

Reception of Biblical Figures

Canon and Beyond

Edited by

Viktor Kókai-Nagy and István M. Ledán

PATMOSZ KÖNYVTÁR

Series of “Patmosz – Institute for Biblical Studies”
of Debrecen Reformed Theological University

Series editor

Dr. István M. Ledán

Volume 21

Reception of Biblical Figures

Canon and Beyond

Edited by

Viktor Kókai-Nagy and István M. Ledán



**DRHE Patmosz Kutatóintézet
Debrecen 2026**

Published by
“Patmosz – Institute for Biblical Studies”
Debrecen

Interior design by: Éva Szilágyiné Asztalos

Printed by: Kapitális Ltd., Debrecen
Production Manager: József Kapusi

Jacket photographs: Pedro de Orrente: Saint John the Evangelist
on Patmos; Gothic Sculptures of the Santa María Cathedral in
Ciudad Rodrigo (Salamanca)

© Kókai-Nagy, Viktor 2026
© Ledán-Muntean, István 2026
© DRHE, Patmosz 2026

ISSN 2063-5052
ISBN 978-615-5853-92-0

Foreword

The Eastern European Liaison Committee (EELC) was established in 1995 as an academic unit of the Society for New Testament Studies (SNTS). The founders' goal was to support the scholarly work of New Testament scholars in Eastern and Central Europe and to help them gain admission to the world's most prestigious organization of New Testament scholars. The EELC fulfils a complex mission: it supports scholars in the region by providing scholarships, organizing conferences, and offering publication opportunities. Although the organization has been active for over 40 years, its impact has been scarcely felt in Hungary.

We sought to change this when we decided to organize a regional conference in Debrecen in April 2025. When selecting the theme, we aimed to attract as many colleagues as possible and ensure that a wide range of presentations could be delivered at the conference. That is why we chose the topic "Reception of Biblical Figures." In addition, it was our open goal to allow as many doctoral students as possible to present their research topics, so their presentations did not have to be strictly tied to the conference theme. This explains the two-part structure of the volume. The conference featured ten thematic presentations and six presentations given by doctoral students. Presenters from six countries attended the event.

We are aware that the publication of the collected essays cannot fully capture the wonderful atmosphere of the conference or the spirit of friendly conversation, but it can at least offer a glimpse of the presentations given.

In the first paper of this volume Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr presents several persons to which James alludes in his letter who are mentioned in other books of the Bible. Niebuhr claims that the epistle of James can be read as one example of different voices of pre-Rabbinic Judaism that base their arguments on the Scriptures of Israel. In the paper entitled „The Reception of the Apostle Paul as an Apocalyptic Hero” by Sidonia Horňanová we can take a look

at some writings dating back to the 2nd century, in which Paul is presented not as a theological thinker but as an apocalyptic hero and the mediator of the hidden mysteries of God. Petr Mareček in his article (Andrew and Philip: Their Role and Significance in the Gospel of John) argues that Philip and Andrew, the most frequently mentioned disciples in John's gospel (along with Simon Peter and Thomas) document that the way to faith in Jesus Christ is not the result of verifiable arguments but is the gracious gift of God or the gift of the risen Jesus. Mihai Ciurea's article (Is It All About Money? Ananias and Sapphira in an Ecclesiological Reading) aims to give a fresh ecclesiological reading of the biblical account of Ananias and Sapphira's death in Acts 5:1-11. The author concludes that Luke's portrayal of the episode of Ananias and Sapphira's death not only addresses the ethical implications of material wealth but also reveals the Church's resilience and the divine protection against both internal and external challenges. In his paper (Cain in Johannine Literature) Viktor Kókai-Nagy examines the figure of Cain in the Johannine writings, while also briefly touching upon his appearance in other New Testament writings. Kókai-Nagy argues that Cain became the "door", by whom the evil came to the world for the first time and then established its rule over humankind. The first part of this volume ends with István M. Ledán's paper (The traitor's character in Matthew and its Hellenistic background), in which the author examines how Matthew sees and displays the character of Judas by analysing Judas' personality as he appears in the gospel of Matthew and by highlighting useful Hellenistic analogies. The second part of the volume contains two articles written by doctoral students. Éva Éles' article seeks to delineate the exegetical and theological coordinates of the spirits in prison 1 Peter 3:18–22, concluding that the passage offers comfort and guidance to believers facing suffering and oppression. The closing article of Ákos József Debreczeni presents some resurrection beliefs of the Greek religions and comes to the conclusion that

resurrection is an essential element in the myths of several deities of the Greek religions.

The organizers would like to thank the administration of the Debrecen Reformed Theological University for hosting the conference, the Centre for Advanced Studies “Beyond Canon” at the University of Regensburg for its financial support, and the doctoral students for their assistance during the conference. We hope that this regional conference will be followed by many similar events.

(The organizers, Viktor Kókai-Nagy and István M. Ledán)

Content

<i>Foreword</i>	5
Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr <i>Biblical Figures in the Epistle of James: A Common Ground of Thinking and Believing</i>	11
Sidonia Horňanová <i>The Reception of the Apostle Paul as an Apocalyptic Hero</i>	37
Petr Mareček <i>Andrew and Philip: Their Role and Significance in the Gospel of John</i>	57
Mihai Ciurea <i>Is It All About Money? Ananias and Sapphira in an Ecclesiological Reading</i>	93
Viktor Kókai-Nagy <i>Cain in Johannine Literature</i>	133
István M. Ledán <i>The traitor's character in Matthew and its Hellenistic background</i>	153
Éva Éles <i>Mysterious Encounters: The Spirits in Prison in the Context of 1 Peter 3:18–22</i>	173
Ákos József Debreczeni <i>Resurrection in Greek Cults</i>	195
<i>Volumes published in the „Patmosz Könyvtár” series</i>	207

Biblical Figures in the Epistle of James: A Common Ground of Thinking and Believing

Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr¹

Abstract

The letter of James alludes to several persons mentioned in other books of the Bible. Obviously, the writer of the letter can assume that his readers will be able to understand the ideas he wants to express by mentioning them. Perhaps, he and they would also have access to motifs and interpretations of biblical stories known from Second Temple literature. Thus, the epistle of James can be read as one example of different voices of pre-Rabbinic Judaism that base their arguments on the Scriptures of Israel.

Keywords: Epistle of James, Second Temple literature, biblical figures

1. Introduction

The letter of James alludes to several persons mentioned in other books of the Bible. Obviously, he could trust in the competence of his readers to understand the ideas and allusions he wanted to express by mentioning such figures. Perhaps, both he and they were familiar with motifs and interpretations of biblical stories as attested in writings of Second Temple literature beyond the OT ‘canon’ (i.e., the Tanakh). Thus, the Epistle of James can be counted

¹ Jena Friedrich Schiller University, prof. em., e-mail: karl-wilhelm.niebuhr@uni-jena.de.

among the variegated literary voices of pre-Rabbinic Judaism that base their arguments on the Scriptures of Israel.

In the following paper I intend to discuss three different ways of how the author of the letter of James is referring to and making use of this common ground of biblical interpretation that unites him with his intended audience. Right from the beginning, already in the letter prescript (James 1:1), he builds up a bridge of common understanding by using qualifying epithets for himself as well as for his addressees that also function as identity markers for the people of Israel. Later, as part of the main section of the letter, he refers to two biblical figures in particular, Abraham and Rahab (James 2:20-26), to base his argument on about how the faith in „God and the Lord Jesus Christ“ shall become alive in the addressed congregations by doing what God is expecting of his people to do. Towards the end of the letter the author points to two more biblical figures as examples, Job (James 5:11) and Elijah (James 5:17f.), together with „the prophets“ (James 5:10), who altogether are to act as models for his epistolary exhortation.

2. Collective Identities in the Letter Prescript

By introducing himself as „James“ and by addressing the letter recipients as „the twelve tribes in the dispersion“ (James 1:1) the author evokes, already in the letter prescript, a set of allusions which are deeply rooted in and substantially filled with narrative traditions from Scripture.² Although in New Testament Greek the spelling Ἰάκωβος for the brother of Jesus (or for other contemporary bearers of that name) is strictly distinct from Ἰακώβ for the biblical

2 Part of my argument in this article is based on passages from my essay NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (2023): Israel's Scriptures in James. In Matthias Henze – David Lincicum (eds.): *Israel's Scriptures in Early Christian Writings. The Use of the Old Testament in the New*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 500–522, 506–508.

patriarch, readers of the Epistle of James would not avoid hearing an allusion to the most prominent biblical figure known by that name (cf. Gen 25–36).³ The Septuagint and Philo of Alexandria know and almost exclusively make use only of the spelling Ἰακώβ for the Biblical patriarch. Flavius Josephus on the other hand has only Ἰάκωβος, both for the patriarch as for other bearers of that name.⁴ Nevertheless, the primary connotation evoked by the name Ἰάκωβος in the letter prescript of the epistle of James would be to think of the brother of Jesus who long ago had become well known to anybody who belonged to the early Jesus movement as one of the leaders of the Jerusalem original church after Easter.⁵

3 On Jacob as father of the twelve patriarchs in the NT, see Acts 7:8, for Jacob as „our father“, see John 4:12; cf. Acts 7:46; Rom 11:26; Hebr 11:20f. For the reception of biblical stories about Jacob among the ‘patriarchs’ in Second Temple literature, see Sir 44,22f.; Wis 10,10–12; CD III 2–5; 4Q158, Fr. 1–2,3; 4Q176a, Fr. 1,9f.; 4Q215, Frgm. 1, I 7–10 (TestNaph); 4Q252, Frgm. 1, IV 3–5; 4Q364, Frgm. 3, II 7f.; 4Q372, Frgm. 1, 13.21; 4Q379, Frgm. 1, 1; 4Q464, Frgm. 7, 5–8; 4Q539, Frgm. 2, 1–3; 5Q13, Frgm. 2, 6; 11QT 23,7; 29,10; Jub 2,20. 23; 6,19; 19,13–31; 22,10–23,4; 24,3–7; 25–39; 44–45; TestLev 9,3; TestJud 9; LibAnt. 8,4–14; 17,3; 18,5f.; 21,5; 23,9; 32,5f; 50,2; 61,5; 4Makk 2,19f; 7,19; 13,17; 16,25; Philon, LegAll 3,190–192; Fug 52; Conf 146; Josephus, Ant. 1.257–2.200. For Jacob in Second Temple literature and in the New Testament, see LÖHR, Hermut (1999): Isaak, Jakob, Esau, Josef. In Markus Öhler (ed.): *Alttestamentliche Gestalten im Neuen Testament* (Beiträge zur Biblischen Theologie). Darmstadt, WBG. 75–96; for references to Jacob in rabbinic literature, see KLEIN, Renate A. (2007): Jakob. *Wie Gott auf krummen Linien gerade schreibt* (Biblische Gestalten 17). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt. 191–199.

4 The only exception to Ἰακώβ is Ἰάκουβος in 1 Esd 9:48 (LXX). For the Septuagint cf. Gen 25–50; Exod 1:1 etc.; Lev 26:42; Num 23:7 etc.; Deut 1:8 etc.; Josh 24:4. 32; 1 Kgs 12:8 etc.; cf. Philo, Mut. 12f.81–83; Somn. 1.168–172; LegAll. 2.59; Josephus, Ant. 1.258 (the son of Isaak); 20.102 (the son of Jude the Galilee); 20.200 (the brother of Jesus); BJ. 4.235 (a military leader of the Idumaeans); Vita 96. 240 (a friend of Josephus).

5 Cf. Mark 6:3; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19; 2:1–13; Acts 12:17; 15:13–21; 21:18–26; Jude 1:1. See for a more detailed argument NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (2024): James and the Historical Jesus. In Patric Gray (ed.): *Oxford Handbook of*

In addition, the term δούλος („servant”) used to characterize the author in his relation to God and Jesus Christ may also include an allusion to the servant of God (παῖς θεοῦ) in prophetic traditions.⁶ On the other hand, more striking for the letter recipients in their social context would be the opposition in the prescript between „slave“ (δούλος) with regard to the „lord“ (κύριος) Jesus Christ. Thus, by carefully selecting his words of self-introduction the author already, in the letter opening, provides an image of himself as deeply rooted in and colored by biblical language.⁷

The qualification of the letter recipients as „the twelve tribes in the dispersion,” even more clearly evokes allusions that are directing the readers exclusively toward the Scriptures of Israel, since the full number of twelve tribes forming the people of Israel did not correspond to Israel’s historical-political state at the present time of the author any longer. It finds its roots exclusively in Scripture that are kept alive in the post-exilic period as an idealized image of Israel, and forms part of its eschatological expectations.⁸ To amplify this impression, we will briefly sketch the use of the phrase αἱ δώδεκα φυλαί („the twelve tribes”) in the Scriptures of Israel.

Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles. Oxford, Oxford University Press. 277–290. For James in early church reception, see MYLLYKOSKI, Matti (2006/2007): James the Just in History and Tradition: Perspectives of Past and Present Scholarship. In *CBR* 5. 73–122; *CBR* 6. 11–98; DEINES, Roland (2017): Jakobus. Im Schatten des Größeren (Biblische Gestalten 30). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 38–58; 277–354; PRATSCHER, Wilhelm (1987): *Der Herrenbruder Jakobus und die Jakobustradition* (FRLANT 139). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 102–260; PAINTER, John (1999): *Just James. The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition*. Minneapolis, Fortress Press. 105–276

6 Cf. Isa 41:8f; 42:1; 49:3. 5; 52:13; Wis 2:13.

7 For a christological interpretation of the letter prescript in James see NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (2020): One God, One Lord in the Epistle of James. In V. Matthew Novenson (ed.): *Monothelism and Christology in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (NTS 180). Leiden–Boston, Brill. 172–188.

8 Cf. TestXII passim; EpArist 47–50; Josephus, Ant. 11.133; IV Esr 13,39–50; Matt 19:28 par. Lk 18:30; Apc 7:4–8.

As the last act of the story about Israel's encounter with God at the mount of Sinai, according to Exod 24:3–8, Moses “built an altar at the foot of the mountain and arranged twelve standing stones – according to the twelve tribes of Israel”.⁹ By reading the „Book of the Covenant to the people” he placed the Israelites under covenantal obligations, whereupon they replied: „We are willing to do and obey all that the Lord has spoken” (24:7, cf. v. 3). The number twelve representing the twelve tribes of Israel then recurs at several places in Scripture. With regard to the letter of James, the motif of twelve pillars or stones representing the total of the twelve tribes of Israel also occurs in the story of Elijah who confronted the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:20–46).¹⁰ Before Elijah turned to God in prayer to invoke God for help, he „took twelve stones, corresponding to the number of tribes that descended from Jacob, to whom the Lord had said, ‘Israel will be your new name’”.¹¹

The motif of twelve stones is also prominent in Scripture elsewhere. According to Exod 28:21¹² the priestly garments are decorated with „twelve stones with their names according to the names of the sons of Israel”.¹³ In the Book of Joshua it is told

9 Ex 24:4: δώδεκα λίθους εἰς τὰς δώδεκα φυλάς τοῦ Ἰσραηλ. On the place and importance of Exod 24 as part of the Pentateuch and its reception, see DOHMEN, Christoph (2004): *Exodus 19–40* (HThKAT). Freiburg–Basel–Wien, Herder. 196–221. See for all references in this paragraph the chart in the appendix.

10 The story is recalled in Jas 5:17f, see below, section 3.

11 1 Kgs 18:31: δώδεκα λίθους κατ’ ἀριθμὸν φυλῶν τοῦ Ἰσραηλ (v.l. Origen: Ἰακωβ, MT כִּבְרָאֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל). On the interpretation of the story as part of the Elijah narrative in 1 Kgs 17–18, see ALBERTZ, Rainer (2012): *Elia. Ein feuriger Kämpfer für Gott* (Biblische Gestalten 13). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt. 115–139.

12 Cf. 36:21 LXX = 39:14 MT.

13 Cf. also Sir 45:11. On the interpretation of the „Choschen“ described in Ex 28 and the stones as representing the twelve tribes of Israel, see DOHMEN (2004): 267f.

that after Joshua had led the people crossing over the Jordan to enter the promised land, he erected a memorial from twelve stones taken away from the middle of the Jordan by representatives of the twelve tribes („twelve men from the people, one from each tribe”, Josh 4:1–9). To explain this action Joshua declared to the twelve men: „When your children ask in time to come, ‘What do those stones mean to you?’ then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off in front of the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the Israelites a memorial forever.”¹⁴

In the Book of Esra (= 2Esdr in LXX), the number of twelve tribes is emphasized with regard to the return of the Babylonian Golah to the temple in Jerusalem: After having returned from the Babylonian exile „the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the sons of the exile, celebrated the rededication of the house of God with joy. They offered, at the dedication of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering *for all Israel twelve male goats* for sin on behalf of all Israel, *for the number of the tribes of Israel* (ὑπὲρ παντὸς Ἰσραηλ δώδεκα εἰς ἀριθμὸν φυλῶν Ἰσραηλ)” (Esr [= 2Esdr] 6:16–18). According to Ezek 47:13–23, in preview to the eschatological distribution of the lots of the Holy Land at the end of time that evokes the depression of the exiled people in the Babylonian Golah, the prophet announces the future distribution of the land: „Thus says the Lord God: These are the boundaries by which you shall divide the land for inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel. ... You shall divide it equally; I swore to give it to your ancestors, and this land shall fall to you as your inheritance.” (47:13f) Ben Sira in his blessings on the patriarchs ends the series of the fathers mentioned before Moses by pointing to Jacob/Israel

14 The story is retold in Josephus, Ant. 5.20, without highlighting the number twelve.

whom God „acknowledged ... with his blessings and gave him his inheritance; he divided his portions and distributed them among twelve tribes.“ (Sir 44:23)

Thus, by alluding to the narrative traditions about the history of Israel as known from different parts of the Scriptures and from extracanonical Jewish texts, the author of the epistle of James already in the prescript of his letter creates a common horizon of understanding for the following arguments. He connects or even identifies his readers with the biblical Israel, and at the same time identifies himself as a bearer of the name of one of the most famous biblical patriarchs. By selecting meaningful traditions from Scripture, James forms a frame of communication that predetermines the content and the intentions of his letter.

3. Biblical Figures as Part of the Letter Argument

At several places in his argument, the author of the Epistle of James mentions still other names of figures particularly prominent in Scripture. Throughout the letter, they form important parts of his argument. In James 2:14–26, an excursus subordinated to his overall thesis that hearing, believing, and doing are not to be separated,¹⁵ James compiles two exemplary figures, male and female, from Scripture: Abraham and Rahab. Later in the letter, the prophets are lumped together as examples of suffering and patience (James 5:10), and Job comes into play as a model of endurance or „steadfastness“ (ὑπομονή, James 5:11). The prophet Elijah concludes the letter exhortation as a model of trustful and

15 For my view of the structure of the letter, see NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (2024): Law and Wisdom in the Letter of James. In Edwin K. Broadhead – Paul Foster – Wolfgang Kraus: *Faith at the Interface of Cultures. Law and Gospel, Johannine Communities, and Hebrews* (BZS 14), Paderborn, Brill–Schöningh. 97–118, 105–110.

enduring prayer (James 5:17f).¹⁶ In each case, the references are very short, often consisting of nothing more but the names of the figures and a few words that recall the stories behind them. Taken together, however, these figures form something like a collection of people from Scripture who embody the qualities put forward in the letter's exhortation.

It is impossible to expand here on the extremely large field of receptions of biblical figures like Abraham in early Jewish literature, although that field provides the basis for James's arguments and forms the horizon under which his readers encountered them.¹⁷ Corresponding parts of the works of Philo and Josephus could provide a rich harvest, who both, however, develop their own lines of interpretation. Among the writings of the New Testament, Paul in particular refers to Abraham as an illustration of his arguments in his letters.¹⁸ Elaborate retellings of biblical stories also belong

16 For the argumentative use of biblical figures as examples in the Letter of James, see FOSTER, J. Robert (2014): *The Significance of Exemplars for the Interpretation of the letter of James* (WUNT II/376). Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. 59–204.

17 For textual evidence on Abraham in early Jewish literature, see (as a selection) Jub 11–23; 1Q20 (Genesis Apocryphon); Philo, *Virt.* 212–217; *Migr.*; *Abr.*; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.154–256; *LibAnt.* 6–8. Abraham is one of the most prominent figures in the Bible and early Jewish literature; cf. DONALDSON, L. Terence (2016): Paul, Abraham's Gentile, Offspring, and the Torah. In Susan J. Wendel – M. David Miller (eds.): *Torah Ethics and Early Christian Identity*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 135–150; EGO, Beate (2009): Abraham im Judentum. In Christfried Böttrich – Beate Ego – Friedmann Eißler (eds.): *Abraham in Judentum, Christentum und Islam*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 11–61; HAHN, Ferdinand (1993): Die Gestalt Abrahams in der Sicht Philos. In Ferdinand Hahn (ed.): *Zion – Ort der Begegnung* (FS L. Klein). Bodenheim, Athenäum. 203–215; KÖCKERT, Matthias (2017): Abraham. Ahnvater – Vorbild – Kultstifter (Biblische Gestalten 31). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt. 290–348; MÜHLING, Anke (2011): Blickt auf Abraham, euren Vater. Abraham als Identifikationsfigur des Judentums in der Zeit des Exils und des Zweiten Tempels (FRLANT 236), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 248–325.

18 Cf. for Abraham in Romans 1, NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (2025): Right Knowledge of God and the Rejection of False Religion: Abraham in

to literary compositions, such as the Book of Jubilees, the Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum, or the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and to texts preserved in the Qumran scrolls as well.¹⁹ Here, I choose only one example to discuss in more detail.

In his argument relating to the (false) opposition between faith and works, the author first points to Abraham who „was justified by works” (2:21).²⁰ Through the use of Scripture, the author intends to substantiate his thesis that faith without works is „dead” or „useless” (2:17, 20, 26). Obviously, by the phrase „when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar” James alludes to Gen 22.²¹

-
- Romans 1. In D. Claudia Bergmann, – R. Thomas IV Blanton (eds.): *Imitating Abraham. Ritual and Exemplarity in Jewish and Christian Contexts* (Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series 42). Leiden–Boston, Brill. 106–127; NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (2019): Das Neue Testament im Kontext jüdisch-hellenistischer Literatur. Röm 1,19–23 als Testfall. In György BENYIK (ed.): *The Hellenistic and Judaic Background to the New Testament* (29th International Biblical Conference Szeged 27–29 August, 2018). Szeged, JATEPress. 327–342.
- 19 On the reception of other Old Testament figures in the New Testament, see ÖHLER, Marcus (ed.) (2009): *Alttestamentliche Gestalten im Neuen Testament* (Beiträge zur Biblischen Theologie). Darmstadt, WBG. (n. 2); LICHTENBERGER, Hermann – MITTMANN-RICHERT Ulrike (ed.) (2009): *Biblical Figures in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature* (DCLY). Berlin–New York, de Gruyter. On summaries about biblical history in early Jewish literature and the New Testament, see NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (2006): *Biblische Geschichte und Menschheitsgeschichte. Überlegungen in Anknüpfung an Herder*. In Christfried Böttrich (ed.): *Eschatologie und Ethik im frühen Christentum* (FS G. Haufe) (GThF 11). Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang. 195–211 (= in: idem (2021): *Tora und Weisheit. Studien zur frühjüdischen Literatur* (WUNT 466), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. 359–375).
- 20 Again, I here quote a passage from my essay *Israel’s Scriptures in James*, mentioned above (n. 1), 513f. For a detailed exegesis of this and the following passages in Jas, cf. the commentaries of WISCHMEYER, Oda (2024): *Der Brief des Jakobus* (KEK). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; METZNER, Rainer (2017): *Der Brief des Jakobus* (ThHK 14). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt; ALLISON, C. Dale Jr. (2013): *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of James* (ICC), New York, T & T Clark; MCKNIGHT, Scot (2011): *The Letter of James* (NICNT), Grand Rapids–Cambridge, Eerdmans.
- 21 For the aqedah story in early Judaism, see 4Q225, Fr. 2 I 7–9; Jub 18,1–13;

He trusts that the letter recipients are aware of the whole story without need to repeat it.²² From the Greek text of the Septuagint, he picks up just one word (θυσιαστήριον), in addition to the names of Abraham and Isaac. This suffices to evoke the whole course of events as retold not only in Scripture but in early Jewish writings as well. However, the conclusion the author draws – that Abraham’s „faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works” (2:22) – is what matters for his argument. Moreover, he underlines his conclusion by quoting Gen 15:6 verbatim „Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”), introduced by the phrase „the Scripture was fulfilled that says”.²³

Finally, he adds that „he (i.e., Abraham) was called a friend of God” (2:23). Whether the letter recipients are aware of the fact

LibAnt. 18.5; 32.2–4; 40.2; 4 Macc 13:12; 16:20; Philo, Abr. 167–207; Josephus, Ant. 1.222–236; cf. LÖHR (1999): 79f. On the meaning of the aqedah story in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, see GREINER, Bernhard – JANOWSKI, Bernd – LICHTENBERGER, Hermann (eds.) (2007): *Opfere deinen Sohn! Das Isaak-Opfer in Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, Tübingen, Francke.

22 For references to Abraham in Jas, see FOSTER Paul, The Significance of Exemplars for the Interpretation of the Letter of James. In Edwin K. Broadhead – Paul Foster – Wolfgang Kraus: *Faith at the Interface of Cultures. Law and Gospel, Johannine Communities, and Hebrews* (BZS 14), Paderborn, Brill–Schöningh. 62–75; ELLIS, Nicholas (2015): *The Hermeneutics of Divine Testing. Cosmic Trials and Biblical Interpretation in the Epistle of James and Other Jewish Literature* (WUNT II/396). Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. 199–211; WISCHMEYER, Oda (2009): Abraham unser Vater. Aspekte der Abrahamsgestalt im Neuen Testament. In Hermann Lichtenberger – Ulrike Mittmann-Richert (ed.) (2009): *Biblical Figures in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature* (DCLY). Berlin–New York, de Gruyter. 567–585; DAVIDS, H. Peter (1993): The Pseudepigrapha in the Catholic Epistles. In H. James Charlesworth – A. Craig Evans, (eds.): *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation* (JSPSup 14). Sheffield, Continuum International Publ. 228–245: 228–230.

23 The quotation of Gen 15:6, combined with an argument about “faith” and “works”, reminds any reader of Paul’s argument on justification by faith in Christ without “works of the law” (cf. Gal 3:6; Rom 4:3). However, James does not speak of “works of the law” or has in mind any problems related to Gentiles among the Christ believers, which is the background of Paul’s

that this phrase does not belong to the text of Scripture is difficult to say.²⁴ Syntactically, it continues the sentence without division.²⁵ Only in 2:24 does the author address the audience by repeating his thesis. By calling Abraham „friend of God” he possibly wanted to allude to narrative traditions alive in Jewish literature,²⁶ but this remains unproven.

As a second example from Scripture that seems to found his argument that “faith apart from works is dead” (2:26) the author refers to Rahab, the prostitute.²⁷ Although Rahab is quite a prominent figure in early Christian literature and her faith was regarded paradigmatic,²⁸ only James puts her on par with Abraham and emphasizes her „being justified” (ἐδικαιώθη). Again, the name and a short phrase alluding to a single moment from the biblical story should suffice to recollect the full course of events: Rahab „received the messengers and sent them out by another way”.²⁹

Only readers who knew the biblical story and its constituting elements could make any sense of such a brief excerpt.

Thus, the whole section of the argument in James 2:21-26 exemplarily demonstrates how James was familiar with, and able

argument on justification in his letters to the Galatians and to the Romans. Therefore, I assume that both independently of each other refer to the same passage from Scripture to corroborate their particular arguments.

24 But cf. 2 Chr 20:7; Isa 41:8.

25 Cf. Jas 2:23: ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραὰμ ... καὶ ἐλογίσθη ... καὶ φίλος θεοῦ ἐκλήθη.

26 Cf. Jub. 19:9; CD III 2; Philo, Abr. 273; ApkAbr. 9,6; 10,6; TestAbr. *passim* (20 x in recensions A and B).

27 Cf. Josh 2; 6:22-25; cf. Josephus, Ant. 5.1–15. On the figure of Rahab in Josephus, see BEGG, Christopher (2005): The Rahab Story in Josephus. In LA 55. 113–130; SWART, Gerhard (2009): Rahab and Esther in Josephus. A Comparative Analysis. In Hermann Lichtenberger – Ulrike Mittmann-Richert (ed.): *Biblical Figures in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature* (DCLY). Berlin–New York, de Gruyter. 471–486.

28 Cf. Matt 1:5; Heb 11:31; 1 Clem. 12:1–8.

29 Jas 2:25: ὑποδεξαμένη τοὺς ἀγγέλους καὶ ἑτέρα ὁδοῦ ἐκβαλοῦσα. See also WALL, W. Robert (2001): The Intertextuality of Scripture: The Example of

to use the Scriptures of Israel to make his points. To substantiate his arguments and intentions, in this single paragraph he combined different ways of referring to Scripture. He just mentions names of figures known from Scripture. He alludes to their stories by using short phrases from biblical texts or even quotes them verbatim. He explicitly points to what Scripture „says” (λέγουσα, V. 23), or he does all that at once. Scripture offers a stock of examples and ideas useful to refer to and to justify what the author wants to express or explain in his letter. He can trust that his readers will be familiar with the names mentioned and the stories implied to understand the point of his letter argument from such short allusions.

4. Biblical Figures as Paraenetical Models

In other instances in the letter, the function of figures evoked from Scripture is less argumentative. Towards the letter ending the author points to Job, to the prophets and to Elijah as role models for the readers to identify with and to apply with regards to their personal decisions of everyday practice and belief. It belongs to the typical means of reception of the Bible in early Jewish literature to bring together several figures from different parts of the biblical tradition and to form out of them a range of paradigmatic examples for parenetical or theological aims. We find it for instances in the Praise of the Fathers in Ben Sira,³⁰ in the paraenetical section of the Wisdom of Solomon,³¹ in the speech of the mother of the seven Martyrs to her sons in 4 Maccabees³² or in a long list of intercessors in 4Esra.³³ There are examples for

Rahab (James 2:25). In: W. Peter Flint (ed.): *The Bible at Qumran. Text, Shape, and Interpretation*. Grand Rapids–Cambridge, Eerdmans. 217–236.

30 Sir 44–50.

31 Wis 10f.

32 4 Macc 18:10–19.

33 4Esr 7:106–110.

this literary technique in the New Testament as well.³⁴ In James, again, the references to Scripture consist of very brief allusions to biblical figures in view that imply their stories as retold much more at length in the writings of the Tanakh or its early Jewish reception.

When in James 5:11 the author points his readers to Job, he brings to a conclusion one of the main topics of his letter that forms an important part of his overall intention.³⁵ The principle of endurance as proved and tested in afflictions is the basis of the first and introductory exhortation that opens the epitome of the letter (James 1:2-4).³⁶ Related motifs of patience and endurance build a link between the letter opening and the letter ending.³⁷ These motifs have been directed by the author to the center of the Christian faith, the confession of Jesus Christ, the Lord (1:1; 2:1), and the expectation of his parusia (5:7f.). In the letter conclusion the author highlights the eschatological perspective of his instructions.³⁸ First as an example of endurance he deploys the metaphor of the farmer who „waits for the precious crop from

34 Acts 7:2–53; Hebr 11:1–12:2; cf. for brief summaries of the history of Israel in early Jewish literature that put together of different stories or figures from the Bible, see NIEBUHR (2006): 363–368; JESKA, Joachim (2001): *Die Geschichte Israels in der Sicht des Lukas. Apg 7,2b-53 und 13,17-25 im Kontext antik-jüdischer Summarien der Geschichte Israels* (FRLANT 195). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 44–118.

35 On Job in Jas 5:11, see also SEITZ, R. Christopher (1993): The Patience of Job in the Epistle of James. In: Rüdiger Bartelmus, et al. (eds.): *Konsequente Traditionsgeschichte* (FS Klaus Baltzer) (OBO 126). Fribourg – Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 373–382; ELLIS (2015): 211–216.

36 For my understanding of the structure of the letter see NIEBUHR (2024): *Law and Wisdom*. 105–110.

37 Cf. the common word fields of ὑπομονή and μακροθυμία in Jas 1:3f. 12 and 5:7–11.

38 Cf. NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (forthcoming): *Zeit und Endzeit im Jakobusbrief*. In: R. Michael Jost, et al. (eds.): *Zeit und Ewigkeit. Ein Kompendium und Arbeitsbuch zu Zeitvorstellungen in der Antike und im frühen Christentum* (UTB). Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck.

the earth“ (5:7).³⁹ Then, he admonishes his readers to strengthen their hearts and to stop grumbling against one another „for the coming of the Lord is near“ (5:8f). To emphasize his exhortation the letter writer then points to selected biblical figures as „models of suffering and patience“ (ὑπόδειγμα, V. 10). First he generally refers to „the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord,“⁴⁰ and then, introduced by a macarism like in 1:12, to „the endurance of Job (τὴν ὑπομονὴν Ἰώβ), and ... the outcome that the Lord brought about“ (5:11). The short paragraph ends with a reference to the compassionate and merciful Lord.

The picture of Job as painted in James 5:11 is limited to one single aspect of the Job story of the Bible.⁴¹ Compared to the Book of Job, this particular aspect of endurance is by no means in the center of the biblical figure, including its Septuagint version. Only later receptions of the Job story in early Jewish literature draw a picture more focused on the piety of Job.⁴² In the Testament of

39 Cf. GLÖCKNER, Michael (2021): *Bildhafte Sprache im Jakobusbrief. Form, Inhalt und Erschließungspotential der metaphorischen Rede einer frühchristlichen Schrift* (ABIG 69). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt. 357–367.

40 One may think about imaginations of the fate of the prophets represented in early Jewish literature as for instance in the *Vitae Prophetarum* or the *Paralipomena Ieremiae*. Cf. also the all-inclusive reference to „the prophets“ in Hebr 11:32, after a long range of biblical figures called by their names.

41 On the prominence of Job in ancient Jewish and rabbinic literature, see OBERHÄNSLI-WIDMER, Gabrielle (2003): *Hiob in jüdischer Antike und Moderne. Die Wirkungsgeschichte Hiobs in der jüdischen Literatur*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 56–177.

42 See for more detail RODENBIKER, Kelsie Gayle (2017): *The Persistent Sufferer: The Exemplar of Job in the Letter of James*. In *ASE* 34. 479–496; RICHARDSON, A. Kurt (2006): *Job as Exemplar in the Epistle of James*. In: E. Stanley Porter, (ed.): *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids – Cambridge, Eerdmans. 213–229; HERZER, Jens (2007): *Jakobus, Paulus und Hiob: Die Intertextualität der Weisheit*. In Thomas Krüger, et al. (eds.): *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen. Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.-19. August 2005*. (ATHANT 88). Zürich, Theologischer Verlag. 329–350; OBERHÄNSLI-WIDMER (2003): 315–328.

Job, Job has been transformed from a sufferer arguing with God to a suffering righteous who „becomes a willing participant in the destruction of evil“.⁴³ Thus, here like in James, but different to the biblical figure, Job has become a model of active endurance as an ethical habit of the righteous and believing sufferer who follows the will of God and will be rewarded for this by the merciful and compassionate Lord.

A similar way of transformation and adaptation of a biblical figure to the particular intentions of the letter writer can be observed with regard to Elijah in James 5:17f. The paraenetical argument in the last section of the letter is focused on the inner relations of the communities of Christ believers (5:13–20). The author first commands his addressees to take care of the sick in their community and to organize how to pray for them. Then, he combines his exhortation to pray with a promise of remission of their sins for those who pray by faith (ἡ εὐχὴ τῆς πίστεως). The topic of sin and forgiveness then he applies to an encouragement of mutual confession of sins and intercession for each other, to conclude his short line of argument with a common maxim: „The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.“ (v. 16 fin.). Only now, Elijah comes into play as an example of „a human being like us“ who „prayed fervently“. By his praying Elijah had effectuated „that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth yielded its harvest.“

The problem with such a reference to Elijah in James 5:17f is that according to the biblical story in 1 Kings, Elijah was neither particularly famous for his righteousness nor was he even praying for rain, but he was asking God to send down *fire* from heaven. Only after God had accomplished his wish and inflamed the offering watered before *by Elijah*, it slowly started raining and

43 RODENBIKER (2017): 491; GRAY, Patrick (2004): Points and Lines: Thematic Parallelism in the Letter of James and the *Testament of Job*. In *NTS* 50. 406–424.

the drought in Israel provoked by a prophetic *curse* of Elijah was stopped.⁴⁴ This is different in the reception of the story in the *Vitae Prophetarum* (VitProph) where, as in Jas, Elijah appears as a model of praying. Prayer is mentioned here as the first in a series of eight miracles Elijah was able to perform. „The signs which he did are these: Elijah prayed, and it did not rain for three years, and after three years he prayed again and abundant rain came.“⁴⁵ Thus, James obviously was familiar with this further development of the biblical story as represented by VitProph without quoting its text verbatim.

Moreover, according to the biblical record and its reception in early Jewish literature, Elijah was rather different to most of „us“, not only as a miraculous healer of the sick and a fiery warrior for the God of Israel, but, more important, as a prophet who never died, but was raised into heaven to return at the end of time.⁴⁶ Nothing of this image of an eschatologically relevant prophet that is so prominent in other early Jewish and NT texts appears in James. Instead, Elijah in James is explicitly defined as “a human being

44 Cf. 1 Kgs 17f. For inconsistencies between the biblical report and its reception in Jas 5:17f, cf. FÖRSTER, Niclas (2022): “Elia war ein Mensch uns gleichgeartet” (Jak 5,17). Jakobus, Elia und das Gebet des Gerechten in der Perspektive des Jakobusbriefes. In Eve-Marie Becker, et al. (eds.): *Who was James? Essays on the Letter's Authorship and Provenance* (WUNT 485). Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. 15–27. KOVALISHIN, Mariam Kamell (2018): The Prayer of Elijah in James 5: An Example of Intertextuality. In *JBL* 137. 1027–1045. 1028–1032. 1040–1044, points to several verbal allusions to the biblical report on Elijah in Jas that may hint to a kind of hidden intertextuality. However, it remains an open question whether the letter recipients would have been able to detect such hidden connections.

45 VitProph 21,4f. On this reference, see XERAVITS, Géza (2009): The Wonders of Elijah in the *Lives of the Prophets*. In Hermann Lichtenberger – Ulrike Mittmann-Richert (ed.): *Biblical Figures in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature* (DCLY). Berlin–New York, de Gruyter. 231–238.

46 2 Kgs 2:11–18; cf. Sir 48:1–11; 1 Macc 2:58; VitProph 21,12. For the traditional image of Elijah in early Jewish and NT writings, see ÖHLER (1999): 184–203; KOVALISHIN (2018): 1033–1036.

like us”, or better, as „somebody who feels like us” (ἄνθρωπος ἢν ὁμοιοπαθῆς ἡμῖν). What makes him a model according to James is his prayer, not his righteousness or his fighting for the Law. What we may expect by following his model of steadfast communion in prayer under pressure is the return of the Lord (not: of Elijah!) at the end of time and forgiveness for our sins.⁴⁷

Thus, biblical figures like Job and Elijah, similarly to Abraham and Rahab earlier in the letter, function as argumentative resources to strengthen the paraenetical intentions of the letter writer. They are not referred to primarily as parts of biblical stories that are to be explained exegetically but as examples to illustrate what the author currently wants to explain with regard to the faith and the works of his audience. Nevertheless, biblical exemplars in James are more than just rhetorical means interchangeable with any other pieces of literary traditions taken from the cultural environment of both the author and his addressees. It is not by chance that there is no single example in the letter taken from, let us say, Homer’s *Odyssey* or Vergil’s *Aeneid* or from any other ancient author and there are no other references in the letter to figures taken from extra-Israelite traditions. Therefore, the ‘universe of understanding’ of the letter is thoroughly ‘Jewish’, if such a qualification is applicable at all.⁴⁸

5. Conclusion

Taken together, all references in the Epistle of James to figures known from the Bible are part of the argument to strengthen and

47 See for this topic the last words of the letter: “Whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner’s soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” (5:20).

48 Cf. for this my essay NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (2024): James Within Judaism. In Karin Hedner Zetterholm – Anders Runesson (eds.): *Within Judaism? Interpretive Trajectories in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from the First to the Twenty-First Century*. Lanham, Fortress Academic. 195–210.

correct the practice and belief of its audience. The author selects biblical elements and constructs out of them his own theological and paraenetical agenda, largely independent of the original contexts of the stories in Scripture. Sometimes, the reception of biblical figures as testified in ancient Jewish traditions and sources beyond the OT 'canon' seem to be directing their understanding in James more than the biblical texts itself.

Such references to biblical figures form a common frame of understanding between the author and his readers that is coined by their self-understanding as Christ-believers who are united with each other by their faith in „God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Jas 1:1). This phrase, occurring twice in the prescript and at the beginning of the main argument of the letter (2:1), determines their common understanding of God as defined ‘christologically’ in their faith.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the references to biblical figures and stories at the same time signal their remaining bonds to the people of Israel on which their faith and their religious practice is theologically grounded.⁵⁰

49 See for the christologically centered belief in God in the letter of James NIEBUHR (2020): 178–186.

50 For this biblically rooted understanding of the Christian community in James, see NICKLAS, Tobias (2017): Großfamilie aus zwölf Stämmen. Die “Kirche” im Jakobusbrief. In *ASE* 34. 363–380.

Appendix: References to Biblical Figures in the Epistle of James

1:1	Ἰάκωβος Jacob/ James	Gen 25–50	passim
	αἱ δώδεκα φυλαί the twelve tribes	Exod 24:4 1 Kgs 18:31; Exod 28:21; 36:21 (MT 39:14); Josh 4:5; 2 Esdr 6:17; Ezek 47:13; Sir 44:23; 45:11	ὀρθρίσας δὲ Μωυσῆς τὸ πρωὶ ῥκοδόμησεν θυσιαστήριον ὑπὸ τὸ ὄρος καὶ δώδεκα λίθους εἰς τὰς δώδεκα φυλάς τοῦ Ἰσραηλ. Now, early in the morning, Moyses constructed an altar at the foot of the mountain and twelve stones for the twelve tribes of Israel. καὶ ἔλαβεν Ἡλίου δώδεκα λίθους κατ' ἀριθμὸν φυλῶν τοῦ Ἰσραηλ (v.l. recensio Orig. Ἰακωβ, MT כִּבְשָׁן וְעַד), ὡς ἐλάλησεν κύριος πρὸς αὐτὸν λέγων Ἰσραηλ ἔσται τὸ ὄνομά σου. And Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of Israel, as the Lord had spoken to him, saying, 'Israel shall be your name'.
2:21	Ἀβραάμ ... ἀνενέγκας Ἰσαὰκ ... ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον. Abraham ... offered his son Isaac ... upon the altar.	Gen 22:2. 9	2 Λαβὲ τὸν υἱὸν σου τὸν ἀγαπητόν, ὃν ἠγάπησας, τὸν Ἰσαακ, καὶ πορεύθητι εἰς τὴν γῆν τὴν ὑψηλὴν καὶ ἀνενεγκον αὐτὸν ἐκεῖ εἰς ὄλοκάρπωσιν ἐφ' ἓν τῶν ὄρεων, ὃν ἂν σοι εἴπω. ... 9 καὶ ῥκοδόμησεν ἐκεῖ Ἀβρααμ θυσιαστήριον καὶ ἐπέθηκεν τὰ ξύλα καὶ συμποδίσας Ἰσαακ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐπέθηκεν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον ἐπάνω τῶν ξύλων. Take your beloved son Isaak, whom you love, and go into the high land, and offer him as a whole burnt offering on one of the mountains, whichever I mention to you. ... And Abraam built the altar there and laid on the wood, and when he had bound his son Isaak hand and foot, he laid him on the altar atop the wood.

