

1-1-2015

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Recommended Citation

Caulley, Thomas Scott (2015) "A Thief in the Night: Paul and Jesus," *Leaven*: Vol. 23: Iss. 1, Article 7.
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A Thief in the Night: Paul and Jesus

Thomas Scott Caulley

As the first and most prominent Christian writer, why did Paul have so little to say about Jesus of Nazareth and his earthly ministry? Why didn't Paul quote more of Jesus's teaching? These questions have been variously posed for a long time. In some academic circles the tendency has been to take Paul's minimal use of Jesus material as evidence that the apostle was not interested in the earthly Jesus, but only the risen Christ. While the vast majority of critical scholars make no such claim, a few contend that from his later theological viewpoint, Paul "retrofitted" Jesus with divine attributes and his death with salvific significance. This argument—assuming that Paul's sparing use of Jesus's teachings implies his lack of interest in the earthly Jesus—allegedly points to the conclusion that Paul is the true founder of Christianity.¹ The controversy continues to elicit strong responses from traditional quarters.² While many scholars are minimalists in their approach, finding in Paul's letters only a handful of references to the teaching of Jesus, others go to the opposite extreme, some listing upwards of 100 quotes and allusions. The reality is probably somewhere in-between.³ The range of opinions reminds us of the ambiguity of the evidence. In turn, this ambiguity causes one to wish for more satisfactory answers.

A standard answer to the question of Paul's supposed lack of interest in Jesus's ministry has been that Paul's writings are epistles, a literary genre that was not given to conveying historical information. Moreover, Paul wrote theology, supposedly by its nature an abstraction not primarily focused on historical facts. Yet from Paul's letters themselves we know that neither of these things was necessarily true: Paul's theology is centered on the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth—that is, on historical persons and events. In addition, the epistle as a writing form was quite flexible: Paul and the other New Testament writers were free in adapting and shaping their chosen literary vehicles, adding historical information when they chose (for example, see Gal 1.13–2.10; Phil 3.4–6; 2 Cor 11.22–33; 1 Tim 6.13; etc.).

Another answer, recently given from the perspective of sociology, suggests that it was the social setting of Palestinian churches versus the Hellenistic churches and their differing "survival strategies" which set the stage for different handling of Jesus's earthly ministry. Such strategies in Palestine involved demonstrating the church's uniqueness over against its parent Jewish faith, emphasizing Jesus's ministry and teaching, whereas survival in the Hellenistic world (allegedly) involved assimilation to the surrounding culture, demonstrating that Christians were not a threat nor were they antisocial. Thus, instead of focusing on the earthly ministry of

1. For example, see chapter 10, "Paul, Jesus, and Christian Origins," in N. T. Wright, *What St. Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

2. See D. Wenham, *Paul, Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); J. M. G. Barclay, "Jesus and Paul," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (ed. G. Hawthorne, R. Martin, D. Reid; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 492–503; M. Bird, "The Purpose and Preservation of the Jesus Tradition: Moderate Evidence for a Conserving Force in Its Transmission," *BBR* 15 (2005): 161–85; etc.

3. D. Fiensy, "The Synoptic Logia of Jesus in the Ethical Teachings of Paul" *SCJ* 13 (2010): 81–98.

Jesus, Paul emphasized theological ideas, such as some of the christological titles that, outside Christian circles, were honorific epithets familiar in Hellenism.⁴

While the observations regarding survival strategies are helpful in certain ways, they account neither for the fact that Paul was at home in both a Palestinian and a *Diaspora* setting, nor the fact that the Gospels—using historical narrative—were produced by Christian leaders outside Palestine, for Hellenistic believers. In addition, even though titles such as “Savior” and “Lord” were used in Hellenism (often of the Caesar), for the New Testament they have their background in the Greek scriptures. Finally, Paul’s preaching of the “foolishness of the cross” and of the resurrection was hardly an attempt at assimilation to the surrounding Hellenistic religious scene. We are reminded that Paul proclaimed Jesus “both as the crucified Messiah . . . and as the risen and living Lord.”⁵ We cannot effectively argue from silence what Paul “must” have thought. With appropriate caution, however, it is possible to reconstruct a plausible scenario that potentially sheds light on the question of Paul’s use of Jesus material.

