:8).

Paul reminds the Thessalonians of their conversion for the purpose of binding them closely to himself despite his absence. He praises his hearers for their "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3), but makes clear that all this finds its basis in God's prior love and election; the Thessalonians are "beloved by God" and have been chosen by God (1:4). Verse 5 could be taken as proof of election, as the NRSV translation ("because") might suggest, but more likely it explains how God's election took place—by the preaching of the gospel "not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit." Paul claims that his initial founding visit was the instrument by which God elected the Thessalonians, Gentiles heretofore being outside the covenant.

Giving his own preaching such a prominent role might seem egotistic, but Paul is adopting the rhetorical strategy of popular philosophers who boasted perfect congruence between words and deeds as basis for confidence in their message. Persuasiveness of the message depended on the authenticity of the messenger. In using this argument, however, Paul also turns it upside down. When Paul boasts of his "full conviction" (1:5), he contrasts his words not to his personal deeds but to the power of the Holy Spirit. Then and only then could the Thessalonians discover what sort of person Paul turned out to be. For Paul, authenticity of the message proves the credibility of the messenger, and that was the warrant for imitating him. Ultimately, Paul hastens to add, the Thessalonians were in reality imitating the Lord (1:6).

Paul has reason to fear for the viability of his relationship with the Thessalonian community. He left the city soon after he established the congregation, and it is now experiencing persecution (2:14; 3:3). To encourage them to stand firm, Paul reminds them of persecution at the time of their conversion (1:6) and informs them of his own before and after his visit (2:2; 3:7). Imitation means more than just mimicking the teacher; it means also sharing his paradigmatic suffering. He alludes to all this in the apocalyptic climax of the prayer, encouraging his new converts to wait for "Jesus, who rescues [note present tense] us from the wrath that is coming" (1:10). Despite the warm tone and praises elaborated on the Thessalonians, therefore, Paul is concerned about the current state of the young congregation, and he is anxious to re-establish relationship with them.

B. Paul's Sincerity and Purity of Motives (2:1–12)

The spotlight that started shifting from the addressees to Paul in the thanksgiving prayer is now trained squarely on Paul. He begins, "You yourselves know" (2:1). The formula is repeated numerously times in this letter (see also 1:5; 2:2, 5, 11; 3:3, 4; 4:2, 4; 5:2; also 2:9, "you remember"; 2:10, "you are witnesses") not only to stress the open honesty with which Paul conducted himself among the Thessalonians but especially to underscore the shared knowledge that establishes a common bond between them. This bond lays a foundation for a friendly persuasion in the remainder of the thanksgiving and especially in the exhortations. He reminds them again of the manner in which he first gained entrance to them (2:1; cf. 1:9) despite the shameful treatment he had received in Philippi (2:2). But that made the Thessalonians' imitation of Paul that much more moving and significant, for they themselves received the gospel "in spite of persecution" (1:5).

In addition, the relationship is also founded on personal integrity. Paul claims purity of his motives (2:3, 5), sincerity of his words (2:5), and upright and blameless conduct (2:10), in the manner of popular philosophers. But just as before, his self-claims only appear excessive; they are ultimately dependent on God, who alone forms the basis for self-regards and confidence. He maintains that he performed his arduous tasks to please God, not mortals (2:4, 6).

In an effort to bind the Thessalonians to himself, Paul uses a number of familial metaphors. He compares himself to a nurse "tenderly caring for her own children" (2:7). Gentleness of the wet nurse was a well-known trope in Roman literature, but Paul amplifies it by twining it with *thalpein* ("*to warm*"), evoking the image of a mother bird warming her eggs. *Her own children*, as opposed to children under her professional care, emphatically underscores her tenderness. Paul also compares himself to a father (2:11), this time as a moral authority and instructor, "urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God" (2:12).

### C. Encouraging the Congregation under Persecution (2:13–16)

From professed sincere motives and personal integrity, attention is now returned to the young congregation, which finds itself under some unspecified siege and is in need of encouragement. Paul begins his encouragement the same way he begins the letter, with another thanksgiving prayer that is formally and thematically similar to the first one: "We also constantly give thanks to God" (2:13; cf. 1:2). Why? A thanksgiving, especially in a friendly, paraenetic letter like 1 Thessalonians, highlights the strengths of the recipients as cause for gratitude, thus setting up a common ground for exhortation, even instruction. The Thessalonians had accepted the word of God (2:13), but amidst persecution: "For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews" (2:14). All three themes—reception of the word of God, persecution, and imitation—are already adumbrated in the first thanksgiving prayer (1:6). But whereas in the first instance imitation appears to be an act of volition, here it is involuntary. Whether they chose it or not, the sufferings of the Thessalonians have rendered them imitators of the Judean churches. Their choice is to endure the persecution, but in so doing they have followed the path of their fellow believers in Judea. Their conscious emulation of Paul has strengthened them to be in solidarity with other sufferers.