2:25	<p>Ῥαὰβ ἡ πόρνη ... ὑποδεξαμένη τοὺς ἀγγέλους καὶ ἐτέρᾳ ὁδῷ ἐκβαλοῦσα.</p> <p>Rahab the prostitute ... welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road.</p>	<p>Josh 2:1–16 (cf. 6:22–25)</p>	<p>2:1 εἰσῆλθοσαν εἰς οἰκίαν γυναῖκός πόρνης, ἧ ὄνομα Ρααβ ... 16 εἰς τὴν ὄρεινὴν ἀπέλθετε, μὴ συναντήσωσιν ὑμῖν οἱ καταδιώκοντες ... καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἀπελεύσεσθε εἰς τὴν ὁδὸν ὑμῶν.</p> <p>They entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab. ... Depart into the hill country so that the pursuers may not come upon you ... and afterward you shall depart on your way.</p>
5:10	<p>οἱ προφῆται οἳ ἐλάλησαν ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου</p> <p>the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord</p>	<p>Dan 9:6</p>	<p>καὶ οὐκ ἠκούσαμεν τῶν παίδων σου τῶν προφητῶν, ἃ ἐλάλησαν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι σου.</p> <p>And we have not obeyed your servants the prophets, what they spoke in your name.</p>
	<p>τὴν ὑπομονὴν Ἰώβ the endurance of Job</p>	<p>Job passim (TestJob)</p>	
5:17	<p>Ἠλίας ... προσευχῆ προσηύξατο.</p> <p>Elijah prayed a prayer.</p>	<p>1 Kgs 18:1–45</p>	<p>1 καὶ ῥῆμα κυρίου ἐγένετο πρὸς Ἥλιου ... καὶ δώσω ὑετὸν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον τῆς γῆς. ... 24 καὶ ἐγὼ ἐπικαλέσομαι ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ ἔσται ὁ θεός, ὃς ἐὰν ἐπακούσῃ ἐν πυρὶ, οὗτος θεός ... 36 καὶ ἀνεβόησεν Ἥλιου εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ εἶπεν Κύριε ὁ θεὸς Ἀβρααμ καὶ Ἰσαακ καὶ Ἰσραηλ, ἐπάκουσόν μου, κύριε ... 45 καὶ ἐγένετο ὑετὸς μέγας.</p> <p>1 And it happened ... that a word of the Lord came to Eliou ... and I will give rain on the surface of the earth. ... 24 and I will call on the name of the Lord, my God, and it will be, the god who answers by fire, he is God. ... 36 And Eliou cried aloud to heaven and said, O Lord, God of Abraam and Isaak and Israel, heed me, O Lord ... 45 and there was a heavy rain.</p>

Bibliography

- ALBERTZ, Rainer (2012): *Elia. Ein feuriger Kämpfer für Gott* (Biblische Gestalten 13). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- ALLISON, C. Dale Jr. (2013): *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of James*. (ICC), New York, T & T Clark.
- BEGG, Christopher (2005): The Rahab Story in Josephus. In *LA* 55. 113–130.
- DAVIDS, H. Peter (1993): The Pseudepigrapha in the Catholic Epistles. In H. James Charlesworth – A. Craig Evans (eds.): *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation* (JSPSup 14). Sheffield, Continuum International Publ. 228–245.
- DEINES, Roland (2017): *Jakobus. Im Schatten des Größeren* (Biblische Gestalten 30). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- DOHMEN, Christoph (2004): *Exodus 19–40* (HThKAT), Freiburg–Basel–Wien, Verlag Herder.
- DONALDSON, L. Terence (2016): Paul, Abraham’s Gentile, Offspring, and the Torah. In J. Susan Wendel, – M. David Miller (eds.): *Torah Ethics and Early Christian Identity*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 135–150.
- EGO, Beate (2009): Abraham im Judentum. In Christfried Böttrich – Beate Ego – Friedmann Eißler (eds.): *Abraham in Judentum, Christentum und Islam*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 11–61.
- ELLIS, Nicholas (2015): *The Hermeneutics of Divine Testing. Cosmic Trials and Biblical Interpretation in the Epistle of James and Other Jewish Literature* (WUNT II/396), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck.
- FÖRSTER, Niclas (2022): “Elia war ein Mensch uns gleichgeartet” (Jak 5,17). Jakobus, Elia und das Gebet des Gerechten in der Perspektive des Jakobusbriefes. In Eve-Marie Becker, et al. (eds.): *Who was James? Essays on the Letter’s Authorship and Provenance* (WUNT 485). Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. 15–27.
- FOSTER, J. Robert (2014): *The Significance of Exemplars for the Interpretation of the Letter of James* (WUNT II/376). Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck.

- GLÖCKNER, Michael (2021): *Bildhafte Sprache im Jakobusbrief. Form, Inhalt und Erschließungspotential der metaphorischen Rede einer frühchristlichen Schrift* (ABIG 69). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- GRAY, Patrick (2004): Points and Lines: Thematic Parallelism in the Letter of James and the *Testament of Job*. In *NTS* 50. 406–424.
- GREINER, Bernhard – JANOWSKI, Bernd – LICHTENBERGER, Hermann (eds.) (2007): *Opfere deinen Sohn! Das Isaak-Opfer in Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, Tübingen, Francke.
- HAHN, Ferdinand (1993): Die Gestalt Abrahams in der Sicht Philos. In Ferdinand Hahn (ed.): *Zion – Ort der Begegnung* (FS L. Klein). Bodenheim, Athenäum. 203–215.
- HERZER, Jens (2007): Jakobus, Paulus und Hiob: Die Intertextualität der Weisheit. In Thomas Krüger, et al. (eds.): *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen. Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.-19. August 2005*. (AThANT 88). Zürich, Theologischer Verlag. 329–350.
- JESKA, Joachim (2001): *Die Geschichte Israels in der Sicht des Lukas. Apg 7,2b–53 und 13,17–25 im Kontext antik-jüdischer Summarien der Geschichte Israels* (FRLANT 195). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- KLEIN, Renate A. (2007): Jakob. Wie Gott auf krummen Linien gerade schreibt (Biblische Gestalten 17). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- KÖCKERT, Matthias (2017): Abraham. Ahnvater – Vorbild – Kultstifter (Biblische Gestalten 31). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- KOVALISHIN, Mariam Kamell (2018): The Prayer of Elijah in James 5: An Example of Intertextuality. In *JBL* 137. 1027–1045.
- LICHTENBERGER, Hermann – MITTMANN-RICHERT Ulrike (ed.) (2009): *Biblical Figures in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature* (DCLY). Berlin–New York, de Gruyter.
- LÖHR, Hermut (1999): Isaak, Jakob, Esau, Josef. In Markus Öhler (ed.): *Alttestamentliche Gestalten im Neuen Testament* (Beiträge zur Biblischen Theologie). Darmstadt, WBG.

- MCKNIGHT, Scot (2011): *The Letter of James* (NICNT). Grand Rapids–Cambridge, Eerdmans.
- METZNER, Rainer (2017): *Der Brief des Jakobus* (ThHK 14). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- MÜHLING, Anke (2011): „Blickt auf Abraham, euren Vater.“ Abraham als Identifikationsfigur des Judentums in der Zeit des Exils und des Zweiten Tempels (FRLANT 236). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- MYLLYKOSKI, Matti (2006/2007): James the Just in History and Tradition: Perspectives of Past and Present Scholarship. In *CBR* 5. 73–122; *CBR* 6. 11–98.
- NICKLAS, Tobias (2017): Großfamilie aus zwölf Stämmen. Die “Kirche” im Jakobusbrief. In *ASE* 34. 363–380.
- NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (2006): Biblische Geschichte und Menschheitsgeschichte. Überlegungen in Anknüpfung an Herder. In Christfried Böttrich (ed.): *Eschatologie und Ethik im frühen Christentum* (FS G. Haufe) (GThF 11). Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang. 195–211.
- NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (2019): Das Neue Testament im Kontext jüdisch-hellenistischer Literatur. Röm 1,19–23 als Testfall. In György Benyik (ed.): *The Hellenistic and Judaic Background to the New Testament* (29th International Biblical Conference Szeged 27–29 August, 2018). Szeged, JATEPress. 327–342.
- NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (2020): One God, One Lord in the Epistle of James. In V. Matthew Novenson (ed.): *Monothelism and Christology in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (NTSup 180). Leiden–Boston, Brill. 172–188.
- NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (2023): Israel’s Scriptures in James. In Matthias Henze – David Lincicum, (eds.): *Israel’s Scriptures in Early Christian Writings. The Use of the Old Testament in the New*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 500–522.
- NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (2024): James Within Judaism. In Karin Hedner Zetterholm – Anders Runesson (eds.): *Within Judaism? Interpretive Trajectories in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from the First to the Twenty-First Century*. Lanham, Fortress Academic. 195–210.

- NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (2024): Law and Wisdom in the Letter of James. In Edwin K. Broadhead – Paul Foster – Wolfgang Kraus: *Faith at the Interface of Cultures. Law and Gospel, Johannine Communities, and Hebrews* (BZS 14). Paderborn, Brill–Schöningh. 97–118.
- NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (2024): James and the Historical Jesus. In Patric Gray (ed.): *Oxford Handbook of Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles*. Oxford, Oxford University Press. 277–290.
- NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (2025): Right Knowledge of God and the Rejection of False Religion: Abraham in Romans 1. In D. Claudia Bergmann – R. Thomas IV Blanton (eds.): *Imitating Abraham. Ritual and Exemplarity in Jewish and Christian Contexts* (Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series 42). Leiden–Boston, Brill. 106–127;
- NIEBUHR, Karl-Wilhelm (forthcoming): Zeit und Endzeit im Jakobusbrief. In R. Michael Jost, et al. (eds.): *Zeit und Ewigkeit. Ein Kompendium und Arbeitsbuch zu Zeitvorstellungen in der Antike und im frühen Christentum*. UTB, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck.
- OBERHÄNSLI-WIDMER, Gabrielle (2003): *Hiob in jüdischer Antike und Moderne. Die Wirkungsgeschichte Hiobs in der jüdischen Literatur*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- ÖHLER, Marcus (ed.) (2009): *Alttestamentliche Gestalten im Neuen Testament* (Beiträge zur Biblischen Theologie). Darmstadt, WBG.
- PAINTER, John (1999): *Just James. The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition*. Minneapolis, Fortress Press.
- PRATSCHER, Wilhelm (1987): *Der Herrenbruder Jakobus und die Jakobustradition* (FRLANT 139). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- RICHARDSON, A. Kurt (2006): Job as Exemplar in the Epistle of James. In E. Stanley Porter (ed.): *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids – Cambridge, Eerdmans. 213–229.
- RODENBIKER, Kelsie Gayle (2017): The Persistent Sufferer: The Exemplar of Job in the Letter of James. In *ASE* 34. 479–496.

- SEITZ, R. Christopher (1993): The Patience of Job in the Epistle of James. In: Rüdiger Bartelmus, et al. (eds.): *Konsequente Traditionsgeschichte* (FS Klaus Baltzer) (OBO 126). Fribourg–Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 373–382.
- SWART, Gerhard (2009): Rahab and Esther in Josephus. A Comparative Analysis. In Hermann Lichtenberger – Ulrike Mittmann-Richert (ed.): *Biblical Figures in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature* (DCLY). Berlin–New York, de Gruyter. 471–486.
- WALL, W. Robert (2001): The Intertextuality of Scripture: The Example of Rahab (James 2:25). In W. Peter Flint (ed.): *The Bible at Qumran. Text, Shape, and Interpretation*. Grand Rapids–Cambridge, Eerdmans. 217–236.
- WISCHMEYER, Oda (2009): Abraham unser Vater. Aspekte der Abrahamsgestalt im Neuen Testament. In Hermann Lichtenberger – Ulrike Mittmann-Richert (ed.): *Biblical Figures in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature* (DCLY). Berlin–New York, de Gruyter. 567–585.
- WISCHMEYER, Oda (2024): *Der Brief des Jakobus* (KEK), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- XERAVITS, Géza (2009): The Wonders of Elijah in the *Lives of the Prophets*. In Hermann Lichtenberger – Ulrike Mittmann-Richert (ed.): *Biblical Figures in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature* (DCLY). Berlin–New York, de Gruyter. 231–238.

The Reception of the Apostle Paul as an Apocalyptic Hero

Sidonia Horňanová¹

Abstract

This paper² explores the visions and heavenly journeys of the apostle Paul, specifically his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, as it is recounted three times in the Acts of the Apostles, and Paul's ascent to the third heaven, as described in 2 Corinthians. These experiences are examined in the context of Jewish apocalypticism of the Second Temple period as well as the early form of Jewish mysticism, the so-called Merkabah mysticism, whose roots are traced to Jewish cosmological apocalypse ideas, in the ascent of a visionary to heaven, which culminates in the vision of the throne of God in the highest heaven and the angelic transformation of the visionary. Attention is paid to parallels between Paul's visions and the Merkabah tradition associated with Ezekiel's throne-chariot vision. It is shown that Jewish apocalypticism and mysticism are important for understanding Paul's conception of his own apostleship. The reception of Paul's visions, revelations, and mystical experiences in the authentic letters of the apostle will be

1 Comenius University in Bratislava, Evangelical Lutheran Theological Faculty Department of The Old Testament; e-mail: hornanova@fevth.uniba.sk.

2 The study embodies a scientific output of the project coming from the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic and the Scientific Grant Agency No. 1/0698/23, carried out in the years 2023–2025 at the Department of the Old Testament at the Evangelical Lutheran Faculty of Comenius University in Bratislava. Its topic is: “Lajčiak's dissertation on Ezekiel in the contemporary context of research on prophetic writings”. The project's principal investigator is Dávid Benka. The deputy leader of the project is the author of the study.

explored in writings dating back to the 2nd century, the Epistle of the Apostles and the Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul, as well as its later Christian counterpart, the so-called *Visio Pauli*. The former apocalyptic writing is a second-century Valentinian text, preserved in the fifth codex of the Nag Hammadi collection, while the latter dates back to the 4th century. In these writings, Paul is presented not as a theological thinker but as an apocalyptic hero and the mediator of the hidden mysteries of God. Concerning Paul's revelations and visions, the focus is also on the stature of Paul among the apostles. It also points out how the figure of Paul was appropriated in later Gnostic and Christian apocalypses for the writers' own theological purposes.

Keywords: apostle Paul, apocalyptic ascent, Merkabah mysticism, epistle of the apostles, apocalypse of Paul

1. Paul's Visionary and Mystical Experiences

There are two crucial visionary and mystical experiences of the apostle Paul: his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, as it is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, and Paul's ascent to the third heaven, which is described in 2 Corinthians 12.

The encounter of Saul/Paul with the exalted Jesus is described as a vision (cf. Ezek 1:28; En 14:14; Dan 10:9.15, etc.). Paul sees a light from heaven. He falls down trembling, as apocalyptic seers prior to him (e.g. Ezekiel, Enoch, Daniel) and hears God's voice. The vision of the risen Christ is described three times in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 9:1–9; 22:3–16; and 26:9–18), with the third of which is presented as a „heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19).

There are similar visionary experiences mentioned in Paul's other authentic letters, which refer to Paul's vision of the glorified Christ on the road to Damascus, which most shaped his life. In 1 Corinthians, Paul states that he has seen Jesus, or that Christ appeared to him (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8). In the letter to the Galatians, the apostle claims that he did not receive the gospel from human hands but through divine revelation (Gal 1:11–12).³ Fourteen years after his previous visit, he went up to Jerusalem because of a revelation (Gal 2:1–2). All these allusions to visionary experiences refer to Paul's vision of the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, and they are mentioned to support his apostolic ministry.

In 2 Cor 12:1–4, Paul boasts of visions and revelations, even of a particular experience of catching up to paradise. The text is a part of the so-called „Fool's Discourse“. The authority of the apostle is challenged by the opponents of Paul, who claimed superiority over him on the basis of their visionary experiences and miracles and accused Paul of being deficient in this regard.⁴ Using the same line of argumentation as his opponents, the apostle boasted about his „visions and revelations“. He mentions a man who was caught up to the third heaven, even into paradise, and heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter (2 Cor 12:1–9). The plural form “visions and revelations” in 2 Cor 12:1 indicates that Paul's visionary experiences were “not a unique occurrence in his life but rather just one outstanding example of his visionary experiences”.⁵

Also, Paul's statement in 2 Cor 5:13 may relate to Paul's ecstatic experiences. Concerning apocalyptic visions, Paul uses, like the

3 BAIRD, William (1985): *Visions, Revelations, and Ministry: Reflections on 2 Cor 12:1–5 and Gal 1:11–17*. In *JBL* 104. 651–662.

4 Cf. 2 Cor 12:12.

5 LINCOLN, Andrew T. (1979): ‘Paul the Visionary’: The Setting and Significance of the Rapture to Paradise in II Corinthians XII. 1–10. In *NTS* 25. 204–220. 204. Also, the phrase “the abundance of revelation” (2 Cor 12:7) could refer to the quality or the quantity of revelations in a broader sense than merely to the visionary experience presented in 2 Cor 12:2–4.

other apocalyptic seers, the term “mystery” to describe God’s purposes for the future.⁶ He claims to have received the mysteries that had been hidden from the foundation of the world. More allusions to Paul’s visionary and ecstatic experiences could be presented.⁷

The apostle’s visionary and mystical experiences could be interpreted in the context of Jewish Merkabah mysticism⁸, an early form of Jewish mysticism that focuses on visions of the throne-chariot (cf. Ezek 1; Ezek 10; Ezek 43).⁹ The passage 2 Cor 12,1–10 has been associated with Jewish Merkaba mysticism by Alan F. Segal¹⁰ or C. R. A. Morray-Jones¹¹.

Ezekiel’s throne vision provided “impetus and language for heavenly visions in pseudepigraphic apocalyptic literature from the first two centuries BCE on and the Merkabah mystical speculation from as early as Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai and his pupils in the second half of the first century”¹². Likely, the apostle Paul was also connected to the Merkabah mysticism through Ezekiel’s throne-chariot vision, as the scholar Alan Segal stated: “To comprehend Paul’s experience, we must therefore inquire into the secret and

6 HAWTHORNE, GERALD F. – MARTIN, RALPH P. – REID, DANIEL G. (1993): *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Downers Grove, Illinois, InterVarsity Press. 507.

7 ROUKEMA, RIEMER (2005): Paul’s Rapture to Paradise in Early Christian Literature. In Anthony Hillhorst – George H. van Kooten (eds.): *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian, and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerhard P. Luttikhuisen* (AJEC 59). Brill, Leiden, Boston, Brill. 267–283. 268.

8 The expression “Merkabah mysticism” is used in this study for an esoteric, visionary-mystical tradition centered upon the vision of God on the celestial throne. In MORRAY-JONES, C. R. A. (1993): *Paradise revisited (2 Cor 12: 1–12). Part 1: The Jewish Sources*. In HTR 86. 177–217. 185.

9 BOWKER, J. W. (1971): Merkabah Visions and the Visions of Paul. In JSS 16. 157–173.

10 SEGAL, ALAN F. (1990): *Paul the Convert*. New York, Yale University Press. 34–71.

11 MORRAY-JONES (1993).

12 OLLEY, JOHN W. (2009): *Ezekiel: A Commentary Based on Iezekiel in Codex Vaticanus* (Septuagint Commentary Series). Boston, Brill. 33.

imperfectly understood Jewish mysticism of the first century later called Merkavah mysticism, after the Mishnaic term for the chariot that Ezekiel saw who sought this same vision”.¹³ In the second temple period, Ezekiel’s throne-chariot vision led to an ecstatic experience for those who meditated on what Ezekiel saw. „... a free meditation on the Throne-Chariot chapter... led to the visionary’s own experience and could make an important contribution to ‘seeing again’ of Ezekiel’s vision.”¹⁴

The book of Ezekiel, with the most well-known visionary accounts of the Merkabah, describes Ezekiel’s inaugural vision which shows numerous similarities with all three accounts of Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. Ezekiel describes the same light, and the prophet also falls to the ground after hearing the voice (Ezek 1:28).¹⁵ It was suggested that „Luke received a tradition or story that likened Paul’s vision to Ezekiel’s vision of the anthropomorphic form of the Lord and identified Paul’s Lord with the figure in Ezekiel... It is possible that the apostle himself was responsible for this interpretation of his vision.”¹⁶

Paul may have been associated with the Merkabah mystics, identifying the anthropomorphic form of God on the throne in Ezek 1:26 as exalted Jesus, even if he did not explicitly state it. Some scholars, however, deny any connection between Paul and Merkabah mysticism, arguing that the latter dates after the apostle Paul. For example, Schäfer argues against the claim that Merkabah mysticism provides the background for Paul: „Merkavah mysticism

13 SEGAL (1990): 11.

14 ROWLAND, Christopher (1979): The Vision of God in Apocalyptic Literature. In *JSJ* 10. 137–154. 153.

15 Ezechiel and Isaiah both mentioned the figure they saw on the divine throne.

16 ALLISON, Dale C. Jr. (2016): Acts 9:1, 22:6–11, 26:12–18: Paul and Ezekiel. In *JBL* 135. 807–826. 807.

does not yield the key, either, to the interpretation of the ecstatic experience to which Paul laid claim.”¹⁷

Gershom Scholem, a pioneer of research on Jewish mysticism¹⁸, believed in an earlier date of Merkabah mysticism: as early as the first century, and argues that Paul was influenced by it: „The details of the Merkavah was subsequently taken up by visionaries in the pre-Christian era, and particularly in the first two centuries of the Christian era, who sought to repeat the experience of the vision of the Merkavah.”¹⁹

The roots of Merkabah mysticism go back to the apocalyptic texts of the intertestamental period and, in a narrower sense, to cosmological apocalypses, which describe an ascent of an apocalyptic visionary to heaven, to the sphere around the throne of God, to penetrate God’s mysteries. The ascended apocalyptic hero is a respected figure from the past – Enoch, Isaiah, Moses, e.g. The heavenly ascent culminates in the transformation of the visionary into an angelic being, or even in the enthronement of the visionary. As an example, the transformation of the apocalyptic seer Enoch, who became the Son of man sitting on the throne: „I fell on my face, my whole body mollified, and my spirit transformed. Then I cried with a great voice by the spirit of the power, blessing, glorifying, and extolling...Then an angel came to me and greeted me and said to me, You, Son of man...” (1 En 71:11.14).²⁰ It is supposed that Paul might be acquainted with apocalyptic ascent texts such as Enoch, namely with the throne-chariot vision of

17 SCHÄFER, Peter (1984): New Testament and Hekhalot Literature: The Journey into Heaven in Paul and in Merkabah Mysticism. In *JJS* 35. 19–35. 34.

18 SCHOLEM Gershom (1941): *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. Jerusalem, Schocken Publishing House. SCHOLEM Gershom (1965): *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and the Talmudic Tradition*. New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

19 SCHOLEM Gershom (1991): *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*. New York, Schocken Books. 21.

20 CHARLESWORTH, James H. (1983): *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Volume 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*. New York, Doubleday & Company, Inc. 50

Enochian literature, originated by Ezekiel. Concerning Paul's visions of 2 Cor 12 and on the road to Damascus, these visions might have arisen from a Merkabah contemplation; Paul might have seen the exalted Jesus as a Son of man.

Also, Paul's concept of glory in 2 Cor 5:1–10 might be connected with Merkabah texts. In Jewish apocalypticism, which is the most important source of Jewish mysticism²¹, the concept of glory plays a significant role. Paul's concept of glory may reflect a human's transformation into an angelic being, as it is presented in Jewish cosmological apocalypses, in the descriptions of the transformation of an apocalyptic seer who was taken into the presence of the divine throne in the highest heaven. When Paul uses the concept of glory in Phil 3:21 in the expression „body of glory”, it might refer to the risen and glorified Christ occupying the divine throne in the highest heaven.

2. *Later Reception of Damascus Road Experience*

An early reception of Paul's visionary experience, his encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, is contained in The Epistle of the Apostles, also known as *Epistula Apostolorum*.²² It is an early Christian text that dates from the mid-2nd century. The writing is a part of the New Testament Apocrypha. Despite its title, it is considered a representative of Christian apocalyptic literature. It was originally written in Greek, but unfortunately, it is preserved only in an incomplete Coptic translation from the late fourth or early fifth century.²³ It has also been preserved in

21 SCHÄFFER, Peter (2009): *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*. Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.

22 WATSON, Francis (2018): *An Apostolic Gospel: The 'Epistula Apostolorum' in Literary Context* (SNTS Monograph Series 179). Cambridge, University Printing House.

23 Op. cit. 18–21. VINZENT, Markus (2023): *Resetting the Origins of Christianity*:

Ethiopic versions, which came from a considerably later period. The text is aimed against false apostles. It is addressed to the Christian communities, including Jews and Gentiles.²⁴

As it is obvious from the title of the writing, it contradicts the primacy of Paul. “The authority of a single letter of the plurality of Apostles contrasts with the plurality of letters of the single apostle Paul (*epistula apostolorum* versus *epistulae apostoli*).”²⁵ The text says about the appearance of the risen Lord to the apostles, predicting to them the conversion and ministry of Paul.

The conversion of Saul/Paul on the road of Damascus (EpAp 31–33) is preceded by the question of eleven disciples who are asking Jesus after his resurrection but still before his ascension, whether there is common salvation for both, Jews and Gentiles (EpAp 31:12–32:1). After some complaints of the apostles about the mysterious nature of Jesus’ response, the Lord announces them that salvation of Gentiles and Jews will be a result of Paul’s mission (EpAp 31:12).

In this early reception of the apostle Paul, his Jewishness is emphasized. However, Paul is presented only as a regular Jew and not as being zealous and strict in observing the Law and receiving unique revelations as he presents himself in his letters (Phil 3:5–6; Gal 1:14). Contrary to Paul’s claims of having had a revelation (Gal 1:12.16; 2:2; 2 Cor 2:13) and contrary to the account of the revelation of the risen Lord on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–9; 22, 3–21; 26, 9–20), in the epistle is explicitly said that Paul was not an eyewitness of the risen Lord. On the road to Damascus, he only heard the voice from heaven without seeing Christ/God. The risen Christ predicts Paul’s conversion to the Apostles. He orders them to instruct Paul in faith „during the period of his blindness“: „he will hear my voice from heaven with astonishment and fear, and

A New Theory. New York, Cambridge University Press. 231.

24 Both Jews and Gentiles are outwardly different, but they essentially belong together like fingers of the hand or ears of corn or fruit on a tree.

25 VINZENT (2023): 231.

trembling. And he will be blinded, and by your hand shall his eyes be sealed with saliva. And do everything for him that I have done for you... Teach him and remind him what is said in the scriptures about me..." (EpAp 33:1–3.12).²⁶

The author of the Epistle of the Apostles intended to incorporate Paul into the group of the original apostles despite his belated call.²⁷ Paul is actually the twelfth apostle – „a replacement perhaps for Judas Iscariot"²⁸, however, losing his extraordinary position as an apostle because he received a revelation from the Apostles who taught him, and not from Jesus himself. In according to EpAp, only the Twelve received their revelation directly from the risen Lord.²⁹

The account of chapter 31 which is related to Paul's conversion contains the text that might be interpreted as a criticism of those who justify the authority of Paul – deriving it from his seeing the risen Christ: „...blessed rather are those who have not seen and yet believed, for such will be called sons of the kingdom and they will be perfect in the perfect one; and I will be life to them in the kingdom of my Father“ (EpAp 29:6).³⁰

Finally, in the epistle, Paul's persecution activity is diminished. While in the Acts of the Apostles, Paul is coming to Damascus from Jerusalem, where he persecuted believers in Christ (Acts

26 WATSON, Francis (2018): *The Epistula Apostolorum: English Translation from Coptic and Ge'ez*. file:///D:/Downloads/The_Epistula_Apostolorum_English_Transla%20(1).pdf (24.09.2025)

27 WATSON, Francis (2018): The Conversion of Paul: A New Perspective (Epistula Apostolorum 31–33). In Jens Schröter – Simon Buttica – Andreas Dettwiler (eds.): *Receptions of Paul in Early Christianity: The Person of Paul and His Writings Through the Eyes of his Early Interpreters* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 234). Berlin, Boston, De Gruyter. 195–214. 210.

28 Op. cit. 207.

29 In contrast to Paul's claim of a direct revelation received from Jesus in Gal 1:11-12.

30 WATSON, Francis (2018).

9:1 – 2; cf. Acts 26:10 – 11; Gal 1:17), in the epistle, Paul comes to Damascus directly from his homeland, Cilicia, with no link to persecution in Jerusalem.

3. *Apocalyptic Imitators of Paul*

Two apocalypses of Paul originated from antiquity, one is gnostic, the other Christian. The inspiration for their authors was Paul's ascension to heaven in 2 Cor 12. The revelatory experience of Paul became interesting for the later generation of Christians, who speculated about what had happened to Paul during his ascension

The Gnostic apocalypse of Paul forms part of the Nag Hammadi collections (Codex V, 2).³¹ It is assumed that it was composed in Greek and later translated into Coptic. It is a second-century Gnostic Valentinian³² text. There was a rivalry between the Valentinians and non-Valentinian Christians: both movements claimed the authority of Paul, to validate their teaching and practices. The Apocalypse of Paul is considered “the literary remains of a battle between Valentinians and proto-orthodox over the correct interpretation of the legend and writings of the apostle Paul”³³. In terms of genre, the Gnostic apocalypse is an ascension

31 MACRAE, George W. – MURDOCK, William R (trans.): *The Gnostic Society Library: The Nag Hammadi Library: The Apocalypse of Paul*. <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/ascp.html> (24.09.2025). A comprehensive study on Apocalypse of Paul including the translation of the apocalypse was written by KALER, Michael (2008): *Flora Tells a Story: The Apocalypse of Paul and Its Contexts* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism 19). Waterloo (Ont.), Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

32 Valentinianism is a description of an early Christian movement and a philosophical “school”. Valentinians were followers of Valentinus (100–160), who began teaching after the apostolic period.

33 KALER, Michael (2005): Contextualizing the *Apocalypse of Paul*. In *LTP* 61. 233–246. 236.

apocalypse that recounts Paul's journey through various heavens until he meets God.

This Gnostic apocalypse is not to be confused with the popular Christian Apocalypse of Paul, also known as *Visio Sancti Pauli*, which has been preserved in eight languages.³⁴ The Latin version dates from the 4th century. It is assumed that the original text dates back no later than the mid-third century.³⁵

3.1. *The Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul*

It begins with a vision of Paul while the apostle is standing on the mountain of Jericho. Paul is on the way to Jerusalem. Besides 2 Cor 12, the vision of the Gnostic Apocalypse is indirectly connected with the account of Paul's apostolic call in Galatians (Gal 1:15–16) as well as the revelation that compelled Paul to visit the apostles in Jerusalem (cf. Gal 1:18; 2:1–10). It is not clear whether the author of The Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul was not aware of the account of Paul's conversion in Acts 9, or whether he rejected it. According to the Gnostic apocalypse, having had a revelation, Paul had been on the way to Jerusalem. In contradiction, the account of Gal 2 presents Paul's journey to Jerusalem together with Titus and Barnabas as the result of the revelation.

In the vision on the mountain, Paul meets the risen Christ, but the title 'Christ' is not explicitly mentioned. Christ is presented as a child guide who is later named either the Spirit or the Holy Spirit. Before the ascent, Paul is called by Christ/Spirit „to awaken his mind to the hidden things in those that are visible” since in gnostic teaching other-worldly realities are in opposition to the visible creation. Paul is told to go to Jerusalem to his fellow apostles (cf.

34 In this study, I refer to the Latin recension of the Apocalypse of Paul. The text *Visio Pauli* was well known during the Middle Ages and was probably the inspiration for Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*.

35 HARRISON, James R. (2004): In Quest of the Third Heaven: Paul & His Apocalyptic Imitators. In *Vigiliae Christiana* 58. 24–55. 26.

Gal 1:18; 2:1–10). Urging Paul to “open his mind”, the Spirit catches Paul up directly into the third heaven that was the destination of the historical Paul in 2 Cor 12. Then, Paul is taken by the Spirit on a journey through the realms up to the tenth heaven, where Paul finally meets his fellow spirits.

Historical Paul was confused about the nature of his ascent in 2 Cor 12, whether it was in the body or out of the body (2 Cor 12:3). For Valentinians, this ambiguity was problematic, so Paul’s ascent was redeveloped in a way to show that it was out of the body. At least beyond the third heaven, it was incorporeal, that is, associated only with the mind.

In the fourth heaven, the Spirit called the apostle to look at Paul’s likeness or image on the earth. Paul sees not only the likeness or image of himself but also his fellow apostles on his right and left hands. Paul’s ascent happened, undoubtedly, in a disembodied fashion. Separation from the body clearly reflects the Valentinian practices. This Valentinian ascent also mirrors the apocalyptic ascents of an apocalyptic seer through the heavenly temple presented in Jewish cosmological apocalypses such as 1 En 6–36.³⁶

In the fourth and fifth heavens, there is a scene of the judgment and punishment of souls. Angels cast down sinful souls to the bodies that are prepared for them and move souls to judgment. In the sixth heaven, Paul meets the Twelve and the creator of the universe, Demiurge, dwelling in a strong light. From a gnostic point of view, the Demiurge is a Judeo-Christian God, an inferior, ignorant deity whom gnostics are supposed to overcome. The Demiurge’s description as an old man dressed in white robes resembles God

36 The exemplary apocalypse among the cosmological apocalypses is *The Book of Watchers*, the oldest part of the story of Enoch (1 En 6–36). It influenced other cosmological apocalypses, such as *The Astronomical Book*, *The Similitudes of Enoch*, *The Testament of Levi*, *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, *The Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, *3 Baruch*, *2 Enoch*, and *The Testament of Abraham*.

in the vision of Daniel or Enoch (Dan 7:13; 1 En 46 – 47). At the entrance, the Demiurge controls who is coming in and out. Paul is greeted by the Demiurge, who even considers him a „blessed“. Nevertheless, he wants to stop Paul, but the apostle overcomes the Demiurge, giving him a secret sign. Then Paul proceeds to the ninth and the tenth heavens, to a divine region. In the tenth heaven, Paul greets his „fellow spirit,“ being united with them, and this is the end of the apocalypse. In comparison to historical Paul, the author of the Gnostic apocalypse does not mention „unutterable words“ (2 Cor 12:4). While historical Paul could not communicate the content of the revelation, that is, heavenly mysteries in the third heaven, gnostic Paul can reveal a hidden reality. In the Gnostic apocalypse, Paul’s visionary experience is extended by a superior Gnostic revelation in the tenth heaven.

The Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul text is considered “a Valentinian Baptismal Liturgy of Ascent”³⁷. It was recognized as an initiatory text for Valentinians, which was used to guide neophytes through the heavenly realms into the company of Paul.³⁸

In the Gnostic text, Paul is presented as an apocalyptic hero and a spiritual pneumatic man. His success is threefold: He overcomes the Demiurge. He attains the tenth heaven and is united with his „fellow spirits,“ and, in the seventh heavens, he declares his intention to the Demiurge to return „to the land of the dead to take captive the captivity“. Like other apocalyptic heroes of ascension apocalypses or cosmological apocalypses, after returning to Earth, he is given a task. Paul is presented as „a cosmic liberator“, if not identified with Christ himself³⁹, showing how Christ’s redemption

37 DOMERACKI, Michael S. (2017): The Apocalypse of Paul (NHC V,2) as a Baptismal Liturgy of Ascent. In *Gnosis Journal of Gnostic Studies* 2. 212–234. Domeracki shows how the second-century Valentinian memory of Paul is a coalescence of his mystical religiosity and authority and the imagistic ritual practices of Valentinians.

38 Op. cit. 219–220.

39 KALER (2005): 243.

will be accomplished through Paul. Christ, who is absent in the text, is substituted by Paul in accordance with Gal 1:13-17, which says that the apostle was pleased by God to reveal his Son „in him”⁴⁰ to preach Jesus among the Gentiles.

Concerning the stature of Paul among the Twelve, it is rather superior. Paul is the only one who enters the divine region. He sees himself standing at the centre amongst the apostles on earth. Paul’s primacy might be confirmed as well as in the sixth heaven, where the Spirit conducts Paul before the other apostles as their guide, or in the seventh heaven, where Paul overcomes the Demiurge. On the other hand, Paul’s superiority among the Twelve may be questioned by the fact that the Ogdoad, e.g. the eight heavens, was reached by the apostles before Paul, or in the tenth heaven, Paul greets the apostles transformed into spirits. Probably the stature of Paul among the apostles may not be the issue of the Gnostic apocalypse, contrary to its Christian counterpart, rather „to present Paul’s visionary revelation as a paradigm for the gnostic believer’s ascent”⁴¹. Paul’s pneumatic status encourages Valentinians to imitate the apostle following him beyond the third heaven. This might be the intention of the author: „to present Paul’s visionary revelation as a paradigm for the Gnostic believer’s ascent”⁴². This is clearly seen in the shift to the first person in the words of Paul in the Gnostic apocalypse, as he departed the fourth heaven: „I gazed upward and I saw the spirit saying to me: Paul, come to me!...”, in contrast to the third person of the original biblical account in 2 Cor 12:2–4. At this point, the biblical account becomes a mystical experience of the Gnostic believer who accompanies Paul in his

40 Ibid. Valentinians may interpret Gal 1:16 in such a way as to identify Paul with Christ. This reading of Paul is entirely in accordance with the statement: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” (Gal 2:20)

41 HARRISON (2004): 29.

42 Ibid.

ascent. Ecstatic experience of historical Paul becomes the own experience of the Gnostic believer.

3.2. *The Christian Apocalypse of Paul*

The Christian Apocalypse, like its Gnostic counterpart, also uses the account of Paul's ascent to heaven in 2 Cor 12 for its theological purposes. The text is primarily focused on a detailed description of heaven and hell. It emphasizes the relationship between sin and punishment, righteousness and reward. The chapters of the Latin manuscript of the text could be divided into seven parts as follows⁴³:

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 1–2 | Discovery of the revelation. |
| 3–6 | Prologue: creation's appeal to God against the sin of man. |
| 7–10 | The report of the angels to God about the good and wicked deeds of humanity. |
| 11–18 | Deaths and judgments of the righteous and the wicked. |
| 19–30 | First vision of Paradise. |
| 31–44 | Hell. Paul obtains a day of rest on Sunday for the damned. |
| 45–51 | Second vision of Paradise. |

Other manuscripts differ in either omitting the introductory explanation of discovery or omitting the second vision of paradise.⁴⁴

Chapters 11–18 present the otherworldly journey of Paul, accompanied by the angel Michael as an interpreter (*angelus*

43 HILHORST, Anthony (2007): *The Apocalypse of Paul: Previous history and afterlife*. In Jan N. Bremmer – István Czachesz (eds.): *The Visio Pauli and the Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul* (Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha 9). Leuven, Peeters. 1–22.

44 Ibid.

interprets). Paul saw merciless angels and the souls that left their bodies; they were judged and led to the abyss of hell to stay until the final Day of Judgment. In contrast, the souls of the righteous were taken to paradise, where they were to remain until the end, to be clothed in new resurrection bodies, while the souls of the wicked returned to their sinful bodies.

In the Christian Apocalypse of Paul, God's mercy is emphasized (chaps. 31–44). God offers the wicked soul to confess its sins. Regarding sins in chapters 43–44, Christ descends to listen to the prayers of the archangel Michael for the dead in the abyss of hell. In other parts, Christ grants relief to the damned from their suffering for the intercession of those who are in heaven, like the archangel Michael and other angels, as well as Paul, the beloved of Christ, and other supplicants on the earth. The Christian apocalyptic text is preoccupied with angels that are named and have revelatory and juridical roles. In contrast, historical Paul does not attribute any revelatory, juridical, or intercessory roles to the angels or give names to them. Paul believed that neither angels, nor principalities, nor powers (Rom 9:38–39), nor a Demiurge figure or intermediary figure can restrain the access to God, as was the case in the Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul.

The peculiarity of the Christian apocalypse is its anti-Jewish tendency. The Jews are blamed for the crucifixion of Jesus: “See Moses, what those of your people have done to the Son of God. Therefore, you are blessed, Paul, and blessed is the generation and people who have believed your word.” The idea of a ‘new’ people points to the supersessionist theology of the replacement of Israel or the synagogue by the Christian church as its successor.

4. Conclusion

In summary, two crucial visionary and mystical experiences of the apostle Paul, his encounter with the risen Christ before Damascus

and Paul's ascent to the third heaven, were later elaborated in the writings dating back to the 2nd century: in the Epistle of the Apostles, in the Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul, and its later Christian counterpart. While historical Paul claimed his superiority over the Twelve because of a direct revelation from Jesus, in later tradition, the extraordinary position of Paul among the apostles could be questioned. Either diminished by the author of the Epistle of the Apostle or confirmed in the Gnostic and the Christian Apocalypse of Paul. In these writings, the apostle is presented not as a theological thinker but as an apocalyptic hero and the mediator of God's hidden mysteries, to support the teachings and practice of their authors and their religious groups; however, it was not always in accordance with the theology and practices of historical Paul.

Bibliography

- ALLISON, Dale C. Jr. (2016): Acts 9:1, 22:6–11, 26:12–18: Paul and Ezekiel. In *JBL* 135. 807–826.
- BAIRD, William (1985): Visions, Revelations, and Ministry: Reflections on 2 Cor 12:1–5 and Gal 1:11–17. In *JBL* 104. 651–662.
- BOWKER, J.W. (1971): “Merkabah Visions and the Visions of Paul.” In *JSS* 16. 157–173.
- CHARLESWORTH, James H. (1983): *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Volume 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*. New York, Doubleday & Company, Inc.
- DOMERACKI, Michael S. (2017): The Apocalypse of Paul (NHC V,2) as a Baptismal Liturgy of Ascent. In *Gnosis Journal of Gnostic Studies* 2. 212–234.
- HARRISON, James R (2004): In Quest of the Third Heaven: Paul & His Apocalyptic Imitators. In *Vigiliae Christianae* 58. 24–55.
- HAWTHORNE, GERALD F. – MARTIN, RALPH P. – REID, DANIEL G. (1993): *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Downers Grove (Ill.), Inter Varsity Press.