This essay looks briefly at the *thief in the night* saying (1 Thess 5.2) as an example of how Paul used Jesus material in his letters. A sketch of the thief saying serves to introduce the discussion of Paul’s use of Jesus material within the larger question of his use of scripture. Both are in light of the situation in the generation after Paul, which saw the development of the proclamation of the gospel message (the *kerygma*) in the early church, as well as the related shift from the preached gospel (*euangelion* or “good news” in Paul’s writings) to the written gospels, which included the earthly ministry of Jesus.⁶ Space constraints require that we skip over these last two points. Suffice it to say, part of the reason Paul does not use more Jesus material is a function of his times. The first generation of Christian leaders was well-versed in the history of their movement. After Paul’s death, it was the changing scene of the second-generation church that for several reasons made more important an emphasis on the ministry of the earthly Jesus. As such, that generation initiated the written gospels and focused on the narrative of Jesus’s life and ministry, as well as his sayings. It is anachronistic to judge Paul’s writing as somehow inadequate based on that later point of view.

Day of the Lord/Christ’s coming as Thief in the Night

The thief in the night saying appears six times in the New Testament, occurring in three slightly different forms. These are in 1 Thessalonians 5.2; Matthew 24.43 and its parallel, Luke 12.39; 2 Peter 3.10; and Revelation 3.3 and 16.15. The six sayings occur in pairs: Matthew and Luke’s version is the same (traditionally identified as from a common source); 1 Thessalonians 5.2 reads the same as 2 Peter 3.10, except that 2 Peter does not include the words, *in the night*;⁷ and the two passages in Revelation are almost identical. The first four sayings refer variously to the coming of the day of the Lord, but in Revelation the risen Christ himself speaks: “I am coming like a thief.” The three different forms bear witness to the different settings and circumstances in which the Jesus saying was preserved and handed down.

Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians in part to respond to some who feared their loved ones were lost who had died before Christ’s second coming (1 Thess 4.13–18). He introduces this section in 1 Thessalonians 5.1 with the words, *now concerning (peri de)*, a phrase that indicates a change or focus in the discussion. In this case, Paul focuses attention on the suddenness of the Parousia. In 1 Corinthians Paul uses that phrase to address specific questions raised by the audience. Although that is not a necessary conclusion here, either way we take

4. See S. Guijarro, “The Jesus of Paul: A Contribution from the Social Sciences,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 67 (2011): 1–6.

5. V. P. Furnish, *Jesus According to Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 66.

6. It is beyond the scope of this essay to engage in arguments over the dates of the Gospels. I am here assuming the traditional view that both Peter and Paul were martyred under Nero in the mid to late 60s, and that Mark—probably the earliest gospel—was written at about that time, or shortly thereafter.

7. Some later manuscripts of 2 Peter add the phrase *in the night* in assimilation to the 1 Thessalonians version of the saying. That the author of 2 Peter would know 1 Thessalonians and accommodate the wording of 2 Pet 3.10 to the Thessalonian passage is altogether possible, given the bold appeal made for *our beloved brother Paul* and *all his letters* (2 Pet 3.15). It is therefore not unreasonable to conclude that 1 Thessalonians had some influence in the wording of the phrase as found in 2 Pet 3.10.

it changes little. Paul says the Thessalonians have no need to have anything written to them (5.1), a standard statement in *paraenesis*, or exhortation. *Paraenesis* typically uses repetition as part of its approach. “You yourselves know very well,” suggests that Paul has already told them these things, and here repeats and clarifies his position. The word translated as “know very well” or “know accurately” (*akribōs*) is found only here in Paul’s writings, but is used of “certain interpretation” in an apocalyptic context in one of the Greek texts of Daniel, such that its use there may inform Paul’s statement here.⁸

“As an apocalyptic image, the [‘thief in the night’] phrase is uniquely Christian; it has no precedent in the Hebrew Bible or in Judaism.”⁹ Paul here equates the Parousia of Christ (1 Thess 4.15) with the day of the Lord. While *the day of the Lord* in the Old Testament referred to the judgment of God the LORD (*YHWH*), 1 Thessalonians 5.2 is the earliest application of the phrase *day of the Lord* to Jesus.¹⁰

In the ensuing verses Paul expands upon the thief saying in 1 Thessalonians 5.2, developing his thoughts about day/light, and night/darkness. Included in 1 Thessalonians 5.4 is “the day as a thief” (“you are not in darkness . . . for that day to surprise you like a thief”). Clearly, chapter 5, verse 4 is an expansion and application of 5.2, in which Paul creates a contrasting chiasm (light/darkness and day /night; but light/day and night/darkness). As he often does, here Paul uses the Jesus material to make an ethical point.¹¹