The harsh judgment against the "Jews" in 2:14–16 has led some to judge the passage to be a later interpolation. But many difficulties can be resolved by recognizing that *Ioudaioi* (2:14) means literally "Judeans." Since the comparison is between the Thessalonians' persecutions by their fellow citizens and those suffered by the Judean communities in the hands of their kinsfolk, the word should perhaps be translated literally. References to killing the prophets and opposition to the Gentile mission (cf. Gal 1:13, 23) all point in the same direction. Paul's strong condemnation is leveled not against all ethnic Jews but against only the inhabitants of Judea. In the same vein, *eis telos* (2:16) means literally "*until the end*" so that the final, eschatological judgment should be read: "God's wrath has come upon them continually until the end" (2:16).

### D. Paul's Desire to Visit the Thessalonians (2:17–3:13)

Paul continues to cultivate his relationship with the Thessalonians, this time by sharing his deep yearning to be with them in spite of physical separation. He does so by reversing a familiar kinship metaphor: "We were made orphans by being separated from you—in person, not in heart" (2:17*a*). To say one is present in spirit but absent in body was a standard epistolary device to exhort the recipients to live as thought the writer were present. It was especially effective when the writer, such as a teacher or a father, enjoyed a higher status than the recipients. Paul uses this convention to make his presence felt (Funk coins the term "apostolic parousia" to describe the phenomenon), but instead of calling his children (cf. 2:7, 11) orphans, as one would expect, he calls himself orphaned by the separation. The effect is not only deep pathos, as conveyed by "we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again" (2:17*b*–18). It is also pastoral

and paraenetic. Pastoral, because in expressing his dire need to be reunited with the Thessalonians, Paul lets them know that he empathizes with their desolation, for he himself is bereft of them as they are of him. Paraenetic, because the Thessalonians must now fulfill what is lacking in Paul by being blameless until the end: "For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? Yes, you are our glory and joy!" (2:19–20; cf. 3:13; 5:13).

The travelogue in 3:1–10 explains the events that led to the writing of the letter (cf. Acts 17:1–9, 15; 18:1. In his anxiety for the congregation, Paul dispatches Timothy from Athens to Thessalonica "to strengthen and encourage" the children he left behind (3:1–2, 5), so that they might not be shaken by "these persecutions" (3:3). That Paul has actual events in mind, and not just emotional distress, seems clear from his specific references both here and in 2:14, even if the nature of the actual persecutions is far from clear. Paul might well fear that these afflictions could cause his young converts to lose hope for the last day, which is why he is at pains to remind them of the coming of the Lord (2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23). Paul's praises the Thessalonians for their faith, love, and hope (1:3), but Timothy's report mentions only of their faith and love, not hope (3:6). Even though the news is good, therefore, hope for the final rescue (1:10) might be waning. The conclusion of the travelogue introduces the occasion for writing the letter: "Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore (literally, "to mend" or "fulfill") whatever is lacking in your faith" (3:10). Paul even makes his living conditioned on the Thessalonians' perseverance: "We now live if you continue to stand firm in the Lord" (3:8). His children must now take responsibility for the well-being of their father.

A concluding prayer (3:11–13) to the thanksgiving recapitulates Paul's deep yearning to be reunited with the Thessalonians and to hold fast "in holiness that [they] may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints" (3:12).

## III. Exhortations (4:1–5:22)

The exhortations are introduced by a recapitulation of the urgent theme of holding firm to the formal instructions the Thessalonians had received from Paul (4:1–2). *Paralambanein* ("to receive," 4:1; NRSV, "to learn") was a technical term for accepting and learning formal tradition, and *parangelia* ("announcement, military command, precept," 4:2; NRSV, "instructions") referred to a precise message conveyed by one party to another. Paul uses these terms to remind the Thessalonians what they already know: "you received from us how you ought to live" (4:1, author's trans.) and "you know what precepts we gave you" (4:2, author's trans.). Since the integrity of the teacher and his love for his students are no longer in doubt, the authenticity of these instructions can be taken in good faith. Moreover, these reminders serve the same function as the formula "as you know": namely, they establish a bond between Paul and the congregation based on common traditions and behaviors.