- HILHORST, Anthony (2007). The Apocalypse of Paul: Previous history and afterlife. In Bremmer Jan N. – Czachesz, István (eds.): *The Visio Pauli and the Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul* (Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha 9). Leuven, Peeters. 1–22.
- KALER, Michael (2005): Contextualizing the *Apocalypse of Paul*. In *LTP* 61. 233–246.
- KALER, Michael (2008): *Flora Tells a Story: The Apocalypse of Paul and Its Contexts* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism 19). Waterloo (Ont.), Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- LINCOLN, Andrew T. (1979): ‘Paul the Visionary’: The Setting and Significance of the Rapture to Paradise in II Corinthians XII. 1–10. In *NTS* 25. 204–220.
- MACRAE, George W. – MURDOCK, William R. (trans.): *The Gnostic Society Library: The Nag Hammadi Library: The Apocalypse of Paul*. <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/ascp.html> (24.09.2025)
- MORRAY-JONES, C.R.A. (1993): Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1-12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul’s Apostolate. Part 1: The Jewish Sources. In *HTR* 86. 177–217.
- OLLEY, John W. (2009): *Ezekiel: A Commentary Based on Iezekiël in Codex Vaticanus*. Septuagint Commentary Series. Boston, Brill.
- ROUKEMA, Riemer (2005): Paul’s Rapture to Paradise in Early Christian Literature. In Anthony Hillhorst – George H. van Kooten (eds.): *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian, and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerhard P. Luttikhuisen* (AJEC 59). Brill, Leiden, Boston, Brill. 267–283.
- ROWLAND, Christopher (1979): The Vision of God in Apocalyptic Literature. In *JSJ* 10. 137–154.
- SCHÄFER, Peter (1984): New Testament and Hekhalot Literature: The Journey Into Heaven in Paul and in Merkavah Mysticism. In *JJS* 35. 19–35.
- SCHÄFER, Peter (2009): *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*. Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.
- SCHOLEM Gershom (1941): *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. Jerusalem, Schocken Publishing House.

- SCHOLEM Gershom (1965): *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and the Talmudic Tradition*. New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America.
- SCHOLEM Gershom (1991): *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*. New York, Schocken Books.
- SEGAL, Alan F. (1990): *Paul the Convert*. New York, Yale University Press.
- VINZENT, Markus (2023): *Resetting the Origins of Christianity: A New Theory*. New York, Cambridge University Press.
- WATSON, Francis (2018): *An Apostolic Gospel: The 'Epistula Apostolorum' in Literary Context* (SNTS Monograph Series 179). Cambridge, University Printing House.
- WATSON, Francis (2018): The Conversion of Paul: A New Perspective (Epistula Apostolorum 31 – 33). In Jens Schröter – Simon Buttica – Andreas Dettwiler (eds.): *Receptions of Paul in Early Christianity: The Person of Paul and His Writings Through the Eyes of his Early Interpreters* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 234). 195–214.
- WATSON, Francis (2018): *The Epistula Apostolorum: English Translation from Coptic and Ge'ez*. file:///D:/Downloads/The_Epistula_Apostolorum_English_Transla%20(1).pdf (24.09.2025)

Andrew and Philip: Their Role and Significance in the Gospel of John

Petr Mareček¹

Abstract

It is characteristic of John's gospel that he names the disciples individually and lets them stand out as individual personalities. Philip and Andrew are among the most frequently mentioned disciples in John's gospel, along with Simon Peter and Thomas. These two disciples appear side by side three times in John's gospel (John 1:35–51; 6:1–15; 12:20–36). They form a kind of pair, although they are not brothers. What unites them, however, is both their common origin in Bethsaida and the fact that they bear a Greek name and belonged to a Jewish population that had been influenced by Greek culture and which spoke both Aramaic and Greek. Both Andrew and Philip, immediately after their call, seek to make another disciple for Jesus through their messianic confessions. The mentions of Philip and Andrew by name in John 6:1–15 is consistent with their prominence in John 1:35–51 and serves both to highlight their helplessness and misunderstanding of Jesus and to emphasize the greatness of Jesus' miracle. In John 12:20–36, Philip and Andrew, by their origin, are appropriate mediators for people from Gentile nations already sympathetic to Judaism who are attracted to Jesus. Finally, then, in John 14:8–11, Philip is mentioned in connection with Thomas (John 14:5–7), who also represents the disciples' attitude of incomprehension and heavy-handed

¹ This study was prepared with financial support from project IGA_CMTF_2025_005, "Johannes aenigmaticus: Studies on the Gospel of John".

faith. He undoubtedly stands out alongside Philip because of his role in the context of the Easter events, when the risen Jesus makes him aware of his true identity and leads him to a personal confession: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Philip and Andrew, along with the other disciples in John’s gospel, document that the way to faith in Jesus Christ is not the result of verifiable arguments but is the gracious gift of God or the gift of the risen Jesus (cf. John 6:44–45).

Keywords: The Gospel of John; Andrew; Philip; Jesus Christ; discipleship

1. Introduction

According to the synoptic gospels, Andrew and Philip belong to the circle of the twelve disciples. The list of the Twelve is found in all three synoptic gospels (Mark 3:16–19; Matt 10:2–4; Luke 6:14–16) and then in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:13). The gospel of John does not contain this list, nor is there any mention of the appointment of this group. Furthermore, the circle of the twelve is mentioned very rarely in John’s gospel (6:67. 70. 71; 20:24). It does not play an important role in the overall Johannine narrative. This suggests that in the time of early Christian preaching and mission, the “Twelve” played only a very limited and local role. It is characteristic of the gospel of John that it gives the individual names of the disciples. This allows these disciples to stand out as individual personalities, albeit without further biographical or theological interest. Our focus will be on two of them, Philip and Andrew.

Philip (Φίλιππος)² occurs only once in the synoptic gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, always in the list of the Twelve.

2 The name Φίλιππος “Philip”, which etymologically includes the meaning “Fond of horses”, is of Greek origin and was a common name in the

Otherwise, except in the gospel of John, he appears nowhere else in the New Testament.³ In the lists of the twelve disciples,

Greco-Roman world. LIDDEL, Henry George – SCOTT, Robert (1996): *A Greek-English Lexicon: With a Revised Supplement 1996*, revised and augmented throughout by Henry Stuart Jones with the assistance of Roderic McKenzie and with the cooperation of many scholars. Oxford, Clarendon Press. 1935. The LXX lists several rulers who bear the name Φίλιππος: 1) King Philip II of Macedonia (1Macc 1:1; 6:2), father of Alexander the Great, who reigned from 359 to 336 BC. 2) King Philip V of Macedonia (1Macc 8:5), father of Perseus, who reigned from 221–179 B.C. 3) Philip, Phrygian governor of Jerusalem, appointed by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (2Macc 5:22) in 169 B.C, who had become hated for his cruelty and who came under great pressure from Judah the Maccabee (2Macc 6:11; 8:8). 4) Philip, a childhood friend of Antiochus Epiphanes (1Macc 6:14; 2Macc 9:29), whom the dying king entrusted with the administration of his entire kingdom and guardian of his son (1Macc 6:55; cf. 6:63; 2Macc 13:23). See further REDDIT, Paul L. (1992): Philip. In Freedman, David Noel (ed.): *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5. New York, Doubleday. 310.

- 3 In addition to Philip, the apostle, three other bearers of this name are mentioned in the New Testament. 1) Philip, the son of Herod the Great and Cleopatra the Jewess of Jerusalem, who after the death of his father (4 B.C.) became tetrarch over the territory north and east of the Lake of Gennesaret: Gaulonitis, Trachonitis, Auranitis, Batanea, and Paneas (*Ant.* 17.319; 17.189). Luke mentions only Trachonitis and Ituraea (Luke 3:1; cf. Mark 8:27; Matt 16:13). He was married to Salome. 2) Herod Philip, son of Herod the Great and Mariamme II, whose wife was Herodias and their daughter Salome. In Mark 6:17 and Matt 14:3 he is named as Philip, though Josephus Flavius (e.g. *Ant.* 18.136) names him only Herod. This is thought to be a confusion with the tetrarch Philip, though this name cannot be entirely ruled out. 3) Philip “the evangelist” (Acts 21:8), one of the seven men appointed to serve at the table in Jerusalem (Acts 6:5), probably a Hellenist. After Stephen’s death, he preached in Samaria, baptized Simon Magus (Acts 8:5–13) and an Ethiopian court official who had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Acts 8:26–39), and worked as a missionary in the cities from Ashdod (Azotus) to Caesarea (Maritima) (Acts 8:40), where he later lived with his four prophetically gifted daughters, who were virgins (Acts 21:8–9). Cf. SCHNEIDER, Gerhard (1992): Φίλιππος. In Balz, Horst – Schneider, Gerhard (eds.): *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, III. Stuttgart – Berlin – Köln – Mainz, W. Kohlhammer. col. 1020–1021.

he is always in fifth place: in Mark's gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles he is listed after Andrew, in the gospel of Matthew and the gospel of Luke he is named after John Zebedee. In contrast to the single occurrence of his name in the synoptic gospels and Acts, it is striking that Philip is mentioned by name a total of 12 times in John's gospel. This in itself makes it clear that he plays a much more important role in the fourth gospel than in the other New Testament books that mention him. Finally, it is noticeable that Philip is the most frequently mentioned disciple after Peter in John's gospel, which emphasizes his importance.

Andrew (Ἀνδρέας),⁴ the brother of Simon Peter (John 1:40; 6:8; Matt 4:18), who is the only bearer of this name in the New Testament, is mentioned a total of 13 times.⁵ Andrew is named only in the list of the Twelve in the gospel of Luke and in the Acts of the Apostles (Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13). The evangelist Matthew mentions his name twice, in connection with his calling at the Sea of Galilee (Matt 4:18) and in the list of the Twelve (Matt 10:2). In Mark's gospel, his name occurs a total of four times: in connection with his call at the Sea of Galilee (Mark 1:16), in connection with the healing of Simon's mother-in-law in Capernaum (Mark 1:29), in the list of the Twelve (Mark 3:18), and finally, together with three other disciples (Peter and Zebedee's sons James and John), as a listener of Jesus' eschatological discourse (Mark 13:3). In the gospel of John, Andrew's name appears five times: at the event of his calling (John 1:40. 44), in connection with the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:8), and in connection with the questioning of the Greeks who had come as pilgrims to Jerusalem for the Passover (John 12:22: twice).⁶ The number of references

4 The name Ἀνδρέας is entirely of Greek origin, includes the meaning "manly" and appears already in Herodotus. Cf. PETERSON, Peter M. (1958): *Andrew, Brother of Simon Peter: His History and Legends* (NTS 1). Leiden, Brill. 1.

5 The name Ἀνδρέας does not occur in the LXX.

6 After Peter (34 times), Philip (12 times), and Thomas (7 times), Andrew is the most frequently mentioned disciple of the Twelve in John's gospel.

to Andrew in John's gospel already suggests that his importance in the New Testament is most emphasized in this gospel. This is also confirmed by the fact that in John, Andrew is called before his brother Simon.

A careful reading of John's gospel reveals that Andrew and Philip are mentioned three times side by side: John 1:35–51; 6:1–15; 12:20–36. They form a kind of pair, although they are not brothers like Simon and Andrew, or James and John. Only once does Philip appear alone, and that is in the last passage where he appears (John 14:8. 9), otherwise he is always listed with Andrew after his calling. In this paper we will concentrate our research on the texts of John's gospel in which these two disciples appear together. In particular, we will seek to answer the questions: How are Andrew and Philip portrayed in the gospel of John? What is their function in this gospel? Our aim will be to point out the main features of their portrayal as well as their role and common significance in John's gospel.

2. Andrew and Philip in John 1:35–51

The gospel of John begins with a beautiful prologue (John 1:1–18) that contains a unique account of the person of Jesus. Jesus is presented as the uncreated, eternal Word. He is God (John 1:1), he participates in God's creative activity (John 1:3). Jesus is further presented as Life (John 1:4), as the true Light coming into the world (John 1:9), and as the incarnate Word (1:14). He is the only begotten God (John 1:18). In John 1:19–34, the evangelist John reports the testimony of John the Baptist, already mentioned in John 1:6–8 and 1:15, which now takes the form of a continuous narrative. John the Baptist, whose task is to bear witness to Jesus, communicates that Jesus surpasses him immeasurably (John 1:27), that he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), that he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit

(John 1:33), and that he is the Son of God (John 1:34). John, then, at the very beginning of his gospel, communicates everything essential about the person of Jesus and points out his significance. But what will Jesus, who is presented in this way, do? John, the evangelist has not yet mentioned a single word that Jesus spoke. He only informed us that Jesus came to John the Baptist (John 1:29). The first thing the evangelist pays attention to and communicates to us is the account of how Jesus met those who recognized his identity and who became his disciples (John 1:35–51). This textual unit consists of two parts, which begin with the time marker τῆ ἐπαύριον “the next day” (John 1:35.43) and which always contain two scenes (John 1:35–39.40–42; John 1:43–44. 45–51).

The first scene of the first part (John 1:35–39) presents John the Baptist as he turns the attention of his two disciples to Jesus through his testimony, and how this reference leads to their encounter with Jesus. It is thus John the Baptist who gives the first impetus to the first encounter with Jesus. By this action he fulfils his task as a witness (cf. John 1:6–7). He bears witness to Jesus and confesses him to be the Lamb of God (John 1:29. 36). John’s testimony prompts two of his disciples to follow Jesus. The verb used here, ἀκολουθέω is to be understood both literally and figuratively: the two disciples of John literally follow Jesus on his journey, as seen in John 1:37–39, but they also become his followers in a deeper sense (cf. John 8:12; 10:4, 27; 12:26; 13:36; 21:19. 22). This verb signals that the first encounter of these two disciples with Jesus marks the beginning of a firm following.⁷

Jesus is now presented as he starts his ministry. He turns to them and, without addressing them in any way, asks them a question: “What are you looking for?” (John 1:38).⁸ These two disciples, who

7 BACKHAUS, Knut (1991): *Die “Jüngerkreise” des Täufers Johannes: Eine Studie zu den religionsgeschichtlichen Ursprüngen des Christentums* (PaThSt 19). Paderborn, Schöningh. 237.

8 The question “What are you looking for?” are the first words Jesus spoke in John’s gospel. These words are similar to the words that the risen

are addressed by Jesus, do not answer his question. Apparently, they were not able to immediately articulate their desire. So, they respond with a counter-question: “Rabbi”⁹ (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” (John 1:38).¹⁰ In their question one can see a hidden request to speak with him. They want to have him as their teacher.¹¹ Jesus grants their request and responds by saying, “Come and see” (John 1:39). This response of Jesus includes not only an invitation but also a promise. While we do not learn from John’s gospel the details of how this encounter took place, it seems clear from what is communicated that it was

Jesus addressed to Mary Magdalene: “Whom are you looking for?” (John 20:15). At the beginning of the gospel, the two disciples of John are depicted as seeking the Messiah, and similarly, at the end of the gospel, Mary Magdalene is shown seeking Jesus. This parallelism, which frames the gospel of John, makes it clear that Jesus’ disciples are both men and women. BULTMANN, Rudolf (¹⁰1968): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, (KEK). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 70, sees in John 1:38 the existential question of everyone who encounters Jesus.

- 9 SCHÜRER, Emil (1991): *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ: (175 B.C. – A.D. 135)*, II. Vermes, Geza – Millar, Fergus – Vermes, Pamela – Black, Matthew (eds.). Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark. 326, believes that the use of “rabbi” as a title originated about the time of Jesus.
- 10 In John 1:38–39, John’s favourite word μένω “stay, remain” appears three times. Of the 118 occurrences in the entire New Testament, it is found a total of 67 times in the Johannine writings (John 40; 1John 24; 2John 3). In John’s gospel, the verb μένω is often used in the deeper theological sense of “abide”. In most of these instances, however, the verb is accompanied by the preposition ἐν “in” e.g., to “abide in” Jesus or his word (cf. John 5:38; 6:56; 15:4–6. 10). This is not the case in John 1:38–39. The first two uses of this verb refer to Jesus himself staying, i.e., lodging somewhere (cf. similar uses in 2:12; 11:6). The third use of μένω, which refers to Andrew and his companion “staying with” Jesus, has a temporal limitation (“that day”), and this differs from the concept of “abiding in” elsewhere in John’s gospel, where the idea is of a permanent connection between the believer and Christ.
- 11 WILCKENS, Ulrich (2000): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD 4). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 47.

indeed a personal encounter and that it transformed their lives. The indication of time, “the tenth hour (= 16 hours)”¹² is hardly symbolic.¹³ This characterization of the time is also found in the gospel of John at the beginning of the encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:6), at the healing of the son of the king’s servant (John 4:52), and at the beginning of the crucifixion narrative (John 19:14). Thus, when the importance of the moment is to be emphasized, the exact time is also given.

The second scene of the first part depicts Andrew’s efforts to win his brother Simon to Jesus the Messiah (John 1:40–42). The personal experience of John’s two disciples with Jesus leads them to bear witness to him – this witness brings other people to Jesus. It is worth noting that human connections, kinship, and lineage also play a role in this process of bringing people to Jesus through personal witness. Andrew, who was one of the two disciples, “first” (πρῶτον)¹⁴ meets his own brother Simon to bear witness to him about whom he has met and whom he has come to know. Andrew does not meet Simon merely by chance but is said to have sought out his brother to inform him of what he had experienced in his encounter with Jesus. He gives him a testimony

12 KÖSTENBERGER, Andreas J. (2004): *John* (BECNT). Grand Rapids, Baker Academic. 75–76, suggests that since the main meal was usually served late in the afternoon, the ‘tenth hour’ may also indicate that Jesus offered table fellowship to these two disciples of John the Baptist. MCHUGH, John F. (2009): *John 1–4: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, ed. Graham N. Stanton (ICC). London, T & T Clark International. 153, in connection with the time reference in John 1:39, states that just as the narrative of Jesus’ first day on earth ends at the time of the evening meal, so too will his last day on earth end with the supper at which he reveals to his disciples the fullness of God’s love for them (John 13:1; 17:26).

13 The symbolic meaning of the time data is held by e.g. WENGST, Klaus (2004): *Das Johannesevangelium. 1 Teilband: Kapitel 1–10* (ThKNT 4,1). Stuttgart – Berlin – Köln, Kohlhammer. 96–97.

14 This is a problematic passage with different textual variants and explanations. See e.g. ZUMSTEIN, Jean (2016): *Das Johannesevangelium* (KEK 2). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 103 n. 65.

of what he experienced together with the other disciple, who remains anonymous:¹⁵ “We have found the Messiah!”¹⁶ – which is translated Christ (John 1:41).¹⁷ If Peter is the first to receive this message, it may reflect the confession of the Messiah found in the Synoptic tradition (cf. Mark 8:27–30 par.).¹⁸ Andrew, however, does not leave his testimony here, on the verbal level: he also leads his brother Simon to an immediate encounter with Jesus. In word and deed, he seeks to fruitfully communicate his own experience of faith.¹⁹ Andrew is not only the first (named) “follower”²⁰ of Jesus, the first to openly profess faith in Jesus as Messiah, but also the first missionary.²¹

15 Apparently, this is the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7. 20; cf. “the other disciple”: John 18:15; 20:3. 4. 8), whose name is nowhere given in John’s gospel. See further, e.g. THEOBALD, Michael (2009): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes: Kapitel 1–12* (RNT). Regensburg, Friedrich Pustet. 181–183.

16 Andrew could have used the first-person plural because his words also contain the testimony of the disciple who remains nameless. Furthermore, the plural could refer to the witness of the believing community that the disciple embodies. Cf. GRASSO, Santi (2008): *Il Vangelo di Giovanni: Commento esegetico e teologico*. Roma, Città Nuova. 92.

17 Of the New Testament writers, only the fourth evangelist transcribes the Hebrew or Aramaic term for Messiah into Greek (cf. 4:25), which argues in favour of the age and origin of the source, which he obtained from Palestine.

18 SCHNELLE, Udo (2004): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (ThHK 4). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt. 64.

19 THEOBALD (2009): 183.

20 Only in John 2:2 are Andrew and the other new followers of Jesus (Andrew’s anonymous companion, Simon Peter, Philip, and Nathanael) called “his disciples.” The only occurrence of the term disciple (μαθητής) in John 1 is in connection with two followers of John the Baptist (John 1:35. 37; cf. 3:25).

21 STIBBE, Mark W. G. (1996): *John*. Sheffield, Academic Press. 37: Andrew’s role is that of “witness and evangelist.”

In Simon's encounter with Jesus, it is pointed out that Jesus has supernatural knowledge, a trait we encounter again in John's gospel.²² Jesus tells Simon who he is and what his future name will be: "Cephas" which is translated "Peter/Rock" (John 1:42). According to John's gospel Simon is not the first one called with Andrew (Mark 1:16–20) but only meets Jesus through his brother Andrew.²³ However, the closer introduction of Andrew as Simon's brother indirectly clarifies to the readers of John's gospel that Simon is the more familiar and important of the two brothers, even though Simon does not meet Jesus until the following verse.²⁴ Peter later takes a key role among the disciples, and his special position among them is emphasized (John 6:66–69[71]; 13:1–11; 13:21–26[30]; 13:36–38; 18:10–11; 18:15–18. 25–27; 20:1–10; 21:1–14. 15–19. 20–23), of which the reader is probably already aware at this stage of the narrative. That Andrew brings Peter to Jesus occupies a crucial role in this important development. Andrew acts exactly as a true disciple of Jesus should act. He confesses Jesus as the Messiah and leads his brother to a personal encounter with him, thereby trying to win him over to Jesus through missionary work. It is worth noting that every time we meet Andrew in this gospel, he brings someone to Jesus (cf. John 6:8; 12:22).²⁵ Unlike

22 According to the account in John's gospel, Jesus sets forth a supernatural knowledge of hidden realities (John 1:47–49; 2:24–25; 4:16–19; 5:6; 6:64, 70–71; 13:1; 21:6). Although this feature of Jesus is not entirely absent in the synoptics, it is more fully expressed in the gospel of John.

23 The Byzantine liturgy derives from the Johannine version of the calling of the disciples its title Πρωτόκλητος "First Called", by which it honours the apostle Andrew. PETERSON (1958): 5.

24 RIDDERBOS, Herman N. (1997): *The Gospel according to John: A Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 84. Similarly, in John 11:2, it is noticeable that Mary of Bethany is introduced as the one who "anointed the Lord with oil" even before the event itself is recounted (John 12:3).

25 MORRIS, Leon (1995): *The Gospel according to John* (NICNT). Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 140; KLINK III, Edward W. (2016): *John* (ZECNT). Grand Rapids, Zondervan Academic. 148.

the stories of the calling of the disciples in the synoptic gospels, in John's gospel the initial invitation does not come from Jesus himself, but from the Baptist (cf. 1:35–39) and the previously called disciple (cf. 1:40–42).²⁶ However, Andrew only plays the role of one who refers to Jesus. The one who actually calls remains Jesus, who, without Simon having been previously introduced to him, addresses him with his full name with miraculous previous knowledge and gives him a new symbolic name, the meaning of which is clarified in the additional chapter where the transfer of the “pastoral office” to Peter is described (John 21:15–19).²⁷

In John 1:43 the second part of the textual unit (John 1:43–51) begins, again with the temporal indication $\tau\eta\ \acute{\epsilon}\pi\alpha\upsilon\acute{\rho}\iota\omicron\nu$ (cf. John 1:29. 35). As in the first part, the calling of Andrew and the anonymous disciple through the testimony of John the Baptist and Simon through the testimony of his brother Andrew (John 1:35–39.40–42), two events are now narrated: Jesus “seeks out”²⁸

26 KOESTER, Craig R. (2003): *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*. Minneapolis, Fortress Press. 62–63, points out: “This pattern differs from the other Gospels, which say that Jesus himself called his first disciples, but it would be congruent with the experience of a later generation of Christians, who came to faith through the witness of others (17:20)”. TALBERT, Charles H. (1992): *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles*. New York, Crossroad. 83–84, finds parallels for both forms of making disciples in profane ancient literature, both through the witness of another man and Jesus' special character (John 1:36–39. 40–42. 45–49; Epictetus *Diatribai* 3.23.27) and through Jesus' personal call to follow (John 1:43b; Plato *Apology* 19E; Diogenes Laertius 2.48).

27 BLANK, Josef (1977): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes, Teil 3* (GSL.NT 4/3). Düsseldorf, Patmos. 199–207.

28 CARSON, Donald A. (1991): *The Gospel According to John* (PNTC). Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press – Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 157, thinks that Andrew sought out Philip and brought him to Jesus. Thus also de BOER, Martinus C. (2013): Andrew: The First Link in the Chain. In: Hunt, Steven A. – Tolmie, D. Francois – Zimmermann, Ruben (eds.): *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (WUNT 314). Tübingen,

Philip²⁹ and invites him to follow (John 1:43–44) and Philip “seeks out” Nathanael and brings him to Jesus (John 1:45–51). Here it becomes clear what the meaning of this “seeking out” is, which reoccurs throughout the narrative (John 1:41. 43. 45). These are events that are determined from heaven and have their hidden origin in the “seeking” of Jesus (John 1:43). For the search from person to person (John 1:41. 45) always leads to a wonderful knowledge with which Jesus surprises the person who is brought to him and enables him to become his disciple.³⁰ According to the internal logic of the text, Jesus is still at the place of baptism on the lower Jordan and is now on his way to Galilee.³¹ Galilee is the starting point of Jesus’ ministry in all four gospels; however, in contrast to the synoptics, where Jesus’ ministry is described to mostly take place in Galilee, in John’s gospel it loses its importance and Jerusalem becomes the decisive place of Jesus’ proclamation.

The depiction of Philip’s call to follow Jesus in John 1:43 corresponds to the type encountered in the synoptic gospels (cf. Mark 1:16–20 par; 2:14 par).³² The call comes directly from Jesus.

Mohr Siebeck. 137–150, here 145. This supposition cannot be proved, since the gospel text does not tell us that Andrew brought Philip to Jesus. See further MICHAELS, J. Ramsey (2010): *The Gospel of John* (NICNT). Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 125.

29 BERNARD, John Henry (1928): *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, I (ICC). Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark. 61, thinks it is possible that the apostle Philip was named after the ruler of the district.

30 WILCKENS (2000): 48.

31 The route described assumes that Jesus travels from Bethany beyond the Jordan (John 1:28) through Galilee to Cana (John 2:1), i.e. more than a hundred kilometres in two days. Cf. BRODIE, Thomas L. (1993): *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary*. New York – Oxford, Oxford University Press. 164. LINDARS, Barnabas (1986): *The Gospel of John* (NCeB). Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 116, notes: “It must be confessed that John’ topographical care deserts him at this point.” The geographical data here are of more theological value.

32 Mark 2:14 reads literally the same: λέγει αὐτῷ: ἀκολούθει μοι. Here it is addressed to Levi.

He finds Philip and calls him to follow. The reason for this action of Jesus is not given, how Jesus knew Philip is not told, and where he found him is not stated. Finally, it may be noted that, unlike the parallels in the synoptic gospels, the positive response is not specifically emphasized, although the following verses implicitly assume it (John 1:44–46). The synoptic gospels, however, do not have a separate narrative of Philip’s calling. This difference points to the importance of Philip in John’s gospel. The personal note in John 1:44 corresponds to a similar note in John 1:40. Its purpose in the original gospel text was probably to explain why Philip in particular journeyed with Andrew to the site of John’s baptism in “Bethany beyond the Jordan” (John 1:28). Like Andrew (and Peter), he was from Bethsaida (John 1:44; 12:21)³³ and probably knew them from his youth. Bethsaida was a fishing village located on the north side of the Sea of Galilee, near the Jordan River, and was rebuilt as a Hellenistic trading town in 2 BC by the tetrarch Herod Philip and named Julius in honour of Augustus’ daughter.³⁴ Philip and Andrew both have Greek names; they must have come from the Jewish population of Bethsaida, which could not close itself off from Hellenistic culture, and they can probably be counted among those who spoke both Aramaic and Greek.³⁵ It can be argued that the vocation of Philip already in some sense anticipates that of the Greeks (John 12:20–22). Several facts point to this idea: 1) His name is not only Greek, but it can be noted that it was borne by several Greek rulers (see note 1). 2) According to the testimony of

33 The reference in John 12:21 to “Bethsaida of Galilee,” is confusing because Bethsaida lies on the other side of the Jordan, which formed the border between Galilee and the territory of Gaulanitis. It is also possible that the evangelist did not have a more precise knowledge of Palestine. Cf. THEOBALD (2009): 190–191.

34 Along with Capernaum and Chorazin, Bethsaida is one of the few places where the ministry of the historical Jesus can be confidently assumed (cf. Mark 6:45; 8:22; Matt 11:21; Luke 9:10; 10:13–15).

35 Thus, for example, DIETZFELBINGER, Christian (2001): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes. Teilband 1: Johannes 1–12* (ZBK 4.1). Zürich, Theologischer Verlag. 55.

John's gospel, the Greeks want to make contact with Jesus through Philip (John 12:21–22). 3) Although the circle of seven (Acts 6:5) all bore a Greek name, it is Philip who is presented as a missionary among the Gentiles (cf. Acts 8). Philip's calling is thus to some extent a foreshadowing of the calling of the Greeks.³⁶

The call of Philip to follow Jesus has a missionary effect.³⁷ Philip seeks out Nathanael (John 1:45). It seems as if the readers of the gospel have known about him for a long time, but in any case, the narrator does not introduce him in particular or reveal his relationship to Nathanael.³⁸ Like Andrew, Philip announces his happy discovery to Nathanael.³⁹ The phrasing of the words, which is again in the plural, could indicate that Philip has already identified himself with a small group of followers of Jesus (cf. John 1:35–42),⁴⁰ or it could foreshadow the “we” of the church (cf. John 1:14), which has been a missionary church from the very beginning. While Andrew referred to “the Messiah” (John 1:41), Philip's message consists of two statements that contradict each other. Jesus is first described as the one “of whom Moses wrote in the law and the prophets.” The phrase “the Law and the Prophets”⁴¹ refers to the

36 BRODIE (1993): 165.

37 KLAIBER, Walter (2017): *Das Johannesevangelium. Teilband 1: Joh 1,1–10,42* (BNT). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 61, points out: “Nachfolge besteht nicht nur darin, dass man hinter Jesus hergeht. Jesus zu folgen bedeutet auch, auf andere zuzugehen und ihnen von Jesus zu erzählen.”

38 According to John 21:2, Nathanael was from Cana of Galilee. SCHNELLE (2004): 65, believes that Nathanael was probably one of the leading figures in the early Johannine school.

39 WESTCOTT, Brooke Foss (1908): *The Gospel According to St. John: The Authorized Version with Introduction and Notes*. London, John Murray. 23, suggests that “the very mixture of Hebrew (Simon, Nathanael) and Greek (Andrew, Philip) names seems to indicate the representative character of this first group of disciples.”

40 MORRIS (1995): 143.

41 Cf. (with mention of Moses) Luke 16:29. 31; 24:27; Acts 26:22; 28:23; (only Law and Prophets) Matt 5:17; 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16; 24:44; Rom 3:21.

entirety of the Old Testament Scriptures.⁴² It is noteworthy that Philip does not refer to any specific Old Testament text here. He thus expresses that in Jesus there is the fulfilment of all the hopes and expectations that run like a thread through the entire history of the chosen people. In this way the significance of the person of Jesus is emphasized. He does not abolish what has hitherto been true for Israel but leads everything to fulfilment. Jesus himself, during his public ministry, communicates that Moses wrote about him (cf. John 5:46) and explicitly declares of himself, “The Scriptures testify on my behalf” (John 5:39). Philip’s assessment of the person of Jesus is extremely important, since he points out that those who want to remain faithful to Moses and the prophets must accept Jesus and recognize his true worth. Jesus is thus indirectly presented as the Messiah. This promised and expected Messiah is then surprisingly referred to by Philip as the son of Joseph of Nazareth.⁴³ This is a popular designation used to distinguish between other bearers of this name in Nazareth. Only unbelieving Jews, who deny his divine origin, speak of him in this way in the gospel (John 6:42: Jesus, son of Joseph).

Nathanael responds to Philip’s testimony with scepticism, with a questioning attitude, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46a).⁴⁴ These words are perhaps also an expression of a certain prejudice and general contempt: can there be any good

42 SCHNACKENBURG, Rudolf (1965): *Das Johannesevangelium*, I (HThK IV/1). Freiburg – Basel – Wien, Herder. 314.

43 Calvin trenchantly comments on Philip’s witness to Jesus, “He foolishly calls Jesus ‘the son of Joseph’ and out of ignorance calls him a Nazarene, but all the same, he leads Nathanael to none other than the Son of God who was born in Bethlehem.” CALVIN, John, (1994): *John*. (CCC). Wheaton, Crossway Books. 40 (The bold font is in the original).

44 STIBBE (1996): 40, notes the fact that Nathanael is the first of a number of named individuals who are distinctive to John’s story and that Nathanael, Nicodemus, and Lazarus are characters who receive detailed attention on the occasions when they appear.

thing that originated in Nazareth? Nathanael, then, takes offense at the insignificant origin of the Messiah. It is true that there was no prediction pointing to this city as the place of origin of the Messiah. Nazareth, in fact, never played any significant role in religious or political terms. It is not mentioned in the Old Testament anywhere, nor in the early rabbinic writings. The origin of Jesus connected with Nazareth may point to the freedom of a God who overturns all human expectations by allowing himself to be found in the very place where men would not have expected him. Just as no one has ever seen God (John 1:18), so no one can recognize on his own the one whom God has sent (John 1:10; cf. 8:19) and know “from where” he is (John 8:14; 9:29–30).

Philip does not let Nathanael’s objection put him in a bind. He does not try to present verbal evidence and refute his doubtful position. In such a situation, words will not help. Personal experience is needed to know Jesus in the first place! Philip therefore urges Nathanael, “Come and see” (John 1:46b):⁴⁵ by means of the same appeal Jesus won two disciples of John the Baptist (John 1:39). Jesus takes the initiative in meeting Nathanael. The evangelist John again communicates that Jesus knows people (cf. John 1:42): Jesus knows that Nathanael is an Israelite in whom there is no guile, i.e., there is no falsity. Jesus also knows quite personal things about him (John 1:48.50: “I saw you under the fig tree”). Nathanael, who is amazed at Jesus’ miraculous knowledge, utters the confession “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (John 1:49), which is addressed to Jesus. In John 1:50, Jesus then implies in his response that his true identity cannot be revealed by man but can only be revealed by himself.

45 The expression ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε is also found in John 11:34.

3. *Philip and Andrew in John 6:1–15*

The second place in John's gospel where Andrew and Philip are mentioned together is the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand in John 6:1–15, which has close parallels in the synoptic tradition (Mark 6:30–44; Matt 14:13–21; Luke 9:10b–17). This is the only miracle of Jesus' ministry in Galilee that is recounted in all four gospels.⁴⁶ This "gift miracle" (*Geschenkewunder*)⁴⁷ is not taken from any of the synoptic gospels, nor is it composed of multiple gospels, but is based on a tradition to which the author of Mark's gospel also had access. One of the many similarities between John and Mark is the same plot and the same numbers: five thousand men, five loaves and two fish, twelve baskets, two hundred denarii. But there are also several differences between the narratives.⁴⁸ According to Mark's gospel, the event of the feeding takes place on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee (cf. Mark 6:32–33, 45). According to John's gospel, the miracle of the feeding takes place on the eastern shore of this lake (cf. John 6:1. 17. 24), which corresponds to Luke's version, according to which this miracle took place in or near Bethsaida (Luke 9:10). In Mark, the miracle of the feeding is preceded by a reference to Jesus' compassion for the crowd and his teaching the multitude (Mk 6:34). In John

46 As for the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand (Mark 8:1–8), which is also found in Matt 15:32–29, it can be assumed that it is a doublet, i.e. a variant of the miracle in Mark 6:30–34. Luke does not mention the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand. It is part of the so-called great omission (Mark 6:45–8:26) and one example of Luke's effort to avoid doublets in his gospel.

47 THEISSEN, Gerd – MERZ, Annette (2001): *Der historische Jesus: Ein Lehrbuch*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 267: The miracle of the gift happens spontaneously, it is barely noticeable, but is nevertheless recognised in detail.

48 For a summary of the comparative elements of these stories, see BROWN, Raymond Edward (1966): *The Gospel according to John I–XII*, (AncB 29). New York, Doubleday. 236–250.

the scene is stylized in a peculiarly sublime manner. Jesus ascends the “mountain” (John 6:3: τὸ ὄρος), which here has a typological undertone – it is the site of theophany *par excellence*.⁴⁹ The mention of Jesus sitting down with his disciples on the mountain makes it clear that we have before us a “teaching scene”.⁵⁰ By mentioning the Passover, the evangelist John is alluding to the exodus from Egypt and the miracle of the manna. At the same time, through the eucharistic echoes (John 6:11), he links the miracle of the feeding with Jesus’ Passover.⁵¹

Unlike the synoptic gospels, where Jesus is depicted teaching and healing until the evening, so that feeding the weary crowd is an act of merciful assistance, in John’s gospel, when Jesus sees the large crowd coming to him, he takes the initiative on his own and asks Philip a question: “Where (πόθεν) are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” (John 6:5b). Since Philip was from Bethsaida (1:44) and therefore presumably knew the area, he is the natural person from whom Jesus asks where bread can be bought.⁵² Of course, Jesus’ question is neither due to his perplexity nor to his helplessness, as is quite clear from the evangelist’s explanation in John 6:6, which informs us of the motive for Jesus’ action.⁵³ The question to Philip in John 6:5 serves only to test⁵⁴ this disciple

49 The typological meaning of “mountain” is disputed: it may signify Jesus’ solitude (cf. John 6:15), it may be considered a place of revelation (cf. Mk 9:2), or it may refer to Moses’ typology (cf. Exod 19:3. 12; 24:15. 18; 34:1–2. 4). It is also possible to use the motif of the messianic banquet (Isa 2:2f; 25:6–10; 56:7; 66:20).

50 WENGST (2004): 231.

51 SCHNELLE (2004): 129–130.

52 Cf. KLINK III (2016): 303.

53 The verse contains Johannine stylistic features (regarding τοῦτο δὲ ἔλεγεν, cf. 7:39; 11:51; 12:33; regarding αὐτὸς γὰρ, cf. 2:25; 4:44; 6:64; 13:11). Cf. BULTMANN (1968): 157, n. 1.

54 It seems unlikely that the verb πειράζω is used here in the negative sense of ‘to tempt’. Cf. HAENCHEN, Ernst (1980): *Johannesevangelium: Ein Kommentar*, Busse, Ulrich (ed.). Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). 301; SCHWANK,

who recognized in Jesus the promised Messiah when he was called (John 1:45). This test is to see if Philip trusts Jesus to do what he intends.⁵⁵ Can Philip stand such a test? How is he to trust that Jesus will provide a meal for all present? The evangelist's comment in John 6:6, however, is primarily addressed to the readers of the gospel, who are not unfamiliar with the question with the term *πόθεν* "from where, whence" (cf. John 2:9; 3:8; 4:11; 7:27–28; 8:14; 9:29f; 19:9). Just as Jesus was the giver of wine (John 2:9) and living water (John 4:11), so now he is also the giver of bread.⁵⁶

Philip failed this test. He does not have a focused view of the sovereign wonder-worker Jesus, even though he has seen "his glory" at the wedding in Cana (John 2:11) and in many "signs" since. He thinks entirely in earthly categories. He proposes a market and economic solution to the problem at hand.⁵⁷ The amount mentioned – two hundred denarii⁵⁸ – is huge, but still not enough to solve this crisis.⁵⁹ Philip's words are meant to document the magnitude of the miracle that is subsequently depicted. Furthermore, it becomes clear that Philip here is thinking entirely in earthly terms and fails to appreciate what Jesus will do. The peculiarity of the Johannine version of the event of the miraculous feeding lies in the mention of the names of the disciples.

In John 6:8 Andrew takes the floor, and his introduction is remarkable. The verse gives the impression that Andrew, whom the reader is also already familiar with (cf. John 1:40), appears here

Benedikt (1998): *Evangelium nach Johannes: Erläutert für die Praxis*. St. Ottilien, EOS Verlag Erzabtei. 197; MICHAELS (2010): 344.

55 Jesus' sovereignty as a miracle worker is thus emphasized.

56 THEOBALD (2009): 431–432.

57 CARSON (1991): 269.

58 According to Matt 20:2, a denarius is the daily wage of a labourer. If we assume that in the land of Israel it was possible to work approximately 200 working days in agriculture, then 200 denarii correspond to the annual wage that a day labourer could at best earn. See further WENGST (2004): 232, n. 12.

59 The size of the miracle is magnified from the version in Mark's gospel, because in Mark 6:37 the sum of two hundred denarii is sufficient.

for the first time. First, the apparently new person is presented in general terms (“one of his disciples”), followed by his name (“Andrew”), and finally defined by a familial relationship (“brother of Simon Peter”). He seems to have been an anonymous person in the synoptic tradition, but the evangelist John, who clearly shows an interest in Philip and Andrew (cf. John 12:20–22), identifies him with Andrew.⁶⁰ In John 6:9a, Andrew first points to the boy (παῖδάριον)⁶¹ who has five barley loaves and two fish.⁶² To this he adds: “But what are these for so many people?” (John 6:9b). In his reasoning, too, Andrew remains in the realm of earthly facts, but this time what is immediately available is named. Given the situation, however, it is a negligible amount. Andrew’s words, like Philip’s earlier words, not only serve to emphasize the disciples’ helplessness⁶³ and their misunderstanding of Jesus but also serve the function of emphasizing the magnitude of the miracle. While Andrew is still sceptical, Jesus is already preparing a miracle.

60 THEOBALD (2009): 432.

61 The text does not say that Andrew “brings” the boy to Jesus. Thus BENNEMA, Cornelis (2009): *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John*. Milton Keynes – Colorado Springs, Paternoster. 52. Nor does the text say that Andrew “introduces” him to Jesus. Thus CULPEPPER, R. Alan (1983): *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*. Philadelphia, Fortress. 120. Andrew is merely indicating his presence to Jesus. There is no indication of any interaction between Jesus and the boy. Furthermore, as part of the crowd, the boy “came” (cf. John 6:5) to Jesus without the intervention of the disciples.

62 Using the term ἀριθμός “made of barley flour”, the loaves (John 6:9) are further defined and made consistent with the Old Testament story of the feeding of the hundred men by the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 4:42–44). Elisha fed the hundred men with twenty barley loaves; Jesus feeds the 5000 men with five barley loaves (John 6:10). Thus, e.g. SCHNACKENBURG, Rudolf (1971): *Das Johannesevangelium*, II (HThK IV/2). Freiburg – Basel – Wien, Herder. 20; KÖSTENBERGER (2004): 201. Barley (ἀριθμός) bread is the food of poor people. See further WENGST (2004): 232.

63 Cf. BORCHERT, Gerald L. (1996): *John 1–11* (NAC 25A) Nashville, Broadman & Holman. 253.

Thus, the doubting disciples are contrasted with the sovereignly acting miracle worker. The miracle of satiation is portrayed with remarkable simplicity: Jesus does not speak a single word to initiate a mighty act, nor does he use any extraordinary means, but acts as any man in a Jewish family would act. He takes the loaves and gives thanks. Unlike in the synoptics (Matt 14:19; Mark 6:41 Luke 9:16), he distributes the food, not the disciples. The distribution by Jesus himself is clearly Christological in its tendency to highlight Jesus as the giver of gifts and to affirm his sovereignty.⁶⁴

After feeding the crowd, Jesus instructs the disciples to gather the leftover bread (John 6:12). This corresponds to the Jewish custom of picking up the leftovers after a meal.⁶⁵ The magnitude of the miracle is emphasized by the fact that the twelve full baskets of scraps gathered are many times greater than the five loaves and two fish available to the boy. The twelve baskets can be interpreted as a reference to latter-day Israel and the circle of the twelve (cf. 6:67).⁶⁶ In John's narrative, the disciples conspicuously play no role in the actual feeding of the multitude; only Jesus takes care of that. The disciples serve only to emphasize the magnitude of Jesus' miracle in the feeding of the five thousand.