The question about Paul’s use of Jesus’s saying leads scholars to compare 1 Thessalonians with the Matthew–Luke saying. The easy assumption for the casual reader is that Matthew records the original saying, which Paul has then adapted.¹² But this is actually backwards—Matthew’s version of the Jesus material reflects the tradition of the generation after Paul. While Matthew likely gives us an accurate picture of Jesus’s words, chronologically Paul’s letters are our first witnesses to Jesus. In any case, with few exceptions all of the New Testament documents remember the words of Jesus—originally in Aramaic—and recall them as they had been handed down in Greek.¹³ In other words, even the “quotes” of Jesus have been mediated through (and interpreted by) the early Christian communities who rendered the sayings into Greek.¹⁴

Paul’s Word of the Lord

Considerable debate has accompanied the meaning of Paul’s use of the phrase, *word of the Lord* (and similar phrases). Within form criticism of the early twentieth century the assumption was that such references indicated a prophetic *word* from the risen Christ through early Christian prophets, something like we see in the book of Revelation. Paul himself invited some of this interpretation, given his own Damascus Road experience and resulting apostleship (via the appearance to him of the risen Christ, 1 Cor 15.8). In Galatians Paul emphasized his independence from the so-called pillar apostles, the primary sources of information on the earthly Jesus. More recently it has been acknowledged that several of Paul’s statements about the word of the Lord are most likely references to sayings of the earthly Jesus (cf. 1 Cor 7.10–11; 1 Cor 9.14; 1 Cor 11.23–25; 1 Thess 4.15–17).¹⁵ It is significant that 1 Corinthians was written in part to combat the problems created by the Corinthians’ radical independence, such that Paul—in contrast to Galatians—emphasizes continuity with

8. A. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (AB 32B; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 289.

9. C. Stanley, “Who’s Afraid of a Thief in the Night?” *NTS* 48 (2002): 468. All the occurrences of thief imagery in the Hebrew Bible are non-eschatological; there are no examples of day of the Lord thief imagery in Jewish apocalyptic texts (E. Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1985], 205); cf. Stanley, “Who’s Afraid?” 468, n. 1.

10. R. Gundry, “The Hellenization of Dominical Tradition and the Christianization of Jewish Tradition in the Eschatology of 1–2 Thessalonians,” *NTS* 33 (1987): 170; Malherbe, *Letters*, 291.

11. Fiensy, “Logia,” 93.

12. See C. Tuckett, “Synoptic Tradition in 1 Thessalonians?” in *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (R. Collins, et al., eds; Leuven: Peeters, 1990), 171. Tuckett thinks that Paul reflects a knowledge of the Synoptic tradition; see Malherbe, *Letters*, 290.

13. Mark records a few words of Jesus in Aramaic, Jesus’s first language which he spoke most of the time.

14. All translation inevitably includes an element of interpretation.

15. S. Kim, “Jesus, Sayings of” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (ed. G. Hawthorne, R. Martin, and D. Reid; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 474–92, here 475.

their history and the Corinthian believers' solidarity with the wider Christian movement. It is no accident that we find in 1 Corinthians two pronounced statements of passing on received tradition, namely the Words of Institution of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11.23–25, and the earliest statement of the apostolic kerygma (preaching), focusing on the death and resurrection of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15.3–4.

In this regard, the reference in 1 Thessalonians 4.15 (“this we declare to you by *the word of the Lord*,” emphasis added) has been long debated. P. Stuhlmacher has argued that the phrase means “in the authority of the Lord,” which Walter takes to imply that Paul was not quoting a saying of the earthly Jesus.¹⁶ But S. Kim has convincingly countered that, within the larger context of the material including 5.2 (the thief in the night saying), it is much more likely that Paul has in mind a saying of the earthly Jesus, rather than a prophetic oracle, either of his own or from an anonymous Christian prophet.¹⁷

Paul's use of Scripture

J. Dunn has noted that methodologically Paul's treatments of Jesus sayings and allusions parallel the ways he uses scripture.¹⁸ That is, we find citations, allusions, and adaptations of various kinds. But the time-honored discussion about New Testament uses of scripture (our Old Testament) is fraught with difficulties. Scholars are revisiting the old debates over citations and what constitutes an “allusion.”¹⁹ Allusions are by nature notoriously difficult to define and identify, but more to the point, Paul and the other New Testament writers were not really about the business of merely citing and alluding to their scripture, as if they were theology students writing term papers.²⁰ What was happening was more complex and, by extension, implies that Paul's use of Jesus material was similarly complex. So what was Paul doing when he tied his assertions to scripture?