### A. Warnings Against Sexual Immorality (4:3–8)

These warnings are likewise set in a framework of reminders. Toward the conclusion of this subsection, Paul warns that "the Lord is an avenger in all these things"—referring to the list of injunctions of 4:3*b*–6*a*—but adds, "just as we have already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you" (4:6*b*).

That all the warnings in this section are against sexual immorality is indicated in 4:3: "Abstain from fornication." The meaning of *skeuos* in 4:4 is uncertain. It can mean the male genital and thus synecdochically *body*, hence the translation, "Each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor" (NRSV). Because of its literal meaning *vessel*, the word can also refer euphemistically to a woman engaged in sexual activities. Thus, an alternative is: "Each of you learn how to acquire your own wife in holiness and honor." "Lustful passion" (4:5) was the Stoic moralists' standard pet peeve, since they judged passion irrational. But given Paul's characterization of Gentiles as not knowing God (4:5), it is likely a part of standard Greek-speaking Jewish polemics against Gentiles in general (e.g., *Testimony of Joseph* 7:8; cf. also Rom 1:24, 26; Col 3:5). The language of exploitation (literally, "do not trespass or covet") in 4:6 also fits the overall theme of sexual immorality, since Greek moralists have compared committing adultery to stripping the man of his prized possession, his wife.

### B. Concerning Life in the Community (4:9–12)

That this and the next two topics are introduced by "concerning" suggests that the Thessalonians had raised them with Paul through Timothy (as in 1 Cor 7:1). The two topics covered therein—brotherly love, on which Paul commends them for loving all throughout Macedonia (4:9–10), and working diligently with their hands, a reminder that harks back to an earlier command (*parangellein*, 4:11; NRSV, "directed," cf. the noun *parangelia* used in 4:2)—appear to have little to do with each other until we notice that they are set in the context of a community. Its self-conscious distinction from outsiders ("behave properly toward outsiders," 4:12) points to a close-knit community with clear boundaries marking insiders from outsiders. Its love-ethos, which earns profuse praise from Paul and from other Jesus-communities (cf. 1:8–9), combined with Paul's injunction that members of this community must perform manual labor (cf. 2:9), possibly indicates some form of communal sharing that takes care of poorer members within the community. Whatever they do, Paul affirms it. He urges them "to do so more and more" (4:10), and "to mind [their] own affairs" (lit. "to do their own things," 4:11), which is to say affairs proper to the community. But he also warns them of freeloaders, who could threaten the stability of the community and who, Paul demands, must be willing to "work with [their] hands" (4:11).

### C. Concerning Those Who Are Asleep (4:13–18)

The discussion of the end time in 4:13–5:11 is the longest and most detailed among Paul's letters. In the first half, 4:13–18, Paul deals with the Thessalonians' grief over those who have "fallen asleep" [author's trans.], specifically what will happen to those still alive at the coming of Christ. In the second half, 5:1–11, he warns against the suddenness as well as the imminence of the Lord's coming. While these issues are certainly theological, the ultimate motive for introducing them is pastoral: both halves end with the consolation, "Encourage one another " (4:18; 5:11).

The issue has to do with deaths in the community after Paul's departure. Paul had obviously instructed the Thessalonians of the Parousia (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23), with many details drawn from Jewish apocalyptic imagery ("For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven," 4:16; cf. e.g., Dan 7). The catalyst was the question raised by the Thessalonians: How will those who have fallen asleep before the Son comes be rescued? (1:10). That this topic is introduced differently from the others, "We do not want you to be uninformed" (4:13), indicates the novelty of the question.

Paul's answer is summarized in v. 14, "Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died" (lit., "fallen asleep"). In this passage, Paul consistently calls the dead "those who have fallen asleep" (4:13, 14, 15; 4:16 the only exception), because they will be awakened. He draws his support from a seldomly used warrant, "the word of the Lord" (4:15), which could refer to a Synoptic-like tradition or a direct prophetic word. The content of the words is summarized in v. 15 and expanded in vv. 16–17: Those who have fallen asleep will be raised first at the Parousia, followed by those still alive being "caught up in the clouds together with [the dead in Christ] to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever" (4:17).