The mention of Philip and Andrew by name in the account of the event in John 6:1–15 might be an indication of legendary development,⁶⁷ but it is consistent with their prominence in John 1 in the context of their calling. They are, however, named in reverse order. The words of the two disciples illustrate a situation in

64 SCHNACKENBURG (1971): 23; BECKER, Jürgen (1979): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes, Kapitel 1–10* (ÖTKNT 4/1). Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus – Würzburg, Echter. 192.

65 STRACK, Hermann L. – BILLERBECK, Paul (1928): *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, IV/2. München, C. H. Beck. 625–626.

66 SCHNELLE (2004): 131.

67 DOOD, Charles Harold (1963): *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge, University Press. 206: “This individualizing of actors in a story is often, though not always, a sign of ‘legendary’ development.”

which Jesus, on his own initiative, is feeding a large crowd and the disciples are completely clueless and do not understand anything, even though Andrew confessed Jesus as the Messiah (John 1:41) and Philip recognized in him ‘the one about whom Moses wrote in the Law and the Prophets’ (John 1:45). Andrew and Philip clearly have much to learn. Together with the gospel reader, they will learn following Jesus’ discourse that he himself is the Bread of Life who came down from heaven (John 6:35. 38. 41. 50), and that they are not to “work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give them” (John 6:27). Finally, it may be noted that in John 6, which forms a literary unit,⁶⁸ three disciples who come from Bethsaida appear by name. At the beginning of this chapter the Eeangelist mentions Philip (John 6:5. 7) and Andrew (John 6:8), and at the end of it Peter (John 6:68), on behalf of the twelve, confesses Jesus as the Holy One of God (John 6:69). Despite the apostasy of many disciples from Jesus (John 6:66), twelve remain faithful to him, among whom Peter, Andrew, and Philip stand out in John’s gospel (cf. John 6:60–61. 67–69).

4. Philip and Andrew in John 12:20–36

John 12:20–36, which recount Jesus’ last public appearance, present Philip and Andrew as intermediaries for the Greeks who inquire about Jesus. The conclusion of their character arc is emphasised through the narrative structure: 12:20–36 in many ways parallels the call of the first disciples in 1:35–51. In both these texts we find common elements: 1) the presence of Andrew and Philip of Bethsaida (John 12:21 // 1:44); 2) Jesus’ self-identification as “Son

68 Cf. CROSSAN, John Dominic (1993): *It is Written: A Structuralist Analysis of John 6*. In: Stibbe, Mark W. G. (ed.): *The Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives* (NTTS 17). Leiden: Brill. 145–164.

of Man” (John 12:23. 34 // 1:51) with the account of his exaltation from earth to heaven (John 12:32 // 1:51); 3) the mention of angels (John 12:29 // 1:51). The textual unit of John 12:20–36, which is dense both literarily and theologically, is *en bloc* the work of the fourth evangelist, who included some sayings of Jesus from the synoptic tradition (John 12:25–26) and the Gethsemane scene (John 12:23. 27–28). With great creative power, the gospel writer found a fitting conclusion to Jesus’ public ministry: it is a view of Jesus’ death on the cross (John 12:24. 33), but which he considers to be the hour of the “exaltation” of the Son of Man (John 12:23. 32), and thus of Jesus’ glorification and victory (John 12:31–32).⁶⁹ The scene of Jesus’ solemn entry into Jerusalem in John 12:12–19 has the characteristics of a “quest story.” John’s version of this episode was characterized by a crowd coming out of Jerusalem to meet Jesus. The narrative of the arrival of the Greeks in John 12:20–36 can also be seen as such a quest story.⁷⁰ The “Greeks” are not interested in seeing Jesus as a result of the missionary activity of Andrew, Philip, or any other disciple of Jesus, but they want to see him of their own accord.

The term Ἕλληνας, used in John 12:20, does not refer to Greek-speaking Jews from the diaspora,⁷¹ but, as in John 7:35, it refers to Gentiles from the various Hellenized countries bordering Israel, not only from mainland Greece itself. The word “Greeks” therefore does not refer to nationality.⁷² In John 12:20, then, it

69 SCHNACKENBURG (1971): 477.

70 BEUTLER, Johannes (2013): *Das Johannesevangelium: Kommentar*. Freiburg, Herder. 357.

71 van TILBORG, Sjef (2005): *Das Johannes-Evangelium: Ein Kommentar für die Praxis*, überarbeitet von Rainer Dillmann und Detlev Dormeyer. Stuttgart, Katholisches Bibelwerk. 176; THYEN, Hartwig (2015): *Das Johannesevangelium* (HNT 6). Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). 556.

72 In Mark 7:26, the Syrophoenician woman is referred to as “Greek” (Ἕλληνίς), which precludes the use of this term to denote nationality.

refers to the proselytes⁷³ or God-fearers⁷⁴ who made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the Passover to “worship (God)” (προσκυνέω).⁷⁵ It seems that the evangelist John deliberately does not state the religious status of the Greeks quite accurately. The vagueness of this group, its unexpected appearance in the narrative, as well as its sudden disappearance, serves a communicative function. It can be assumed that the coming of the Greeks concretizes the Pharisees’ declaration: “Look, the world has gone after him!” (John 12:19). These Greeks belong to the “sheep that are not of this fold” (John 10:16), to the “scattered children of God” whom Jesus is to gather beyond the Jewish people into one group of his disciples (John 11:52). Thus, the coming of the Greeks points to a future when the Gentile world, unlike the Jews, will accept the gospel and believe in Jesus Christ.

The Greeks do not seek Jesus directly, but they make a request to Philip that they would like to see Jesus. Why they turned to one of the disciples instead of Jesus himself is not stated. Perhaps it

73 BROWN (1966): 466; de BOOR, Werner (¹²2000): *Das Evangelium des Johannes: 2. Teil, Kapitel 11 bis 21* (WSB). Wuppertal, R. Brockhaus. 55; MATTHEWS, Christopher R. (2002): *Philip: Apostle and Evangelist: Configurations of a Tradition* (NTS 105). Leiden, Brill. 114.

74 SCHNACKENBURG (1971): 478; BLANK, Josef (1981): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes, Teil 1b*, (GSL.NT 4/1b). Düsseldorf, Patmos. 308; BUSSE, Ulrich (1992): Die “Hellenen” Joh 12:20ff. und der sogenannte “Anhang” Joh 21. In: Segbroek, Frans van et alii (eds.): *The Four Gospels*, III (BETHL 100 C). Leuven, Leuven University Press. 2083–2100, here 2091; DSCHULNIGG, Peter (2000): *Jesus begegnen: Personen und ihre Bedeutung im Johannesevangelium* (Theologie 30). Münster, Lit Verlag. 45; KÖSTENBERGER (2004): 377; SCHNELLE (2004), 225.

75 The God-fearing (semi-proselytes) were not allowed to participate in the Passover feast (cf. Josephus states that “non-Jews/foreigners who were present at the service” were excluded from the Passover meal [*Bell.* 6.427]), but they could worship God and even perform some sacrificial rites in the court of the Gentiles. Cf. STRACK, Hermann L. – BILLERBECK, Paul (1924): *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, II. München, C. H. Beck. 548–551.

was because they were unsure if Jesus would accept the Gentiles. Philip, apparently sharing their hesitation (cf. Matt 10:5–6), does not immediately lead the Greeks to Jesus, but first introduces this request to Andrew.⁷⁶ Perhaps this is to emphasize that Andrew is in a position of leadership.⁷⁷ Together, Andrew and Philip then go and tell Jesus of the Greeks' request.⁷⁸ They are the only two disciples with Greek names, they come from Hellenized Bethsaida, and both of them apparently spoke Aramaic as well as Greek. This makes them ideally suited as intermediaries for the Greek pilgrims to Jesus.⁷⁹ So Philip and Andrew are together again, just as in John 6 Philip is mentioned first and then Andrew (in John 1 they are mentioned in reverse order). It is noteworthy that Andrew is not only the first (John 1:41) but also the last (John 12:22) disciple mentioned by name in the fourth gospel, in recounting Jesus' public ministry (John 1:19–12:50).⁸⁰

76 CARSON (1991): 437; BEASLEY-MURRAY, George R. (1999): *John* (WBC 36). Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 211. BERNARD, John Henry (1928): *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, II (ICC). Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark. 431: "Andrew is one of the inner circle of the Twelve, and perhaps might venture to proffer an unusual request to Jesus, where Philip would hesitate." MORRIS 1995, 526: "In his perplexity (Philip) sought out Andrew."

77 PETERSON (1958): 5.

78 The text literally reads: ἔρχεται Ἀνδρέας καὶ Φίλιππος καὶ λέγουσιν τῷ Ἰησοῦ. "Andrew went, also Philip, and they told Jesus."

79 PESCH, Rudolf (1992): Ἀνδρέας. In: Balz, Horst – Schneider, Gerhard (eds.): *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, I. Stuttgart – Berlin – Köln – Mainz, W. Kohlhammer. col. 229–230, here col. 230; KLAIBER, Walter (2018): *Das Johannesevangelium. Teilband 2: Job 11,1–21,25* (BNT). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 48. WIKENHAUSER, Alfred (1961): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (RNT 4). Regensburg, Pustet. 230, suggests that the Greeks may have come from one of the neighbouring Hellenistic cities in the Decapolis and were acquainted with Philip. Cf. KEENER, Craig S. (2012): *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, II. Grand Rapids, Baker Academic. 872.

80 Andrew's prominent position in the narrative has sometimes led to the suggestion that he might in fact be the Beloved Disciple. So BERGER, Klaus (1997): *Im Anfang war Johannes: Datierung und Theologie des vierten Evangeliums*.

Jesus does not respond to this request of the Greeks, which is communicated to him by Andrew and Philip (John 12:22), with a single word. Instead, he provides an explanation for his death (John 12:23).⁸¹ Thus, he does not grant the Greeks an immediate encounter, but by his words he indicates that the encounter with the members of the Gentile world who come to him will be the fruit of his death. It is only through a saving death that the people of the nations can find faith and through that, eternal life. The desire of the Greeks to see Jesus becomes the reason that Jesus speaks of the hour of the death and glorification of the Son of Man (John 12:23ff). This speech culminates in John 12:32 with the declaration that Jesus, who will be lifted up from the earth, will draw all to himself. This statement refers to the death on the cross (cf. John 12:33), through which all believers, including those from different nations, will receive eternal salvation.

At the end of Jesus' public ministry in John 12:20–36, there are people from the nations who are already spiritually close to Judaism and want to see Jesus. Their intermediaries with Jesus are the two disciples Philip and Andrew, who occupy a prominent position in John's gospel. Philip and Andrew, who obviously played an important role in the missionary work of the early church, were probably revered as outstanding missionaries,⁸² especially in the

Stuttgart: Quell Verlag. 96–106. This is very difficult to prove. Andrew is mentioned by name only in John 1–12, while the Beloved Disciple appears only in John 13–21.

81 Thomas Aquinas rightly noted: “It is important to know that Christ only preached to the Jews personally. But he preached to the Gentiles through the apostles. So this is already foretold here, insofar as the Gentiles who wanted to see Christ did not come to him directly, but to one of his disciples, namely Philip.” (Nr 1633) Cf. WEINGARTNER, Paul – ERNST, Michael – SCHÖNER, Wolfgang (eds.): *Thomas von Aquins Kommentar zum Johannesevangelium, Teil 2*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016. 162.

82 Cf. GNILKA, Joachim (1989): *Johannesevangelium* (NEB.NT 4). Würzburg, Echter Verlag. 100; THEOBALD (2009): 799.

church community to which the fourth gospel was addressed.⁸³ Just as Andrew and Philip were presented with missionary activity in their first appearance in John's gospel (John 1:35–51), so too now in John 12:20–36 their missionary significance is emphasized. In John's gospel they stand out among Jesus' disciples through this characteristic. In the event of the miraculous feeding in John 6:1–15, where Philip and Andrew also appear together, their role as missionaries is not made explicit. However, since this event is localized in John's gospel to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, it cannot be ruled out that people from Gentile nations are indirectly included alongside the Jewish participants in the meal and that a missionary perspective is thus emphasized.

5. Philip in John 14:8–11

The verses John 14:1–17, in which Jesus speaks of his going to the Father and which are part of the first farewell discourse (John 13:31–14:31), are the last place we meet Philip in John's gospel. His name is mentioned two times (John 14:8, 9). Jesus' discourse on going to the Father (John 14:1–17) begins with the announcement of his departure and return (John 14:1–3). The disciples are to be prepared to be left alone. They are given promises (in the future tense): I will take you to myself (John 14:3), you will know my Father also (John 14:7), you will do even greater works (John 14:12). Alongside this there is also the imperative: believe (John 14:1, 11: always twice). The promises and the requirement to believe are joined. From the group of disciples, Thomas (John 14:5–7) and Philip (John 14:8–11) stand out as their representatives who turn to Jesus. It is striking that Jesus speaks to one of them in the plural "you" (John 14:7) and to the other in the singular "you" (John

83 SCHNELLE (2004): 226.

14:9–10).⁸⁴ Philip’s request is preceded by the word of Thomas, which is also introduced by the address κύριε “Lord” (John 15:5; cf. 14:8). Thomas speaks of not knowing where Jesus is going. Jesus responds with a solemn threefold predication introduced by “I am” (“I am the way, the truth, and the life,” John 14:6a), to which he adds a negatively phrased soteriological statement (“no one comes to the Father except through me,” John 14:6b). The three-part “I am” can be seen as the culminating formulation of all seven predications in John’s gospel that are introduced by “I am.”⁸⁵ As the only way that leads to the goal, Jesus is the revelation of God and eternal life, and according to John, God can only be known and found through him and through faith in him. Whoever knows Jesus has also known the Father (John 14:7). John the evangelist ties the understanding of God exclusively to the person of Jesus. Who God is can only be discerned from Jesus. According to John 14:8, Philip turns to Jesus in this situation and asks, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” It seems that seeing and knowing the Father through Jesus is not enough for him. It also expresses the desire of the human race and the desire of all religions, the desire to see God.⁸⁶ The Old Testament testifies how Moses asked for and received a limited vision of God’s glory (Exod 33:18; cf. 24:10). Isaiah received a vision of “the Lord sitting on a high and lofty throne” (Isa 6:1) and later predicted that the glory of the Lord would be revealed in the day of the Messiah (Isa 40:5). In Jesus’ day, many Jews longed for a direct encounter with God. In keeping with the Old Testament, the evangelist John denies the possibility of a direct vision of God not mediated by Jesus

84 Cf. GNILKA (1989): 111.

85 WILCKENS (2000): 223.

86 SCHENKE, Ludger (1998): *Johannes: Kommentar*. Düsseldorf, Patmos. 285; BEASLEY-MURRAY 21999, 253. See also KORTEWEG, Theodoor (1979): *The Reality of the Invisible: Some Remarks on St John XIV 8 and Greek Philosophic Tradition*. In: Vermaseren, Maarten Jozef (ed.): *Studies in Hellenistic Religions* (EPRO 78). Leiden, Brill. 50–102.

(John 1:18; 5:37; 6:46). For this reason, Philip's request is utter foolishness.⁸⁷ There is a certain irony in Philip's words "and it is enough for us" because the disciple does not show himself to be too modest. Is it a coincidence that the verb ἄρκέω "be enough, sufficient" in John's gospel occurs only in Philip's words at the miracle of the feeding (John 6:7)? Is this allusion meant to remind us that Philip witnessed that great sign, and yet Jesus' revelation to him was not enough?⁸⁸ While on the one hand the evangelist John presents Philip as a man who is ready to believe, who acts as a missionary (cf. John 1:43–47), and who plays the role of mediator between the people Jesus attracts and Jesus himself (John 12:21–22), on the other hand he also portrays him as a man who has difficulty understanding Jesus' intentions (John 6:5–7) and his true identity (John 14:8–11). This seems to be why the evangelist John sees Philip as well suited to illuminate the still insufficient faith of the disciples through his plea in John 14:8.

It is noteworthy that Philip does not appear here together with Andrew, but is mentioned in connection with Thomas, who also appears in an active role on behalf of the disciples. The mention here of Thomas, who represents the disciples' attitude of incomprehension and heavy-handed faith, must be put in connection with the Easter events in John's gospel. To Thomas, who had hitherto understood Jesus only in earthly terms, his divine dimension is revealed by the risen Jesus himself. In his encounter with the risen Jesus, he comes to faith in him who is the giver of indestructible eternal life. Thomas's personal confession of faith, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28), brings to a close a series of

87 BULTMANN (1968): 470. MOLONEY, Francis J. (1998): *The Gospel of John* (SP 4). Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press. 396, says that Philip is "exasperatingly ignorant".

88 SCHNACKENBURG, Rudolf (1975): *Das Johannesevangelium*, III (HThK IV/3). Freiburg – Basel – Wien, Herder. 77.

confessions in John's gospel (John 1:49; 4:42; 6:69; 9:37–38; 11:27; 16:30; 20:16) which reach their climax in his words.

6. Summary and Conclusion

It is characteristic of the gospel of John, which does not list the twelve disciples, and which does not mention the appointment of this group, that it gives the individual names of the disciples. Through this, these disciples stand out as individual personalities. Philip (mentioned 12 times by name) and Andrew (mentioned 5 times by name) are among the most frequently mentioned disciples in John's gospel, along with Simon Peter and Thomas. These two disciples appear side by side three times in John's gospel (John 1:35–51; 6:1–15; 12:20–36). They form a kind of pair, although they are not brothers. Philip and Andrew are the only disciples of Jesus who have Greek names. It can be assumed that Philip and Andrew came from the Jewish population of Bethsaida, which had been influenced by Hellenistic culture, and that they were probably among those who spoke both Aramaic and Greek. Andrew is called through the witness of John the Baptist, while Philip is called directly by Jesus. Thus, it is undoubtedly emphasized that indirect calling through a person also leads to a personal encounter with Jesus. Both Andrew and Philip seek to be missionaries immediately after their call. Andrew seeks out his brother Simon and brings him to Jesus (John 1:41–42). Similarly, Philip seeks out Nathanael and brings him to Jesus (John 1:45–47). Andrew confesses Jesus as the Messiah (John 1:41). Philip declares that Jesus is the one of whom Moses wrote in the Law and the Prophets (John 1:45) and so indirectly also confesses him as the Messiah. Thus, it is emphasized that being a disciple must be accomplished through missionary activity. The mention of Philip and Andrew by name in the account of the event of the feeding of the five thousand in John 6:1–15 corresponds to their prominence in John 1:35–51 in

the context of their calling. However, they are named in reverse order. The words of both Philip (John 6:7) and Andrew (John 6:9) speak of their helplessness and misunderstanding of Jesus but also serve to emphasize the greatness of Jesus' miracle. The third and last time Philip and Andrew appear side by side is at the end of Jesus' public ministry in John 12:20–36, when they are approached by Greeks who would like to see Jesus. These two disciples are, by their origin, suitable intermediaries for people from Gentile nations who are already sympathetic to Judaism and who are attracted to Jesus. Andrew is not only the first (John 1:41) but also the last (John 12:22) disciple whom the fourth evangelist mentions by name in his account of Jesus' public ministry (John 1:19–12:50).

Philip is then mentioned again in John 14:8–11, which belongs to the second main part of John's gospel, which contains Jesus' revelation to the disciples (John 13:1–20:31). Although on the one hand the evangelist John presents Philip as a man who is ready to believe, who is missionary (cf. John 1:43–47), and who plays the role of mediator between the people whom Jesus attracts and Jesus himself (John 12:21–22), on the other hand he also portrays him as one who has difficulty understanding Jesus' intentions (John 6:5–7) and his true identity (John 14:8–11). For the first time in John's gospel, Philip does not appear with Andrew but is mentioned in connection with Thomas (John 14:5–7), who also represents the disciples' attitude of incomprehension and awkward faith. Thomas undoubtedly stands out alongside Philip because of his role in the context of the Easter events. For Thomas, who like Philip and Andrew understood Jesus only in earthly terms, his divine dimension is revealed by the risen Jesus himself, leading him to a personal confession, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28), which is the highest Christological confession in John's gospel. According to the gospel of John, the way to coming to faith in Jesus Christ is not the result of verifiable arguments, but is the gracious gift of God, or the gift of the risen Jesus (cf. John 6:44–45).

Bibliography

- BACKHAUS, Knut (1991): *Die "Jüngerkreise" des Täufers Johannes: Eine Studie zu den religionsgeschichtlichen Ursprüngen des Christentums* (PaThSt 19). Paderborn, Schöningh.
- BEASLEY-MURRAY, George R. (1999): *John* (WBC 36). Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers.
- BECKER, Jürgen (1979): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes, Kapitel 1–10* (ÖTKNT 4/1). Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus – Würzburg, Echter.
- BENNEMA, Cornelis (2009): *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John*. Milton Keynes – Colorado Springs, Paternoster, 2009.
- BERGER, Klaus (1997): *Im Anfang war Johannes: Datierung und Theologie des vierten Evangeliums*. Stuttgart: Quell Verlag.
- BERNARD, John Henry (1928): *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John, I* (ICC). Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark.
- BERNARD, John Henry (1928): *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John, II* (ICC). Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark.
- BEUTLER, Johannes (2013): *Das Johannesevangelium: Kommentar*. Freiburg, Herder.
- BLANK, Josef (1977): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes, Teil 3* (GSLNT 4/3). Düsseldorf, Patmos.
- BLANK, Josef (1981): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes, Teil 1b*, (GSLNT 4/1b). Düsseldorf, Patmos.
- de BOER, Martinus C. (2013): Andrew: The First Link in the Chain. In: Hunt, Steven A. –Tolmie, D. Francois – Zimmermann, Ruben (eds.): *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (WUNT 314). Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. 137–150.
- de BOOR, Werner (1999): *Das Evangelium des Johannes: 2. Teil, Kapitel 11 bis 21* (WSB). Wuppertal, R. Brockhaus.

- BORCHERT, Gerald L. (1996): *John 1–11* (NAC 25A) Nashville, Broadman & Holman.
- BRODIE, Thomas L. (1993): *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary*. New York – Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- BROWN, Raymond Edward (1966): *The Gospel according to John I–XII*, (AncB 29). New York, Doubleday.
- BULTMANN, Rudolf (¹⁰1968): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, (KEK). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- BUSSE, Ulrich (1992): Die “Hellenen” Joh 12:20ff. und der sogenannte “Anhang” Joh 21. In: Segbroek, Frans van et alii (eds.): *The Four Gospels*, III (BETHL 100 C), Leuven, Leuven University Press. 2083–2100.
- CALVIN, John, (1994): *John*. (CCC). Wheaton, IL, Crossway Books.
- CARSON, Donald A. (1991): *The Gospel According to John* (PNTC). Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press – Grand Rapids, Eerdmans.
- CROSSAN, John Dominic (1993): It is Written: A Structuralist Analysis of John 6. In: Stibbe, Mark W. G. (ed.): *The Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives* (NTTS 17). Leiden: Brill. 145–164.
- CULPEPPER, R. Alan (1983): *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*. Philadelphia, Fortress.
- DIETZFELBINGER, Christian (2001): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes. Teilband 1: Johannes 1–12* (ZBK 4.1). Zürich, Theologischer Verlag.
- DOOD, Charles Harold (1963): *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge, University Press.
- DSCHULNIGG, Peter (2000): *Jesus begegnen: Personen und ihre Bedeutung im Johannesevangelium* (Theologie 30). Münster, Lit Verlag.
- GNILKA, Joachim (³1989): *Johannesevangelium* (NEB.NT 4). Würzburg, Echter Verlag.
- GRASSO, Santi (2008): *Il Vangelo di Giovanni: Commento esegetico e teologico*. Roma, Città Nuova.

- HAENCHEN, Ernst (1980): *Johannesevangelium: Ein Kommentar*, Busse, Ulrich (ed.). Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).
- KEENER, Craig S. (2012): *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, II. Grand Rapids, Baker Academic.
- KLAIBER, Walter (2017): *Das Johannesevangelium. Teilband 1: Job 1,1–10,42* (BNT). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- KLAIBER, Walter (2018): *Das Johannesevangelium. Teilband 2: Job 11,1–21,25* (BNT). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- KLINK III, Edward W. (2016): *John* (ZECNT). Grand Rapids, Zondervan Academic.
- KOESTER, Craig R. (2003): *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*. Minneapolis, Fortress Press.
- KÖSTENBERGER, Andreas J. (2004): *John* (BECNT). Grand Rapids, Baker Academic.
- KORTEWEG, Theodoor (1979): The Reality of the Invisible: Some Remarks on St John XIV 8 and Greek Philosophic Tradition. In: Vermaseren, Maarten Jozef (ed.): *Studies in Hellenistic Religions* (EPRO 78). Leiden, Brill. 50–102.
- LIDDEL, Henry George – SCOTT, Robert (1996): *A Greek-English Lexicon: With a Revised Supplement 1996*, revised and augmented throughout by Henry Stuart Jones with the assistance of Roderic McKenzie and with the cooperation of many scholars. Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- LINDARS, Barnabas (1986): *The Gospel of John* (NCeB). Grand Rapids, Eerdmans.
- MATTHEWS, Christopher R. (2002): *Philip: Apostle and Evangelist: Configurations of a Tradition* (NT.S 105). Leiden, Brill.
- MCHUGH, John F. (2009): *John 1–4: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, ed. Graham N. Stanton (ICC). London, T & T Clark International.
- MICHAELS, J. Ramsey (2010): *The Gospel of John* (NICNT). Grand Rapids, Eerdmans.
- MOLONEY, Francis J. (1998): *The Gospel of John* (SP 4). Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press.

- MORRIS, Leon (1995): *The Gospel according to John* (NICNT). Grand Rapids, Eerdmanns.
- PESCH, Rudolf (1980): Ἀνδρέας. In: Balz, Horst – Schneider, Gerhard (eds.): *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, I. Stuttgart – Berlin – Köln – Mainz, W. Kohlhammer.
- PETERSON, Peter M. (1958): *Andrew, Brother of Simon Peter: His History and Legends* (NT.S 1). Leiden, Brill.
- REDDITT, Paul L. (1992): Philip. In Freedman, David Noel (ed.): *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5. New York, Doubleday. 310.
- RIDDERBOS, Herman N. (1997): *The Gospel according to John: A Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans.
- SCHENKE, Ludger (1998): *Johannes: Kommentar*. Düsseldorf, Patmos.
- SCHNACKENBURG, Rudolf (1965): *Das Johannesevangelium*, I (HThK IV/1). Freiburg – Basel – Wien, Herder.
- SCHNACKENBURG, Rudolf (1971): *Das Johannesevangelium*, II (HThK IV/2). Freiburg – Basel – Wien, Herder.
- SCHNACKENBURG, Rudolf (1975): *Das Johannesevangelium*, III (HThK IV/3). Freiburg – Basel – Wien, Herder.
- SCHNEIDER, Gerhard (1992): Φίλιππος. In Balz, Horst – Schneider, Gerhard (eds.): *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, III. Stuttgart – Berlin – Köln – Mainz, W. Kohlhammer. col. 1020–1021.
- SCHNELLE, Udo (2004): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (ThHK 4). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- SCHWANK, Benedikt (1998): *Evangelium nach Johannes: Erläutert für die Praxis*. St. Ottilien, EOS Verlag Erzabtei.
- SCHÜRER, Emil (1991): *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ: (175 B.C. – A.D. 135)*, II. Vermes, Geza – Millar, Fergus – Vermes, Pamela – Black, Matthew (eds.). Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark.
- STIBBE, Mark W. G. (1996): *John*. Sheffield, Academic Press.
- STRACK, Hermann L. – BILLERBECK, Paul (1924): *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, II. München, C. H. Beck.

- STRACK, Hermann L. – BILLERBECK, Paul (1928): *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, IV/2. München, C. H. Beck.
- TALBERT, Charles H. (1992): *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles*. New York, Crossroad.
- THEISSEN, Gerd – MERZ, Annette (²2001): *Der historische Jesus: Ein Lehrbuch*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- THEOBALD, Michael (2009): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes: Kapitel 1–12* (RNT). Regensburg, Friedrich Pustet.
- THYEN, Hartwig (²2015): *Das Johannesevangelium* (HNT 6). Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).
- van TILBORG, Sjef (2005): *Das Johannes-Evangelium: Ein Kommentar für die Praxis*, überarbeitet von Rainer Dillmann und Detlev Dormeyer. Stuttgart, Katholisches Bibelwerk.
- WEINGARTNER, Paul – ERNST, Michael – SCHÖNER, Wolfgang (eds.): *Thomas von Aquins Kommentar zum Johannesevangelium, Teil 2*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016.
- WENGST, Klaus (²2004): *Das Johannesevangelium. 1 Teilband: Kapitel 1–10* (ThKNT 4,1). Stuttgart – Berlin – Köln, Kohlhammer.
- WESTCOTT, Brooke Foss (1908): *The Gospel According to St. John: The Authorized Version with Introduction and Notes*. London, John Murray.
- WIKENHAUSER, Alfred (³1961): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (RNT 4). Regensburg, Pustet.
- WILCKENS, Ulrich (²2000): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD 4). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- ZUMSTEIN, Jean (2016): *Das Johannesevangelium* (KEK 2). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Is It All About Money?

Ananias and Sapphira in an Ecclesiological Reading

Mihai Ciurea¹

Abstract

This article aims to give a fresh ecclesiological reading of the biblical account of Ananias and Sapphira's death in Acts 5:1-11. The pericope marks a pivotal moment in Luke's theological narrative, which disrupts the „golden age” depiction of early Church (Acts 2-5) and highlights the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. It also expresses the ecclesial expansion amid conflict with Jewish authorities. In accordance with the traditional Chrysostomic interpretation, this analysis argues that Luke's theological intent is to demonstrate the Church's ontological unity and the severe consequences of any internal discord, exemplifying this in relation to financial matters. The narrative structure, including its gradual diptych presentation and surrounding summaries, reveals that the story serves as a critical example of the Church's shared integrity and its role in spreading the gospel. Ananias and Sapphira's deceit represents a profound internal threat, a sin against the *pneuma*, illustrating the importance of morality and unity within the *ekklesia*. This account underscores the eschatological dimension of the Church and its reliance on the Spirit's guidance, furthermore points to the importance of individual responsibility in divine judgement, and shows the essential nature of sharing goods within the Christian community. Luke's portrayal of this episode not only addresses the ethical implications of material wealth but

1 University of Craiova, Faculty of Orthodox Theology; email: ciureamihaijr@yahoo.co.uk.

also reveals the Church's resilience and the divine protection against both internal and external challenges.

Keywords: Ananias and Sapphira, ecclesiology, unity, pneuma, money, sacrilege

1. Preliminary considerations

The biblical account of Ananias' and Sapphira's violent death (Acts 5:1-11) constitutes the ultimate drama in Lucanian theology, which is finally intended to provoke „great fear” (v. 11) all throughout the early Church. One could be surprised by the violence of this episode, particularly by the lack of any possibility for conversion, given the author's well-known tendency to moderate his narrations of internal conflicts. Thus, the pericope presents itself both as a fracture in the depiction of the „golden age” of Christianity (Acts 2-5) and as an outlying element within Luke's theology. The text is constructed like a diptych, one panel focusing on the husband (vv. 1-6) and the other on his wife (vv. 7-11). Most commentaries rely on an external hermeneutic canon by observing the perspective constructed by the author in the organization of his narrative. The Church Fathers focus on the dogmatic (development of ecclesiology), ethical (sacrilege, rejection of greed), or institutional (exaltation of Peter's authority) aspects. Modern exegesis has developed five types of interpretations: etiological, Qumranic, typological, institutional, and historical-salvific.²

2 For more details about the five types of interpretation on this particular episode of the Acts, see MARGUERAT, Daniel (1993): *La mort d'Ananias et Sapphira (Ac 5:1-11) dans la stratégie narrative de Luc*. In *NTS* 39, 209–226; BROWN, Paul B. (1969): *The Meaning and Function of Acts 5:1-11 in the Purpose of Luke-Acts*. Boston University School of Theology. 51–92.

A more recent reading observes the text itself and focuses on the process of contextualization employed by the author. A first analysis focuses on the immediate context, which employs an economic vocabulary. It consists of a summary (4:32-35), which introduces the principle of sharing among the early Christians, followed by the two scenes, each presenting an application of this principle: the exemplary case – Barnabas (4:36-37), and the counter-example – Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11). However, a second summary that follows our scene, focusing on the miraculous activity of the apostles (Acts 5:12-16), invites us to broaden our perspective to a larger new context: Acts 2-5. This first section of the book is marked by a first major summary (2:42-47), which has its *inclusio* in 5:42. It appears that the description is not only marked by summaries but also governed by a repeating structure (with some variations) that presents the following elements in succession: *summary* — *event (scene)* — *interpretation (speech)* — *contrasting effect*. This arrangement rhetorically implies that the scene illustrates and embodies the thesis proposed by each narrative summary within the fellowship of love. In other words, it is undeniable that, within the Lucan vision, the Church's missionary effectiveness and growth, as given by God, depend on one essential factor: the communion of believers. From the first to the third summary, the narrative accelerates in this growth of success, and the sequence from 4:32 to 5:11 plays a crucial role. Ultimately, this large narrative section of Acts 2:42-5:42 describes how the Spirit of Pentecost had seized the first Christian community, gathered around the apostolic group, to establish and amplify that, in the context of an open crisis with the Jewish religious authorities. Even though the sequence from Acts 4:32–5:11 does not perfectly align with the general story that highlights the rising hostility from the Jewish authorities, its decisive role in the community's success is evident in the religious fear that surrounds it like an aura (5:5b, 11).³

3 MARGUERAT, Daniel (2002): *The First Christian Historian: Writing the 'Acts of*

Therefore, four main points can be identified from this perspective. Firstly, the growth of the community depends on a vital factor, which is the communion of believers, as an ontological quality of the Church. Secondly, the fraud of Ananias and Sapphira marks a shift from an external threat to an internal conflict within the community, which has serious consequences for the expansion of the missionary movement. Thirdly, the first occurrence of the term *ekklesia* (5:11) presents the Jerusalem assembly as the archetypal model of every Christian community and a prototype of the eschatological community of salvation, a status achieved through God's judgement. Fourthly, the offending act of the couple is put in the context of the needs of others and the construction of a communion of love. It is not about sacrilege but rather the offence has an ethical dimension with regards to sharing goods within the community.

Thus, Luke's rhetoric focuses on the intra-communitarian perspective, and the reader is suggestively placed inside this circle. In contrast, the reasons for Ananias and Sapphira's act, external and contrary to that spirit, remain incomprehensible, and individual responsibility becomes obvious with the exclusion of the community from guilt. The measure corresponds *stricto sensu* to an excommunication. This communal register is also not contradicted by the figure of Peter, whose powerful words are the work of the Holy Spirit, and the theological interpretation of the deceit is placed within the framework of the eternal battle between God and Satan.⁴ The judgment of God, as a manifestation of divine power, descends upon the community to protect it. Therefore, Luke does not unfold the drama of individual salvation threatened by a criminal act, but instead reports how the early community, endangered while facing Israel, was saved from division by God's

the Apostles' (SNTSMS 121), Trans. by K. McKinney, G. J. Laughery and R. Bauckham. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 155–178.

4 FITZMYER, Joseph A. (1989): Satan and Demons in Luke-Acts. In *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of his Teaching*, New York, Paulist Press. 146–174.

practical judgment. Ananias and Sapphira serve as examples here to demonstrate God's intervention, which transforms the community threatened by internal crisis into His *ekklesia*. In this battle against the Church, Satan has invaded the territory that was supposed to be filled with the Spirit. By opposing the Holy Spirit in this way, Ananias and Sapphira have contradicted the *koinonia*, putting the community in danger. Nevertheless, the activity of the Spirit-filled community is an activity of the Logos, and this power of the Word provokes a sacred fear, as the human response to the epiphany of divine power. God overcomes an obstacle of the spread of the gospel, in a terrifying manner, strengthening the community weakened by an act that wounded its unity. Surprisingly, Ananias and Sapphira are united (*symphonesai*) in their deceit, and their complicity has detached them from the community. Complicit in the fraud, the couple has formed a faction against the ecclesial group, substituting their collusion for the shared bond of the believers, recalling the original couple at the beginning of creation.

Hence, lying to the Spirit constitutes, in the Acts narrative, the original sin within the Church. The conclusion of Acts 5 is that the *ekklesia* is a community of imperfect members, but God's judgment safeguards its communion. In light of the judgment on Ananias and Sapphira, which prefigures the eschatological judgment, the ethics of sharing goods takes on extreme gravity. Mammon, the destroyer of life, is also a destroyer of the Church. The crime is lying about the fullness of the commitment to God. While the judgment of God on the cursed couple belongs to the time of origins and cannot be repeated as such, the call to share goods always remains in His Church. The literary genre of the origin narrative explains both the marvellous aspect of the story (the Church's irresistible growth) and its tragic dimension (the sudden deaths of two individuals without any display of compassion from the narrator). The text is marked by two opposing and mutually exclusive plenitudes: one pertains to the work of the Spirit, which leads to a confident testimony of the Logos; the other is the

work of Satan, which leads to holding back for oneself. Satan has invaded the heart (*kardia*), the centre of the believer's personality, which should have been filled with the Holy Spirit. Satan raised Ananias against the *pneuma*, and this opposition brings about death. That is why Peter says that the lie was not to men but to God (5:3). The lie to the *pneuma*, a repetition of the original sin, constitutes in the narrative of Acts the unpardonable sin within the Church. Ultimately, the offense lies in the failure to recognize the evident truth that the selfless management of goods is indeed an ontological dimension of the Church, and in the deception regarding the totality of one's commitment to it.⁵

2. The Ecclesiological Implications of the Ananias and Sapphira's account in the book of Acts (5:1-11)

The story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11 is a fascinating and sobering narrative, which presents not only a personal failure but also addresses profound theological and ecclesiological concerns within the life of the early Church. This passage, brief yet powerful, paints a vivid picture of the serious consequences of deception within the community of believers. However, it also offers a deeper reflection on the workings of the Holy Spirit, the power of the spoken Word, and the sanctity of the ecclesial body. This text serves as a powerful theological anchor for understanding the essential qualities that must characterize the Church and the gravity of maintaining purity within the community of believers.⁶

5 Ibid. 163–164.

6 For the community life in Acts as a result of the Spirit's work, see TURNER, Max (1996): *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (JPTSup 9). Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press. 266–315.

To understand the gravity of Ananias and Sapphira's sin, it is essential to consider the context in which their story unfolds. In Acts 4, Luke portrays a community characterized by radical generosity, unity, and mutual care. As described in Acts 4:32-35, the early believers were „of one heart and soul” (*kardia kai psyche mia*; v. 32) and shared all things in common (*panta koina*). This unity was not merely a communal ideal, but a tangible manifestation of the Holy Spirit's presence among them. The Spirit had been poured out upon the apostles and believers, empowering them to live in extraordinary ways, including the self-sacrificial sharing of resources. Those who owned land or houses sold their possessions and brought the proceeds to the apostles for the common good (Acts 4:34-35). This practice of radical generosity was a powerful witness to the world of the transformative power of the gospel. Among these early believers, one figure, Barnabas, stood out. In Acts 4:36-37, he sold a field and laid the proceeds at the apostles' feet. His generosity was not only material but symbolic, serving as an example of selfless giving and commitment to the well-being of the community. His actions epitomized the ideal of a truly Spirit-filled community, one in which personal sacrifice for the greater good became a natural outflow of God's love. Barnabas' example was widely praised, and his actions contributed to the growing reputation of the early Church.⁷ The unity of the Church had remained the foundation of the Christian mission's success, just as the outcome of this mission fosters a sense of fraternal communion.⁸

7 DUPONT, Jacques (1979): Community of Goods in the Early Church. In *The Salvation of the Gentiles: Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, Trans. John R. Keating. New York, Paulist Press. 85–102.

8 BOVON, François (1987): *L'œuvre de Luc. Études d'exégèse et de théologie* (Lectio divina 130). Paris, Cerf. 220.

In stark contrast to Barnabas, Ananias and Sapphira's actions represent a betrayal of the very values that the community was founded upon. The couple, like many others, sold a piece of property with the intention of bringing the proceeds to the apostles. However, they conspired together to keep part of the money for themselves, presenting only a portion of it and claiming that it was the full amount. This lie, although seemingly insignificant in comparison to their grand acts of generosity, was a direct assault on the community's integrity. In essence, they sought to maintain the appearance of sacrificial giving without the accompanying cost. Peter's response to Ananias makes it clear that this sin was far more serious than simple dishonesty. In Acts 5:3, Peter confronts him, saying, „Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” The very nature of the fraud was that it sought to mislead not only the apostles but also the Holy Spirit. This act of lying to the Spirit revealed a profound fracture in the community's unity. It exposed a willingness to compromise the truth for personal gain, which undermined the very foundation upon which the community was built.

A crucial theological theme in this passage is the power of the spoken word. The entire narrative is framed by the effects of what is said. When Ananias is confronted, Peter does not simply express disappointment; he pronounces a judgment based on the truth that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him. The words of Peter carry divine weight. Peter's words expose the deception and pronounce immediate divine judgment upon Ananias. In the moment that Ananias hears the apostle's words, he falls dead (Acts 5:5). This connection between speech and judgement is not incidental. Throughout Acts, the spoken word is the means by which the Church's life is established and the gospel is proclaimed. The apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit, speak the truth with boldness, and it is through their words that both life and death are enacted. Ananias and Sapphira's offense illustrates the power of the word in the most dramatic way possible. Their lie to the Holy Spirit, exposed through Peter's words, brings death to their lives.

The word is not only a vehicle for communicating the gospel's message of life but also a vehicle for judgment when the truth is suppressed.⁹

In Luke's theology, the word is not just a concept or an abstract principle; it is a living force. It is the word of God that brings life as well as has the power to bring judgment. Throughout the narrative of Acts, the spoken word shapes the direction of the Church's mission. In Acts 2:37, the people are "cut to the heart" by the words of Peter's sermon, leading to their repentance and baptism. The words spoken by the apostles carries the power to convict, to heal, and to transform. In Acts 4:31, the apostles are filled with the Spirit and speak the word of God with boldness, further expanding the reach of the gospel. In the case of Ananias and Sapphira, the word spoken by Peter—exposing their deceit—also serves as purification for the community. This episode emphasizes the role of the word as a means of protection for the community of faith. The word is not only a tool for spreading the Gospel but also a means of maintaining the Church's integrity and holiness. The immediate consequences for Ananias and Sapphira underscore the importance of truthfulness within the ecclesial body and highlight the severe danger of sin that undermines the community's unity.

The judgment that falls upon Ananias and Sapphira is not only a consequence of their sin but also a powerful manifestation of the holiness and sovereignty of God. When the truth is revealed and the deception is exposed, „great fear came upon all who heard of it" (Acts 5:5, 11). This fear is not a terror of arbitrary punishment, but a reverential awe in response to the holy presence of God in the community. This fear is not a "terror of the sacred" but a healthy fear that results from encountering God's righteous judgment. The fear that grips the community serves to purify the believers, reminding them of the holiness of the God they

9 PILGRIM, Walter E. (1981): *Pilgrim, Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House. 148–151.

serve and the seriousness with which they must approach their life together. Far from stifling the Church's mission, this fear serves to heighten its urgency. The holiness of God calls the community to live with integrity, transparency, and authenticity. This fear, therefore, becomes an essential aspect of the community's witness. The Church is not merely a gathering of individuals, but a holy people set apart for God's purposes. Ananias and Sapphira's judgment serves as an unambiguous reminder of this calling.