To understand Paul's use of scripture one must be clear about the concept and shape of scripture in Paul's day. First, it is important to remember that the Bible of the first Christians (our Old Testament) was written in Greek. First-century Christian writers regularly referred to the Septuagint (the Greek “Pentateuch”) and the Old Greek (the rest of the Bible), not primarily the different Hebrew text-types available at the time.²¹ Occasionally the NT writers appear to cite Greek texts that are closer to the Hebrew than today's known texts of the Greek Bible, and sometimes they appear to use texts that are unknown to us today. In addition, almost certainly they were also adapting the texts themselves.²²

Second, to suggest that Paul cited the Septuagint most of the time he referred to scripture, while technically correct, is potentially misleading. Paul and the other NT writers did not have a bound volume of the *Septuaginta* at their fingertips, as modern Bible scholars do. The Bible books we refer to as the Septuagint and Old Greek were still written on scrolls, one scroll for the larger books like Deuteronomy or Isaiah. Each scroll was a *biblos* (a book), the origin of our word *Bible*. Instead of our modern concept of Bible, which implies a bound volume (and *de facto* a closed collection), the first-century Christians had just an idea of *scriptures*. They knew, of

16. P. Stuhlmacher, “Jesu-tradition im Romerbrief? Eine Skizze” in *Theologische Beiträge* 14 (1983): 240–50; see N. Walter, “Paul and the early Christian Jesus-tradition” in *Paul and Jesus* (A.J.M. Wedderburn; London: T. & T. Clark International, 1989), 51–80.

17. S. Kim, “The Jesus Tradition in 1 Thess 4.13—5.11.” *NTS* 48 (2002): 225–242; see Kim, “Jesus, Sayings of,” 474–92.

18. J. Dunn, “Jesus Tradition in Paul” in *Studying the Historical Jesus* (B. Chilton and C. Evans, eds.; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 155–78, here 175.

19. See R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

20. To say that Paul's method of citing Jesus sayings is “allusiveness” is not particularly helpful; see D. Dungan, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Churches of Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 146.

21. This fact is the source of modern confusion, as when the student reads the NT writer's quote (from the Septuagint), and then looks it up in her English Old Testament. Often the two do not match, because our Old Testament is based on a Hebrew text, and the NT writers were quoting from one of the available Greek texts.

22. The NT writers sometimes appear to play off one textual reading against another, choosing the wording which worked best for their specific argument. We should note that the differences in text-types were not cause for concern. The ancients seem unconcerned with the “original autographs.” The Bible was considered inspired whether in the original language or in translation, in spite of the marked differences in some of those texts.

course, that the Torah was comprised of the five books of Moses (five scrolls), and they knew generally what books made up the collection of the “Prophets.”²³ The Christians also had an idea of what constituted the “Writings,” books like the Psalms and Proverbs.²⁴ But especially the Writings category was fluid, both because it is a general designation, and because the idea of a *closed canon* had not yet been established.

Highlighting the fluidity of its collection of scripture, among the Greek books of the early church were several documents that later came to be known as the Apocrypha.²⁶ These books originated with the Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) synagogue, the home of many of the first Jewish Christians. When those believers were eventually constrained to leave the synagogue because of their faith that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), they naturally brought their scriptures with them. For that reason—and because there was not yet any closed canon among the Jews—the books of the Apocrypha were part of the scriptures used and treasured by the first Christians.²⁷

Third, as a consequence of the first two points we should remember that Paul did not always have access to all the books of scripture (however he may have defined that). Rather, while it is possible that Paul owned some of his own scrolls, it would have been difficult for him to carry very many with him on his journeys. When traveling, Paul probably had access to scripture scrolls through various local synagogues. More likely was his use of collections of excerpts of specific passages dear to the Christians—Psalm 110, for example, and other favorite passages.²⁸ We can see in the New Testament which books and which passages were important to the early church by the frequency with which they were cited (Isaiah, Psalms, and Deuteronomy were favorites). Beyond that, Paul almost certainly cited from memory. He was after all, raised in Tarsus, with probable influence from both the *Diaspora* synagogue and Greco-Roman education.²⁹ And he was educated as a Pharisee at the feet of the masters in Jerusalem.³⁰ It is very likely that Paul cut his teeth on Torah memorization and its interpretation.