### D. Concerning the Imminence of the Parousia (5:1–11)

Paul continues his discussion of the Parousia under the heading of the "times and seasons" of the Parousia (5:1). It is evidently an old teaching, "for you yourselves know very well (lit., "precisely") that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (5:2) or "as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman" (5:3). The "Day of the Lord" is a biblical idea that the Almighty will wage war of retribution against the impious (e.g., Isa 13:6; Jer 46:10; Ezek 13:5; Joel 2:1, 11; Amos 5:18, 20). Paul uses it as a synonym for the Parousia, but stresses its salvific outcome for the elect instead (1 Cor 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 1:10; 2:16). Thus, Paul exhorts his hearers, "God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him" (5:9–10; cf. 1:10). The precondition is that as "children of light" who "belong to the day" (5:5, 8), believers must stay vigilant

and sober, "[putting] on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation" (5:8). The imminent arrival of the Lord requires that combatants stay ever alert and maintain their ethical urgency.

The warlike language about children of light and children of darkness was also used by the Essenes, who withdrew themselves from what they regarded as defiled Jerusalem in order to keep themselves pure and ready for the day of the Lord. Though there is no evidence that Paul had direct contact with them, the sectarian tendency in 1 Thessalonians is comparable. In 4:12, Paul calls attention to outsiders to encourage mutual responsibility between members of the same love-community. In 4:13, he makes a sharp distinction between the believers and "the rest" (*hoi loipoi*, NRSV, "others") of humanity who have no hope. In 5:5–7, he consigns the same outsiders, "the rest" of the world who fall asleep and are drunk, to the night and darkness. Some commentators, perhaps influenced by later Christian apocalypses and 5:20–22, think those who espouse "Peace and security" (5:3) are false prophets. But the saying was a standard slogan of Roman political propaganda designed to boast the superiority of *Pax Romana*. It therefore cannot be discounted that Paul here mobilizes dualistic symbols of apocalypticism to resist pressure, if not outright persecutions (2:14), from Thessalonian society at large. The difference between the Thessalonian congregation and the Essene sectarians, however, is that Paul never suggests total withdrawal from society. It is still important to him that his Jesus-followers make a good impression on outsiders (4:12).

### E. General Parenesis (5:12–22)

These general admonitions begin with a series of imperatives on life in the community (5:12–15) before branching off into a loose collection of aphorisms (5:16–22). Paul counsels respect for leaders of the community because of their labor (5:13). The exhortations, "[to] be at peace among yourselves" (5:13), "to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them," (5:14), and not "[to repay] evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all" (5:15), might seem unrelated unless we recognize that they are all issued against "the disorderly people" (*ataktoi*; lit., "out of ranks," 5:14; NRSV, "idlers"). In 4:11 idle freeloaders take advantage of communal sharing and thereby threaten the order of the love-community; the only remedy is to work with their hands. Thus the appeals of 5:14–15 are all made with such internal relations in mind.

## IV. Postscript (5:23–28)

Paul ends the letter with his customary prayer, in which he repeats the theme of being blameless at the Parousia (5:23–24), a request for prayer (5:25), greeting to all (5:26), and a final benediction (5:28). It also includes a "solemn command" (*enorkizein*; lit., "to swear") that the letter be read out loud to the congregation (5:27). In spite of the literary quality of the letter, therefore, it is the oral performance of it that is meant to be a substitute for the absent apostle.

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# CULTURES OF THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

John T. Fitzgerald

The Greco-Roman world requires careful analysis because of its daunting complexity. The following brief survey will focus on its political history, its cultural interactions, its religions, and its education, rhetoric, and philosophy.

## Political History

The Persians were the major power in the ancient Mediterranean world for some two centuries (539–331 BCE), but their domination was brought to an end by Alexander of Macedon (356–323) when he decisively defeated them at Gaugamela (in modern Iraq) in 331. With Judea (332) and Egypt (332–331) already under his control, Alexander turned his attention eastward, going through Iran and Afghanistan, and proceeding into India. In the words of one Jewish author, Alexander thus "advanced to the ends of the earth" (1 Macc 1:3). Along the way he founded at least six cities, including Alexandria in Egypt and Kandahar in Afghanistan. The latter's connection with the Macedonian is reflected in "al-Iskandar," the Arabic name for Alexander.