Through the emphasis on Ananias and Sapphira's deaths, the narrative emphasizes the importance of maintaining purity within the community. Acts 5:11 records that „great fear came upon the whole Church and upon all who heard of these things.” As mentioned above, the fear here is not paralyzing, but a reverential response to the holiness of God. The Church, as the body of Christ, is called to live in holiness, reflecting God's character to the world. The actions of Ananias and Sapphira threaten the purity of the community, and God's swift judgment serves as a reminder that the Church must be set apart, maintaining its integrity in both its actions and its witness. This account reinforces the idea that the Church is not simply a human institution; it is a divine community that exists under the sovereignty of God. The judgment of Ananias and Sapphira underscores the fact that God is actively involved in preserving the purity of His Church. The word, as proclaimed through the apostles, plays a key role in both the establishment and the purification of the Church. The words spoken by the apostles carry the authority of God and are the means by which the community is both built up and held accountable. Therefore, the biblical account of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11 offers a powerful ecclesiological reflection on the nature of the Church. It highlights the seriousness with which the early Christian community approached its mission and the need for purity and integrity within the body of believers.¹⁰

10 See EVANS, Craig A. – SANDERS, James A. (eds.) (1993): *Luke and Scripture*:

3. *The Ecclesiological Implications of the Ananias and Sapphira's account in the Commentary of St. John Chrysostom*

In his 11th *Homily* within the Commentary on the Book of Acts, St. John Chrysostom provides a theological and moral reflection on the early Christian community, especially regarding its unity, generosity, and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. The passage, in which the apostles and the first believers are filled with the Holy Spirit and live in radical unity, sets the stage for a profound ecclesiological lesson that Chrysostom expounds upon. He offers both a detailed understanding of the dynamics of the early Church and a deeper exploration of the figures of Ananias and Sapphira, whose story stands as an unambiguous contrast to the altruistic actions of the other members of the community.¹¹

At the beginning of his *Homily*, Chrysostom focuses on a pivotal moment in the life of the Church: the prayer of the apostles and the early Christians, which results in the place where they are gathered being shaken by a divine presence. This physical shaking, Chrysostom asserts, is a powerful external sign of God's presence among them. He emphasizes that it was not just a moment of emotional experience, but a concrete manifestation of God's grace, confirming that their prayers had been heard. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which followed this miraculous sign, was not a passive experience but one that actively transformed the believers. The apostles and the others were „inflamed” by the Spirit, a fiery presence that empowered them to speak confidently about the resurrection of Christ. For Chrysostom, this moment is of radical importance. It marks the Church as being directly and tangibly filled with God's power and grace. The boldness that followed, the ability to preach and witness with authority, and the unity that

The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts, Minneapolis, Fortress Press.

11 (1851): *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Acts of the Apostles, Translated with Notes and Indices. Part I. Hom. I-XXVIII*, Oxford-London, John Henry Parker-F. and J. Rivington.

would soon follow all stemmed from this powerful experience of the Holy Spirit.

Unity is therefore the central theme of the passage. The text mentions that the believers were „all of one heart and one soul. Behold, heart and soul are what make the whole together.”¹² This unity, however, is not a mere emotional or superficial harmony. For Chrysostom, it is a profound and active cooperation between divine grace and human will. In orthodox theology, this is known as *synergy*: the concept that human effort and divine grace work together to accomplish the good work that God desires. The believers were not just passive recipients of grace but active participants, embodying the love that Christ had poured into their hearts. This led them to live in such a radical manner that they voluntarily shared everything, selling their possessions and giving the proceeds to the apostles for distribution amongst the poor.

This shared living was not mandated by a command or imposed by external authorities. Instead, it was the natural outgrowth of the love that Christ had implanted in their hearts. Chrysostom suggests that it was their love for one another that led them to live this way. He even poses a theological question: did their love for each other result in their shared poverty, or was it the voluntary poverty that deepened their love? He concludes that it was their love that gave rise to this fellowship. The selfless act of sharing was a direct expression of the love that permeated the community. In turn, their communal poverty served to deepen that love, creating bonds between them that were unbreakable.

At this point, Chrysostom draws attention to the role of the apostles in the life of the community. The apostles were not only spiritual leaders but also stewards (*oikonomoi*) of the resources entrusted to them by the community. The believers would bring their wealth and lay them at the apostles' feet, trusting them to distribute

12 Ibid. 156.

the funds justly, which is a “great mark of honour”,¹³ which means power and authority. This act of laying their possessions at the feet of the apostles was not just a practical step; it was a profound act of humility and trust in the apostles’ leadership: „And with great respect they did this: for they did not presume to give into their hands, nor did they ostentatiously present, but brought to the Apostles’ feet. To them, they left it to be the dispensers, made them the owners, that thenceforth all should be defrayed as from common, not from private, property. This was also a help to them against vain-glory.”¹⁴ By doing so, the community recognized that the apostles were divinely entrusted with the stewardship of God’s gifts. This act of humble submission to the apostles’ authority was an expression of the believers’ trust in their leadership, knowing that they would use the resources to meet the needs of the poor and marginalized.

The Church Father also highlights the example of Barnabas, whose name means „son of consolation.” Barnabas was one of the believers who exemplified this radical generosity. He sold a piece of land and laid the proceeds at the Apostles’ feet, demonstrating both his generosity and his trust in the apostles’ leadership. Chrysostom praises Barnabas for his virtuous actions and uses him as a model of generosity and self-sacrifice. He notes that Barnabas’ actions were not motivated by obligation or a desire for recognition but by a deep sense of responsibility toward the well-being of the community. In this sense, Barnabas’ example perfectly embodied the unity and love that Chrysostom saw as the foundation of the early Church. His generosity, like that of the other believers, was an expression of the love that flowed through the entire community, transforming their way of life and their relationship with one another.¹⁵

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid. 161.

15 BORI, Pier Cesare (1972): *L’idea della comunione nell’ecclesiologia recente a Nuovo Testamento*. Brescia, Paideia. 108–111.

Continuing in his *12th Homily*, in sharp contrast to this self-sacrifice, Chrysostom introduces the tragic figures of Ananias and Sapphira. Their story serves as a dark counterpoint to the selfless generosity of the rest of the believers. While the other members of the community sold their possessions and gave everything to the apostles, Ananias and Sapphira conspired to deceive the church. They sold a piece of property but kept back part of the money, meanwhile pretending to donate the entire amount to the apostles. Chrysostom views their actions as an attempt to present themselves as more virtuous than they were, seeking to gain the admiration of the community without genuinely embodying the generosity of the other believers. Their sin was rooted in pride and a desire for personal gain: „For that this was in consequence not merely of the miraculous signs, but of their purpose”.¹⁶ They wanted to appear generous without actually giving up everything, and in doing so, they sought to manipulate both the community and God. Chrysostom argues that their actions were not simply a moral failing but a deeper spiritual dishonesty.¹⁷ To lie to the apostles, Peter declares, was to lie to the Holy Spirit. This statement highlights the seriousness of their sin, as it was an outrage not just to the Christian community but also to God himself.

The death of Ananias and Sapphira, therefore, serves as a divine judgment on their dishonesty. Chrysostom interprets their sudden deaths as a sign that God does not tolerate hypocrisy within his church. The integrity of the Christian community, which had been founded on sincerity, self-sacrifice, and unity, could not be compromised. Chrysostom emphasizes that the early church was not founded on superficial appearances, but on genuine love and devotion to Christ. Ananias and Sapphira’s deceit threatened the

16 (1851): *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom*. 160–161.

17 It is about the so-called “evil thoughts” that hide in a person’s heart and defile them from within (cf. Mark 7:20-23), some of which perfectly match the attitude of Ananias and Sapphira: thefts, covetous desires, wickedness, deceit, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness.

purity of this community,¹⁸ and their deaths served to purify it and send a strong warning to others about the dangers of hypocrisy.

Chrysostom's theological reflection on the story of Ananias and Sapphira extends into ecclesiology. He views the early Christian community as a model of the church in its ideal form, a community of radical generosity, mutual care, and unity guided by the Holy Spirit. The deceit of Ananias and Sapphira posed a threat to the unity and integrity of the community, and their judgment underlines the importance of sincerity and humility in the life of the church. The trust the believers placed in the apostles' leadership was essential to the functioning of the early church, and Chrysostom emphasizes the necessity of a well-ordered ecclesial structure to ensure the common good.¹⁹

Despite the fear the death of Ananias and Sapphira instilled in the community, Chrysostom notes that the apostles continued to minister with confidence and power. The miracles they performed, including the healing of the sick, further validated their leadership and affirmed their authority as divinely appointed representatives of Christ. The reference to Peter's shadow healing the sick emphasizes that the power of the apostles extended beyond their actions to their very presence, which was a tangible manifestation of God's grace at work in the world.²⁰

18 "By their deformed character adulterate the simplicity of the Church [...] Although by no means did they give up their possessions, they pretended to preserve apostolic discipline" – (1989): *The Venerable Bede, Commentary on The Acts of The Apostles*, Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by Lawrence T. Martin, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Cistercian Publications. 57–58.

19 We observe here the Chrysostomic depiction of a "radical social utopia," employed by the author as a contemporary model aimed at transforming society - RITTER, Adolf Martin (1990): John Chrysostom as an Interpreter of Pauline Ethics. In Williams S. Babcock (ed.): *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*. Dallas, Southern Methodist University Press. 183–192. 360–369.

20 "These rule miracles of punishment primarily demonstrate that God and the Holy Spirit are working through the apostles, especially Peter, in the community.[...] Luke portrays a radical connection between the apostles,

In this context, Chrysostom reflects on the emotional and spiritual life of the early church. There was joy in the spread of the gospel and in the many miracles that occurred, but there was also sorrow, especially when confronted with the sin of members like Ananias and Sapphira. This duality – joy and sorrow – marks the early Christian experience, where the reality of human frailty and sin tempers moments of triumph. Chrysostom's reflection on this complexity highlights the challenges the early Christians faced in living out their faith and the constant tension between the ideals of the gospel and the realities of human imperfection.

Finally, the story of Ananias and Sapphira serves as a broader theological reflection on the nature of sin and judgment. Chrysostom compares their sin to sacrilege, an act of despoliation against the sacred. They had promised to give all the proceeds to God, yet they withheld part for themselves, defiling what had been consecrated. Chrysostom views their actions as an affront to God's holiness and an act of contempt for the authority of the apostles. The severity of their punishment, in this light, is seen as a necessary step to purify the community and deter others from following their example.²¹

especially Peter, and God.[...] The activity of God and the Holy Spirit in and through the apostles makes them the true representatives of the divine and authority figures." – O'TOOLE, Robert F. (1995): "You Did Not Lie to Us (Human Beings) but to God" (Acts 5,4c), In *Bib* 76, 185.

- 21 A hagiographical account tells that a wealthy governor once dedicated a golden vessel to the Church of Saint Menas. However, overcome by greed, he later took it back for himself. As he sailed across the sea, a violent storm arose, threatening to sink the ship. Realizing that his sacrilege had provoked divine wrath, he repented and vowed to return the vessel. The moment he made this decision, the sea calmed, and he reached the shore safely. Humbled and full of gratitude, he hastened to the Church and restored the sacred gift, acknowledging that what had been offered to God could not be taken back without grave consequences. This miraculous event reaffirmed the holiness of Saint Menas and the inviolability of what is dedicated to the Lord – See BROWNE, Gerald M. (1994): *The Old Nubian Miracles of Saint Menas* (Beitrage Zur Sudanforschung Beiheft 7). Wien-Mödling, Verein d. Förderer d. Sudanforschung.

4. *Ananias and Sapphira's account and Achan's case (Joshua 7)*

In St. John Chrysostom's *Commentary on Acts*, particularly in his 12th *Homily*, he draws a significant typological parallel between the actions of Ananias and Sapphira and some important figures in the history of Israel: „Something of the same kind had happened upon a time in the Old Testament”. Chrysostom's *Commentary*, however, is not only concerned with the immediate moral lesson but also touches on a broader theological context, drawing connections to key Old Testament figures and events. Firstly, the sin of sacrilege committed by Achan, described as „the son of Charmi who coveted the devoted thing”. This comparison has been a traditional one within the patristic commentaries, where the story of Achan's theft of sacred spoils and the subsequent divine judgment on him and his family is seen as prefiguring the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira for their deceit in withholding part of the proceeds from their property sale: „the matter was not one to be simply passed over: like a gangrene, it must be cut out, that it might not infect the rest of the body.”²² However, while this typological comparison holds a certain weight within the context of Christian tradition, it is essential to unpack the nuances and differences that complicate the paralleling of these two acts of transgression.

In the Old Testament, Achan's sin in Joshua 7 is one of direct theft. After the fall of Jericho, the Israelites are commanded by God to destroy everything in the city and consecrate all the spoils as devoted to the Lord (Joshua 6:24). However, Achan, moved by personal greed, takes some of these forbidden spoils and hides them in his tent. This stealing, done in secret, brings God's judgment upon the entire Israelite camp. The fact that Achan is not only stealing but at the same time violating a sacred covenant by taking what has been consecrated to God is crucial to

22 (1851): *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom*. 169.

understanding the depth of his sin: “Sacrilege, beloved, is a most grievous crime, insulting, and full of contempt”.²³

Ananias and Sapphira, by contrast, commit an act of dishonesty rather than absolute theft. The couple is part of the early Christian community, which is experiencing a profound sense of unity and generosity, where believers are selling their possessions and laying the proceeds at the apostles’ feet to be distributed among the poor. Ananias and Sapphira also sold their property, but rather than offering the full amount to the apostles, they kept back a portion of the income while presenting the remaining sum as if it were the entirety. Their sin, as Chrysostom interprets it, is not in withholding a part of their wealth, but in their desire to appear more generous than they were. They wanted to maintain the outward appearance of self-sacrifice while keeping part of the money for themselves. This deceit was an attempt to manipulate the community’s perception of their piety and generosity, thereby inflating their status within the early Christian church.

Thus, while both Achan and Ananias and Sapphira are guilty of a serious offense, the nature of their crimes differs meaningfully. Achan’s transgression is one of theft, directly violating the sacred command to consecrate the spoils of war to God. In contrast, Ananias and Sapphira’s offense is one of hypocrisy and deceit, as they attempted to present themselves as more virtuous than they truly were. This distinction is important because while the act of theft is inherently more disruptive to the community’s integrity, deception threatens the very foundation of the church’s spiritual unity and authenticity.

Another key difference in these two stories lies in the manner in which judgment is rendered. In the case of Achan, the people of Israel, under Joshua’s leadership, executed God’s judgment. Achan’s sin is publicly revealed, and he is stoned to death along with his family, his livestock, and all of his possessions, symbolizing

23 Ibid.

the complete eradication of sin from the camp of Israel (Joshua 7:24-26). This act of collective punishment is meant to purify the community and remove the contamination caused by Achan's disobedience. The judgment is swift and severe, as is often the case with acts of direct desecration in the Old Testament, particularly when God's holiness is violated.

In contrast, the judgment against Ananias and Sapphira is not administered by the collective community but by the apostles, specifically by Peter, through the discernment of the Holy Spirit. The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira are immediate, but they are not the result of a human decision or an action of the entire community. Instead, it is God's direct judgment, executed through Peter's prophetic insight. Peter does not issue a sentence but, prophetically, reveals the deceitfulness in their hearts and pronounces the judgment. This aspect of the story emphasizes the authority of the apostles and the role of the Holy Spirit in maintaining purity within the church. While Achan's sin required a collective and public response, the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira are more personal and revelatory. The swift judgment serves as a solemn reminder that God is not mocked and that the integrity of the church, as the new covenant community, must be protected at all costs.

This distinction highlights a theological development from the Old to the New Testament. In the Old Testament, sin is often addressed through direct, communal punishment. In contrast, in the New Testament, under the new covenant inaugurated by Christ, judgment is reserved for God's direct intervention through the Holy Spirit. Chrysostom's reflection on the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, therefore, emphasizes that God's judgment is now exercised in a more mysterious, yet no less powerful, manner than in the days of Israel.²⁴

24 CRAWFORS, Timothy G. (1998): Taking the Promised Land, Leaving the Promised Land: Luke's Use of Joshua for a Christian Foundation Story. In *RE* 95, 251–261.

In Joshua 7, the punishment for Achan's sin extends beyond just Achan. His family, along with his entire household, is stoned and burned, along with his possessions. This collective punishment, where the entire family is held accountable for Achan's sin, reflects the corporate nature of sin in the Old Testament. The Israelites are, in a sense, a collective entity, and the sin of one member can have repercussions for the entire community. This concept of corporate responsibility is a theme often found in the Old Testament, where sin is viewed not only as an individual act but also as something that can affect the entire community.

In the case of Ananias and Sapphira, however, the judgment is individual. While Sapphira shares in her husband's fate, the text is careful to emphasize her guilt and complicity in the deceit. Both Ananias and Sapphira are judged and die separately, though their deaths are linked in a double burial. This structure of the narrative – where Ananias is struck down first and then Sapphira follows – highlights the individual nature of their sin. Chrysostom notes that the way the story is structured reflects the distinction between the two individuals, emphasizing their accountability before God. The text portrays a male-female duality, with Sapphira's guilt being presented independently of her husband's, thus marking a departure from the corporate punishment seen in the story of Achan.

This focus on individual responsibility rather than collective punishment reflects the shift in how sin is understood in the New Testament community. The church is not merely the same body but is composed of individual members who are personally responsible for their actions before God. This shift in understanding marks, once again, a theological development from the Old to the New Testament, where personal integrity and sincerity are emphasized as vital components of the church's life.

Despite the similarities in the stories of Achan and Ananias and Sapphira, there are several challenges to equating the two narratives

as typological parallels.²⁵ The use of the verb „spoil,” found in both Joshua 7:1 and Acts 5:2, is often cited as a point of connection; however, it is essential to note that the concept of „spoils” in Koine Greek differs significantly from its understanding in the context of Joshua. Achan’s theft involved spoils of war that were sacred and consecrated to God, whereas Ananias and Sapphira’s crime was one of deception about a freely given offering. The connection between these two uses of „spoil” is tenuous at best, and it is not clear that the Lucan text intentionally makes this allusion.

Furthermore, the theological and narrative differences between the two stories suggest that while there may be some superficial similarities, a direct typological comparison between Achan and Ananias and Sapphira is not perfect. The severity of Achan’s theft, which directly violates the sacred, is different from the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira, who are guilty not of stealing sacred items but of trying to deceive the church and inflate their perceived righteousness. Therefore, while the typological comparison between these two narratives has a long tradition among the Church Fathers, it is clear that the analogy is imperfect, and as some modern scholars argue, may not be the most compelling comparison. Nonetheless, the comparison serves to underscore the gravity with which both God and the church must guard against sin, particularly those that threaten the integrity of the community. Just as Achan’s stealing disrupted the unity of Israel and led to judgment, Ananias and Sapphira’s deceit threatened the purity and unity of the early Christian community, resulting in instant divine judgment. The story of Ananias and Sapphira serves as a powerful reminder that God will not tolerate deception and hypocrisy within the church, and that the sacred integrity of the community must be preserved at all costs.

25 This is partially Marguerat’s polemic arguments regarding the typological reading of the passage on Achan in the story of Joshua 7 – Cf. MARGUERAT, Daniel (2002): *The First Christian Historian*. Cambridge, University Press. 164.

5. *Ananias and Sapphira's account and Uzzah (2 Samuel 6)*

In a similar approach to St. John Chrysostom's typological readings of transgressions within the biblical narrative, another important parallel is often drawn in his commentaries between the account of Ananias and Sapphira and that of Uzzah, from 2 Samuel: „So true is that saying, The Lord is known by executing judgments. The same thing had occurred in the case of the Ark: Uzzah was punished, and fear came upon the rest. However, in that instance, the king, through fear, removed from him the Ark; but here the disciples became more earnestly heedful”.²⁶ Uzzah's transgression, described in 2 Samuel 6:6-7, shares several thematic similarities with the story of Ananias and Sapphira, particularly about the improper handling of sacred things and the immediate divine judgment that follows. While the comparison between these two incidents is significant, it also raises important theological and interpretative questions about how sacred acts, offerings, and the integrity of religious practice are treated in both the Old and New Testaments.

Uzzah, in his role as a guardian of the ark of the covenant, was entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring its safe transport. However, as the ark was being moved on a cart, he took it upon himself to steady it with his hand when the oxen stumbled, despite the divine prohibition against touching the Ark (Numbers 4:15). The exact nature of his transgression may not seem immediately clear. However, he violated the command concerning the sanctity of the ark, acting out of presumption rather than obedience. His act, though seemingly well-intentioned, resulted in immediate and fatal divine judgment; he was struck dead on the spot, highlighting the seriousness with which God regards the sanctity of his commands.

Similarly, Ananias and Sapphira, in the narrative of Acts 5, commit an act of deceit that profanes the sanctity of the Christian

26 (1851): *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom*. 170.

community. Their sin lay not in withholding a portion of their wealth, but in attempting to present themselves as more generous than they truly were. By pretending to offer the full proceeds from the sale of their property while secretly keeping a portion, they sought to manipulate the community's perception of their piety. Both cases – Uzzah's irreverence in handling the ark and Ananias and Sapphira's deceit – reveal a deeper issue of corruption of the sacred, whether through presumption or dishonesty in what is offered to God.

Both stories are marked by the immediate execution of God's judgment. In 2 Samuel 6, Uzzah's punishment is swift and public. God's wrath is manifested instantly as he is struck dead for touching the ark, demonstrating the seriousness of disregarding divine commands. The sacredness of the ark, as the physical representation of God's presence, required absolute reverence, and any violation of its sanctity carried severe consequences. Likewise, in Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira are struck dead after Peter exposes their deceit. The immediacy of their punishment underscores a common theme: God holds his people accountable for violating the sacred and profaning what has been consecrated to him.

While the exact nature of the sin in both cases differs – one involving an unauthorized act concerning the ark and the other being deceit in offering – the judgment serves a similar purpose: to demonstrate that any act disregarding God's holiness and His commands is met with swift and unambiguous consequences. This immediate retribution highlights the community's responsibility to maintain purity and integrity, whether in the handling of sacred objects or the sharing of goods within the Christian fellowship.

Another point of comparison lies in the roles of the individuals involved. Uzzah was a man entrusted with the task of safeguarding the ark, yet his failure to adhere to the prescribed manner of its transport led to his downfall. His transgression, though seemingly minor, undermined the reverence required for handling the most sacred artifact of Israel's worship. In contrast, Ananias and

Sapphira were not in any special religious office; they were ordinary members of the early Christian community. However, their sin was equally grave because it involved profaning the community's shared resources and presenting themselves as more righteous than they were. While a priestly figure did not administer the judgment, the apostles, who represented the new priesthood of believers in the church, acted with divine authority in pronouncing their verdict. The comparison between these figures highlights a broader principle: the holiness and integrity of God's people, whether in sacred duties or communal life, are to be upheld with the utmost seriousness.

The typological comparison between Uzzah and Ananias and Sapphira suggests a recurring theme in Scripture: the sanctity of what belongs to God must be preserved at all costs. Whether through unauthorized actions (in the case of Uzzah) or through deceit (in the case of Ananias and Sapphira), the violation of God's holiness and the profaning of what has been consecrated is met with immediate judgment. This reinforces the biblical truth that God's holiness cannot be compromised, and any attempt to dishonour or manipulate what is sacred – whether through presumption or dishonest offerings – will be judged.

Chrysostom's reflections on these stories emphasize that both actions – whether concerning the ark or the resources of the Christian community – threaten the very foundation of God's work among His people. The judgment in both cases serves to purify the community, whether the Israelites or the early Church, and to remind all believers of the need for integrity and reverence in all things pertaining to God. In the New Testament, as in the Old, God's holiness remains paramount, and His judgment is a safeguard for the keeping of his people in truth and purity. The typological connections between these stories underscore the ongoing relevance of this principle for the church, reminding believers of the gravity of their actions before a holy and righteous God.

6. Ananias and Sapphira's account and the story of the fall (Genesis 3)

In his 12th *Homily* on the Acts of the Apostles, St. John Chrysostom provides a theological and pastoral interpretation of the episode of Ananias and Sapphira. The tragic death of the couple for lying to the Holy Spirit, which is *the crux* of the narrative, holds a deep meaning for the early church and serves as a warning against hypocrisy and deception. Among the numerous Old Testament connections, Chrysostom alludes to another important parallel by emphasizing the complicity of both Ananias and Sapphira, as they conspired together to lie to the apostles about the money they had promised to give to the community: „The aggravating circumstance was, that the sin was concerted, and none other saw what was done.”²⁷ This joint action of deceit mirrors the early creation story of Adam and Eve, whose fall was also a result of shared disobedience. Chrysostom does not explicitly draw this comparison in his *Homily*. However, the theological implications of the parallel become obvious when examining both the narrative structure and the moral foundations of the story. Although we speak of a joint action that shows a corporative dimension, it remains distinct from the concept of common responsibility as found in Old Testament theology.

The story of Ananias and Sapphira, though seemingly a mere instance of financial fraud within the Christian community, reveals deeper theological insights when viewed through the lens of the fall of humanity in *Genesis*. The first human sin was a shared act of disobedience by Adam and Eve, who, together, transgressed God's command in the garden of Eden. Similarly, Ananias and Sapphira's crime is not one of individual moral failure but a collective act of fraud. They are united in their deception and in their attempt to deceive both the apostles and, ultimately, the Holy Spirit. This parallel to the fall becomes even more significant when considering

27 Ibid. 166.

the role of deceit in the narrative. In both cases, the transgression involves a lie to God – Eve’s manipulation of God’s command and Ananias’s attempt to deceive the Spirit of the Lord.

The shared nature of sin in the Genesis 3 account of Adam and Eve provides a theological context for the events in Acts 5. Chrysostom’s focus on the personal responsibility of each individual in the story allows for the subtle exploration of this shared complicity between Ananias and Sapphira: „The woman he would fain save, for the man had been the author of the sin: therefore he gives her time to clear herself, and opportunity for repentance.”²⁸ They are, after all, co-conspirators in their crime, and Peter’s pointed question to Sapphira – „How could you agree together to test the Spirit of the Lord?” (Acts 5:9)—directly addresses the complicity of the couple, inviting a reflection on how sin enters the community when individuals act in concert with one another in violation of God’s will.

Moreover, it is not just the act of lying that connects the story to the fall narrative; it is also the theological implication that both accounts reveal the disruption of a state of innocence or harmony. The early Christian community in Acts 4 is described as being of „one heart and one soul”, living in harmony and freely sharing their possessions (Acts 4:32). However, this unity is shattered by the selfishness and deceit of Ananias and Sapphira. The harmony of the community, which mirrors the peaceful state of the garden of Eden before the fall, is disrupted by the couple’s refusal to live according to the same selflessness that marked the early believers. Just as the harmony of creation was marred by the fall of Adam and Eve, so too is the communal life of the church impacted by the sin of the couple.

Upon further examination, the theological and literary structure of the narrative in Acts 5 comes into sharper focus. The juxtaposition of the communal life of the church with the sin of

28 Ibid. 167.

Ananias and Sapphira highlights an internal crisis that threatens the fledgling community. However, unlike the consequences of the fall, where the penalty was the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden, the punishment for Ananias and Sapphira is not exclusion from the community, but divine justice resulting in their immediate deaths. This serves as a theological corrective to the moral disorder introduced by sin. Chrysostom's *Commentary* suggests that, unlike the consequences faced by the first couple, the judgment in Acts is a necessary purification of the Christian community, ensuring that it is safeguarded from such sin in the future.

Chrysostom, in his reflections on the death of Ananias and Sapphira, is implying to the far-reaching theological significance of this event. The sin of the couple, as Chrysostom sees it, is not just a mere act of dishonesty but a betrayal of the Holy Spirit. Through their act of deception, Ananias and Sapphira attempt to subvert the Spirit's presence in the early church. By lying to the apostles and trying to control the outcome of their giving, they demonstrate a profound misunderstanding of the nature of the Christian community. Their sin has consequences that are not only individual but collective, for it disrupts the unity of the church, which was founded upon mutual love, trust, and the shared experience of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, the fact that the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira occur in such close succession to one another highlights the theological importance of their shared guilt. In many ways, their shared punishment echoes the twin consequences of Adam and Eve's sin in Genesis: the introduction of sin into the world and the subsequent expulsion from Eden. Ananias and Sapphira's deaths, while not resulting in an eternal separation from God, are symbolic of the cost of sin and the danger of hypocrisy. Just as Adam and Eve's actions led to a disruption of the divine order, so too does the fraud of Ananias and Sapphira cause a rupture within the community of believers.

The fall narrative, therefore, provides a helpful theological lens through which to understand the significance of Acts 5 and the death of Ananias and Sapphira. By drawing a parallel between the original sin of Adam and Eve and the lie of the couple in Acts, we can see that the early Christian church is not immune to the temptations and dangers that affected humanity from the very beginning. The fall is not merely an isolated event in the past but is instead an ongoing struggle within the church itself. The sudden deaths of Ananias and Sapphira underscore the seriousness of this struggle and remind the Christian community of the need for vigilance, honesty, and purity in its relationship with God.

The narrative context indeed shows that the events of Acts 5 represent the first crisis in the origins of Christianity. A constellation of elements supports the reference to Genesis 3: 1) the disruption of the original harmony (Acts 4:32); 2) the figure of Satan, commonly understood in Jewish tradition as the serpent; 3) the origin of the sin being located in the transgression of a couple; 4) the lie to God (Genesis 3:1; Acts 5:4b); 5) the final expulsion (cf. Genesis 3:23). This phenomenon is also found elsewhere, in an apocryphal writing, the Greek Acts of Andrew, where the fall narrative is reread with a marked emphasis on the agreement between Adam and Eve. This text, dated between 150 and 200, recounts the success of Andrew's preaching to Maximilla, the wife of the proconsul Egeates, who then refuses her husband. Distraught with grief and anger, Egeates has the apostle imprisoned, and Andrew will die as a martyr on a cross. The way Andrew comments to Maximilla about his decision and its consequences is particularly interesting from our perspective: „Just as Adam died in Eve by consenting to her assent, so now I live in you, who keep the commandment of the Lord and attain the dignity of your essence” (39:11). The verb *sumphonesai* means „to give one's consent,” „to agree” (see *Acts of Andrew* 3:1; 17:1; 42:3; 49:3; 53:7; 58:2; 62:2). Here, Adam's sin is having consented to Eve's positive statement. Andrew and Maximilla's “conversion” counteracts the sin of Adam and Eve's

mutual consent; against this fault of the original couple, they will resist. Maximilla is thus able not to repeat Eve's sin. It is noted that consent, as in Acts 5, is reciprocal: sometimes attributed to Adam, sometimes to Eve.²⁹

In conclusion, these parallels shed new light on the typology at play in the narrative: the fraud of Ananias and Sapphira is viewed as a replica of the original sin of Adam and Eve. Lying to the Spirit constitutes, in the Acts narrative, the original sin within the church. The conclusion of Acts 5 is that the *ekklesia* is a community of fallible members, but its community is safeguarded by God's judgment.

7. The original sin in the church is an economic one? The case of Judas

The story of Ananias and Sapphira, as narrated in Acts 5:1-11, serves as a stark warning about the destructive potential of greed, wickedness, and deceit, which are referred to as 'evil thoughts' in Mark 7:22, particularly when money is allowed to supplant one's moral and spiritual priorities. In many ways, this narrative mirrors the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, as reflected in the writings of Saint John Chrysostom, who draws parallels between the two stories to emphasize the spiritual dangers that arise when wealth becomes an idol: „Judas was sacrilegious, but it was no stumbling-block to the disciples. Do you see how many evils spring from love of money?“.³⁰ Both accounts are grounded in the theme of betrayal—not only of human trust but, more importantly, of divine trust and the integrity of the Christian community.

In the early Christian community depicted in Acts, there was a profound sense of unity and shared purpose. The believers held

29 (1990): *The Acts of Andrew and the Acts of Andrew and Matthias in the City of the Cannibals*. Texts and Transl. by MacDonald, Dennis R., Christian Apocrypha Series 1, Atlanta, Scholars Press. 56–57.

30 (1851): *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom*. 170.

all things in common, living a life marked by radical generosity and mutual care. The sale of property and the sharing of proceeds for the benefit of others were visible expressions of the Christian ideal of communal life, deeply rooted in Jesus' teachings about love, sacrifice, and service. The early church, in this sense, demonstrated a tangible witness to the values of the coming kingdom of God, where wealth was viewed as a fleeting resource meant to serve others, rather than accumulate for personal gain. The Holy Spirit guided this communal life, empowering believers to live in harmony and selflessness. However, the story of Ananias and Sapphira represents a grave turning point in this communal life. This act of deceit was not only about lying to the apostles but also speaks about a financial transaction – it was an attempt to hold on to a portion of wealth while pretending to be fully committed to the ideals of communal life.

Chrysostom, in his *Homily* on this passage, connects the sin of Ananias and Sapphira with the more well-known betrayal of Judas Iscariot. While their actions are not identical, both stories illustrate the corrupting influence of greed and materialism. Judas, driven by a love of money, betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, choosing material gain over loyalty to Christ. Similarly, Ananias and Sapphira, motivated by a desire for wealth, chose to deceive the apostles in order to retain control over part of their possessions. In both cases, the individuals involved prioritized material wealth over faith in God, thereby violating the trust placed in them by their respective communities.

Chrysostom's analysis highlights the shared spiritual danger between the two acts of betrayal. Both Judas and the couple were willing to lie and deceive to protect their wealth. For Chrysostom, this reflects the greater spiritual malady of greed, which can easily become an idol in one's life (the so-called *Mammonas*; cf. Mt 6:24, Lk 16:13), demanding devotion and loyalty. The love of money, as Chrysostom teaches, is not inherently sinful, but when it becomes the driving force behind one's actions, it leads to destructive

consequences. The love of wealth leads to dishonesty, division, and ultimately a loss of spiritual integrity. Ananias and Sapphira's deceit, therefore, is not merely an isolated moral lapse; it is part of a broader pattern of sin in which the attachment to material wealth overrides one's commitment to the values of the kingdom of God.

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not merely a personal failing but also a communal crisis. Their deceit weakened the bonds of trust and unity that held the early church together. The church was a community that depended on mutual care and generosity. Ananias and Sapphira's selfishness, motivated by their desire to control their wealth, disrupted the flow of grace within the church and jeopardized the work of the Holy Spirit. This is why their sin was so severe—it was not just an individual moral failing, but a threat to the spiritual health of the entire community. The early church was called to live in radical selflessness, sharing all things in common, and the actions of Ananias and Sapphira directly contradicted this vision.

In drawing the parallel with Judas, Chrysostom underlines the gravity of Ananias and Sapphira's sin. While Judas's betrayal led to despair and his eventual suicide, the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira serve as a clear and immediate judgment from God. Both acts of betrayal, according to Chrysostom, are a violation of the sacred trust that God places in his followers. Judas betrayed Jesus, and Ananias and Sapphira betrayed the trust of the church and the Holy Spirit. Both sins, in Chrysostom's view, are forms of idolatry, where material wealth becomes a false god that takes precedence over faithfulness to God's calling.

The Scripture writer also draws attention to the timing and structure of the narrative, noting how Peter confronts Ananias first, and then waits for Sapphira to enter separately, unaware of what had happened to her husband. This deliberate pacing, Chrysostom argues, highlights the seriousness of the sin. Not only had Ananias sinned, but Sapphira's complicity in the lie further demonstrates how easily one can fall into the trap of greed when

money becomes the focus of one's life. Their actions expose the potentially dangerous influence of wealth to distort relationships and values, not only within the church but also in one's relationship with God.

At the heart of Chrysostom's *Commentary* is the idea that wealth, in and of itself, is not evil. It is the attachment to wealth—the love of money—that becomes the root of sin. The love of money is described as a form of idolatry, and in both the cases of Ananias and Sapphira and that of Judas, it led to betrayal, deceit, and spiritual death. This love of money, Chrysostom warns, can lead to actions that destroy the unity of the church and disrupt the work of the Holy Spirit. The early Christians were called to live in humility, transparency, and mutual support, and any deviation from this ideal, driven by the desire to hoard wealth, leads to spiritual corruption.³¹

For modern Christians, Chrysostom's reflections on Ananias and Sapphira offer a sobering reminder of the dangers of materialism. The temptation to place trust in wealth for security or status is just as real today as it was in the early church. Jesus' warning against the idolatry of wealth challenges Christians to examine their relationship with money and to ensure that their priorities align with the values of the kingdom of God. Wealth is not inherently evil, but when it becomes the object of one's devotion, it leads to destruction. The example of Ananias and Sapphira serves as a powerful call to live according to the values of the kingdom – values that emphasize humility, generosity, and trust in God's provision.

Money is a reality that possesses us as much as we possess it. However, God's intervention in this "confrontation" with money alters the equation, prompting us to reflect deeply on what a

31 See also MACCABE, David (2011): *How to Kill Things with Words. Ananias and Sapphira under the Prophetic Speech-Act of Divine Judgement (Acts 4.32–5.11)*, London–New York, T&T Clark International. 200–208.

person becomes in the face of reality: wealth or poverty. Money presents itself as a guarantee of stability and refuge, seemingly destined to offer us peace and security. Behind the accumulation of wealth lies the fear of scarcity, and behind that fear, the fear of death. However, ironically, just when people think they have triumphed over their fragility, death appears. At the very moment they believe they are protected from precariousness, death arises. For money offers itself, illusorily, as a guarantee against death. Alternatively, rather than being invested in an idol of consolation, money has abandoned its status as an object to become a god. To deify money means to transform it into a bastion against death, as a promise of eternity. It is a god whose promises are illusory, because it does not turn our weaknesses into strength, nor our fragility into eternity. Even money earned honestly carries with it a bit of the world's misery. However, investing in building personal relationships, opening real connections, and stimulating creativity means purifying oneself for the eternal kingdom. Since we live in an economic system that generates injustices, money can be potentially lethal, putting the person at risk of isolation and a hardened heart. If, however, it is invested in the direction of communion and manages to free the poor from their hardships, money becomes a source of life and has value for the kingdom of heaven. This is the meaning of the Saviour's words when He calls people to gather "treasures in heaven" (Mt 6:20). This salutary gesture represents, in a positive sense, a profanation of money, meaning a stripping of the sacredness with which it was endowed, reducing it to its role as a material instrument for exchange and destined, with much wisdom, for life-giving and friendship-building relationships.³²

This is also affirmed by the Church Fathers in the early centuries when they address the issue of wealth and the salvation of the rich.

32 See here my study, CIUREA, Mihai (2024): *Reflecții teologice despre problema bogăției și a sărăciei în scrierile Sfintei Scripturi*. In *MO LXXVI* (905-908), 5–8. 66–83.

It is no longer about blaming the owners of wealth, but rather about demonstrating that money, as a result of divine blessing, generates both responsibility and freedom. This freedom consists in using one's own thinking and wisdom so that one's goods serve, paradoxically, to enrich many, making money a source of life rather than death. Thus, received as a gift from God, money is no longer condemned to be a pit of our anxieties and fears. It can become a sign of openness to the other, so that the use of goods no longer illustrates the lack of limitations in our desires, but rather the love of God. Therefore, the story of Ananias and Sapphira is more than just a cautionary tale about dishonesty; it is also a profound theological lesson about the dangers of greed, materialism, and the love of money. By drawing a parallel between the sin of Ananias and Sapphira and the betrayal of Judas, Chrysostom underscores the spiritual consequences of allowing wealth to become an idol. Both stories serve as a warning to Christians to remain vigilant, guarding their hearts against the seductive power of money, and to live by the values of the kingdom of God, where wealth is shared for the good of others, and where proper security is found in God alone.

8. Conclusions

The account of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11) occupies a decisive place within Luke's narrative of the early church, functioning as a theological and ecclesiological turning point that interrupts the idealized depiction of the primitive Christian community found in Acts 2–4. Far from being merely an episode about financial dishonesty, the narrative reveals the profound theological stakes of communal life in the Spirit. Through the dramatic exposure and judgment of deceit within the community, Luke underscores the ontological unity of the Church, the sanctity of its shared life, and the seriousness of sin committed against

the Holy Spirit. Read within this broader framework, the story illustrates how the internal integrity of the *ekklesia* is essential to its mission and identity, especially in a context in which the church is simultaneously expanding and facing external opposition.

The ecclesiological implications of this pericope become particularly evident when one considers both Luke's literary strategy and the theological interpretation offered by Chrysostom. The narrative structure of Acts 5:1–11, framed by summary passages describing the unity and generosity of the community (Acts 4:32–37; 5:12–16), forms a deliberate diptych that highlights the contrast between authentic communion and hidden hypocrisy. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira is not primarily the withholding of money, but the rupture of ecclesial communion through deceit directed against the Spirit who animates the Church. Luke's theological intention, therefore, is not to condemn private property as such, but to reveal that the life of the Church depends upon transparency, sincerity, and fidelity to the Spirit's work. The patristic interpretation of this passage, particularly in the Chrysostomic *Homilies*, further deepens this ecclesiological reading. Chrysostom emphasizes that the gravity of the sin lies in its attempt to undermine the unity of the Church from within. For him, the early Christian community represents a new mode of existence grounded in the transformative presence of the Holy Spirit, where material goods become a visible sign of spiritual communion. Consequently, the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira constitutes not merely an ethical failure but a direct challenge to the divine order established within the ecclesial body. Chrysostom's reflections thus highlight the inseparable relationship between moral integrity, communal solidarity, and the presence of the Spirit within the Church.