Like other Jewish interpreters of his day, Paul’s use of scripture went farther yet. Paul’s letters show familiarity with certain Jewish methods of interpretation, such as *midrash* (a kind of commentary), and allegory. Moreover, Paul and his inheritors operated comfortably within the culture of the paraphrases of

23. Complicating our understanding is the fact that the book of Jeremiah, the book of Daniel, and others, were known in Greek in widely divergent versions. Multiple versions of these books are recorded in modern publications of the Septuagint; see A. Rahlfs/R. Hanhart, *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007); A. Pietersma and B. Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

24. All of our OT books *except* the book of Esther were found among the scrolls at Qumran.²⁵ For example, see T. M. Law, *When God Spoke Greek: The Septuagint and the Making of the Christian Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 89–91.

25. For example, see T. M. Law, *When God Spoke Greek: The Septuagint and the Making of the Christian Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 89–91.

26. *Apocrypha* means “hidden,” a reference to hidden meaning. These writings were thought of as beneficial, but were not recommended for the novice. L. McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origins, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody, Mass. Hendrickson, 2007), 142.

27. See L. Stuckenbruck, “Apocrypha and the Septuagint: Exploring the Christian Canon” in *The Septuagint and Christian Origins* (ed. T. S. Caulley and H. Lichtenberger; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2011), 177–201. When the rabbis later closed the Hebrew canon, the books of the Apocrypha were excluded, since most of them were originally in Greek. The Christians continued to include the Apocrypha in their collections—albeit not always the same exact list. The books of the Apocrypha in the Septuagint were included in the later Latin Bible—a translation of the Septuagint—and although excluded by the Reformers in Protestant Bibles, those books are still contained in Catholic Bibles today. A slightly different collection of Apocrypha books is recognized in the Orthodox churches.

28. Greenspoon theorizes that Paul arranged for his own such lists to be compiled by his coworkers; L. Greenspoon, “By the Letter? Word for Word? Scriptural Citation in Paul” in *Paul and Scripture: Extending the Conversation* (ed. C. D. Stanley; Early Christianity and Its Literature 9; Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 9–24.

29. Greenspoon, “By the Letter?” 9–24.

30. N. T. Wright (*What St. Paul Really Said*, 26–29) believes that, based on his “zeal for the Law,” Paul was a Shammaite Pharisee. This however need not exclude Luke’s assertion that Paul sat at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3). But see M. Hengel, “The Pre-Christian Paul” in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (ed. J. Lieu, et al. New York: Routledge, 1992), 35–36.

scripture in Aramaic called *Targumim* (e.g., the divine Rock in 1 Cor 10.4; the rewording of Ps 68.18 found in Eph 4.8). In addition, he demonstrates awareness of Jewish interpretive traditions such as the expansion of Deuteronomy's *near word*, which in Deuteronomy 30.12 refers to the Jewish commandments, but for Paul becomes the word of the gospel (Rom 10.6). There are at least four other examples of Jewish recontextualization of Deuteronomy 30.12 in Paul's world.³¹

Fourth, authors—ancient or modern—never just cite a text in a vacuum, so to speak. Rather, an interpreter of scripture cites or alludes to a given text within the context of that interpreter's previous understandings, and within the matrix of interactions between the many interpretations that have been put forward for the entire history of the reading of that passage. On top of that, we are reminded that the ancient interpreters were often aware of more than one version of a specific text. This interplay between a text (often in multiple versions), its rich history of interpretation, and its repeated recontextualization is referred to as *intertextuality*.³² The ancient authors sometimes wrote commentaries—citing a text and then commenting on it—but Paul only does this rarely. His use of scripture is intertextual—reflecting the complex ongoing dialog between the interpreter, textual histories, and a range of interpretations.

An example of intertextuality in Paul is his reference to the *moving well*, the tradition about the rock from which Israel received water in the wilderness. According to Jewish interpretive tradition, that rock was divine, and followed Israel throughout their wilderness wandering. Both *Wisdom* (10.17–18; 11.4) and Philo (*Leg. alleg.* 2.86) link the Rock (the moving well) with Wisdom.³³ While these conclusions are not found in our familiar text, it was a popular interpretation. Although speaking about another main point, Paul seems to mention casually his interpretation, “that Rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10.4). To equate Jewish tradition's divine rock with Christ needs some unpacking. For Paul, this appears to be related to the early Christian faith in the preexistent Christ (Phil 2:6–11; Col 1.15–20; etc.). But that faith is closely connected to the Jewish idea of preexistent Wisdom (see Prov 8.1–38; Wis 1.6–7; 7:22–25, etc.). In Judaism, it was Wisdom—personified as a woman—who was present with God at creation and was God's agent in creation. It was Wisdom which was breathed out by God and hovered over the waters of chaos, and Wisdom who came to dwell with the righteous person in Israel as an expression of God's presence (Wis 9.9; Sir 24:2–9; etc.).