When Alexander died in 323, his vast empire began to fall apart, and his generals and their descendants began jockeying among themselves for power. What emerged from these power struggles were ultimately three major Hellenistic kingdoms whose founders traced their origins to Alexander and thus are known as his "Successors" (*Diadochoi*). These were the Antigonid kingdom centered in Macedonia, the Ptolemaic kingdom centered in Egypt, and the Seleucid kingdom centered in Syria. In addition to these three successor kingdoms, there were other Hellenistic kingdoms that attained considerable distinction. Of these, the two most prominent were the Attalid kingdom centered at Pergamum, which had an excellent library and developed the use of parchment as a material for writing, and the rulers of the island of Rhodes, which, with its five harbors, became the major Hellenistic clearing house for commercial traffic between the East and the West.

For the history of early Judaism during the Second Temple period, the most important of these Hellenistic kingdoms were the Ptolemaic and the Seleucid, which fought six Syrian Wars over the control of Coele-Syria (lower Syria, including Judea) during the third and second centuries. The Ptolemies were in effective control of the region from 301 to 198, during which time Alexandria not only emerged as the greatest city of the Mediterranean world but also became a major center of Diaspora Judaism. It was here that the Old Testament began to be translated into Greek, a project that culminated in the version known as the Septuagint. The Ptolemies lost control of Coele-Syria during the Fifth Syrian War (202–195) when the Seleucid king Antiochus III (the Great) defeated them. In an effort to foster Jewish support for his regime, he granted various rights and privileges to Jerusalem and its Temple. One of his sons, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, endeavored to incorporate Egypt into his realm during the Sixth Syrian War (170–168), but failed when Rome intervened and issued an ultimatum forcing him to withdraw. It was at this point that Antiochus IV revoked the rights granted by his father to the Judeans, prompting the revolt led by Judas the Maccabee and his brothers. This revolt led ultimately to the establishment of an independent Jewish state led by the descendants of Judas' family.

All of the Hellenistic kingdoms, including that of the Maccabees, were eventually to lose their independence as Rome rose to power. Rome's expansion into, and ultimate control of, the Mediterranean world is a remarkable story. At the beginning of the Hellenistic Age in 336 (when Alexander became king of Macedon), Rome was a small city-state in central Italy. By its end in 31, when Octavian (Augustus) defeated Marc Antony and Cleopatra VII at Actium and proceeded to incorporate Ptolemaic Egypt into the Roman realm, it had conquered or absorbed all of the Hellenistic kingdoms and become the world's undisputed superpower. During those three centuries it had first gained control of central Italy by defeating the Samnites, and then proceeded to conquer the Italian peninsula (Magna Graecia). Next, by defeating Carthage in the course of three Punic Wars (262–241, 218–201, 149–146), Rome established control of

the western Mediterranean, and it began its expansion eastward by engaging in four Macedonian Wars (214–205, 200–196, 171–167, 150–148). The last of these wars resulted in the establishment of Macedonia as a Roman province in 148, with Thessalonica as its capital. The subsequent Achaean War (146–145) brought the razing of Corinth in 146 and the partial dissolution of the Achaean Confederacy, functionally ending Achaia's political independence. When Attalus III, the last king of Pergamum, bequeathed his kingdom to Rome in 133, he was only recognizing political and military reality. Three wars against Mithridates VI (89–85, 83–81, 73–63), the Hellenistic king of Pontus (1 Pet 1:1), solidified Roman control of Asia Minor, setting the stage for the end of both the Seleucid and the Maccabean kingdoms, and the establishment of Syria as a Roman province in 63. Octavian's victory at Actium in 31 ended the Ptolemaic kingdom and marked the beginning of the Roman Empire. By that point, Herod the Great had already become one of Rome's client kings, having been declared king of the Jews by the Roman senate in 40 and having won his kingdom by 37. Ten years later, in 27 BCE, the Roman senate bestowed on Octavian the title of "Augustus." That same year Achaia was established as a Roman province, with Corinth (having been refounded as a Roman colony by Julius Caesar in 44) as its capital. Two years later (in 25 BCE), the Roman province of Galatia was formed. The pattern begun during the waning years of the Republic and the early years of the Empire continued for centuries. Rome controlled the ancient Mediterranean world through its provinces and its client kings, sending Romans to the provinces to serve as proconsuls (such as Gallio, Acts 18:12), legates (such as Quirinius, Luke 2:2), prefects or procurators (such as Pontius Pilate [Matt 27:11], Felix [Acts 23:24], and Festus [Acts 24:27]), and other administrators, or appointing non-Romans as client kings (such as Herod Agrippa I [Acts 12:1] and Aretas IV [2 Cor 11:32]).