A distinctive aspect of Chrysostom's interpretation—one that significantly enriches the ecclesiological perspective of this study—is his use of typological parallels with several Old Testament narratives. These comparisons situate the episode of Ananias and Sapphira within a broader biblical pattern in which the emergence

of a new sacred reality is accompanied by a dramatic act of divine judgment that safeguards its holiness. The parallel with Achan in Joshua 7 is particularly illuminating. Just as Achan's hidden appropriation of the devoted goods threatened the integrity of Israel at the moment of its establishment in the Promised Land, the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira endangers the unity of the nascent Christian community. In both cases, a seemingly private act of disobedience carries communal consequences, revealing that the covenantal community cannot tolerate hidden corruption without jeopardizing its relationship with God. The judgment that follows serves not simply as punishment but also as a means of preserving the sanctity of the community's mission. Similarly, the comparison with Uzzah in 2 Samuel 6 emphasizes the seriousness of violating what belongs to God. Uzzah's attempt to steady the ark, though seemingly well intentioned, disregards the sacred boundaries surrounding the divine presence. Chrysostom's association of this narrative with the account in Acts highlights the theological conviction that the Church, like the ark, is the locus of God's dwelling through the Spirit. Any irreverence toward this sacred reality, whether through presumption or deceit, threatens the order established by God. The parallel with the story of the Fall in Genesis 3 introduces an even deeper theological dimension. Like Adam and Eve, Ananias and Sapphira succumb to a distortion of truth that disrupts communion with God and with one another. Their attempt to conceal their action mirrors the primordial human impulse to hide from divine scrutiny. In this sense, the narrative reflects a recurring pattern of human failure in the presence of divine grace. Yet within the ecclesial context of Acts, this failure also reveals the transformative seriousness of life in the Spirit, where deception cannot remain hidden. These Old Testament parallels, emphasized by Chrysostom, demonstrate that the episode in Acts is not an isolated moral lesson but part of a broader biblical theology of holiness within the people of God. At decisive moments in salvation history—whether in the formation of Israel,

the establishment of the monarchy, or the birth of the Church—divine judgment appears as a protective measure that preserves the integrity of God’s covenantal community. Consequently, the account of Ananias and Sapphira must be understood not merely as a narrative about wealth or economic ethics, but as a profound reflection on the nature of ecclesial life. The episode reveals that the Church’s unity is both a gift of the Spirit and a responsibility entrusted to its members. Material sharing, moral integrity, and communal transparency are therefore not secondary ethical ideals but essential expressions of the Church’s ontological reality. This study has sought to demonstrate that the narrative of Ananias and Sapphira functions as a foundational ecclesiological moment within Luke’s portrayal of the early Church. By reading the episode in light of both Luke’s narrative structure and the patristic interpretation of John Chrysostom, the present analysis highlights how the holiness of the ecclesial community is inseparable from its unity in the Holy Spirit. From this perspective, the judgment narrated in Acts 5 appears not merely as a punitive act but as a theological affirmation of the sacred character of the Church as the dwelling place of the Spirit. Ultimately, Luke’s portrayal of this dramatic event underscores the eschatological character of the Christian community. The Church lives under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, and its mission to proclaim the Gospel depends upon the authenticity of its internal life. The story of Ananias and Sapphira thus serves as a powerful reminder that the holiness of the Church is safeguarded not only against external persecution but also against internal corruption. By situating this narrative within a wider biblical tradition, both Luke and Chrysostom affirm that the integrity of the ecclesial body is indispensable for the faithful witness of the gospel in the world.

Bibliography

- (1851): *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Acts of the Apostles, Translated with Notes and Indices. Part I. Hom. I-XXVIII*, Oxford-London, John Henry Parker-F. and J. Rivington.
- (1989): *The Venerable Bede, Commentary on The Acts of The Apostles*, Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by Lawrence T. Martin, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Cistercian Publications.
- (1990): *The Acts of Andrew and the Acts of Andrew and Matthias in the City of the Cannibals*. Texts and Transl. by MACDONALD, Dennis R., Christian Apocrypha Series 1, Atlanta, Scholars Press.
- BORI, Pier Cesare (1972): *L'idea della comunione nell'ecclesiologia recente a Nuovo Testamento*. Brescia, Paideia.
- BOVON, François (1987): *L'œuvre de Luc. Études d'exégèse et de théologie* (Lectio divina 130). Paris, Cerf.
- BROWN, Paul B. (1969): *The Meaning and Function of Acts 5:1-11 in the Purpose of Luke-Acts*. Boston University School of Theology.
- BROWNE, Gerald M. (1994): *The Old Nubian Miracles of Saint Menas*, Beitrage Zur Sudanforschung Beiheft 7. Wien-Mödling, Verein d. Förderer d. Sudanforschung.
- CIUREA, Mihai (2024): *Reflecții teologice despre problema bogăției și a sărăciei în scrierile Sfintei Scripturi*. In: *MO. LXXVI* (905-908), 5–8. 66–83.
- CRAWFORS, Timothy G. (1998): *Taking the Promised Land, Leaving the Promised Land: Luke's Use of Joshua for a Christian Foundation Story*. In *RE. 95*, 251–261.
- DUPONT, Jacques (1979): *Community of Goods in the Early Church*. In: *The Salvation of the Gentiles: Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, Trans. John R. Keating. New York, Paulist Press.
- EVANS, Craig A., SANDERS, James A. (eds.) (1993): *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press.

- FITZMYER, Joseph A. (1989): Satan and Demons in Luke-Acts. In: *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of his Teaching*, New York, Paulist Press.
- MACCABE, David (2011): *How to Kill Things with Words. Ananias and Sapphira under the Prophetic Speech-Act of Divine Judgement (Acts 4.32–5.11)*, London–New York, T&T Clark International.
- MARGUERAT, Daniel (1993): La mort d'Ananias et Saphira (Ac 5:1-11) dans la stratégie narrative de Luc. In *NTS* 39, 209–226;
- MARGUERAT, Daniel (2002): *The First Christian Historian: Writing the 'Acts of the Apostles'* (SNTSMS 121), Trans. by K. McKinney, G. J. Laughery and R. Bauckham. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- O'TOOLE Robert F. (1995): "You Did Not Lie to Us (Human Beings) but to God" (Acts 5,4c), In *Bib* 76, 182–209.
- PILGRIM, Walter E. (1981): *Pilgrim, Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House.
- RITTER, Adolf Martin (1990): John Chrysostom as an Interpreter of Pauline Ethics. In Williams S. Babcock (ed.): *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*. Dallas, Southern Methodist University Press.
- TURNER, Max (1996): *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (JPTSup 9). Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press.

Cain in Johannine Literature

Viktor Kókai-Nagy¹

Abstract

In this paper, I examine the figure of Cain in the Johannine writings, while also briefly touching upon his appearance in other New Testament writings. It is striking that in these writings, Cain is the beginning of the workings of evil in the world. He is the one through whom evil appears in the world; he is the first demonic figure in the Bible, not Adam. He and his brother Abel serve as a paradigm for all people in their decision-making. Cain became the “door”, by whom the evil came to the world for the first time (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς) and then established its rule over the life of humankind.

Keywords: Cain, evil, New Testament theology, ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς

1. Introduction

In an earlier study² I tackled the issue of Cain in Josephus, and it became apparent that the early Jewish tradition of Cain contains much more than the Old Testament. No wonder since the murder committed by Cain, the first one in human history, had far-reaching consequences in the history of humanity. Despite the rich tradition, the New Testament rarely refers to Cain (Hebr 11:4, 1John 3:12, Jude 11), but the story is subtly alluded in numerous other verses (e.g. John 8:44, James 5:1–6, Mt 5:21–24, Rev 6:9–11). These

1 Debrecen Reformed Theological University and Komárno J. Selye University; email: kokainagy.viktor@drhe.hu.

2 KÓKAI-NAGY, Viktor (2023): Josephus’ Kaingeschichte. In *BN* 199, 35–61.

passages show clearly that the authors of the New Testament knew much more about the first murder than the narrative of Gen 4. In this paper I focus on the Johannine literature because it contains the most complex picture, and the children of the evil (die Teufelsohnschaft) is its important subject throughout, a real „Leitmotiv“.³

2. Cain's provenance

The statement that Cain coming from the devil (1 John 3:8 – ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν) may refer to a statement that is very difficult to interpret. Even scholars of the Old Testament struggle greatly with the interpretation of Gen 4:1, since the Hebrew text (קַיִן בֶּן-אֱדָם – I have got a man, YHWH)⁴ and its Greek translation (διὰ

3 DOCHHORN, Jan (2016): Kain, der Sohn des Teufels. Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu 1. Joh 3,12. In Jan Dochhorn – Susanne Rudnig-Zelt – Benjamin Wold (eds.): *Das Böse, der Teufel und Dämonen – Evil, the Devil, and Demons*. Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. 169–87. 186.

4 „et vor Jahwe muß entweder konjiziert werden, oder Gott muß als Subjekt bzw. Mitsubjekt der Zeugung gedacht werden. Es kann »mit« heißen, wie in Gen 5,22.24 und 6,9.“ – KLEMM, Peter (1981): Kain und die Kainiten. In *ZThK* 78, 391–408. 392. Cf. GONZÁLEZ HOLGUÍN, Julián Andrés (2018): *Cain, Abel, and the Politics of God. An Agambenian reading of Genesis 4:1-16*. London – New York, Routledge. 25–28; GERTZ, Jan Christian (2018): *Das erste Buch Mose. Genesis. Die Urgeschichte Gen 1–11 (ATD 1)*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 157–59. Rabbinical exegesis specifically addresses the possibility that Cain's father was Sammael or the devil, which could also explain his evil nature. Cf. DOCHHORN (2016): 172–77; GRYPEOU, Emmanouela – SPURLING, Helen (2013): *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity. Encounters between Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (Jewish and Christian Perspectives 24). Leiden – Boston, Brill. 100–04. 133–34. In rabbinical literature, one also encounters the opinion that Cain was not a human being at all, but an angelic being: KUGEL, James L. (1998): *Traditions of the Bible. A Guide to the Bible as it Was at the Start of the Common Era*. Cambridge, MA – London, Harvard University Press. 157–58.

τοῦ θεοῦ – from God)⁵ allows for the understanding of God as a superhuman power, possibly also a fallen angel which was active at the birth of Cain. This necessarily implies that Cain’s origin can only be evil.⁶ However, the formulation of John is more precise. He often asserts that the righteous are from God (ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ – 1John 3:10, 5:19), but even more that they have been born of him (ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγέννηται – 1John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1, 4, 18)⁷ – but we never read about the same idea in connection to evil, that anybody has ever been born of him. In 1 John 3:9 we read that those who do not sin, have been born of God, but in verse

5 Cf. BYRON, John (2011): *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition. Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry* (Themes in Biblical Narrative 14). Leiden – Boston, Brill. 11–20.

6 GRYPEOU – SPURLING (2013): 117. In his article (2016) Dochhorn convincingly argues that this tradition forms the background to 1John 3:12. Later, this view was particularly widespread among the Gnostics. See: GRYPEOU – SPURLING (2013): 120–21.

7 Being born of God is essential to understanding the text. See: BOLYKI, János (2008): *A tanúvallomás folytatódik. Kommentár János leveleibez.* Budapest, Osiris. 143; cf. DAHL, Nils Alstrup (1964): Der Erstgeborene Satans und der Vater des Teufels (Polyk. 7,1 und Joh 8,44). In Walther Eltester (ed.): *Apophoreta. FS für Ernst Haenchen* (Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 30). Berlin, A. Töpelman. 70–84, 79. Because here, although speaking metaphorically, it is not a question of the word of God or the Holy Spirit, but specifically of the conception of God. However, it is important to note that the title “Son” refers exclusively to Jesus. It is no coincidence that the expression “born of God” first appears in 1John 2:29, and only later, in chapters 3 and 5:2, does the expression “children of God” appear. Cf. LIEU, Judith M. (1997): *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 33–34. 49–50.

Dochhorn believes that the two terms are “bedeutungsäquivalent verwendet werden,” but adds that, based on 2:19 and 4:5, this can only be argued on the basis of the historical background of the tradition (cf. 2016: 170–71). However, he later concedes: “Es sieht so aus, als werde die Idee von der Teufelsohnschaft Kains hier nicht entworfen, sondern alludiert. Was aber alludiert wird, das ist schon da” (ibid. 183).

10 those who do not do what is right are not born of the devil, they simply are “not of God”.⁸ They are “only” of the evil (3:12 – ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἦν) and their deeds show this.⁹ Evil has got its followers, and the world lies under the power of evil (1 John 5:19, cf. John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11), but the children of God are born of him¹⁰ which is shown in reality.

In Jude 11 Cain appears together with Balaam and Korah¹¹ as the predecessor of heresy: they curse the one whom they do not know. They go the way of Cain, that is, they live like Cain. There is no direct reference made to Gen 4, but it is clear that Cain is the prototype of sinners,¹² therefore the letter of Jude mentions Cain as a warning against heresy. This clearly shows that the author interpreted him as a

8 BOLYKI (2008): 157. This is underscored by the fact that 3:8a only states that the one who commits sin is “of the devil,” which stands in antithetical parallelism to 9a. See: BULTMANN, Rudolf (1967): *Die drei Johannesbriefe* (KEK). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 57.

9 „Das εἶναι ἐκ nicht derart physisch versteht, vor der Vorstellung einer Zeugung aus dem Teufel – im Unterschied zu seiner Konzeption einer Zeugung der Glaubenden aus Gott (1Joh 2,29; 3,9 u. ö.) – eher zurückschreckt und in 12d eine andere, weniger mythologische Begründung für die Wesensverwandtschaft Kains mit dem Bösen liefert” KLAUCK, Hans-Josef (1989): *Brudermord und Bruderliebe. Ethische Paradigmen in 1Joh 3,11–17*. In Helmut Merklein (ed.): *Neues Testament und Ethik. FS. für Rudolf Schnackenburg*. Freiburg–Basel–Wien, Herder. 151–69, 158.

10 Being descended from God, which in the Old Testament was still a royal-messianic privilege (Ps 2:7; 110:3), is now the property of every believer – similar to the Hellenistic view. Cf. SCHNELLE, Udo (2010): *Die Johannesbriefe* (ThHK 17). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt. 114–15.

11 The combination could be traditional. “Doch findet sich alle drei je für sich auch anderen frühchristlichen Texten als Prototypen von Irrlehrern bzw. Gegner” FREY, Jörg (2015): *Der Brief des Judas und der zweite Brief des Petrus* (ThHK 15/II). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt. 88. But all three characters undergo significant changes in Jewish tradition (cf. *ibid.* 89–92).

12 Cf. FREY (2015): 89; further KÓKAI-NAGY (2023): 48–49.

heretic.¹³ It is difficult to say how old this tradition might have been, but it is certain that the author of the letter knew of these elements of interpretation from the tradition.

Provenance from the evil (or belonging to it) explains the deeds which are necessarily evil, too. Not only is the murder explained this way in the tradition but also the fact that God did not accept Cain's offering – in the book of Genesis, this explanation is lacking.¹⁴ The latent question is answered by the author of the letter: murder is a consequence of the ill-will of Cain, but the context suggests that he had already been evil before this act,¹⁵ whilst contrastingly Abel was righteous before his death. If, on the other hand, the failure of his offering is not explained by his previous evil deeds, then his decision in Gen 4:7 makes clear at the latest: he chose evil deliberately.¹⁶ Similar explanation of Gen 4:7 is to be found in the Targumim: Cain had the chance of controlling his desires, but he chose the evil deed.¹⁷ This is the ultimate answer to the question

13 BYRON (2011): 228.

14 The interpretations show how much this lack of clarity disturbed readers. Cf. APTOWITZER, Victor (1922): *Kain und Abel in der Agada, den Apokryphen, der hellenistischen, christlichen und muhamedanischen Literatur*. Wien – Leipzig, R. Löwit Verlag. 10–15; GERTZ (2018): 160–62.

15 Cf. KÓKAI-NAGY (2023): 41–42.

16 Cf. BROWN, Raymond (1982): *The Epistles of John (AB)*. New York et al., Doubleday. 442. „Mit der Formulierung ‚Ist es nicht so?‘ rekurriert Jhwh auf ein Wissen um gut und schlecht, das Kain (und den Lesern) hinlänglich und ohne vorherige Erläuterung bekannt ist“ GERTZ (2018): 162) On the difficulties of the text (ibid. 162–66).

17 Cf. LIEU, Judith M. (1993): What was from the Beginning: Scripture and Tradition in the Johannine Epistles. In *NTS* 39, 458–77, 468. Günter Reim also points this out in his article, and draws the following conclusion: Since we only read in the Targum that Cain still had the ability to control his desires (קַיִן/ἐπιθυμία), Cain would also be the father here whose desires the people addressed want to fulfil, as we must also think of him in John 8:38, 41. Cf. REIM, Günter (1984): Joh. 8. 44 – Gotteskinder/Teufelskinder. Wie antijüdisch ist 'Die wohl antijudaistischste Äusserung des NT'? In *NTS* 30, 619–24, 621–22.

why Cain killed Abel: the murder is the response to the warning of God.

In Hebr 11:4 Cain's name occurs in a list of the examples of faith. It is then no wonder that we do not hear very much about him, rather about his brother Abel. The author states explicitly that Abel was righteous (cf. Mt 23:35¹⁸), his faith testified to his righteousness, so Abel's offering through faith was better. Neither the Hebrew text nor the Greek translation states that God received this offering (better offering: *πλείονα θυσίαν*), but in the first century A.D. this was combined with the righteousness of Abel.¹⁹ Abel's faith appears on the scene as a new element.²⁰ The phrase *δι' ἧς ἐμαρτυρήθη εἶναι δίκαιος* might refer to the offering, too, but it presumably means Abel's faith through which he receives righteousness.²¹ To be sure: neither righteousness nor faith of Abel are mentioned in Gen 4. The sprinkled blood of Abel is here only a proof of Cain's evil deed.²²

18 Cf. dazu KLAUCK, Hans-Josef (1991): *Der erste Johannesbrief* (EKK). Zürich – Neukirchen Vluyn, Benzinger – Neukirchener Verlag, 204–06; also BOLYKI (2008): 162–65. In the parallel passage in Luke 11:51, Abel's righteousness is not mentioned!

19 Cf. BYRON (2011): 168–71; further LIEU (1993): 467; LOHR, Joel N. (2009): Righteous Abel, Wicked Cain: Genesis 4:1-16 in the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, and the New Testament. In *CBQ* 71, 485–96.; und APTOWITZER (1922): 23–24.

20 In contrast, Cain's disbelief is also mentioned in the Palestinian Targums, when he tells his brother his opinion about the truth and mercy that govern the world before killing him. Cf. BASSLER, Julette (1986): Cain and Abel in the Palestinian Targums: A Brief Note on an Old Controversy. In *JSJ* 17, 56–64, 56–61.

21 Cf. ATTRIDGE, Harold W. (1989): *Hebrews* (Hermeneia). Philadelphia, Fortress Press. 316.

22 Blood was evidence in a murder trial. Cf. NOORT, Ed (2003): Gen 4:1–16. From Paradise to Reality: The Myth of Brotherhood. In Luttikhuisen, Gerard P. (ed.): *Eve's Children*, Leiden – Boston, Brill. 93–106, 98–100. For

However, in *Enokh* 22:5–7 it refers to Abel’s crying for vengeance (cf. also 2 *Makk* 8:3, *Rev* 6:9–11). This idea combines *Gen* 4:10 with 9:4 where the sprinkled blood (martyrium) and the cry for vengeance form an important element of the Christian tradition.²³ This element is then expanded later: the sprinkled blood of Jesus speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (*Hebr* 12:24).

The term used for Cain’s deed (σφάζω: killing, slaughtering) resembles the slaughtering of animals for offering; it also stresses the violence and brutality of it.²⁴ It cannot be by chance that the name of Abel is missing in 1 *John* 3:12, instead we read „brother” – this word is used for the addressees of the letter in the subsequent verse.²⁵ The main difference between the children of God and the children of the devil is that the children of God do the right and love their brothers – in contrast to Cain, *ὁ ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἦν* (1 *John* 3:10, 12).

the difficulties of the Hebrew text and possible interpretations – cf. BYRON, John (2011): *Abel’s Blood and the Ongoing Cry for Vengeance*. In *CBQ* 73, 743–56.

- 23 Cf. BYRON (2011): 180–83; GRYPEOU – SPURLING (2013): 119. “Our author may, however, have viewed Abel as a suppliant interceding before God” ATTRIDGE (1989): 317.
- 24 For the expression, see BYRON, John (2007): *Slaughter, Fratricide and Sacrilege Cain and Abel Traditions in 1 John 3*. *Biblica* 88, 526–35, 531–33. Cf. BROWN (1982): 441–42. Jewish tradition also states that Cain closely observed the way his father sacrificed animals and killed Abel accordingly (cf. *Genesis Rabba* 22:8). It is no longer possible to determine whether the author of the letter was familiar with this tradition. “What is clear, however, is that the rather underwhelming description of the murder in *Genesis* was often expanded in a way that emphasized the violent nature of Cain’s crime” BYRON (2011): 75.
- 25 In contrast to *Gen* 4:8, where it occurs twice, “was das Unfassbare der Tat unterstricht” GERTZ (2018): 166.

3. *Cain's Deed*

In the gospel of John the name of Cain does not occur, but we refer to John 8:44 since the term ἀνθρωποκτόνος²⁶ – only here and 1 John 3:15 in the New Testament – unites the two passages.²⁷ As Jewish literature makes use of this term in the context of Cain's evil deed, they must be dealt with together.²⁸ There are even more common characteristic features in the Johannine literature, too, first in the participating groups. In this debate (John 3:21–59), the opponents of Jesus were Jews who formerly believed in him (John 8:31 – πεπιστευκότες) – but in 1 John, the debate is within the congregation itself.²⁹ According to many commentators, John 8:44

26 Greek sources are also not very numerous when it comes to the use of the word. “While the scarcity of the term in ancient literature signals the need for caution, the impression is that when it was used ἀνθρωποκτόνος did not refer to murder in general, but to those acts of killing which were considered to be particularly repugnant, including, but probably not limited to, the sacrifice and/or devouring of a human victim. The killing of a family member could be viewed with the same repugnancy” BYRON (2011): 211; Cf. also BYRON (2007): 527–28.

27 Although Dochhorn states in connection with 1 John 3:15, “... ohne das Kain-Paradigma wäre diese weitreichende Behauptung für den Leser kaum nachvollziehbar” DOCHHORN (2016): 172; cf. BROWN (1982): 444, and admits that this interpretation appears in the early church (cf. DOCHHORN (2016): 179), but does not assume a connection (ibid. 177).

28 In addition to SapSal 10.3, we can point to Philon, who uses the word ten times to refer to Cain's deed, occasionally without mentioning the name, and it also appears in Josephus (Ant. 1.65). Cf. BYRON, John (2012): Cain and Abel in Second Temple Literature and Beyond. In Craig A. Evans – Joel N. Lohr – David L. Petersen (eds.): *The Book of Genesis. Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (SupVT 152). Leiden – Boston, Brill. 331–51, 340. Similarly, LIEU (1993): 476–77. Although the only concrete reference to the Old Testament in the letter is the memory of Cain's deed, the background and argumentation of the letter show the influence of the Old Testament despite the lack of explicit references (for an overview of the history of research, cf. ibid., 458–61).

29 See the overview by BEUTLER, Johannes (2012): *Neue Studien zu den johanneischen*

should be understood against the background of Gen 3, since it contains the motif of lie.³⁰ To be sure lie occurs only in this verse, while its opposite, truth, plays an important role throughout the whole Gospel.³¹ But the emphasis is not so much on the lie itself but on its consequences: on the murder. It is Jesus's life which is at stake in the gospel – and in 1 John 3:13–15 the life of Christians.³² Lies may draw back mankind to his original state (i.e., far from God) and, consequently, one may leave the truth, even if they knew it before. Human life is in danger while lies prevail, and those kept by lies need not be killed: their ways lead them to damnation, even if they do not take notice of giving up truth. “Gegen diejenigen,

Schriften, Göttingen, V & R unipress – Bonn University Press. 46–48. On the groups of opponents in 1 John: VOUGA, François (1990): *Die Johannesbriefe*. Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). 46–48. The most polemical argument of the fourth Gospel is therefore not directed against the Jews but reflects the internal Christian debate: converted Jewish Christians must remain faithful to the decision they have made. BEUTLER (2012): 70.74–76.85; cf. KLAIBER, Walter (2017): *Das Johannesevangelium. Teilband 1: Joh 1,1–10,42*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 236. Sigfred Pedersen takes a different view, according to which Jesus addresses the Jews in general from verse 37 onwards (cf. 8:48, 52, 57) – PEDERSEN, Sigfred (1999): Anti-Judaism in John's Gospel: John 8. In Johannes Nissen – Sigfred Pedersen (eds.): *New Readings in John. Literary and Theological Perspectives. Essays from the Scandinavian Conference on the Fourth Gospel Århus 1997* (JSNTSup 182). Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press. 172–93, 184 n. 46.

- 30 BOLYKI János (2001): „Igaz tanúvallomás”. *Kommentár János evangéliumához*. Budapest, Osiris. 245; KLAUCK (1991): 59; cf. BULTMANN, Rudolf (1957): *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEK). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 242–44; KLAIBER (2017): 242–43; THEOBALD, Florian (2015): *Teufel, Tod und Trauer. Der Satan im Johannesevangelium und seine Vorgeschichte* (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus 109). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 156–57.
- 31 Cf. FREY, Jörg (2022): Dualism and the World in the Gospel and the Letters of John. In Jörg Frey, *Vom Ende zum Anfang. Studien zum Johannesevangelium. Kleine Schriften IV*. (WUNT 492). Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. 703–20. 714.
- 32 Cf. BROWN (1982): 441. In 1 John, it is probably not a specific murder that is in the background, but rather it is meant to express “that hatred of one's brother was easily equated with Cain's act of fratricide” BYRON (2007): 529.

die seinem Herrschaftsbereich nicht (mehr) angehören, geht er als physischer ἀνθρωποκτόνος vor, will sie dadurch in Angst und Schrecken versetzen, um sie zum Abfall von Jesus und Gott zu verleiten, somit (wieder) Macht über sie zu gewinnen und sie als geistiger ἀνθρωποκτόνος durch die Sünde in den eschatologischen Tod zu stürzen.”³³ He should have known the truth! Cain’s portrayal is tied up with heresy and lies about God – as we have noted above.

Alongside with murderer there are even more elements in our text which connect it with the Cain narrative. We have already noted that the provenance from the devil (ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστε) understands the birth of Cain as from a supernatural power (cf. 1 John 3:12). The refusal of the Jews in John 8:41 is seen in a new light: they have another father, God himself.³⁴ The translation of John 8:44 is difficult as it contains a double genitive; the most conclusive rendering is: „You are from the father, from the devil”.³⁵ In Judith M. Lieu’s view it is likely that behind this idea we can see the portrayal of Cain, whose father was the devil.³⁶ His desire to put his brother to death corresponds to the will of the devil. This concept fits well with the wider context, „denn die Juden verhalten sich zu Jesus wie Kain zu Abel, nicht wie der Teufel zu Adam“³⁷ (cf. John

33 THEOBALD (2015): 177; cf. 183–88. The Johannine and early Jewish traditions undoubtedly appear heresy and lie together already in Polycarp (Phil. 7:1), where the “firstborn of Satan” was an established part of heretical polemics. Cf. DAHL (1964); DOCHHORN, Jan (2007): Mit Kain kam der Tod in die Welt. Zur Auslegung von SapSal 2,24 in Clem 3,4; 4,1–7, mit einem Seitenblick auf Polycarp, Phil. 7,1 und Theophilus, Ad Autol. II,29,3–4. In *ZNW* 98, 150–59, 154–58.

34 Cf. DAHL (1964): 78.

35 It could also be translated as: “ihr stammt von dem Vater des Teufels” (DAHL (1964): 76). The above translation is suggested by THEOBALD (2015): 155; SCHNELLE, Udo (2016): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, (ThHK 4). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt. 211. N. A. Dahl also accepts the above as the original version (ibid. 79).

36 LIEU (1993): 471.

37 DAHL (1964): 78.

5:16,18; 7:1,19; 10:31–39; 19:7). Accordingly, the Jews participate in a murder which comes from the devil; those committing the murder also come from the devil.³⁸ To all this is attached: *ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς*, from the beginning.

4. *The Beginning*

The first expression in the gospel of John is *ἐν ἀρχῇ*, which the gospel writer repeats in the prologue one more time (John 1:1, 2). Outside of the prologue however, with one notable exception, the word ‘beginning’ marks the beginning of something that Jesus has done (Jn 2:11; 6:64; 8:25; 16:4) or refers to the fellowship of the disciples with each other and with Jesus (Jn 15:27). The only exception is the above-mentioned verse of John 8:44: *ἐκεῖνος ἀνθρωποκτόνος ἦν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς*.³⁹ The context makes clear that, although the name of Cain does not occur, his murder was the deed of *διάβολος*, from the beginning (*διάβολος* in the gospel, apart from this passage, only in 13:2⁴⁰). The Johannine Jesus says

38 Cf. BYRON (2011): 234–35. According to SapSal 2:24, human mortality, traditionally associated with the deeds of Adam and Eve, can be traced back to the envy of the devil, which in (Jewish) tradition is linked to the murder of Cain. It cannot therefore be ruled out that the author of SapSal believed that death actually came into the world through the deeds of Cain. Cf. DOCHHORN (2007); further THEOBALD (2015): 160–61 – with other examples.

39 Pedersen believes he has discovered the “creation terminology” in v. 44, “the repetition of *ἐν ἀρχῇ* from 1:1 in *ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς*.” PEDERSEN (1999): 186. However, he does not address the other occurrences of *ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς*, nor does he deal with the interpretation of the specific term “murderer of men,” but merely writes that “to live by this lie is therefore the sin that has human death as its consequence (vv. 21,24,34,46)” (ibid., 187).

40 Since the name *διάβολος* becomes dominant in later documents of the New Testament, “this may indicate that the Johannine terminology represents a later stage of early Christian tradition.” FREY (2022): 711.

„dass der Teufel von Anfang an ein Menschenmörder war und (von Anfang an) nicht in der Wahrheit stand“.⁴¹

The first letter of John begins just like the Gospel: „what was from the beginning...” The neutral formulation (four times in 1 John 1:1)⁴² makes the interpretation difficult. Generally, it is presumed that ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς cannot be the beginning of creation, rather that of a historical event.⁴³ Taking other occurrences into consideration, we may conclude that in the vocabulary of the gospel, it denotes the beginning of the preaching of Jesus (e.g. in the commandment of love – 1 John 3:11, cf. also 2 John 5, 6),⁴⁴ viz. the beginning of the Johannine tradition or the existence of the congregation (1 John 2:7, 13, 14). But there is an exception to the rule: 1 John 3:8 states that the devil desired and committed sin from the very beginning (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ὁ διάβολος ἀμαρτάνει). So the deeds of the devil have a starting point, and all those who do not do right and hate their brother come from him (1 John 3:10⁴⁵). This starting point is identical with Cain’s deed since Cain and his work derived from evil (1 John 3:12); the climax is reached when Cain killed his brother (1 John 3:15). Cain then is a contrast to brotherly love, he was so at the very beginning. And this is the earliest possible time. For although the tempter is present in the first sin, Adam and Eve certainly did not come from him: Cain is the first to be derived from the evil. And if this world is also determined by the evil (cf. 1 John 2:15–17), so mankind can escape

41 THEOBALD (2015): 156.

42 Details on this question: BOLYKI (2008): 75–76.

43 Cf. KLAUCK (1991): 58–60; LIEU (2009): 87–88.

44 Since the commandment of love was presumably given to the parishioners as a guideline during baptismal catechesis, it refers here to the beginning of their Christian life. Cf. KLAUCK (1989): 155.

45 Cf. KLAUCK (1991): 186–87. There is also the view that this could refer to the case in Paradise (e.g. BROWN (1982): 429 – later he also suggests a reference to Cain [ibid., 442]), since the noun διάβολος only occurs in 1John 3:8, 10, it makes sense to relate it to the story of Cain.

only through God, if the seed of God resides in them.⁴⁶ While the devil represents the metaphysical dimension of evil, Cain, as the first murderer, is the human manifestation of evil. „D.h. von Anfang an in den Taten des Hasses sein (sc. der Teufel) Wirken entfaltet und in entmythoisierter Sprache nichts anderes darstellt als die Verdichtung solchen Hasses zu einer transpersonalen Macht“.⁴⁷ The devil in the Johannine literature does not enter the stage as a corporeal being, for in the gospel he is not the ruler of demons, rather the ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, the ultimate ruler over mankind, and through humans he intervenes in history. „Der Teufel wirkt im vierten Evangelium durch Judas und durch diejenigen, die in 8,44 als seine Kinder angesehen werden, somit durch Menschen und nur durch sie.“⁴⁸ This means that the wording „from the beginning“ refers to Cain who committed the evil deed. These two characters are closely tied together, even in different forms, as they introduce death into human life.⁴⁹ However, descent from the devil is not deterministic in the sense that one could not decide in favour of God through the confrontation with the revelation of Jesus⁵⁰: although they belong to the devil in their nature, they can be saved by God as new-born children. So it is not that people make a mistake, but that they exist in the mistake. „Sünde konstituiert und qualifiziert einen Bereich, in dem sich der Mensch befindet, der sein Denken und Handeln bestimmt und in dem er nicht nur unausweichlich dem Tod entgegengeht, sondern in dem er sich

46 Cf. BOLYKI (2008): 155. The term “seed” also plays an important role in connection with the story of Cain. In Jewish tradition, it was a widespread view that Adam’s seed continued in Seth, not in Cain. Cf. Gen 4:25. LIEU (1997): 35; LIEU (1993): 469–71. Here we can only point to the fact that Cain is not mentioned as being in the image of Adam, whereas this is clearly stated in the case of Seth (Gen 5:3). Cf. KÓKAI-NAGY, Viktor (2022): Εἰκὼν bei Paulus. In *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai* 67, 7–28, 7–11.

47 Cf. KLAUCK (1989): 156.

48 THEOBALD (2015): 152.

49 GRYPEOU – SPURLING (2013): 119; cf. THEOBALD (2015): 151–53.

50 Cf. BULTMANN (1957): 240; FREY (2022): 712.

letztlich bereits im Tod befindet.”⁵¹ Cain is the starting point; he provides the graphic material for what it means to be a child of the devil who no longer has the choice of whether he wants to live in paradise or not. By the murder of Cain the foundations of the evil are firmly established forever, and his descendants can only leave this vicious circle when they are newly born by God.⁵² In Christian sources, the metaphorical connection between the devil and Cain is best elaborated in John 8:44 and 1 John 3:7–12⁵³: Evil gets stronger and increases when the number of sins grows: committing a sin against God means giving place to the devil. The uncertain timing in Gen 4:8 does not make it clear whether Cain’s decision to commit murder arises immediately after the refused offering or only after a certain period of time. „So oder so signalisiert der Verzicht auf jeden erläuternden oder bewertende Zwischenschritt, dass das Geschehen eine Eigendynamik entwickelt, die sich nur schwer aufhalten lässt.”⁵⁴ But in the Wisdom of Solomon, chapter 10, we can see a list of righteous and wicked persons, and SapSal 10:3–4 says about Cain (without mentioning his name⁵⁵) that he has abandoned wisdom (ἀποστὰς δὲ ἀπ’ αὐτῆς) and has become an unrighteous man (ἄδικος⁵⁶), who has murdered his brother

51 THEOBALD (2015): 170.

52 “Interessant ist nun, dass der johanneische Teufel gerade gegen diejenigen als physischer ἀνθρωποκτόνος vorgeht, die er nicht (mehr) durch die Sünde als geistiger ἀνθρωποκτόνος in den eschatologischen Tod stürzen kann, gegen Jesus selbst und gegen die Jünger” THEOBALD (2015): 176.

53 GRYPEOU – SPURLING (2013): 134–35.

54 GERTZ (2018): 167.

55 “The anonymity of the Pentateuchal characters is significant because it reflects the midrashic aspect and the universal perspective of this Hellenistic work.” SCHNIDER, Anikó Angelika (2018): The Cain and Abel Story in the Wisdom of Solomon (Wisdom 10.3) – Echoes of the First Sibling Rivalry in a Hellenistic World. On https://www.academia.edu/43886095/The_Cain_and_Abel_Story_in_the_Wisdom_of_Solomon_Wisdom_10_3_Echoes_of_the_first_sibling_rivalry_in_a_Hellenistic_world (04.12.2024), 5.

56 „The significance of this presentation is that he has the notoriety of being the only person in this list to be referred in this way. Even the collective

(ἀδελφοκτόνος). Interestingly, the opposite of Cain is not Abel but the „first father“: Adam. Over Adam wisdom kept guard and she saved him (SapSal 10:1–2).⁵⁷ It is also clear from this text that the flood came through the fault of Cain – practically, he caused all the evil in the world and he bears responsibility for it.⁵⁸ Sin is then a power causing damnation and affecting the whole of humanity; when it prevails, it determines the existence of individuals and rules over them. We may then conclude that John 8:44 und 1 John 3:11–12 are the two passages in the Johannine Literature (but in the whole of the New Testament, too) which best describe the essence and effect of the devil.⁵⁹ Our investigation showed that the doctrine of the Johannine School fit in well with the Jewish tradition of exegesis in which Cain and not Adam was the point of departure of the effect of evil, whilst Abel, the first victim, was the first righteous and God-fearing human.

5. Conclusion

In Jewish tradition there are many views of when and how evil appears and effects the world. This paper cannot tackle all of them, we only mention that the beginning of sin with Adam is one of the latest ideas in Jewish thought.⁶⁰ Presumably, in this

enemies of the 'righteous' are not called ἄδικος“ (BYRON (2012): 339).

57 In tradition, Abel is not only the first true, God-fearing representative of virtue, but he is also the first to suffer innocently and to be persecuted innocently (cf. James 5:1–6). BYRON (2012): 331–38. 344–48.

58 For more details on this topic, see SCHNIDER (2018), Cain and Abel Story.

59 Cf. THEOBALD (2015): 153.

60 For an overview of the topic, see GÖTTE, Monika Elisabeth (2016): *Von den Wächtern zu Adam*, (WUNT 2/426). Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. 10–36, on the case of Adam: 25–28. “Im Römerbrief findet sich vermutlich zum ersten Mal ein deutlicher kausaler Zusammenhang zwischen der Sünde Adams und dem Übel des Todes. Die paulinische Adam-Rezeption hat sowohl die Anthropologie als auch die Hamartologie der späteren

representation Adam, the first created man, could not be a paradigm of both positive and negative quality. That is why Abel became the positive,⁶¹ and Cain the demonic figure in the history of the first murder – and Cain’s origin and decision determined the sort of all humanity.⁶² They both could provide a paradigm for mankind to make their decisions. Abel was the first to appeal to God outside the garden of Eden and to gain his benevolence – this made him able of being paradigmatic.⁶³ By his decision, murderous deed and way of life, Cain became not only the first murderer, but also a model for disbelievers,⁶⁴ indeed, he became the „door”, by whom evil came to the world for the first time (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς) and then established its rule over the life of humankind.

Bibliography

- APTOWITZER, Victor (1922): *Kain und Abel in der Agada, den Apokryphen, der hellenistischen, christlichen und muhammedanischen Literatur*. Wien – Leipzig, R. Löwit Verlag.
- ATTRIDGE, Harold W. (1989): *Hebrews* (Hermeneia). Philadelphia, Fortress Press.

kirchlichen Theologie maßgeblich geprägt” (ibid., 27). There is no trace of this in the Gospel of John; Pedersen finds the closest parallel in 8:40, where Jesus speaks of himself in general terms as a human being. PEDERSEN (1999): 175.

- 61 “But Abel’s status as the first human to obey God outside of the garden made him a role model that could be emulated by all who lived in the Post-Edenic world” (BYRON (2012): 336).
- 62 “Cain come both to do evil and, most important, to conceive of evil in murdering his brother” (LIEU (1993): 468).
- 63 BYRON (2012): 338.
- 64 “Cain a model for disbelievers may explain 1 John’s use of Cain as a model for the secessionists (since 3:12 must be related to 3:17)” BROWN (1982): 443.

- BASSLER, Jouette (1986): Cain and Abel in the Palestinian Targums: A Brief Note on an Old Controversy. In *JSJ* 17, 56–64.
- BEUTLER, Johannes (2012): *Neue Studien zu den johanneischen Schriften*. Göttingen, V & R unipress – Bonn University Press.
- BOLYKI János (2001): „Igaz tanúvallomás”. *Kommentár János evangéliumához*. Budapest, Osiris.
- BOLYKI János (2008): *A tanúvallomás folytatódik. Kommentár János leveleibez*. Budapest, Osiris.
- BROWN, Raymond (1982): *The Epistles of John* (AB). New York et al., Doubleday.
- BULTMANN, Rudolf (1957): *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEK). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- BULTMANN, Rudolf (1967): *Die drei Johannesbriefe* (KEK). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- BYRON, John (2007): Slaughter, Fratricide and Sacrilege Cain and Abel Traditions in 1 John 3. In *Biblica* 88, 526–35.
- BYRON, John (2011): *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition. Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry* (Themes in Biblical Narrative 14). Lieden – Boston, Brill.
- BYRON, John (2011): Abel’s Blood and the Ongoing Cry for Vengeance. In *CBQ* 73, 743–56.
- BYRON, John (2012): Cain and Abel in Second Temple Literature and Beyond. In Craig A. Evans – Joel N. Lohr – David L. Petersen (eds.): *The Book of Genesis. Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (SupVT 152). Leiden – Boston, Brill. 331–51.
- DAHL, Nils Alstrup (1964): Der Erstgeborene Satans und der Vater des Teufels (Polyk. 7,1 und Joh 8,44). In Walther Eltester (ed.): *Apophoreta. FS für Ernst Haenchen* (Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 30). Berlin, A. Töpelman. 70–84.
- DOCHHORN, Jan (2007): Mit Kain kam der Tod in die Welt. Zur Auslegung von SapSal 2,24 in Clem 3,4; 4,1 – 7, mit einem Seitenblick auf Polycarp, Phil. 7,1 und Theophilus, Ad Autol. II,29,3–4. In *ZNW* 98, 150–59.

- DOCHHORN, Jan (2016): Kain, der Sohn des Teufels. Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu 1. Joh 3,12. In Jan Dochhorn – Susanne Rudnig-Zelt – Benjamin Wold (eds.): *Das Böse, der Teufel und Dämonen – Evil, the Devil, and Demons* (WUNT 2/412). Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. 169–87.
- FREY, Jörg (2015): *Der Brief des Judas und der zweite Brief des Petrus* (ThHK 15/II), Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- FREY, Jörg (2022): Dualism and the World in the Gospel and the Letters of John. In Jörg Frey (ed.): *Vom Ende zum Anfang. Studien zum Johannesevangelium. Kleine Schriften IV* (WUNT 492). Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. 703–20.
- GERTZ, Jan Christian (2018): *Das erste Buch Mose. Genesis. Die Urgeschichte Gen 1–11* (ATD 1). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- GONZÁLEZ HOLGUÍN, Julián Andrés (2018): *Cain, Abel, and the Politics of God. An Agambenian reading of Genesis 4:1–16*, London – New York, Routledge.
- GÖTTE, Monika Elisabeth (2016): *Von den Wächtern zu Adam* (WUNT 2/426). Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck.
- GRYPEOU, Emmanouela – SPURLING, Helen (2013): *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity. Encounters between Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (Jewish and Christian Perspectives 24). Leiden – Boston, Brill.
- KLAIBER, Walter (2017): *Das Johannesevangelium. Teilband 1: Job 1,1–10,42* (Die Botschaft des Neuen Testaments). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- KLAUCK, Hans-Josef (1989): Brudermord und Bruderliebe. Ethische Paradigmen in 1Joh 3,11–17. In Helmut Merklein (ed.): *Neues Testament und Ethik. FS. für Rudolf Schnackenburg*. Freiburg–Basel–Wien: Herder. 151–69.
- KLAUCK, Hans-Josef (1991): *Der erste Johannesbrief* (EKK). Zürich – Neukirchen Vluyn: Benzinger – Neukirchener Verlag.
- KLEMM, Peter (1981): Kain und die Kainiten. In *ZThK* 78, 391–408.