In the Old Testament and Jewish traditional literature, personified Wisdom was a way of speaking about God, an expression of God's being on behalf of his people. Much of what is said about Wisdom in that literature is recontextualized in the New Testament and predicated of the Holy Spirit. In addition, much attributed to Wisdom in Judaism in the New Testament is stated about Christ.³⁴ Moreover, in certain Jewish circles the Torah was equated with preexistent Wisdom (Sir 24.23; Bar 4:1). In this Jewish thought, Torah was “God-breathed” as an expression of preexistent God-breathed Wisdom (Sir 24.3). Thus, all scripture is inspired by God (God-breathed, 2 Tim 3.16–17), and able to make one “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim 3.15). In this passage, however, the huge difference with Jewish thought is that Torah is *not* the last word in God's revelation: Christ is. Inspired scripture is in the service of Paul's gospel (it is profitable for teaching, correction, rebuke, and training in righteousness). This is another way of acknowledging Paul's Christological hermeneutic, his recontextualizing of scripture for the purpose of formulating his Christian message. For Paul, it is not personified Wisdom or Torah, but Christ who “is the Wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1.24; Col 2.3).

These points bring us to a promising recent line of investigation, the Jewish practice during this period of recontextualizing familiar Bible passages—and sometimes whole books. This recycling of familiar material is

31. Targum, *Neofiti*, on Deuteronomy 30, the near word is the Torah; Philo, *Post.* 84–85, the near word is the Good; Philo, *Virt* 183–184, the near word is repentance; *Baruch* 3:29–30, the near word is Wisdom. See J. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (WBC 38B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 602–605; also see D. Lincicum, *Paul and the Early Jewish Encounter with Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 153–58.

32. See Hays, *Echoes*, 14–21.

33. P. Perkins, “Jesus: God's Wisdom,” *Word & World* 7/3 (1987): 273–80, here 276.

34. For example, by Wisdom all creation is held together, which is stated about Christ in Col 1.17; see T. S. Caulley, “The Holy Spirit,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Walter Elwell, ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 521–27; (repr. Baker, 2001), 568–73.

being referred to loosely as *rewritten scripture*. In the 1960s Dead Sea Scroll scholar Geza Vermes began speaking of certain recontextualized writings of Judaism—including some found at Qumran—as *rewritten Bible*.³⁵ The book of Jubilees is thought of this way, as are a few other texts prominent at Qumran. Biblical examples of such recontextualization may include 1 and 2 Chronicles, the various Greek texts of Daniel and Jeremiah, and the book of Deuteronomy itself. *Rewritten Bible* has been defined as “a narrative that follows Scripture but includes a substantial amount of supplements and interpretative developments.”³⁶ The phrase *rewritten Bible* may be accurate in a few specific cases, but the broader rubric *rewritten scripture* has come to be used regarding recontextualizing at several levels.³⁷ It has also been suggested that we are not talking about one original Biblical text that the Qumran writers then rewrote, but that during the Second Temple period the Biblical text itself was going through a process of repeated updating, revision and expansion, such that “multiple versions of scriptural texts circulated simultaneously.”³⁸ The multiple textual traditions known from that time period are perhaps best explained by the process of rewritten scripture. In contrast to the earlier idea of rewritten Bible, the concept of rewritten scripture does not necessarily refer to the recasting of entire books of the Bible, as in those few cases mentioned, but includes the reuse of familiar passages which were very popular, and were recontextualized to fit a later need. The near word of Deuteronomy 30 is one such example.

When viewed like this, our understanding of Jewish Christian writings of the New Testament—Paul’s letters chief among them, but also Matthew, Luke and Acts, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and perhaps James—might benefit from the perspective that the NT writers did not just cite scripture but recontextualized it.³⁹ Rewritten scripture as a discreet activity has not been completely defined—scholars continue to debate the finer points of definition. In general, however, it is informative to locate Paul squarely within his world of Jewish interpretation and read his treatment of scripture citations and allusions as part of the larger enterprise of rewritten scripture.⁴⁰ To be sure, Paul’s rewriting comes from his overtly Christian standpoint, but the idea that he is recontextualizing—rewriting—scripture as a *Jewish* Christian interpreter helps us understand his hermeneutic. Thus, “Christ died for our sins *in accordance with the scriptures*, (and) he was buried, (and) he was raised on the third day *in accordance with the scriptures*” (1 Cor 15.3–4). It has long been recognized that no one OT passage prophesied that the Messiah would die for our sins, nor can we point to a passage that says that the Messiah would rise on the third day. Indeed, the Old Testament does not specifically mention “the Messiah” at all. Rather, we find that the messianic(-style) passages of the Old Testament, recombined and reread through later lenses—that is, recontextualized as rewritten scripture—were understood to be of the Messiah. Some of these messianic prophecies were recognized by other Jewish interpreters of the day; some were uniquely Christian.