Augustus (31 BCE–14 CE) and his four immediate successors (Tiberius, 14–37 CE; Gaius Caligula, 37–41; Claudius, 41–54; and Nero, 54–68) were related by birth, adoption, or marriage, and comprise what is known as the Julio-Claudian Dynasty. Following a period of civil conflict (68–69), the Flavian Dynasty arose, which consisted of Vespasian (69–79) and his two sons, Titus (79–81) and Domitian (81–96). It was followed by a long period during which each emperor adopted his successor: Nerva (96–98), Trajan (98–117), Hadrian (117–138), and Antoninus Pius (138–161), who was the first ruler of the Antonine Dynasty (138–192). He was followed by Marcus Aurelius (161–180), Lucius Verus (161–169), and Commodus (177–192). Politically and economically, the first two centuries of the Empire were its strongest, with declines in both areas becoming manifest in the late second century.

## Cultural Interaction

Alexander's campaigns set the stage for much greater cultural interaction during the subsequent centuries. He did not initiate this interaction, which was already underway, but rather accelerated the pace at which it transpired. Among the texts found at Kandahar, for instance, is a third-century bilingual Buddhist inscription (*SEG* 20.326), written in Greek and Aramaic, of the Mauryan king Ashoka (ca. 268–232). Without Alexander's campaigns and the cities that he founded—his most important cultural legacy—such a text is inconceivable. The term that is most often used to describe this cultural interaction is "Hellenization," which is especially used with reference to the Hellenistic Age, that is, the period from 336 to 31 BCE. The term itself has been used both positively (to refer to the diffusion and triumph of Hellenic values) and negatively (to condemn cultural imperialism and the ruthless imposition of Greek practices on resistant Eastern populations). It is best used neutrally to describe an interactive process by which Greek customs, ideas, institutions, practices, and terms spread into non-Greek regions and, to varying degrees, were not only appropriated by some indigenous individuals and groups but also resisted and rejected by others. The adoption or adaptation of Greek culture was usually selective rather than comprehensive. Those who learned the Greek language and adopted some aspects of Greek culture did not necessarily embrace all aspects of that culture. Given this selectivity, Greek culture did not replace local, indigenous culture but either became amalgamated with it or existed alongside it. Local customs during the Hellenistic Age continued not only to exist but also, in many cases, to thrive. The same is true of most Eastern languages; although Greek became the lingua franca of the Mediterranean world, local

languages continued to be spoken (e.g., Acts 14:11), and translations both from Greek and into Greek were routinely made. The same selectivity is seen in buildings. For example, whereas temples to Greek deities are well attested for cities such as Gadara (Matt 8:28), which Meleager (fl. ca. 100 BCE) called "an Attic fatherland among Syrians" (*Anth. Pal.* 7.417), there is no evidence for theaters anywhere in Hellenistic Syria or Palestine. Depending on the time and place, the degree of Hellenization was sometimes significant, at other times superficial. In general, Hellenistic influence is discernible in cities rather than in villages, and among the social elite rather than the lower classes. Except in rare circumstances, the adoption or rejection of Hellenism was voluntary, and there was never any prolonged systematic attempt on the part of the Greeks to impose their culture on others. When compulsory measures were applied and traditional indigenous practices banned, these steps were typically taken with the support of many local inhabitants. Even in the case of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who prohibited any practice that made the Jewish people distinctive, the author of 1 Maccabees makes clear that the initiative for Hellenization came from members of the Jewish community (1:11–15) and that even the oppressive measures had the support of many Jews (1:43, 52). In short, Hellenistic cultural interaction led to social, cultural, and religious changes, some of which enjoyed broad support and others which were fiercely resisted.