- KÓKAI-NAGY, Viktor (2022). Εἰκόν bei Paulus. In *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai* 67, 7–28.
- KÓKAI-NAGY, Viktor (2023): Josephus' Kaingeschichte. *BN* 199, 35–61.
- KUGEL, James L. (1998): *Traditions of the Bible. A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era*. Cambridge, MA – London, Harvard University Press.
- LIEU, Judith M. (1993): What was from the Beginning: Scripture and Tradition in the Johannine Epistles. In *NTS* 39, 458–77.
- LIEU, Judith M. (1997): *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- LOHR, Joel N. (2009): Righteous Abel, Wicked Cain: Genesis 4:1–16 in the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, and the New Testament. In *CBQ* 71, 485–96.
- NOORT, Ed (2003): Gen 4:1–16. From Paradise to Reality: The Myth of Brotherhood. In Gerard P. Luttikhuisen (ed.): *Eve's Children*, Leiden – Boston, Brill. 93–106.
- PEDERSEN, Sigfred (1999): Anti-Judaism in John's Gospel: John 8. In Johannes Nissen – Sigfred Pedersen (eds.): *New Readings in John. Literary and Theological Perspectives. Essays from the Scandinavian Conference on the Fourth Gospel Århus 1997* (JSNTSup 182). Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press. 172–93.
- REIM, Günter (1984): Joh. 8. 44 – Gotteskinder/Teufelskinder. Wie antijüdisch ist 'Die wohl antijudaistischste Äusserung des NT'? *NTS* 30, 619–24.
- SCHNELLE, Udo (2010): *Die Johannesbriefe* (ThHK 17). Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- SCHNELLE, Udo (2016): *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (ThHK 4). Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- SCHNIDER, Anikó Angelika (2018): The Cain and Abel Story in the Wisdom of Solomon (Wisdom 10.3) – Echoes of the First Sibling Rivalry in a Hellenistic World, https://www.academia.edu/92117344/The_Cain_and_Abel_Story_in_the_Wisdom_of_Solomon_Wisdom_10_3_ (04.12.2024)

- THEOBALD, Florian (2015): *Teufel, Tod und Trauer. Der Satan im Johannesevangelium und seine Vorgeschichte* (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus 109). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- VOUGA, François (1990): *Die Johannesbriefe* (HNT 15,3). Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck.

The traitor's character in Matthew and its Hellenistic background

István M. Ledán¹

Abstract

The figure of Judas as traitor appears only in the gospels and in Acts (and possibly in 1 Cor 11), and only in a fleeting way. Moreover, Judas' betrayal is not psychologically prepared. The reader is merely informed about it, without being able to be really shocked, since the evangelists indicate beforehand, already in the list of disciples that Judas betrayed Jesus. There is no vivid picture of his personality: we do not read about his family, his occupation, his kinship. However, despite the fact that his personality is quite blurred (at least in the synoptics), his character seems to have been shaped by the evangelists for certain purposes. In this paper, I will examine how Matthew sees and displays the character of Judas. I do this by analysing Judas' personality (his complexity, his possible development, his inner life) as he appears in the gospel of Matthew. The narrator is obviously not neutral about Judas, nor is the narrative itself. But my goal is not to draw an objective picture of Judas (if this is possible at all). I am not going to investigate the "historical Judas". I am specifically interested in how the evangelist, with his biases and (theological) preconceptions, saw and interpreted Judas' deed. In the course of the analysis, I will also highlight potentially useful Hellenistic analogies.

Keywords: Judas, traitor, suicide, Matthew, characters.

¹ Debrecen Reformed Theological University, Department of New Testament, e-mail: ledan.istvan@drhe.hu.

1. Introduction

A 5th-century ivory casket depicts the solitary suicide of Judas and the public execution of Jesus side by side, as if to contrast the deaths of Judas and Jesus. The tree on which Judas hanged himself and the cross of Jesus are on the same level, but Judas is pulled down by the weight of his body, while Jesus is visually „floating” on the cross (as if he were not suspended or nailed to it). Although the deaths of Judas and Jesus are seen in the same scene, Judas is excluded from the circle of Jesus’ present and future friends and followers: Mary (the mother of Jesus) and John (the beloved disciple) turn their backs on him, and Jesus’ arms, extended in a kind of embrace, reach only his mother, his beloved disciple, and the Roman soldier. The cross of Jesus is a dead tree, yet there is life underneath it (present and future disciples, Jews and Gentiles), while Judas’ is a living tree, but there is no life underneath it, only the wages of his betrayal. On Judas’ tree, a bird feeds its young, a possible reference to the fact that his betrayal could not subvert the divine plan, but that his greedy act contributed to the fulfilment of God’s redemptive will.²

It was a great audacity on the part of the unknown artist to depict in the same scene the disgraceful end of Judas and the death of Jesus (which was considered disgraceful too). But he took his courage from Matthew. For according to Matthew, Jesus and Judas died on the same day (Matt 27:3–10), both hanging from a tree, a despicable and abominable way to die (cf. Gal 3:13, Deut 21:23) in both Jewish and Roman terms. Did Matthew intend to contrast Judas with Jesus? Would Judas be the anti-hero in the drama of the Passion? In Greek tragedies, it is a common feature that the author contrasts the hero with an anti-hero. In *Antigone*, for instance, the

2 Cf. HARLEY, Felicity (2020): Hanging by a thread: the death of Judas in early Christian art. In Olsen Lam – Rossitza Schroeder (eds.): *The Eloquence of Art*. London–New York, Routledge. 122–123.

protagonist's contrasting persona is Ismene, who does not want to defy Creon's orders; she, unlike Antigone, chooses life over a noble death. In her view, however much Antigone is moved by brotherly love, her action (i.e. the burial of the brother) is folly.³ Another possibility for the anti-hero is Creon who stands in contrast to Antigone. She is motivated by piety, the fear of gods (εὐσεβοῦσα), mercy and love, prepared to die for her principles, while Creon is motivated by the laws of the polis, according to which the traitor and the one who was found to be disloyal are punishable even *post mortem*. The reader's sympathy is clearly directed towards Antigone, but the author does not deny his compassion for Creon either: we are able to pity the fate of Creon just as we pity Judas in the gospel of Matthew. The question is, however, whether the person of Judas in the gospels is complex enough to be seen as an anti-hero, that is, an anti-hero whose actions could be contrasted with those of Jesus? Indeed, the accounts of Judas are scant and sparse. The figure of Judas appears only in the gospels and in Acts (and possibly in 1 Cor 11), and only in a fleeting way.

There are five references to Judas Iscariot in Matthew (Matt 10:4, 26:14–16, 26:20–26, 26:47–50, and 27:1–5), three in Mark (Mark 3:19, 14:10–11 and 14:43–45), four in Luke-Acts (Luke 6:16, 22:3–6, 22:47–48, and Acts 1:15–20) and five in John (John 6:70–71, 12:4–7, 13:2, 13:11, and 13:21–30). Moreover, Judas' betrayal is not psychologically prepared. The reader is merely informed about it, without being able to be really shocked, since the evangelists indicate beforehand, already in the list of disciples that Judas betrayed Jesus (παραδούς, aor!). There is no vivid picture of his personality, as in the case of Peter. We do not read about his family, his occupation, his kinship. Apart from the details of John, who calls him a thief and accuses him of occasionally stealing,

3 Cf. GARRISON, P. Elise (1995): *Groaning Tears*. Leiden–New York–Köln, Brill. 133.

we only know of his betrayal.⁴ However, despite the fact that his personality is quite blurred (at least in the synoptics), his character seems to have been shaped by the evangelists for certain purposes. In this paper, I will examine how Matthew sees and displays the character of Judas. I do this by analyzing the character of Judas as he appears in each of the gospels. The narrator obviously is not neutral about Judas, nor is the narrative itself. But my goal is not to draw an objective picture of Judas (if this is possible at all), I am not investigating the “historical Judas”, I am specifically interested in how the evangelist, with his biases and (theological) preconceptions, saw and interpreted Judas’ deed. In the course of the analysis, I will also highlight hopefully useful Hellenistic analogies.

2. Judas’s „transfigurations” in the gospels

Whenever we read about Judas in the gospels, it is almost always noted that he betrayed Jesus. Judas has the fixed epithet of *betrayer*. It is hardly possible to say anything darker about a disciple than this. Nevertheless, it is striking that the gospels (from Mark to John) offer a picture of him that is increasingly dark. Of course, it may be possible that outside the evangelists’ portrayal of Judas as an increasingly dark figure, his image became increasingly negative in the early church tradition as well. Mark merely tells of his betrayal, without saying anything about his motive (or motives). Matthew emphasizes that the reason for his actions was greed: he offered his services to the chief priests for money (Mt 26:15). Luke says that Satan entered Judas; in his account the material gain is almost incidental and secondary. In John, in addition to being Satan’s agent,

4 GRENE, Clement (2016): *Cowardice, Betrayal and Discipleship: Peter and Judas in the Gospels*. School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh. 55. (doctoral thesis).

he is also a thief who regularly steals from the disciples' purse (Jn 13:2, Jn 12:5–6). His later fate is also progressively gruesome. While in Matthew, seized with remorse, he commits suicide, in Luke he suffers a horrible and disgusting accident on his property bought from the wages of treason. John, without going into further details of Judas' fate, says tersely but all the more unequivocally that he is the son of *perdition* (υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας, 17:12).

At the same time, the Jews are portrayed in the gospels similarly in an increasingly negative light. They are more and more hostile to Jesus. In John, Satan, the Jews, and Judas are closely linked.⁵ Judas is Satan's agent and even the leader of the devil's host (John 18:3), the Jews are the children of the devil (John 8:44). Judas' "negative transfiguration", his gradual "darkening" in the gospels, respectively the contradictory nature of the accounts of him, his – so to say – one-dimensional and vague character and personality, led some scholars, especially in the early 20th century, to assume that Judas is a fictitious, symbolic person, a kind of embodiment of Judaism.⁶ Judas' betrayal is Judaism's betrayal of Jesus. No doubt, the reader of the Bible thinks of Judas not as Judas, the writer of the letter, or as the brother of Jesus, but as Judas the betrayer, and his name is almost reflexively associated with Judaism and Jews. But this can be explained more by Judas' tradition history, than by any intention of the evangelists. In any case, "inventing" a traitorous disciple would have done more harm than good to the Christian community. In the case of a novel, the introduction of a traitor (or even of Peter) into the plot would have beneficially complicated and "coloured" the narrative. But it would have been a major "blunder" for the purpose of the Gospels to invent a character such as Judas. Judas' betrayal was certainly very uncomfortable

5 Cf. LUZ, Ulrich – KOESTER, Helmut (2005): *Matthew 21–28: A commentary*, vol. 3. Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress Press. 480.

6 LOISY, Alfred (1962): *The Origins of the New Testament*. New York, Collier Books. 115. See also KERMODE, Frank (1979): *The Genesis of Secrecy*. Cambridge, HUP. 75–99.

for Christian communities. It raised the question that when Jesus called Judas, how could he not foresee that he would betray him? What kind of a master is he who is betrayed by one disciple, denied by another, and abandoned by others? Celsus formulated this question in the 2nd century, but it is unlikely that he was the first.⁷ It is absurd to suppose that the evangelists (or the Christian tradition) could invent a figure who was theologically embarrassing from the very moment of its invention. It seems most appropriate to treat Judas as a real historical figure whose actions caused confusion and pain to the community, a trauma that had to be dealt with. But it is quite possible that there were models and patterns available to the evangelists in portraying Judas' betrayal⁸ (just as we have Judas or the great traitors of history as models in presenting actual traitors or informers). The motifs of the Judas narratives (fallen disciple, kiss, betrayal for money, suicide, terrible accident) have parallels and analogies in Jewish and Greco-Roman literature, but these Jewish and Hellenistic motifs merely influenced (or could have influenced) the Judas narratives, and were not a source for the evangelists to construct a "Judas story". Analogy is by no means genealogy.

We now turn to a closer examination of the portrayal of Judas in Matthew. I will do this using Bennema's theory of character. First, we will examine Judas' character, that is: 1) to what extent is the character complex (does the evangelist highlight a single trait, or does he present him as a complex character, or does the character vary in degrees of complexity in each gospel) (2) does the character show any kind of development, (3) what is said about the character's inner life, its psychological profile (does the narrator provide insight into the character's inner world or not, and to what extent). Next, I will draw some potentially useful parallels

7 Origen, C.Cels. 2:18. See ORIGEN (1980): *Contra Celsum* (trans. Henry Chadwick). London–New York, Cambridge University Press.

8 Cf. GRENE (2016): 68.

and analogies from Jewish and Greco-Roman literature. Finally, we consider what purpose(s) the author intended the character of Judas to serve.⁹ What does the author expect from the reader: what should the reader think of Judas, how should he or she evaluate him?

3. Judas in the Gospel of Matthew

3.1. The personality of Judas

Reading Matthew, we are still not particularly surprised by Judas' betrayal. In fact, like Mark, Matthew already indicates in the list of disciples that Judas has become a betrayer of Jesus (Mt 10:4). Matthew follows Mark in his accounts of Judas in many ways, but his Judas is a more complex figure. On the one hand, his motive is more clearly revealed, as the evangelist indicates that he betrayed his Master for money (Mt 26:15), and on the other hand, we get some insight into his inner world: Judas repents, wants to be free of the wages of his betrayal, and finally, in desperation, hangs himself. In Matthew, Judas is involved in dialogues (with the chief priests during the bargain, with Jesus at the Last Supper, with Jesus at the arrest, and again with the chief priests when he returns the thirty pieces of silver), which makes his figure seem more vivid and alive than in the Marcan accounts.

The first dialogue (Mt 26:14–15) reveals the motive for Judas' betrayal. While Mark only vaguely hints (if he hints at all) at a material gain, Matthew says that Judas has betrayed Jesus for money. The motivation, however, is somewhat ambivalent. In the dialogue, we are told of a regular business arrangement: the amount is discussed, agreed and paid, but the amount is both ridiculous (at least compared to the amount the woman spends on Jesus during

9 BENNEMA, Cornelis (2013): Judas (the Betrayer): The Black Sheep of the Family. In Steven Hunt –D. Francois Tolmie – Ruben Zimmermann (eds): *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel*. Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. 362–364.

the Bethany anointing) and symbolic. Here Matthew does not explicitly indicate that prophecies are fulfilled by the offering of the sum, but the reader is expected to associate the thirty pieces of silver with Zech 11:12. Judas later returns the money, which makes it questionable whether his motive was solely greed.¹⁰

The second dialogue (Mt 26:25) unfolds Judas' dissembling, despicable and cynical character. At Mark's announcement of the betrayal, the disciples, saddened, ask Jesus: Surely you don't mean me? Matthew's Judas, who has already agreed with the chief priests to betray Jesus, asks separately if Jesus is talking about him. In Mark, he remains silent or his voice is lost in the 'choir of disciples', but in Matthew he seems to be insolently provoking Jesus: does he really know who is betraying him? Judas is not only greedy, but also cynical and insolent. Jesus, in any case, answers Judas' question ambiguously, somewhat enigmatically (as he later answers Pilate's question, Mt 27:11): you have said so. It is not clear to those present that Judas is the traitor.

The third dialogue (Mt 26:49–50) also speaks about Judas' cynical character: he calls Jesus a master, but does not consider him one, just as he can no longer consider himself a disciple. Jesus' answer can be understood as a question (my friend, is that why you have come?) or as a statement (my friend, that is why you have come!). In either case, Jesus' answer may contain his horror or regret at Judas' actions.

The fourth and final dialogue takes place after Peter's denial (Mt 27:3–4) between Judas and the chief priests. Judas, after learning that Jesus has been condemned to death, feels that he has betrayed innocent blood and repents. μεταμεληθείς suggests a strong emotional turn. In the Psalms of Solomon, it is directly synonymous with repentance (μετάνοια): your [God's] goodness will be upon those that sin, when they repent (ἡ χρηστότης σου ἐπὶ ἀμαρτάνοντας ἐν μεταμελείᾳ (Ps. Sol. 9:7). In the New Testament's

10 Cf. GRENE (2016): 196–197.

rare occurrences, it means to reconsider one's previous action or conduct (Mt 21:29, 2 Cor 7:8). Matthew justifies Judas' repentance or remorse by saying that he saw Jesus condemned to death. But there is no psychological justification for the act. A notorious traitor who betrayed his master for money does not behave in this way. What did he expect, what would be the consequence of his betrayal? Furthermore, a born traitor does not return the wages of his betrayal (he does not do so in Luke). In short, although Judas' betrayal in Matthew does not surprise the reader (since he is presented as a traitor at the very beginning of the Gospels), Judas himself (as a character, as a personality) is very capable of surprising us. He asks for money for the betrayal but later returns it. He is cynical, insolent, but later regrets having betrayed Jesus to the authorities. Finally, in desperation (which the reader hardly expects) he commits suicide: he hangs himself.

In Matthew's portrayal, Judas is not a completely negative figure, and he is not as colourless a character as in Mark.¹¹ As readers we feel not only contempt for him, but pity, almost a kind of sympathy.¹² He is greedy and cynical, but in the end he is able to face up to his shameful deed and repent. Judas in Matthew seems to be able to change in a positive sense. And by committing suicide, he becomes an almost tragic hero in our eyes. But the important question here is: how does Matthew see his own character? Does he really want his readers to feel sympathy or pity for him? Does he really see Judas as developing, at least to some extent, in a positive direction? Does the evangelist see Judas something else than a born traitor? Indeed, what does Matthew intend Judas' suicide to mean?

11 *Contra* HEZSER, Catherine (2018): Followers, Servants, and Traitors: The Representation of Disciples in the Synoptic Gospels and in Ancient Judaism. In E. Stanley Porter – W. Andrew Pitts (eds.): *Christian Origins and the Establishment of the Early Jesus Movement*. Leiden–Boston, Brill. 80.

12 Cf. SAARI, Aaron Maurice (2006): *The Many Deaths of Judas Iscariot: a meditation on suicide*. New York, Routledge. 91–98; KLASSEN, William (1996): *Judas: Friend or Betrayer of Jesus?* London, SCM. 96–107.

Is it another great sin after the betrayal? Or does Judas want to be punished, and because there is no one to punish him, he takes on him the punishment he deserves?¹³ Since Matthew does not add much to the Marcan portrait of Judas, except that, after seized with remorse, he commits suicide¹⁴, it is perhaps not too much to say that the traitor's suicide is a key element in the Matthean portrait of Judas. But the question what Judas' suicide might mean, can be answered more plausibly once we have examined the motif of suicide, and especially that of hanging, in Greco-Roman literature.

3.2. Motifs of the Matthean Judas narratives and their Hellenistic parallels

Matthew, unlike Mark, explicitly states that Judas betrayed Jesus for money. While his greed is somewhat nuanced by the fact that he later returns the wages of his betrayal, there is little question that Matthew intends to portray Judas as a greedy person. In ancient literature we find a story in Livy about betrayal for money and its consequences. King Tatius of the Sabines bribed the daughter of Spurius Tarpeius, a Roman commander, with gold to let his soldiers into the citadel. According to the story, as a reward for her treachery, the girl asked the enemy to give her what was on their left hand, since the Sabines wore heavy gold bracelets and beautiful jewelled rings on their left hands. Indeed, the Sabines paid with what was on their left, that is, they piled their shields upon her instead of golden gifts, so she died in this way.¹⁵ What is particularly significant and interesting for us in this story is that the traitor is most closely related to the commander responsible for defending Rome. She betrays not only his people, but also his

13 Cf. DROGE, J. Arthur – TABOR, D. James (1992): *A Noble Death, Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity*. New York, Harper Collins. 113.

14 Cf. HAGNER, Donald (2002): *Matthew 14–28*. Dallas, Word. 811.

15 Tit. Liv. Ab Urb. cond. 1.11. See LIVY (1912): *History of Rome* (trans. Canon Roberts), vol. 1. New York, E. P. Dutton and Co.

own father. It is also significant that the enemy, while accepting her services, has the greatest contempt for the traitor. Judas, likewise, betrays not only a cause, but someone with whom he has an intimate relationship. The chief priests accept the services he offers, but they have the greatest contempt for him (*What is that to us? That's your responsibility*, Mt 27:4).

The most striking element of the Matthean accounts of Judas is undoubtedly the suicide of Judas. According to Luz, the evangelist is not interested in Judas' ugly end, his suicide - as the reader might be - but in the fate of money and the field purchased with that money. This, however, is highly debatable. Moreover, Luz sees the contemporary reader as reading the later Christian view of suicide inevitably into the text when he or she sees it in a negative light. The reader of the time did not see Judas' suicide as a consequence of his sinfulness and depravity. In this respect, Luz, in his monumental Matthew-commentary, gives several textual examples of the positive (or not entirely negative) perception of suicide in the ancient literature.¹⁶ But for us, the interesting and relevant question is not how the various ancient philosophical schools and the various authors approached suicide, but rather the way (the *modus operandi*) in which suicide was committed, and especially the relationship between betrayal/murder/greed and suicide.

The average Greco-Roman person (and most Greco-Roman authors) did not in principle "criminalize" suicide, but nor did they "boast" about it in their epitaphs. Especially if the suicide was committed in a certain way. (Self-)hanging specifically horrified them; this is even more true of Roman society. We know of an inscription (not a funerary inscription!) from Sarsina (1st century BC) which tells us that a certain Horace Balbus donated land for a cemetery to his fellow citizens, and at the same time laid down the terms of his donation. The cemetery excluded gladiators, those who practised a notorious profession, and those who killed

16 LUZ- KOESTER (2005): 471.

themselves by hanging. This means, according to Voisin, that it was not self-murderers in general who were denied burial, but only those who died by hanging, either voluntarily or by the hands of others (i.e. by crucifixion). In Roman society, the hanged man was an object of fear. Romans were repulsed by all forms of hanging, the body of a hanged man had to be removed within an hour. But no one had the right to cut it off, only the *manceps*.¹⁷ This form of death turned the dead into *insepultus* (unburied) and *infelix* (cursed), and defiled the dwelling place of the living and the splendour of the sun as well.¹⁸

There are several ancient texts which show that the “divine” punishment for a traitor and/or murderer is to commit suicide. I will begin with Thucydides’ account of the death of Themistocles, the famous Athenian commander who was considered a traitor by Athenians. The author describes two traditions about the death of Themistocles. One says that he died of illness, the other that he killed himself with poison when he realised that he could not fulfil his promise to Xerxes to help him conquer Greece.¹⁹ The suicide version may have been motivated by a desire to get the traitor punished. A traitor who turns out to be unfit even to be a traitor, cannot die a natural death. The cause and the mode of suicide are strangely synchronic: frustrated (full of venom) at not being able to fulfil his promise to the king, Themistocles kills himself with poison. According to Suetonius, none of Caesar’s murderers died of natural causes: “some died by shipwreck, some in battle, some took their own lives with the self-same dagger with which they had impiously slain Caesar” (e.g. Cassius).²⁰ Plutarch writes that Caesar’s

17 Undertaker, who employed slaves. These slaves also worked as executioners, e.g. at crucifixions.

18 VOISIN, Jean-Louis (1987): *Apicata, Antinoüs et quelques autres*. In: *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome–Antiquité*. 99, nr. 1. 260–261.

19 Thuc. 1. 138. 4–5. See THUCYDIDES (1910): *The Peloponnesian War*. London–New York, J. M. Dent–E. P. Dutton.

20 Suet. Iul. 89. See SUTTONIUS (1913–1914): *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars* (trans. J. C. Rolfe). London. [Publisher Missing].

genius (i.e. ghost) sought out his murderers and killed them one way or another. A similar thing happened to Brutus. After Caesar's assassination, a phantom appears to him, his own evil genius, and indicates that they will meet again before the battle of Philippi. After battle, Brutus "put his naked sword to his breast (...), and so died".²¹ Of particular interest and relevance to us is the connection between greed and suicide by hanging, which is found in several examples in Greek epigram literature. In the following, we will look at two epigrams in which only men committed suicide by hanging themselves in a specifically feminine way. Since the Greeks saw the way in which suicide was committed as gendered, men's unmasculine suicide made them feminine, and thus the targets of black humour. In other words, it was not only the cause, but also the method itself that could provoke mockery and contempt. Suicide by hanging, whether out of avarice or greed, is a favourite topos of epigrams. I will quote an epigram by Statillius Flaccus (1st century BC), and another by Lucillius (1st century AD).

χρυσὸν ἀνὴρ εὐρῶν ἔλιπε βρόχον αὐτὰρ ὁ χρυσὸν
ὄν λίπεν οὐχ εὐρῶν ἦψεν ὄν εὖρε βρόχον.

*A man, finding gold, left his noose, but a man who didn't find the gold
which he had left fastened the noose which he had found.*²²

Ποίησας δαπάνην ἐν ὕπνοις ὁ φιλάργυρος Ἔρμων
ἐκ περιωδυνίας αὐτὸν ἀπηγγόνισεν.

*Hermon the miser, having spent money in his sleep,
hanged himself from vexation.*²³

21 Plut. Vit. Caes. 1.89. See PLUTARCH (1919): *Lives* (trans. Bernadotte Perrin). Vol.7. Cambridge–London, Harvard University Press–William Heinemann Ltd.

22 AG IX, nr. 44. See PATON, William Roger (1915): *The Greek Anthology*. Vol.3. London, William Heinemann Ltd.

23 AG XI, nr. 264. See PATON, William Roger (1926): *The Greek Anthology*. Vol.4. London, William Heinemann Ltd.

Was Matthew trying to be ironic at the expense of Judas? One thing we can take for granted: in the episode of Judas' suicide the connection between greed (avarice) and suicide (or the way it is committed) is, I think, obvious. Judas' ugly end is caused by his greed. Furthermore, Judas betrays innocent blood, i.e. he is involved in the execution of Jesus, he is in fact (one of) Jesus' murderers, and thus cannot meet his end differently than the notorious traitors, apostates and assassins of ancient literature: he destroys himself with his own hand. Finally, it is worth to note that, as in the case of Themistocles, who in his anger kills himself with poison, i.e. the cause and manner of his suicide are synchronous, Judas also inflicts on himself a manner of death similar to that of Jesus: he dies hanging from a tree, as his betrayed Master. There can be little doubt that Matthew, by suicide, is in fact „punishing” the treacherous, greedy Judas, who was guilty of Jesus' death.

3.3. Matthew's purpose/aim with the character of Judas

In Matthew's accounts of Judas, the personality of the traitor is much more complex and at the same time more controversial than in Mark. On the one hand, he behaves like a typical traitor who is willing to betray his Master for material gain, and without any external constraints. On the other hand, he does not keep the wages of betrayal: he wants to get rid of it. It is as if he had a sudden impulse to betray, and then, equally impulsively, he throws away the thirty pieces of silver. He also regrets his deed in a manner not at all typical of traitors, and finally (in a manner typical of traitors) commits suicide. Matthew does not comment on the suicide itself. He reports it with as much reportorial detachment as the author of 2 Samuel reports the suicide of Ahithophel, who betrayed David: “*Ahithophel (...) saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He put his house in order and then hanged himself. So he died and was buried in his father's tomb*” (2 Sam 17:23). At the same time, Matthew does not withhold some compassion from Judas. It is unlikely that he intended to give a psychological profile of the traitor and an

insight into his inner world (the accounts are too brief and terse for that), but Judas' remorse and suicide certainly carry a message. The question, then, is what Matthew's intention might have been. What did he want his readers to think? Is it possible that in Judas' fate Matthew was trying to portray the future fate of the Jews?²⁴ It is well known that at the end of the Jewish war, Jewish freedom fighters committed suicide en masse.²⁵ But in this case Judas would be a kind of *pars pro toto* for Judaism. But in my opinion, Judas is not the epitome of Judaism, but rather the prototype of the failed disciple. Judas' suicide is told by Matthew immediately after Peter's denial, which underlines the contrast between the two disciples. The big difference between Peter and Judas is their response to the failure. Judas' action is, of course, more shameful and his failure more blatant.

His suicide is by no means a heroic suicide (like the suicidal freedom fighters of the Jewish war), but a shameful and despicable one. Judas' death is not a noble death, by which he might have saved his honour, restored his lost integrity, or by which he might have gained some kind of atonement for himself.²⁶ The emphasis is not on honour, but on sin: Judas caused the death of an innocent man. Matthew's purpose in describing Judas' betrayal and subsequent fate is similar to Mark's. Judas' case is a warning to the disciple of all time. Judas dies on the same day as Jesus, their deaths are similar (both are deaths by hanging, and both are considered shameful and abominable), but Judas is the epitome of the negative hero in the Passion. His voluntary death, though Matthew does not deny him some compassion and pity, is not a martyrdom, nor a self-sacrifice for Jesus, nor an extreme act of confession, but a desperate act of a failed man. Matthew was probably not trying to be ironic (like the authors of the Greek epigrams) at the expense of a (greedy) traitor.

24 Cf. GRENE (2016): 195.

25 Josephus BJ. 3.734. See JOSEPHUS (1927): *The Jewish War, volume II: Books 3-4* (trans. H. St. J. Thackeray). Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

26 *Contra* TABOR – DROGE (1992): 113.

There is no black humour or satire in his description of Judas' fate. Matthew portrays satirically the chief priests, who, for reasons of purity, do not return the money offered for treason to the temple treasury, but have not a shred of remorse for having handed over a fellow countryman to the Roman authorities, moreover show complete contempt for Judas, who, from their point of view, has done them an invaluable service.²⁷ In the figure of Judas, Matthew presents the sad and inevitable fate of the failed disciple. One who fails will inevitably be seized with remorse. His fate is the same – in the unanimous view of the ancient authors and the Old Testament – as that of all (greedy) traitors. The fate of the traitor is not merely death (and not merely a dishonourable, shameful death, since Jesus' death is similar), but (unlike martyrdom and death for others) a meaningless, futile death.

4. Summary

In this paper, I have examined how Matthew presents the character of Judas and how he interprets Judas' actions. I have done this by analyzing the character of Judas as he appears in in the gospel of Matthew. In the course of this analysis, I have also drawn a number of Hellenistic analogies that have proved useful in interpreting the portrayal of Judas. Judas' betrayal is not psychologically prepared in any of the Gospels. His figure (especially in Mark, but not only) seems to be vague and colourless. The reader is not surprised by Judas' betrayal in any of the gospels, since he has already been informed of it in advance (in the disciples' list). There is no vivid drawing of his personality, as in the case of Peter. We are not given information about his family, his occupation, his kinship. Nevertheless, in each gospel his character, his motives and his

27 KEENER, S. Craig (1999): *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*. Cambridge, Eerdmans. 654–656.

subsequent fate are given different emphases. His character is more one-dimensional (Mark) or more complex (Matthew), and each author speaks of his fate with more (Matthew) or less (Mark) compassion, or denies it altogether (Luke).

Matthew presents Judas as a controversial figure. On the one hand, he behaves like a typical traitor who is willing to betray his Master for material gain, but on the other hand, he does not keep the wages of betrayal. In a manner not at all typical of a traitor, he is seized with remorse and commits suicide. In the figure of Judas, Matthew presents the sad and inevitable fate of the fallen disciple. He who falls, will inevitably be seized with remorse, but his fate cannot be other than of all (greedy) traitors. The fate of the traitor is not merely death (and not merely shameful death), but – in contrast to martyrdom, or death for others – a meaningless, futile death.

Bibliography

- BENNEMA, Cornelis (2013): Judas (the Betrayer): The Black Sheep of the Family. In Steven Hunt – D. Francois Tolmie – Ruben Zimmermann (eds): *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel*. Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. 360–372.
- DROGE, J. Arthur – TABOR, D. James (1992): *A Noble Death, Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity*. New York, Harper Collins.
- GARRISON, P. Elise (1995): *Groaning Tears*. Leiden–New York–Köln, Brill.
- GRENE, Clement (2016): *Cowardice, Betrayal and Discipleship: Peter and Judas in the Gospels*. School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh (doctoral thesis).
- HAGNER, Donald (2002): *Matthew 14–28*. Dallas, Word.

- HARLEY, Felicity (2020): Hanging by a thread: the death of Judas in early Christian art. In Olsen Lam – Rossitza Schroeder (eds.): *The Eloquence of Art*. London–New York, Routledge. 115–131.
- HEZSER, Catherine (2018): Followers, Servants, and Traitors: The Representation of Disciples in the Synoptic Gospels and in Ancient Judaism. In E. Stanley Porter – W. Andrew Pitts (eds.): *Christian Origins and the Establishment of the Early Jesus Movement*. Leiden–Boston, Brill. 71–86.
- JOSEPHUS (1927): *The Jewish War, volume II: Books 3-4* (trans. H. St. J. Thackeray). Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- KEENER, S. Craig (1999): *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*. Cambridge, Eerdmans.
- KERMODE, Frank (1979): *The Genesis of Secrecy*. Cambridge, HUP.
- KLASSEN, William (1996): *Judas: Friend or Betrayer of Jesus?* London, SCM.
- LIVY (1912): *History of Rome* (trans. Canon Roberts), vol. 1. New York, E. P. Dutton and Co.
- LOISY, Alfred (1962): *The Origins of the New Testament*. New York, Collier Books.
- LUZ, Ulrich – KOESTER, Helmut (2005): *Matthew 21–28: A commentary*. Vol. 3. Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress Press.
- ORIGEN (1980): *Contra Celsum* (trans. Henry Chadwick). London–New York, Cambridge University Press.
- PATON, William Roger (1915): *The Greek Anthology*. Vol.3. London, William Heinemann Ltd.
- PATON, William Roger (1926): *The Greek Anthology*. Vol.4. London, William Heinemann Ltd.
- PLUTARCH (1919): *Lives* (trans. Bernadotte Perrin). Vol.7. Cambridge–London, Harvard University Press–William Heinemann Ltd.
- SAARI, Aaron Maurice (2006): *The Many Deaths of Judas Iscariot: a meditation on suicide*. New York, Routledge.
- SUETONIUS (1913–1914): *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars* (trans. J. C. Rolfe). London. [Publisher Missing].

THUCYDIDES (1910): *The Peloponnesian War*. London– New York, J. M. Dent – E. P. Dutton.

VOISIN, Jean-Louis (1987): Apicata, Antinoüs et quelques autres. In *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome–Antiquité*. 99, nr. 1. 257–280.

Mysterious Encounters: The Spirits in Prison in the Context of 1 Peter 3:18–22¹

Éva Éles²

Abstract

1 Peter 3:18–22 is one of the most complex and challenging passage in Scripture. The pericope combines warnings addressed to suffering and unjustly treated Christians in Asia Minor with a solemn confession of faith, revealing that the death, resurrection, ascension, and redemption of Christ have spatial and temporal implications far broader than a superficial reading might suggest. This paper aims to delineate the exegetical and theological coordinates of the enigmatic encounter between Christ and the spirits in prison, addressing three fundamental questions: who these spirits are, what message Christ proclaimed to them, and when this encounter took place. The analysis seeks to clarify the underlying Jewish and Christian traditions, highlight connections with the early church's confessions, and show how the passage offers comfort and guidance to believers facing suffering and oppression.

Keywords: 1 Peter 3:18–22, triduum mortis, hell, afterlife, spirits in prison, resurrection, Asia Minor.

1 This paper was published in Hungarian with some modification as: ÉLES Éva (2022³): Rejtélyes találkozások. A börtönben levő lelkek az 1Pt 3,18–22 kontextusában. In: Református Szemle 115: 247–258; and in Romanian as: ÉLES Éva (2023): Întâlniri misterioase. Duhurile din închisoare în contextul lui 1 Petru 3:18–22. In: BALOGH Csaba (ed.): *Despre lucruri prea minunate: Studii din domeniul teologiei protestante*. Cluj-Napoca, Kolozsvári Protestáns Teológiai Intézet. 69–79.

2 Protestant Theological Institute of Cluj-Napoca, Department of New Testament; e-mail: eleseva@proteo.hu.

1. Preliminary considerations

A sacred text contains passages and revelations that position us at the very limits of human knowledge and confront us with unsettling questions. To what extent can we comprehend divine action? At what point do we acknowledge that our understanding, our meticulous hermeneutics, our carefully calibrated logic, and even the dogmas of our faith reach their boundary? A notable example in this regard is 1 Peter 3:18–22. Why was this passage – which states that Jesus preached to the spirits in prison – not preserved as an unrevealed mystery? If, however, this declaration was indeed made public, examined, and transmitted as a spiritual heritage throughout the generations, how was it assimilated into the dogmas of the church? Which elements were integrated into ecclesial teaching, and which were consigned to oblivion? These questions call for a profound introspection regarding the ways in which sacred texts and sacred teachings are interpreted and incorporated into our faith.

The passage under consideration, 1 Peter 3:18–22, stands among the most enigmatic texts of the New Testament, inviting profound reflection on the nature of faith and the believer's relationship with the divine. It presents the theme of Christ's redemptive suffering through a series of carefully formulated theological affirmations. The declaration „*Christ also suffered once for sins*” underscores the definitive and unrepeatable character of Jesus' atoning death. The phrase „*the righteous for the unrighteous*” conveys the substitutionary dimension of his suffering, wherein the sinless one bears the burden of sin on behalf of humanity. The statement “*to bring you to God*” reveals the teleological aim of the atonement – namely, reconciliation between God and humankind. Finally, the clause „*put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit*” highlights the paradox of Christ's passion and resurrection, contrasting his physical death with his spiritual vindication and exaltation.

Throughout the history of interpretation, 1Peter 3:19 in particular has been closely associated with several other New Testament passages. Yet to apprehend its original meaning more clearly, it is necessary to disentangle these later connections and return to the fundamental thread that remains distinctive within the broader textual fabric. The present paper seeks to trace that thread by exploring possible interpretations and explanations, guided by three central questions: Who are these spirits? What did Christ proclaim to them? And when did this mysterious encounter take place?

2. *Who are these spirits?*

The question of what kind of spirits does 1 Peter 3:19 refer to requires an answer on at least two levels. We must ask whether the subject concerns human beings - the souls of the departed - or instead it refers to supernatural beings such as angels. Throughout history, several theories have been developed to identify the nature of these spirits. The text in question brings up elements connected to the narrative of Noah in Genesis 6–9. According to 1 Peter 3:18–20 (NRSV):

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

At first glance, it might seem that these souls could be the contemporaries of Noah, the people who caused God to grieve and regret (אָנָּחָה) that He had created humankind (Gen 6:5–6)

and who were ultimately destroyed by the flood. But could these souls really have been the recipients of Christ's preaching? A closer reading of Genesis 6 reveals that there is no explicit reference to Noah's contemporaries, but rather to a general disobedience, a cosmic rebellion, against the Creator: „*I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created, people together with animals, creeping things, and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them...*” The earth was corrupt in God's sight and filled with violence (Gen 6:7, 11).

The event that preceded this divine grief was the marriage and union of the *sons of God* (הַאֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי) with the *daughters of men* (הַאֲדָמָה בָּנוֹת).³ Genesis 6:1–4 functions as a prelude to the Noah narrative.

3 Scholars' opinions regarding the meaning of the expression „*sons of God*” diverge. The earliest interpretation suggests that this phrase refers to angels. This theory is also supported by the fact that in the Old Testament, the expression “*sons of God*” is used with this meaning (Psalm 29:1; Job 1:6; 2:1). On the other hand, a similar expression appears in Ugaritic literature, where the “*sons of God*” are regarded as members of the divine pantheon. The view adopted in this study is that of the first interpretation. For detailed arguments, see the following sources: PARKER, Simon B. (1999): Son(s) of (the) God(s). In Van der Toorn, Karel – Becking, Bob – Van der Horst, Pieter W. (eds.): *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. Leiden, Brill.794–799; HANSON, Paul D. (1977): Rebellion in Heaven: Azazel and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6–11. In *JBL* 96. 195–233. Another perspective holds that these „*sons of God*” are powerful human leaders or rulers. This interpretation developed in the mid-second century A.D., when Jewish exegesis apparently sought to reduce the tension created by the idea of a possible sexual relationship between human and divine beings. For more details, see ALEXANDER, Philip S. (1972): The Targumim and Early Exegesis of “Sons of God” in Gen. 6. In *JJS* 23. 60–71; CLINES, David J. A. (1979): The Significance of the „Sons of God” Episode (Gen. 6:1–4) in the Context of the Primeval History (Gen. 1–11). In *JOT* 13. 33–46. KLINE, Meredith G. (1963): Divine Kingship and Gen. 6:1–4. In *WTJ* 24. 187–204. A third interpretation seems to have arisen for the same purpose, namely, to diminish the tension surrounding the idea of a possible sexual union between human and divine beings. According to this theory, the „*sons of God*” are viewed as the descendants of Seth, among whom Noah is also included. It is noteworthy that elsewhere in the Pentateuch, the chosen nation of Israel is referred to as the „*son of God*” (Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy

Similar narratives typically begin by recounting the divine decree underlying the subsequent events.⁴ Walter Brueggemann observes that this union represented a subversion of the created order and was driven by the primal sin: the desire for likeness to God.⁵ The first step toward the restoration of the overturned order was the flood, and this restoration was to be brought to completion through salvation in Jesus Christ.

The tradition concerning this theme appears in several apocryphal writings, the most representative of which are *The Life of Adam and Eve*, the *Ethiopic Book of Enoch* (12:1–6), and the *Book of Jubilees*, also known as *The Lesser Genesis*. The most detailed account is found in the *Book of Enoch*, chapters 6–16. These non-canonical apocalyptic sources seek to provide an explanation for the origin of the conflict between God and Satan, establishing points of contact with various canonical passages such as Psalm 82, Genesis 6:1–4, and Isaiah 14:12–14.

The identification of the “sons of God” as divine beings - namely, as fallen angels - may provide a key to understanding 1 Peter 3:19–20.⁶ In the Greek text, the term πνεύματα appears

14:1). See ESLINGER, Lyle (1979): A Contextual Identification of the *bene ha'elohim* and *benoth ha'adam* in Gen. 6:1–4. In *JOT* 13. 65–73.

4 WENHAM, Gordon J. (2002): *Genesis 1–15*. Dallas, Word. 138.

5 BRUGGEMANN, Walter (1982): *Genesis. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Atlanta, Westminster John Knox. 72.

6 In the study of the Watchers and the divine judgment in early Jewish apocalyptic literature, The Book of Enoch provides a vivid account of the fate of Azazel and his followers. In Chapter XII, Enoch is commissioned to deliver a message of condemnation to the heavenly Watchers, emphasizing the seriousness of their transgressions against both God and humankind. See CHARLES, Robert Henry (1917): *The Book of Enoch*. London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. Chapter XII–XIII (excerpts):

1. Before these things Enoch was hidden, and no one of the children of men knew where he was hidden, and where he abodes, and what had become of him.
2. And his activities had to do with the Watchers, and his days were with the holy ones.

(1 Pet 3:19). In the Holy Scriptures, the word *πνεύματα* is translated as souls or spirits, and that latter commonly refers to supernatural beings. The term frequently occurs in adjectival constructions, such as „unclean spirits” (*ἀκάθαρτα πνεύματα* – Matt 8:16; Luke 4:36; 10:20; Eph 2:2) and „ministering spirits” (*λειτουργικά πνεύματα* – Heb 1:14). In several passages of the Book of Revelation, angels

-
3. And I, Enoch, was blessing the Lord of majesty and the King of the ages, and lo! the Watchers called me - Enoch the scribe - and said to me:
 4. “Enoch, thou scribe of righteousness, go, declare to the Watchers of the heaven who have left the high heaven, the holy eternal place, and have defiled themselves with women, and have done as the children of earth do, and have taken unto themselves wives.
 5. Ye have wrought great destruction on the earth: and ye shall have no peace nor forgiveness of sin; and since they delight themselves in their children,
 6. The murder of their beloved ones shall they see, and over the destruction of their children shall they lament, and shall make supplication unto eternity, but mercy and peace shall ye not attain.”