What does this tell us about Paul’s use of Jesus material? If we understand Paul’s use of Jesus tradition as methodologically similar to how he used scripture, we should see some citations and allusions,⁴¹ but more to the point we should expect recontextualization. It is fair to say that in Paul’s writings we see examples of all of this. The kerygma handed down was in set form (1 Cor 15.3–4). Likewise, the liturgically central Words of

35. See G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1961, 1983), 95.

36. S. Docherty, “Joseph and Aseneth: Rewritten Bible or Narrative Expansion?” *JSJ* 35 (2004): 27–48; see M. Zahn, “Get Fuzzy: the Elusive Rewriter of Scripture,” *ASOR Blog* for September 18, 2012 <http://asorblog.org/?p=3173>

37. A. K. Petersen, “Rewritten Bible as a Borderline Phenomenon—Genre, Textual Strategy, or Canonical Anachronism?” in *Flores Florentino: Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish Studies in Honour of Florentino García Martínez* (ed: A. Hilhorst, et al. SJSJ 122; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 285–306.

38. Zahn, “Get Fuzzy”; see M. Zahn, “Genre and Rewritten Scripture: A Reassessment,” *JBL* 131 (2012): 271–88.

39. Some scholars would extend the idea of “rewritten scripture” to include Matthew and Luke’s presumed use of Mark. To this, we might add the relationship between Colossians and Ephesians; 2 Peter’s use of Jude; James’ use of Sermon on the Mount material; and possibly other examples.

40. For Paul, “reliance on an existing text in Greek was the starting, not the ending point for his citation of Scripture”; Greenspoon, “By the Letter?” 22.

41. Paul did not cite Jesus’s sayings from written sources, but from oral tradition, including collections of sayings.

Institution for the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11.23–25) were handed down as an established formula. The church has been using this material in worship since the beginning, and continues to do so.⁴² On the other hand, other Jesus material was recontextualized to fit the Christians' later situation.

A fascinating example of this process is Paul's use of *Abba, Father* in Galatians 4.6 and Romans 8.15. Scholarly consensus understands that *Abba* originated with Jesus, and is an expression of Jesus's relationship to God. *Abba* becomes shorthand to refer to Jesus's intimate relationship with the Father, but it is significant that he teaches his disciples to address God in this way, too. Scholars think that the *Abba* address of God stands behind the opening of the Lord's Prayer, especially Luke's "Father" (vs. Matthew's "Our Father").⁴³ Yet neither Matthew nor Luke records the word *Abba*. Mark gives us Jesus's address of God as *Abba* in Gethsemane (Mk 14.36), "Abba, Father . . . let this cup pass from me,"⁴⁴ but Mark does not include the Lord's Prayer.⁴⁵ Moreover, we must take seriously Mark's report that no one heard Jesus's words—the disciples were sleeping.⁴⁶ What is happening here?

It appears that Paul inherited from Christians before him this bilingual saying of Jesus, *Abba* (Aramaic), immediately translated by *ho patēr* (Greek for "Father"). Judging from Paul's two uses of the phrase, as well as the exact same phrase in Mark 14.36, we see that the phrase came down from the Aramaic-speaking (i.e., originally Palestinian) Jewish Christian community, but within a Hellenistic context. The two-part bilingual phrase traveled as a unit, the Aramaic word plus its Greek translation. In other words, Jesus said, "Abba," to which Hellenistic Christians added "Father," and the word pair was then handed down as one saying. Paul clearly associated Jesus's *Abba* address with the unique Father-Son relationship which is at the heart of his two uses of the phrase. But instead of quoting Jesus outright (remember, Mark had not yet written his gospel), Paul took the base meaning of the phrase and recontextualized it to fit into his description of believers' adoption as God's children. Jesus's unique Sonship paved the way for our adoption. For his part, Mark—who almost certainly knew Paul's letter to the Romans—wrote his gospel a few years after Paul's death, using traditional stories and sayings of Jesus to flesh out the Passion Narrative. In a stunning theological move, Mark recontextualized Jesus's *Abba* address of God, reconstructing the scene in Gethsemane in such a way that it would call to mind Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, during which (according to the Targumim on Genesis 22),⁴⁷ Isaac cried out to Abraham, "Abba," imploring him to spare his life.⁴⁸ God spared Isaac, the "son of promise," but Jesus—the "new Isaac"—gave his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10.45). The conclusion is that both Paul and then Mark recontextualized Jesus's saying as it came down to them in this bilingual unit from the first Christians.⁴⁹ Mark had the added advantage of his familiarity with Romans 8.15, and possibly Galatians 4.6.