Rome's rise to power brought no significant cultural change to the eastern Mediterranean. Although individual Romans in the East regularly spoke Latin and sometimes used Latin for their monumental inscriptions (as Pontius Pilate, for example, did at Caesarea Maritima for a dedication to Tiberius), Rome itself made no attempt to Latinize its provinces in the East. The Greek language remained the lingua franca of the eastern Mediterranean, and Greek became increasingly used at Rome. Indeed, Paul's letter to the Christ-believers at Rome was written in Greek, and Greek remained the primary language of the Christian community at Rome for many years. Many natives of the East traveled to Rome or became residents of the city, and numerous Romans had extensive contact with Greece and the East. Cicero, for example, was a student in both Rhodes and Athens, and served as proconsul of Cilicia, the province where the Apostle Paul was born (Acts 22:3). Moreover, some Roman emperors were philhellenes, such as Hadrian, whose journey to the Roman East in 129–131 CE brought Hellenistic influence to an unprecedented new apex in Syria-Palestine. Yet it also had disastrous consequences. His plan to rebuild Jerusalem as a Roman colony (Aelia Capitolina), complete with shrines to the major deities of the region as well as a temple to Jupiter Capitolinus, was one of the factors that led to the Bar Kokhba revolt of 132–135.

## Religion

Religion took diverse forms in the Greco-Roman world, including civic cults, healing cults, hero cults, mystery religions, private associations, and ruler cults. It was practiced in cities and in the country, in homes and at shrines, by priests and prophets, and publicized with festivals and processions. There was continuity with the past as well as a host of new options for religious expression. Traditional Greek religion, which centered on the worship of the gods depicted by archaic writers such as Homer and Hesiod, was a continuing religious option, with temples built and worship offered to deities such as Zeus and Hermes (Acts 14:12). One key difference, however, was that the peoples of the Greco-Roman world tended to identify the gods and goddesses of the Greek pantheon with their non-Greek counterparts. For example, instead of regarding Zeus and the Roman god Jupiter as two different gods, they equated them. Similarly, Hermes was identified with Mercury, Hera with Juno, Poseidon with Neptune, and Aphrodite with Venus. The same kinds of identifications were made with the gods of other peoples, including the Jews, with Yahweh equated with Olympian Zeus (2 Macc 6:2). Such crosscultural identifications reflected the syncretistic principle of polyonymy, that "the gods have one nature but many names" (Maximus of Tyre, *Or.* 39.5).

Greco-Roman religions were polytheistic and non-exclusive, so that the worship of one deity did not exclude the worship of another. To insist on the worship of just one god to the total exclusion of others, as did both Judaism and Christianity, struck many people as being narrow-minded, intolerant, and disdainful of most of the divine world. The salient feature of divinity was widely regarded as power—an idea

still reflected in the modern use of "omnipotent" as an epithet for God—so that it was thought that it was only prudent to acknowledge that reality. One did not have to love the gods, but it was foolish to ignore their power, which could be used to harm the religiously negligent. In a sense, Greco-Roman religion was essentially concerned with the management of divine power, seeking to ensure it was used to one's benefit rather than detriment. A Greek word used to designate this attitude was *deisidaimonia*, "fear of/reverence for divinity." It entailed taking precautions against needlessly offending the gods, and the Athenians' erection of an altar to "an unknown god" was interpreted as a display of such religiosity (Acts 17:22–23). Philosophers, on the other hand, tended to regard this fearfulness as superstitious cowardice, and the Pauline emphasis on love for God and confident boldness in approaching the divine (Eph 3:12) was the antithesis of *deisidaimonia*.

We also know that many pagans' understanding of the divine world was quite similar to that of Jews and Christians, prompting some scholars to speak of "pagan monotheism." Pagan monotheists may have worshiped a multiplicity of gods, but they tended to think in terms of one supreme deity whose power was conveyed through lesser divinities, such as minor gods, angels, or other supramundane mediators. This pagan monotheism, which arose independently of Judaism and prior to Christianity, is evident, for example, in the widespread cult of "The Greatest God" (*Theos Hypsistos*), which was especially popular in Asia Minor and is attested as early as the second century BCE. This pagan tendency toward a monotheistic conception of the divine, along which a henotheistic penchant to pay homage to a particular deity, means that it is fundamentally misleading to make a simplistic contrast between "pagan polytheism" and "Jewish and Christian monotheism." The Apostle Paul himself acknowledged the existence of "many gods and many lords" yet did not view that as a contradiction of his monotheistic understanding of God (1 Cor 8:5–6). Like Augustine centuries later (*City of God* 9.23), what he denied was the ultimate divine status of such beings, not their existence.