Chapter XIII (excerpt)

1. And Enoch went and said: „Azâzêl, thou shalt have no peace: a severe sentence has gone forth against thee to put thee in bonds.
2. And thou shalt not have toleration nor request granted to thee, because of the unrighteousness which thou hast taught, and because of all the works of godlessness and unrighteousness and sin which thou hast shown to men.”
3. Then I went and spoke to them all together, and they were all afraid, and fear and trembling seized them.
4. And they besought me to draw up a petition for them that they might find forgiveness, and to read their petition in the presence of the Lord of heaven.
5. For from thenceforward they could not speak (with Him) nor lift their eyes to heaven for shame of their sins for which they had been condemned.
6. Then I wrote out their petition, and the prayer regarding their spirits and their deeds individually and regarding their requests that they should have forgiveness and length (of days).

are designated as „the seven spirits of God” (Rev 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). Taken together, these parallel passages indicate that the New Testament provides a solid theological basis for interpreting the „spirits in prison” as referring to such supernatural beings.⁷

In 1 Peter 4:6, we encounter a very similar formulation: „The gospel was proclaimed also to the dead.” Here, the author does not use *πνεύματα* but rather *νεκροί*, a more common and natural term when referring to human beings.⁸ Verse 4:6 differs from 3:19 both structurally and in content. Therefore, it is advisable to return to the immediate context, where we read in verse 20 that „in the days of Noah (...) when the ark was being prepared, only a few lives, precisely eight souls, were saved through water.” It is evident that the eight souls refer to Noah and his family. The term used here is *ψυχαί* (1:9, 22; 2:25; 3:20; 4:19). Consequently, the author distinguishes between the spirits in prison and the eight saved souls by employing these different Greek terms. This distinction most likely reflects the fact that the author is referring to different entities. Within the New Testament context, *ψυχαί* is associated with the entirety of the human person or human life (John 10:11; Acts 2:41; 27:37; Romans 16:4).⁹

The image of the prison, *φυλακή*, from which the later doctrine of purgatory developed, is associated more with angels than with human beings (cf. Revelation 20:1–3, 10). In the formulation of this passage, the repressive and subjugating power of the divine is evident: the angels (*ἄγγελοι*), authorities (*ἐξουσίαι*), and powers

7 Regarding the range of meanings associated with *πνεῦμα*, see BAUER, Walter (2000): *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press. 738–741; DANKER, Frederick William (2009): *A Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press. 289.

8 Although it is true that Hebrews 12:23 speaks of “the spirits of the righteous” (*πνεύματα δικαίων*), the context makes it clear that this refers to human beings.

9 BAUER (2000): 979–980.

(δυνάμεις) are all subjected to him, the Lord (ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ; 3:22). The epistles of 2 Peter and Jude, drawing on the apocalyptic tradition of Enoch, likewise refer to those angels who were not spared by God but were cast into the dark depths of the underworld to be kept in custody until the final judgment (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6, 13).¹⁰

3. Evaluation of interpretations

Many scholars have concluded that those who were once disobedient can be understood as either fallen or malevolent angels, or as the wicked and ungodly humans contemporary Noah.¹¹ The permissive nature of this exegesis is primarily due to the fact that certain Church Fathers, such as Clement of Alexandria (150–215), Cyril of Alexandria (375–444), Athanasius of Alexandria (296–373), and the so-called Alexandrian reading¹²

10 The Epistle of Jude not only refers to the Book of Enoch but also cites it directly: „Even the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but abandoned their own dwelling, are bound in eternal chains in darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6; cf. 14). These examples demonstrate that, unlike Jude and 2 Peter, 1 Peter treats this apocryphal tradition in a distinctive manner. While in Jude and 2 Peter the tradition forms part of a polemical discourse aimed at discouraging heresies, in 1 Peter it is incorporated into an early Christian creed. Its purpose is not to discourage or engage in polemic, but rather, in accordance with the intent of the pericope, to provide peace and consolation to those who suffer unjustly (1 Peter 3:13–14, 17).

11 REICKE, Bo (1946): *The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism*. Copenhagen, Ejnar Munksgaard. 52–92; WINDISCH, Hans (1930): *Die katholischen Briefe* (HNT 15). Tübingen, Mohr-Siebeck. 71; SELWYN, Edward Gordon (1958): *The First Epistle of St. Peter: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Essays*. London, Macmillan. 198–199.

12 KEENER, Craig S. (2021): *1 Peter. A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Baker Academic. 225; GOPPELT, Leonhard (1993): *A Commentary on I Peter*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 260–263.

propagated and cultivated the understanding that Christ descended into Hades between his death and resurrection, and preached to the dead. Over time, this group of the dead came to include not only the disobedient but also the righteous who had died without knowing Christ yet were afflicted on account of their own sins. In other words, the „gathering of the souls from prison” became increasingly indeterminate. According to Luther and Calvin, Christ preached to the saints of the Old Testament, but the difference is that he did so not between his death and resurrection, but after his resurrection.¹³ The temporal aspects of this event will be discussed later.

Karen Jobes makes an interesting observation, reminding us that the first Book of Enoch disappeared in the second century CE, with only a few fragments surviving in Aramaic, Greek, and Latin until the eighteenth century, when a complete Ethiopian version of the Book of Enoch was discovered (1773, J. Bruce). By noting this, Jobes seeks to emphasize that the disappearance of the Book of Enoch resulted in the erosion of the original background of 1 Peter 3:19–20. The increasing dominance of Christianity led to the fading of the Jewish tradition, and contemporary theological concerns of the church transcended the textual boundaries, rendering the original context of Asia Minor largely irrelevant. This was a context in which a strong cult of Enoch–Noah existed in the second–first centuries BCE, due to the belief that the ark had settled in the mountains of Asia Minor.¹⁴ How were the saints

13 CALVIN, John (1999): *Commentaries on the First Letter of Peter*. Calvin’s Commentaries 22. Grand Rapids, Baker. 293–294; see also CALVIN, John: *Institutio Religionis Christianae* II 16.9; ELLIOTT, John H. (2000): *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 37B). New York, Doubleday. 650.

14 The site of modern Dinar in Turkey was once the settlement known as Apamea Kibotos. Its name derives from the Greek translation of the word “ark” (κιβωτός, ἡρῆ), probably via the Septuagint. Noahic coins from this region may also be associated with Asia Minor. The story of Noah was the first – and perhaps the only – biblical narrative to appear in Roman art.

of the Old Testament saved? What did Jesus do between his death and resurrection? What will be the fate of those who were born before Jesus and, therefore, had no opportunity to hear the gospel? Clement of Alexandria taught post-mortem conversion precisely based on 1 Peter 3:19–20, establishing a trajectory for church exegesis that persisted for centuries. Augustine, however, was cautious regarding the idea of post-mortem conversion and developed, as a counter-exegesis, the notion that the preexistent Spirit of Christ worked through Noah, preaching to the wicked world, at least to those who were still alive. His aim was to defend the theological concept that the destiny of human beings is decided during their earthly life (cf. 1 Peter 1:10–11; 1 Cor 10:4).¹⁵

Nevertheless, 1 Peter 3:19–20 is far from being the appropriate passage to answer these sweeping theological questions. A permissive exegesis is particularly risky because it must first answer the question: why was it only this generation, the disobedient and sinful people of Noah's time, that had the privilege of encountering Christ?

Examining Old Testament perspectives on the afterlife can provide helpful orientation. The absence of a clearly defined reward or punishment after death led the righteous to anticipate recompense for their deeds during life, while the wicked were to receive punishment prior to death. From this viewpoint, God's justice was manifest in earthly life. The God of Israel was the God of the living, and the faithful were called to obedience during their temporal existence. In other words, the Israelites had no doubt

Noahic coins were popular during the reigns of five Roman emperors, over a period of slightly more than half a century, between 193 and 253 CE. For a more detailed discussion and evaluation of the data, see TREBILCO, Paul R. (1991): *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (Society for New Testament Studies – Monograph Series 69). Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 90–91; JOBES, Karen H. (2005): *1 Peter*. Grand Rapids, Baker Academic. 306–307.

15 KEENER (2021): 225.

regarding the fate of Noah's contemporaries, upon whom God's judgment had already been pronounced – a complete, closed story.

The story of the „sons of God,” by contrast, remained open, not only in the pages of Scripture but also in the public consciousness of the Jewish people. They were not destroyed by the Flood because they did not belong to this world, this earthly dimension. Around them remained a profound silence. What was their fate? The Book of Enoch synthesizes and develops traditions that contain mythical elements and that were developed over the centuries by popular religiosity to fill narrative gaps. In other words, the journey of this tradition did not begin with the Book of Enoch; rather, the Book of Enoch is the embodiment of a tradition with a long preceding history.

Thus, 1 Peter 3:19–20 reflects the apocalyptic popular belief of the time, according to which the “sons of God” are fallen angels held captive by God, awaiting in chains. But what are they waiting for? For the conclusion of their story. This idea brings us to the next two questions: what did Jesus preach to them, and when did this encounter take place?

4. What did Jesus preach?

The Greek text uses the verb κηρύσσω to describe the activity of Jesus. In this instance, the linguistic analogy with the tradition of Enoch is particularly strong. Enoch, the righteous man of God, repeatedly spoke to the Watchers, delivering the message of God's judgment: they would not receive forgiveness of sins despite their prayers. More generally and neutrally, κηρύσσω means “to proclaim, declare, or announce” (cf. Luke 12:3; Rom 2:21; Rev 5:2).

When 1 Peter elsewhere speaks of proclaiming the gospel in history, it does not use this verb, but rather the more familiar εὐαγγελίζω, „to bring good news.” In 1 Peter 1:12, this term is accompanied by ἀναγγέλλω, „to report, announce,” referring to

the angels' desire to investigate the gospel they proclaim through the Holy Spirit among the called in the provinces of Asia Minor. In 1 Peter 3:19, however, Christ himself conveys the message to a place where human words cannot reach.

Here we observe two types of proclamation: one is the preaching of salvation, which calls for conversion; the other is revelation, which communicates a specific message. Some interpretations deny that Jesus personally visited these souls, suggesting instead that the message itself reached them. In any case, this message no longer needs to be sought, investigated, or awaited, as it exists beyond time and space and has become known both in the human and invisible realms.

But what is this message? It is the message of Christ's victory intertwined with the triumph of the Holy Trinity, as evidenced in the triple event of salvation: he was delivered to death in the flesh, was resurrected in the Spirit, and ascended into heaven. This proclamation is a judgment for the disobedient, for those who rebel against God, yet it is good news for those who, in covenant with him (cf. the reference to baptism), desire and seek obedience and thus live faithfully. The reference to Genesis 6:1–3, at the conclusion of the story of the „sons of God,“ is clarified through 1 Peter 3:19–20: their story has finally come to an end.

5. When did the encounter take place?

Regarding the location of this encounter, the scholarly literature enumerates three main theories:

- 1) The most widespread view, prevailing for centuries, is that Christ went to the souls held captive between His death and resurrection (cf. Leonhard Goppelt; Bo Reicke).¹⁶

16 GOPPELT (1993): 259; REICKE (1946): 118.

The theological tradition of the triduum mortis (sacrum triduum, or paschalis triduum, the three holy days) was shaped by an exegesis that interpreted the spirits held in prison as souls awaiting and suffering in Hades, Sheol, or Tartarus. According to this view, after Jesus died on the cross, he descended into Hades.¹⁷ However, with respect to 1 Peter 3:19, it is noteworthy that the text does not explicitly assert a descent into Hades. The verb πορεύομαι („to go, to proceed”) is used simply to describe action. Had the author intended to emphasize a downward movement, it would have been more natural to use καταβαίνω, as found in other passages such as Romans 10:7 or Ephesians 4:9. In the New Testament, πορεύομαι is consistently used to refer to Christ’s ascension—that is, his departure or movement (cf. Matt 11:23; Luke 10:15; John 14:2–3, 28; 16:28; Acts 1:10–11; Rom 10:7; Eph 4:9–10).¹⁸ The chiasmic structure of 1 Peter 3:18–22 does not support the notion of two distinct locations, but rather presents a description of a single journey, in which πορεύομαι is closely linked to the event of the resurrection.

- 2) Some scholars, who consider the souls in prison to have been contemporaneous with Noah, argue that the preexistent

17 The theological aspects related to the darkness and silence of Holy Saturday, as well as the significant challenges this day presents for preaching the Word, coherently reflect this perspective. In this light, the question arises: what should be proclaimed on Holy Saturday? The homiletical approach to Holy Saturday directs attention to the following narratives and themes: the guarding of the tomb, Jesus’ rest in the tomb, and the sanctification of the day of rest (Matt 27:62–66; Luke 23:56). See FEKETE, Károly (2021): A nagyhét homiletikuma. In Fekete Károly – Literáty Zoltán – Steinbach József (eds.): *Igehirdetők kézikönyve*. Budapest, Kálvin kiadó. 389–391.

18 DALTON, William Joseph (1965): *Christ’s Proclamation to the Spirits*. Rome, Pontifical Biblical Institute. 160; ACHTEMEIER, Paul J. (1996): *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter* (Hermeneia). Minneapolis, Fortress Press. 257.

Christ approached these individuals and, while the ark was being built, preached the gospel of conversion through Noah. However, this approach does not seem to sufficiently account for the fact that the flood narrative was already intertwined with conceptions and beliefs concerning fallen angels.¹⁹

- 3) A third theory posits that this extraordinary encounter occurred after Jesus' resurrection.²⁰ According to this perspective, the spirits in prison are the fallen angels, the wicked, to whom Christ proclaimed his victory following his resurrection and ascension. Contemporary research on 1 Peter largely supports this interpretation.

According to early Jewish and Christian conceptions of the afterlife, the prison was not located in the depths of the earth but rather between the earth and the firmament. In 2 Enoch, it is situated in the second heaven (2 Enoch 7:1–3). Calvin mentions a watchtower at the site of the prison, where the saints of the Old Testament

19 GRUDEM, Wayne (1988): *1 Peter* (Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series). Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 209–210; CLOWNEY, Edmund (1988): *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross*. Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press. 154–168; FEINBERG, John S. (1986): 1 Peter 3:18–20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State. In *WTJ* 48. 303–336.

20 SELWYN (1958): 198–200; ACHTEMEIER (1996): 245–246; KELLY, John Norman Davidson (1969): *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (Harper's New Testament Commentaries). New York, Harper. 152–156; ELLIOTT (2000): 648–650; DAVIDS, Peter H. (1990): *The First Epistle of Peter* (NIC). Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 138–141; HIEBERT, D. Edmond (1982): Selected Studies from 1 Peter Part 2: The Suffering and Triumphant Christ: An Exposition of 1 Peter 3:18–22. In *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139. 146–158; BANDSTRA, Andrew J. (2003): "Making Proclamation to the Spirits in Prison": Another Look at 1 Peter 3:19. In *CTJ* 38, 120–124; SCHREINER, Thomas R. (2003): *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (NAC 37). Nashville, Broadman & Holman. 186; MARSHALL, I. Howard (1991): *1 Peter* (IVP New Testament Commentary Series 17). Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press. 125.

found refuge in the realm of the dead, awaiting their salvation.²¹ Nevertheless, another valid interpretation identifies the prison not as a physical location but rather as a symbolic indicator of status.²²

6. Final observations

The expression „*He descended into hell*”, present in both the Apostles’ Creed and the Athanasian Creed, while lacking a direct biblical warrant, nonetheless emerges from the same ancient belief system that informs the creed ultimately canonized by the author of 1 Peter for the Christian communities in Asia Minor. This belief finds resonance in the language and imagery of Psalm 139:5–12:

*You hem me in behind and before,
and lay Your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high, I cannot comprehend it.
Where can I go from Your Spirit,
or flee from Your presence?
If I ascend into heaven, You are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there!
If I take the wings of the dawn
and dwell at the farthest sea,
even there Your hand shall lead me,
and Your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, “Surely darkness will cover me,
and the light around me turn to night,”
even darkness is not dark to You;
the night shines as the day,
for darkness is as light.*

21 CALVIN (1999): 293.

22 MICHAELS, J. Ramsey (2002): *1 Peter* (WBC 49). Dallas, Word. 120.

The enduring affirmation of this belief in the Church's liturgical and confessional tradition reflects its significance not merely as a cognitive proposition but as a vehicle of spiritual efficacy and existential assurance. Its continued inclusion in the Apostles' Creed testifies to the church's recognition of its theological and devotional resonance, independent of exegetical precision.

The Petrine epistle demonstrates that the tradition surrounding Enoch and Noah – especially valued in the Asia Minor context – was appropriated by the author not only formally but substantively into the devotional life of the early Church. This is evident in the structural and thematic parallels to 1 Timothy 3:16, which may be schematically represented as follows:

Christ

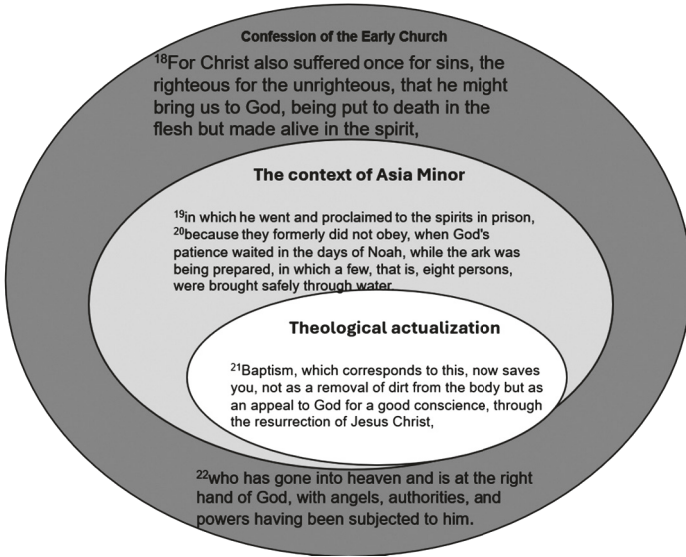
He who was manifested in the flesh
Was vindicated in the Spirit
Was seen by angels
Was proclaimed among the nations
Was believed in the world
Was taken up in glory

In this schema, it becomes clear as well that the ultimate Righteous One capable of guiding humanity to God is not Enoch or Noah, but Jesus Christ. While his victory is partially shrouded in mystery, 1 Peter 3:18–22 frames this victory as transcending conventional temporal and spatial boundaries. By reworking the Enoch-Noah tradition through a Christological lens (see the draft below), 1 Peter subverts apocalyptic dualism: Christ's resurrection, not Noah's ark, becomes the ultimate "antitype" (3:21) of salvation; universalizes hope: the gospel's scope extends beyond Israel to the nations (cf. "proclaimed among the nations," 1 Timothy 3:16), fulfilling Noah's covenant (Genesis 9:17) in Christ; democratizes righteousness: all believers, like Noah's "eight souls" (3:20), are saved through baptismal union with Christ's resurrection (3:21).

The passage functions as a *liminal text*, testifying both to Christ's triumph over cosmic and spiritual powers and to the ongoing relevance of this victory for believers confronting trials, oppression, and persecution. Although the Christian struggle is not directed against "flesh and blood" (cf. Ephesians 6:12), the locus of authentic power resides in continual prayer and reliance upon God.²³

This theological perspective coheres with the broader Petrine ethic, which emphasizes both submission (ὕποτάσσω – 1 Peter 2:13; 2:18; 3:1; 3:5; 5:5) and the cultivation of a good conscience (συνείδησις ἀγαθή – 1 Peter 2:19; 3:16; 3:21). The interplay of divine victory and human responsiveness underlines the practical and spiritual perspectives of the text: believers are called to align their ethical and devotional life with the transcendent reality of Christ's salvific work, even amid suffering and oppression.

23 In the most recent commentary on *1 Peter*, a critical observation is made concerning the supposed consolatory function of this passage. Horrell and Williams argue that it is debatable whether such an event would, in fact, offer the comfort often attributed to it. In their view, Christ's proclamation to the imprisoned angels would seem hollow, since those to whom the message was directed were already confined under divine punishment and thus incapable of exerting further negative influence upon humanity. Meanwhile, the *spiritual forces* that were actively afflicting the readers continued to pose a significant threat - constantly tempting believers to renounce their faith and possibly inciting human opponents to hostility and violence (cf. 1 Pet 5:8–9). The „fellow elder,” therefore, leaves his audience to ponder whether this supposed „triumph” may not, in fact, have been overstated. See HORRELL, David G. – WILLIAMS, Travis B. (2023): *1 Peter: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary. Volume 2.* (ICC). London – New York, T & T Clark – Bloomsbury. 233.



Bibliography

- ACHTEMEIER, Paul J. (1996): *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter* (Hermeneia). Minneapolis, Fortress Press.
- ALEXANDER, Philip S. (1972): The Targumim and Early Exegesis of “Sons of God” in Gen. 6. In *JJS* 23. 60–71.
- BANDSTRA, Andrew J. (2003): “Making Proclamation to the Spirits in Prison”: Another Look at 1 Peter 3:19. In *CTJ* 38. 120–124.
- BAUER, Walter (2000): *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- BRUEGGEMANN, Walter (1982): *Genesis. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Atlanta, Westminster John Knox.
- CALVIN, John (1999): *Commentaries on the First Letter of Peter* (Calvin’s Commentaries 22). Grand Rapids, Baker.
- CALVIN, John: *Institutio Religionis Christianae* II 16.9.
- CHARLES, Robert Henry (1917): *The Book of Enoch*. London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.
- CLINES, David J. A. (1979): The Significance of the “Sons of God” Episode (Gen. 6:1–4) in the Context of the Primeval History (Gen. 1–11). In *JSOT* 13. 33–46.
- CLOWNEY, Edmund (1988): *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross*. Downers Grove, Inter Varsity Press.
- DALTON, William Joseph (1965): *Christ’s Proclamation to the Spirits*. Rome, Pontifical Biblical Institute.
- DANKER, Frederick William (2009): *A Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- DAVIDS, Peter H. (1990): *The First Epistle of Peter* (NIC). Grand Rapids, Eerdmans.
- ELLIOTT, John H. (2000): *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 37B). New York, Doubleday.
- ESLINGER, Lyle (1979): A Contextual Identification of the *bene ha’elohim* and *benoth ha’adam* in Gen. 6:1–4. In *JSOT* 13. 65–73.

- FEINBERG, John S. (1986): 1 Peter 3:18–20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State. In *WTJ* 48. 303–336.
- FEKETE, Károly (2021): A nagyhét homiletikuma. In Fekete, Károly – Literáty, Zoltán – Steinbach, József (eds.): *Igebirdetők kézikönyve*. Budapest, Kálvin kiadó.
- GOPPELT, Leonhard (1993): *A Commentary on I Peter*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans.
- GRUDEM, Wayne (1988): *1 Peter* (Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series). Grand Rapids, Eerdmans.
- HANSON, Paul D. (1977): Rebellion in Heaven: Azazel and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6–11. In *JBL* 96. 195–233.
- HIEBERT, D. Edmond (1982): Selected Studies from 1 Peter Part 2: The Suffering and Triumphant Christ: An Exposition of 1 Peter 3:18–22. In *Bibliotheca Sacra*.
- HORRELL, David G. – WILLIAMS, Travis B. (2023): *1 Peter: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary. Volume 2*. (ICC). London – New York. T & T Clark – Bloomsbury.
- JOBES, Karen H. (2005): *1 Peter*. Grand Rapids, Baker Academic.
- KEENER, Craig S. (2021): *1 Peter. A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Baker Academic.
- KELLY, John Norman Davidson (1969): *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (Harper's New Testament Commentaries). New York, Harper.
- KLINE, Meredith G. (1963): Divine Kingship and Gen. 6:1–4. In *WTJ* 24. 187–204.
- MARSHALL, I. Howard (1991): *1 Peter* (IVP New Testament Commentary Series 17). Downers Grove, Inter Varsity Press.
- MICHAELS, J. Ramsey (2002): *1 Peter* (WBC 49). Dallas, Word.
- PARKER, Simon B. (1999): Son(s) of (the) God(s). In: Van der Toorn, Karel – Becking, Bob – Van der horst, Pieter W. (eds.): *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. Leiden, Brill, 794–799.
- REICKE, Bo (1946): *The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism*. Copenhagen, Ejnar Munksgaard.

- SCHREINER, Thomas R. (2003): *1, 2 Peter, Jude*. (NAC 37). Nashville, Broadman & Holman.
- SELWYN, Edward Gordon (1958): *The First Epistle of St. Peter: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Essays*. London, Macmillan.
- TREBILCO, Paul R. (1991): *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor*. (Society for New Testament Studies – Monograph Series 69). Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- WENHAM, Gordon J. (2002): *Genesis 1–15*. Dallas, Word.
- WINDISCH, Hans (1930): *Die katholischen Briefe* (HNT 15). Tübingen, Mohr-Siebeck.

Resurrection in Greek Cults

Ákos József Debreczeni¹

Abstract

Although the idea of resurrection and revival mostly appears in Judaism and Christianity, Greek religions have also created their own resurrection beliefs. The cults of Asclepius, Dionysus and Orpheus present a more colourful image of resurrection than other Greek cults existing in this period. These three focus mostly on afterlife, where the insiders who follow the instructions of their gods can hope for a reward in the otherworld. Resurrection is an essential element in the myths of these deities.

Keywords: resurrection, Greek cults, Asclepius, Dionysus, Orpheus, New Testament

1. Introduction to Greek concepts of resurrection

Ancient Greek religion does not present a unified doctrine of resurrection, but various cults and myths explore themes of death, rebirth, and transformation. Unlike the Christian vision of collective resurrection, Greek cults offered individual or symbolic forms of return from death. This paper examines three major figures and traditions associated with resurrection in ancient Greece: Asclepius, Dionysus, and the Orphic movement. These figures represent different responses to the question of what

¹ Debrecen Reformed Theological University, Department of New Testament Studies, PhD Student; e-mail: akosdebreczeni98@gmail.com

happens after death and how mortals might overcome its finality.² Through divine healing, ecstatic rebirth, or the immortal soul, each tradition attempts to answer humanity's deep-seated concern regarding mortality.

The resurrection narratives surrounding these cults are not uniform in meaning.³ For Asclepius, resurrection is closely tied to healing. For Dionysus, it is a symbol of the cycles of nature and divine presence. The Orphics, meanwhile, offer a philosophical and mystical perspective, focusing on the liberation of the soul from the body through ritual and remembrance. Together, these traditions paint a complex picture of Greek eschatological thought.

2. *Asclepius – God of healing and resurrection*

Asclepius, son of Apollo and the mortal Coronis, is the archetype of divine healing.⁴ According to myth, his extraordinary abilities allowed him to heal the sick and even resurrect the dead. This power provoked Zeus, who killed Asclepius with a thunderbolt, but he was later resurrected and deified.⁵ His transformation from mortal to god reflected his unique status as a healer who could bridge the mortal and divine worlds.

The cult of Asclepius emerged in the 6th century BCE, notably in Epidaurus, and later spread across the Greco-Roman world.⁶

2 HEGYI Dolores (2002): *Polis és vallás, Bevezetés a görög vallástörténetbe*. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó. 23–29.

3 Cf. KERÉNYI Károly (1999): *Az isteni orvos. Tanulmányok Asklepioszról és kultuszhelyeiről*. Budapest, Európa. 59–66; PAUSANIAS (1918): *Descriptio Graeciae*, II. 26,3–5; DIODORUS (1946–50): *Bibliotheca Historica*, IV. 71,1–4.

4 BURKERT, Walter (1985): *Greek religion*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press. 214.

5 EDELSTEIN, Emma J.– EDELSTEIN, Ludwig (1945): *Asclepius. A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies II*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press. 49–51.

6 HEGYI Dolores (2002): 82; THOMPSON, Robin (2017): Healing at the Pool of Bethesda, A challenge to Asclepius? In *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 27, 77–78.

Rituals at his sanctuaries included purification, sacrifice, and incubation, a process where supplicants slept in a sacred space (abaton) to receive healing through dreams. Sacred animals like snakes and dogs were often present and believed to aid in the healing process.⁷

Inscriptions and votive offerings describe miraculous cures, some of which involved the restoration of life. These acts were not merely medical but spiritual, requiring faith.⁸ Asclepius' resurrection and deification underscored the belief that healing could extend beyond life and that divine power might grant temporary reprieve from death.⁹

His resurrection, according to tradition, signified more than a personal return to life. It indicated the ultimate form of divine endorsement, elevating a mortal to the rank of godhood through acts of mercy and miraculous power. Mircea Eliade viewed figures like Asclepius as intermediaries between mortals and gods, suggesting his posthumous worship was both spiritual and theological in nature.¹⁰

3. The cult and influence of Asclepius

Asclepius' sanctuaries served not only as temples but also as early hospitals. The rituals performed there – especially the incubation rites – demonstrate a blend of religion and proto-medicine. The importance of dreams in healing points to a strong belief in divine communication. The sanctuaries functioned as centers of hope where individuals could experience physical and spiritual renewal.

7 HEGYI (2002): 84; KERÉNYI (1999): 36–37.

8 IG. IV. 1.2., 121 (III.), 22–33.

9 THOMPSON (2017): 77.

10 ELIADE, Mircea (2011): *Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase, De la epoca de piatra la misterele din Eleusis*. Iași, Polirom. 256–260.

Many accounts speak of miraculous resurrections attributed to Asclepius, including the revival of figures like Hippolytus, Capaneus, and Lycurgus.¹¹ These resurrections often had consequences; they angered the gods and disrupted natural order, leading to Asclepius' own death.¹² Nonetheless, such stories solidified his role as a figure capable of confronting death itself. He was not simply a healer; he was a challenger of mortality.

These myths suggest that death, in the Greek imagination, was not always final. Through divine intervention, healing could be so powerful it reversed death, even if temporarily. Asclepius' role as a healer who transcended death made him one of the most beloved and widely worshipped deities in the Greco-Roman world.¹³

4. *Dionysus – ecstasy, dismemberment, and return*

Dionysus, the god of wine, ecstasy, and transformation, embodies a different form of resurrection. Born from Zeus and the mortal Semele, he was torn apart by Titans and later reborn by the goddess Rhea. His myth reflects a deep association with nature's cycles and the concept of death and rebirth. This theme was central to the mystery cults that celebrated him.¹⁴

The Dionysian cult involved rituals of ecstatic dance, music, wine-drinking, and symbolic acts like omophagia—the eating of raw flesh—to unite the initiate with the god.¹⁵ While these rituals

11 Κεΐνή[σιας] ο ρελοποιδς, ο [τι τὸν] Ἰππόλυτόν [παρα] κληθείς]ὕπ' Ἀρ[τέμι]δος ἀνεστ[η]σε[ν]. PHILODEMUS (1986): *De Pietate*, 52.

12 Ἐριφύλη Χ[τησίχορ]ος, ὅτι Κα[πανεα καὶ Λυ]κουρ [γον]. PHILODEMUS (1986): *De Pietate*, 52.

13 ENDSJØ, Dag Øistein (2009): *Greek Resurrection Beliefs and the Success of Christianity*. New York, Palgrave MacMillan. 57–58.

14 FERGUSON, Everett (1999): *A kereszténység bölcsője*. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó. 220–221.

15 FERGUSON (1999). 224.

shocked early observers, by the Hellenistic period they evolved into more structured ceremonies. Initiates sought communion with the divine and the promise of a joyful afterlife, though not bodily resurrection.¹⁶

Despite references to his tomb at Delphi, Dionysus' myth suggests a resurrection that is both spiritual and symbolic. He returned from Hades, bringing his mother Semele to Olympus. His divine presence, constantly renewed through ritual and epiphany, captivated worshippers. The god's popularity rested on his tangible, ecstatic interaction with humanity, more than on doctrinal promises.¹⁷

5. *Dionysus and the afterlife*

Dionysus' presence in the afterlife traditions is further evidenced by inscriptions and mythic imagery. One tomb inscription describes a young girl leading a dance among the blessed in the afterlife, indicating a belief in the soul's joyful continuation.¹⁸ These images emphasize participation in divine joy rather than the permanence of bodily resurrection.

Initiates into the Dionysian mysteries were promised not immortality in flesh, but happiness after death. The ecstatic experiences of the cult were believed to mirror the afterlife's bliss. Thus, Dionysus' resurrection provided hope, not for a return to earthly life, but for transcendence through divine connection.¹⁹

16 ELIADE, Mircea (2006): *Vallási hiedelmek és eszmék története*. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó. 285.

17 SEAFORD, Richard (2006): *Dionysos Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World*. Abingdon, Routledge. 85.

18 EIDENEIER, Hans (1971): Einige Ghost-Words in der griechischen Papyruslexikographie. In *ZPE* 7 280: “ὄν τείων Διόνυσος ὁ Βάκχιος ἐν θιά<σ>οισιν [ἡγ]ήτειραν ἐμὲ σπείρης ἐ[ν]έβησεν [χ]ορεύειν.”

19 ELIADE (2006): 285.

His multiple births and returns, some even described him as *twice-born*, reinforce his connection with cyclical death and rebirth. These patterns, while not promising eternal life to all, created a mythological foundation for believing in divine proximity beyond death.

6. Orphism – origins and beliefs

The Orphic tradition, inspired by the mythical figure Orpheus, fused Dionysian elements with Apollonian purification. Orphics taught that the soul was immortal and divine but entrapped in a cycle of reincarnation due to its inherited Titanic nature. This belief system aimed to liberate the soul through initiation, ethical living (ex. vegetarianism), and ritual purification.²⁰

Central to Orphic cosmology was the myth of Dionysus-Zagreus, who was torn apart by the Titans. We know from mythology humans were formed from the ashes of the Titans, thereby inheriting both a divine and a chaotic nature. This duality necessitated purification and escape from the cycle of rebirth.²¹

The Orphic doctrine introduced sacred texts and funerary tablets that provided instructions for the soul in afterlife.²² These texts emphasized remembrance (Mnemosyne) over forgetfulness (Lethe), reinforcing the idea that spiritual awareness led to liberation. The goal of the Orphic life was not resurrection of the body but the release of the soul.²³

20 ELIADE (2006): 414.

21 Diod. Sic. V. 75.4.

22 ZUNZI, Günther (1971): *Persephone, Three Essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia*. Oxford–New York, Clarendon Press–Oxford University Press. 328; EDMONDS III, Radcliffe, G. (2011): Sacred scripture or oracles for the dead? The semiotic situation of the “Orphic” gold tablets. In: Edmonds III., Radcliffe, G. (ed.): *The ‘Orphic’ Gold Tablets and Greek Religion, Further along the Path*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 244–245.

23 ELIADE (2006): 414.

7. *Orphic practices and eschatology*

Orphic followers practiced asceticism, vegetarianism, and rituals aimed at cleansing the soul. Unlike other Greek religious movements, Orphism focused intensely on the afterlife, developing a structured eschatology. The soul, after death, would be judged and directed either toward rebirth or toward rest among the blessed.²⁴

Initiation into Orphism promised an escape from the cycle of reincarnation. Tomb inscriptions suggest that the faithful hoped not for bodily resurrection but for a return to a divine, incorporeal state. Those who completed the Orphic journey were said to reign with the heroes and dwell in Persephone's sacred groves.²⁵

This vision of resurrection was inward, spiritual, and ethical. It differed fundamentally from the miraculous bodily revivals seen in the myths of Asclepius. Orphism offered a profound metaphysical reinterpretation of what resurrection could mean.

8. *Comparative reflections*

Each tradition examined – Asclepius, Dionysus, and the Orphics – offers unique insights into Greek perceptions of life, death, and resurrection. Asclepius represents bodily healing and temporary revival; Dionysus symbolizes the joyful mystery of spiritual rebirth; and Orphism presents a philosophical system of spiritual liberation.

These traditions suggest that while the Greeks feared death, they also viewed it as permeable. Through divine interaction,

24 ELIADE (2006): 415.

25 GV, n° 1169 = IGUR III, n° 1321. "Μοιρῶν οὐκ ἔφυγεν τρι<σ>σῶν μίτον, ἀλλὰ νεκρωθεὶς τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπέδωκεν ἐς ἀέρα, σῶμα δὲ πρὸς γῆν. ἀλλὰ καὶ εὐσεβείης ἔσχεν κρίσιν ἐν φθιμένοισιν καὶ πάλιν εἶδε τὸ φῶς νεκρὸς ὢν καὶ πόντον ἔπλευσε καὶ χάρις ἰδίης ἐπέ<β>η."

death could be postponed, reversed, or rendered meaningless. The gods offered hope, not necessarily for eternal life in flesh, but for continued existence in divine presence or spiritual peace.

The complexity of these beliefs highlights the diversity of Greek religious imagination. It reflects a nation deeply preoccupied with the afterlife, yet open to multiple, often conflicting interpretations.

9. Greek versus Christian resurrection

The concept of resurrection in ancient Greek religion differs starkly from that in Christianity. Greek cults emphasized individual cases and symbolic acts. Resurrection was not universal, nor was it permanent. It served as a demonstration of divine power, mercy, or favour, but it did not imply a reconstitution of humanity at the end of time.

In contrast, Christian resurrection is collective and eschatological, promising a transformed and eternal bodily existence. The Christian narrative offers a clear moral and theological framework – resurrection as redemption (Rom 5:18-19). Yet, some elements, like the importance of faith, healing, and divine grace, echo Greek precedents.²⁶

There is evidence that early Christian communities were influenced by Greek eschatological language and metaphors. The figure of Christ as healer and resurrector bears strong thematic parallels to Asclepius and even Dionysus. This suggests that while distinct, Greek and Christian views on resurrection were part of a shared cultural discourse.

26 LEDÁN M. István (2022): Ókori csodák, csodatevők és csodaelbeszélések. In *Studia Doctorum Theologiae Protestantis* 13, 55–60.

10. Conclusion – The meaning of resurrection in Greek cults

Resurrection in Greek cults was not about universal salvation but about transformation – physical, spiritual, or symbolic. Whether through miraculous healing, ecstatic union, or liberation from reincarnation, the Greek imagination provided many ways to cope with mortality.

These myths and rituals offered reassurance, guidance, and meaning in the face of death. They invited believers to enter into divine mystery, to find peace, healing, and perhaps a glimpse of eternity. While Greek resurrection lacked the ultimate nature and promise of the Christian doctrine, it conveyed something equally powerful: the human desire to transcend suffering and commune with the divine. Reincarnation and resurrection of Jesus is the hope for all Christians.

In the end, resurrection in Greek cults is a testament to human hope. It is not a dogma but a story, a narrative repeated through dreams, rites, and epiphanies, reminding mortals that life, even in the face of death, is touched by the gods.

Bibliography

- (1929) *Inscriptiones Graecae*, IV. *Inscriptiones Argolidis*. 2nd edn. Fasc. 1, *Inscriptiones Epidauri*, F. H. von Gaertringen. (ed.), Berlin, 82–84.
- BURKERT, Walter (1985): *Greek religion*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- EDELSTEIN, Emma J.– EDELSTEIN, Ludwig (1945): *Asclepius. A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies II*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press.
- EDMONDS III, Radcliffe, G. (2011): Sacred scripture or oracles for the dead? The semiotic situation of the “Orphic” gold tablets. In: Edmonds III., Radcliffe. G. (ed.): *The ‘Orphic’ Gold Tablets*

- and Greek Religion, Further along the Path*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- EIDENEIER, Hans (1971): Einige Ghost-Words in der griechischen Papyruslexikographie. In *ZPE* 7, 53–60.
- ELIADE, Mircea (2006): *Vallási hiedelmek és eszmék története*. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó.
- ELIADE, Mircea (2011): *Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase. De la epoca de piatră la misterele din Eleusis*. Iași, Polirom.
- ENDSJØ, Dag Øistein (2009): *Greek Resurrection Beliefs and the Success of Christianity*. New York, Palgrave MacMillan.
- FERGUSON, Everett (1999): *A kereszténység bölcsője*. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó.
- HEGYI Dolores (2002): *Polis és vallás, Bevezetés a görög vallástörténetbe*. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó.
- JONES, William Henry Samuel (ed.) (1918): *Pausanias, Description of Greece, Volume I: Books 1–2*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- KERÉNYI Károly (1999): *Az isteni orvos, Tanulmányok Asklépiosról és kultusz helyeiről*. Budapest, Európa.
- LEDÁN M. István (2022): Ókori csodák, csodatevők és csodaelbeszélések. In: *Studia Doctorum Theologiae Protestantis* 13, 25–80.
- ORBINK, Dirk (ed.) (1986): *Philodemus, De pietate I–II*. Stanford, Stanford University.
- OLDFATHER, Charles Hernry (ed.), (1946): *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History, Volume IV*, Books 9–12.40 (Loeb Classical Library 375). Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- OLDFATHER, Charles Hernry (ed.), (1950): *Diodorus Siculus: The Library of History, Volume V*, Books 12.41–13 (Loeb Classical Library 384). Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- PEEK, Werner (1960): *Griechische Grabgedichte*. Berlin, Akademie Verlag.
- PEEK, Werner (1988): *Griechische Versinschriften*. Chicago, Ares Publ.
- PERES Imre (2003): *Griechische Grabinschriften und neutestamentliche*

Eschatologie, (WUNT 157). Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck.

SEAFORD, Richard (2006): *Dionysos Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World*. Abingdon, Routledge.

THOMPSON, Robin (2017): Healing at the Pool of Bethesda, A challenge to Asclepius? In *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 27, 65–84.

ZUNZI, Günther (1971): *Persephone, Three Essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia*. Oxford–New York, Clarendon Press–Oxford University Press.

Volumes published in the “Patmosz Könyvtár” series

1. PERES Imre – JENEI Péter (szerk.), *Az ókori keresztény világ* (2013)
2. PERES Imre, *Pál apostol túlvilági látomásai* (2015)
3. PERES Imre, *Pillantások a végidőkbe* (2016)
4. PERES Imre – NÉMETH Áron (szerk.), *Az ókori keresztény világ III.* (2016)
5. PERES Imre, *Mennyei polgárjogunk* (2018)
6. PERES Imre – NÉMETH Áron (szerk.), *Az ókori keresztény világ IV.* (2018)
7. NÉMETH Áron (szerk.), *Az ókori keresztény világ V.* (2019)
8. PERES Imre, *Az apokaliptikus egyház* (2019)
9. PERES Imre – NÉMETH Áron (szerk.), *Az ókori keresztény világ VI.* (2020)
10. PERES Imre, *Korinthusi hitviták* (2020)
11. PERES Imre, *A halál fullánkja* (2021)
12. Jörg FREY, *Tanulmányok az Apokalipszishez* (2021)
13. PERES Imre – LEDÁN M. István (szerk.), *Hellenisztikus antropológiai motívumok az újszövetségi eszkatológiában* (2022)
14. LEDÁN M. István – NÉMETH Áron (szerk.), *Az ókori keresztény világ VII–IX.* (2023)
15. LEDÁN M. István, *Adakozás a Korinthusi levelekben* (2024)
16. Ledán M. István – Németh Áron (szerk.), *Az ókori keresztény világ (X – XI.)* (2025)
17. LEDÁN M. István, *Végidőbeli mozaikok. Tíz ígétanulmány a Jelenések könyvéből rövid bevezetővel* (2025)
18. ÉLES Éva, *Péter első levele mint a bibliai és a gyakorlati teológia metszéspontja* (2025)
19. Ledán M. István (szerk.), *Az ókori keresztény világ (XII.)* (2025)
20. Ledán M. István, *Gyülekezeti problémák az első Korinthusi levélben* (2026)