42. At the same time, it is informative to notice that the Words of Institution in the Gospels and 1 Corinthians 11.23–25 are among a handful of passages which in the Bible manuscripts show a good deal of editing. This editing reflects activity by manuscript owners and/or users, that is, by Christians who were frequently using and adapting this material for worship; see David C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 49–102.

43. See R. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: a Foundation for Understanding* (Waco: Word, 1982) 285–86; J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967, 1978), 89–90.

44. My paraphrase.

45. Mark translates the Aramaic *Abba* with an unusual form, the Greek nominative in lieu of vocative (*ho patēr*), but Matthew and Luke use the true vocative form *pater*, both in their respective accounts of the Lord's Prayer and in their presentations of Jesus's prayer in Gethsemane.

46. For example, C. K. Barrett, *Jesus and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1967), 47.

47. At Gen 22:7, Targumim *Onkelos*, *Neofiti I* (Vatican Codex) and *Pseudo-Jonathan* all render Isaac's address of Abraham, "my father" (in Hebrew), as "father" (*Abba* in Aramaic); see J. Grassi, "'Abba, Father' (Mark 14.36): Another Approach," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50 (1982): 451–54.

48. See Thomas Scott Caulley, "Abba," *Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Logos Bible Software, forthcoming).

49. I do not mean to suggest that Mark's version of the Gethsemane scene is not historical; only that in his reconstruction Mark takes advantage of the material he received to make a profound theological point.

What does all this mean for our understanding of the thief in the night saying in 1 Thessalonians 5.2? Jesus's futuristic eschatology has become in Paul a "full-blown apocalypticism."⁵⁰ The Thessalonians had likely already heard this information in Paul's original message to them, but had misconstrued the implications. Paul recontextualized the Old Testament day of the Lord motif and applied it here first to Jesus's Parousia, the Second Coming. But he does it in such a way as to encourage, not threaten. Jesus's thief in the night saying, which emphasized suddenness and carries an implied warning, is in Paul softened to stress watchfulness rather than judgment. Paul's use of Jesus material here—within *paraenesis* (exhortation)—is not a matter of citing Jesus for the purpose of gaining authority. Paul is confident of his authority in Christ without that. Rather, citing the Jesus material solidifies the readers' understanding by the use of material they already knew. Further, citing the Jesus material connected Paul's audience to the founder of the faith, and unified them with Christians everywhere. As Paul engaged in rewritten scripture elsewhere, in the thief in the night saying he similarly recontextualized a saying of Jesus in order to make his larger point, his reassurance to those whose loved ones had died waiting for the Second Coming.

To summarize: While the gospels of the second Christian generation emphasized the earthly ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, during the prior generation Paul focused on the kerygma, the preached gospel message. Members of that first generation were well aware of the details of Jesus's life and ministry, while later developments made more urgent the recording of those details along with their theological meaning. It is important to remember the textual complexity of Jewish and Christian scriptures of the time (multiple versions of the same text circulating simultaneously in both Greek and Hebrew), as well as the flexible pre-canonical ideas of scripture held by the first Christians. Paul's use of Jesus material parallels his use of scripture, but instead of merely citing and alluding to his sources, Paul recontextualized them, using familiar Jewish methods and concepts to engage the scriptures intertextually. Paul was at home in the Jewish world of rewritten scripture, an approach to scripture which continually revised and reapplied the material. An example of this is how Paul recontextualized Jesus's thief in the night saying in order to address the needs of the Thessalonian Christians.

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50. J. C. Hurd, "The Jesus Whom Paul Preaches (Acts 19:13)" in *From Jesus to Paul: Studies in Honour of Francis Wright Beare* (ed. P. Richardson and J. C. Hurd; Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984), 73–89.