Worship typically took three principal forms: prayers, votive offerings (gifts offered in fulfillment of a vow), and sacrifices, with both animals and vegetables offered. Of these, sacrifice merits emphasis because it was so widespread and central to many Greco-Roman religions. Within this context, the fact that the early Christians, while using the language of sacrifice (e.g., in regard to the death of Jesus), did not practice animal sacrifice was conspicuous. This absence of sacrifice, which was tantamount to a modern religion not praying, was one of the aspects of Christianity that its religious neighbors found baffling.

## Education, Rhetoric, and Philosophy

Greco-Roman education, though fluid and varied, generally involved three stages: primary, secondary, and tertiary, with a diminishing number of individuals advancing to the second and third stages. The standard curriculum developed early in the Hellenistic Age, not long after Alexander's campaigns, and always gave emphasis to physical education. Elementary students, who were usually escorted to and from school by a custodian (*paidagōgos*, Gal 3:24), learned simple arithmetic, how to copy and read aloud simple texts, and how to write. Already at this initial stage students were introduced to such forms as gnomes and chreiai (anecdotes). The liberal arts (grammar, literature, mathematics, music, etc.) were the focus of the secondary stage, with a core curriculum that included Homer and Euripides as well as an extended curriculum that exposed students to Menander (quoted in 1 Cor 15:33) and some rhetoric. Basic instruction in the writing of letters was taught at this stage, and the "preliminary exercises" (*progymnasmata*), which were designed as transitional exercises that prepared students for more difficult and sophisticated rhetorical exercises, were increasingly introduced into the secondary curriculum during the late Roman Republic and early Empire, though some students did not learn them until the third stage of education.

Tertiary education involved a choice between philosophy and rhetoric, with the vast majority of students opting for the latter. The goal of rhetoric was the acquisition of the art of persuasive eloquence,

an indispensible skill whatever one's profession or role in civic life and administration. That entailed knowledge of the various parts of a speech, skill in developing arguments and proofs, expertise in the rhetorical methods involved in composing and delivering speeches, and mastery of three basic types of speeches: the forensic speech, designed for courtroom accusations and apologies relating to past actions; the deliberative speech, aimed at persuading or dissuading the undertaking of future endeavors; and the epideictic speech, devoted to the bestowal of praise and blame in the present. Epistolary theory was also a concern of tertiary education, where attention was given to enhancing literary style and to developing skill in how to write different kinds of letters, such as thank-you notes for gifts received or services rendered, congratulatory letters for accomplishments and awards, notes of condolence on occasions of death and disappointment, requests, paraenetic letters of moral exhortation, letters of recommendation, and words of advice.

Various philosophical schools developed during the Hellenistic Age, with the four major sects being Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism. Others included the Cynics, the Neopythagoreans, the Skeptics, and various eclectics. At the beginning of the period, Athens was the unquestioned center of philosophy, and any serious student went there to study. Toward the end of the second century BCE that began to change, in part because of the expansion of Roman power into the eastern Mediterranean and the growing interest of Romans in philosophy. Influential philosophers began to leave Athens and teach elsewhere, such as Panaetius (d. 109 BCE), who lectured in his native Rhodes and was a frequent visitor to Rome. When the Roman general Sulla sacked a considerable portion of Athens during the First Mithridatic War (89–85 BCE), it precipitated a major exodus of philosophers, their schools damaged or destroyed. This had two major consequences. The first was the radical decentralization of philosophy, with schools now established all across the Mediterranean world and influential philosophers active in various places. Posidonius of Apamea in Syria (ca. 135–51 BCE), for example, the most important Stoic of the first century BCE, taught at Rhodes and was never head of the Stoic school in Athens. Similarly, the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus (ca. 110–40 BCE), who was born in Gadara of Syria and studied in Athens, made Italy his base of operations. There were, of course, philosophers still in Athens in the first century CE (Acts 17:18), yet Athenian supremacy in philosophy was over. The second major consequence was a corollary of the first. Philosophical education increasingly involved instruction in the doctrines of all the philosophical schools, not just those of the particular sect with which one was affiliated, along with the exegetical study of the various "classic" texts of philosophy. Editions of, and commentaries on, key texts now began to appear, and histories of philosophy began to be written. The canonization and exegetical study of the Old and New Testament thus took place within a cultural context in which philosophers were similarly engaged in discussions about what the founding fathers had written and taught.

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